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Portrait William R. Warnock

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It was a frightful time, frigid air turned rain to sleet covering the rolling hills with a shimmering, thick layer of ice, making digging nearly impossible when cutting trenches from the earth or erecting fortifications. Veteran soldiers were devoted to reshaping the landscape to meet their needs. It was December 1864, and the Civil War was well into its third year. By this time, men of the 95th Ohio had become professional soldiers. Most had enlisted in the summer of 1862 with William R. Warnock, a recent graduate of Ohio Wesleyan University, who joined the regiment on a most auspicious, perhaps infamous, date of July 21, 1862. A year before his enlistment, the Union had suffered an embarrassing defeat at First Bull Run, a defeat which foreshadowed the obvious. First, the war would last longer and be more brutal than most imagined; and second, it would take men hardened by battle with the necessary skills to fight and survive conflict.

The Buckeye State answered Lincoln's call for troops over the course of the war by sending 320,000 of her men in 260 regiments to defend the Union. She was third, behind New York and Pennsylvania, in states to provide troops to the Union. By the end of the conflict, the casualty rate of the 95th was better than some regiments but perhaps worse than others. She lost one officer and 58 men to battle and two officers and 215 enlisted men to disease.

Warnock, elected captain of Company G., 95th Ohio Volunteer Infantry Regiment when he joined the unit, was a product of the Midwest. He was born in the small Ohio community of Urbana, located in the near center of the state, surrounded by prosperous farms and flatlands. He was a lawyer or would become one when this business was over. His men worked the land, came from small towns, and had no clear notion about how to

soldier. They, like Warnock, would learn. Their education came at a price and within a month of the regiment's creation.

It began as many battles did, with cavalry either screening or probing and, as a result, bumping into the enemy. This particular event took place near Richmond, Kentucky, on August 29, 1862, when Union Colonel Leonidas Metcalf's 7th Kentucky Cavalry drove back Confederate troopers but was forced to retreat to Richmond by Rebel infantry. The next day, the main bodies of both Union and Confederate forces locked horns, with some of the hottest action taking place, in a macabre twist, in the town's cemetery.

After a day of fighting, the Confederate forces not only won the field but also captured nearly 4,000 Union troops and 10,000 stands of arms. The 95th Ohio, as green as troops could be, (and there were many on both sides of the Richmond battlefield) was essentially, captured in total. Six hundred men of the regiment swallowed up by a gray cloud in one fell swoop. It was a humiliating entrance into the world of soldiering. The soldiers of the 95th were exchanged about two months later and returned to Camp Chase in Columbus, Ohio, (where they had first been organized) to start the process of soldiering all over again.

It wasn't until late spring of 1863 that the regiment was sent back on campaign. They journeyed from Memphis, Tennessee, to Louisiana, to Mississippi, taking part in the siege of Vicksburg and doing well enough to prove they had gotten the hang of soldiering. They reported capturing nine pieces of Confederate artillery, 52 officers and men, and "about 40 stand of arms." Perhaps the debacle of Richmond could be put behind them. It was not to be. A raid on Tupelo, Mississippi, resulted in the Battle of Guntown on June 10, 1864, during which nearly 150 officers and men of the regiment were killed, wounded, or marked as missing. By July 1864, the 95th had just 100 men fit for service.

What was left of the regiment was sent west to Arkansas after Confederate General Sterling Price's forces. On November 30, 1864, the 95th, now commanded by Lieutenant Colonel Jefferson Brumback, arrived at Nashville, Tennessee. They were one of five infantry regiments and Cogswell's Battery of the Illinois Light Artillery, assigned to Colonel William L. McMillen's 1st Brigade or McArthur's First Division, folded within Major General Andrew J. Smith's benignly named Detachment, Army of the Tennessee.

By winter 1864, the 95th Ohio Volunteer Infantry Regiment was a veteran regiment filled with experienced soldiers. They had missed the Battle of Franklin but had departed their river transports at Nashville in time to face the 30,000 men of Confederate Army of Tennessee, commanded by Lieutenant General John Bell Hood. Hood's force had been roughly handled by Major General John Schofield's command at Franklin (7,000 Rebel casualties, including six generals killed in action), and now they faced Union Major General George H. Thomas and an army cobbled together to defend Nashville. "Pap" Thomas, known to be calm and deliberate when the need arose, had earned the sobriquet "The Rock of Chickamauga" through pure courage and poise was thought by some, including U.S. Grant, to be reluctant.

Hood was just the opposite; but rather than attacking Thomas's 7-mile long defensive line, he chose to entrench his army, build a series of redoubts, and wait for the expected attack. And wait he did, as did Thomas and a very irritated U. S. Grant at City Point, Virginia. In Grant's mind, Thomas should have immediately attacked Hood. Thomas knew he could do nothing until the weather broke and he delayed, despite Grant's urging.

The 95th Ohio Volunteer Infantry Regiment and the rest of Smith's 13,000-man detachment waited as well. They had been in place for nearly two weeks, assaulted by an icy rain and frigid temperatures, so it was probably a relief when they were ordered on December 14 to prepare to attack. A thick fog formed during the morning of December 15, 1865, as the Union forces moved into position. The 95th and Smith's entire command would attack the left of Hood's 4-mile line, after a demonstration to Hood's right, in hopes of pulling forces away from the left.

The Union forces moving against Hood fought their way through a thick curtain of fog, slipping and stumbling over the muddy ground. It wasn't until 9:00 a.m. that the feint was made on Hood's right, but it failed to draw any of Hood's troops away from the Rebel line. A. J. Smith's command with IV Corps led by Brigadier General Thomas J. Wood and a division of cavalry led by Brigadier General Edward Hatch hit the exposed left flank of Hood's line.

McArthur's division (including the 95th Ohio) of Smith's detachment moved to attack. The Rebels fell back as the sun came out and burned away the fog. Smith's corps, supported by cavalry, attacked Confederate Redoubt #5, farthest to the left of the Rebel line. All five redoubts had no more than

150 men and four cannons each to defend themselves. Resistance collapsed at Redoubt #5 followed by Redoubt #4, as a blue wave washed over the incomplete fortifications.

Smith, looking not so much like a Yankee general as Zeus on horseback, rode past soldiers of the 12th Iowa, who, frantic to engage the enemy, cried, "Bring us a fort! Bring us a fort!" Smith ordered them to Redoubt #3, which fell under the onslaught and soon after, Redoubt #2. The day ended with Hood's army badly mauled and in danger of being destroyed.

Late in the day, on December 16, 1865, Brigadier General John McArthur, commander of the First Division Commander, launched an attack against Shy's Hill, after ordering the men "to fix bayonets, not fire a shot and neither halt or to cheer until they have gained the enemy's works." McMillen's 1st Brigade with the 114th Illinois, 93rd Indiana, 10th Minnesota, 72nd Ohio, and the 95th Ohio led the attack. After breaking through the Confederate line just to the East of Shy's Hill, Smith's men poured into the breach and captured hundreds of Rebel prisoners. Shy's Hill fell, Hood's defenses crumbled, and his army disappeared as surely as the sun burned away the heavy fog on the morning of the 15th.

Warnock was mustered out of the regiment on August 14, 1865, after having been brevetted lieutenant colonel. He was admitted to the bar in 1866 and was active in civic affairs in and around Urbana, Ohio, for the rest of his life. Like many Union veterans, Warnock joined the Grand Army of the Republic and served as the commander of the department of Ohio. He was also a member of the Ohio Commandery, the Military Order of the Loyal Legion of the United States.

Warnock's painting at the Abraham Lincoln Library and Museum shows him, a young man, in uniform as a lieutenant colonel in the Union army. A later photograph captures Warnock's maturity and confidence, his beard liberally speckled with gray. Warnock died in July 1918, as the First World War drew to a close. How much he knew about that conflagration is unknown. It was not his war. His was a conflict of young men, dense fog, and the shimmering, ice-covered terrain around Nashville.