

Athens Post Newspaper Article February 27, 1863

The Hardshell – 26th – Tennessee Regiment.

The 26th Tennessee Volunteers was organized in August, or September, 1861, with over one thousand rank and file, by choosing J.M. LILLARD, Colonel; [missing] ODELL, Lieut. Colonel; and [missing] McCONNELL, Major, and was assigned to Bowling Green, where, under Gens. Johnston and Buckner, it was pronounced one of the best disciplined regiments in the service. Gen. Johnston said to President Davis that he sent his picked troops to the defence [sic] of the Cumberland River. The 26th was among the first sent to the fatal field of Fort Donelson, where, after three days of dreadful sufferings, from cold, snow and rain, without tents, being on [illegible] position the entire time, and unsurpassed successful fighting, they were surrendered to Gen. Grant of the Northern army, against their earnest, urgent protest. Having withstood every onset of the enemy, succeeded in every charge, turned every flank, and still in possession of their hard-earned field, they until the last refused to surrender, and when the white flag was waved many wept and their indignation knew no bounds. After the surrender the regiment was sent to and confined at Camp Morton, Indiana, and Johnson's Island, Ohio, where the brutal treatment they received sends a thrill of horror to many a heart. Many there, far from home and friends, sleep the long sleep of death and not a note to mark their resting place, but a monument is reared to their names in every true and patriotic Tennessean's [sic] heart. In September they were exchanged at Vicksburg, sent to Knoxville, and reorganized at that place in October by re-electing Col. Lillard, and electing J.S. Bottles Lieut.-Colonel, and B.M. Saffle Major. It was soon assigned to Murfreesboro', attached to Gen. J.C. Brown's Brigade Breckenridge's Division. On the 29th December, put in line of battle. From their known proficiency in drill and steadiness in action, were held as Gen. Breckenridge's reserve on Wednesday, under shot and shell from the enemies [sic] batteries throughout the day. They murmured not nor avoided their responsibilities. Once they were ordered to charge the enemy's extreme left, sheltered by a dense cedar-grove, where their batteries were doing great damage to our troops. Their advance was nearly a mile through an open field. The order was received with cheer after cheer. No murmuring heard, no faltering seen, officers in position and men in ranks, in the face of a dreadful fire the distance is nearly made, when to their chagrin the order was countermanded, and they retire under the same fire with the steadiness of veterans on review. Their loss was slight, and that was [illegible] with [illegible] to [illegible] [illegible] in every sense complete.

Thursday was hailed as a day of rest. But our Generals, ever generous, ever chivalrous, gave the enemy the privilege of re-organizing his demoralized ranks, choosing his positions, entrenching and planting his batteries – then attack him. Gen. Breckenridge's Division was ordered to attack the enemy's left, which was drawn up in three strong parallel columns, either outnumbering Breckenridge's force, posted in a thicket of cedar, the front rank protected by piles of rails arranged for that purpose. A creek (Stewart's)

crossed their left at acute angles, having bluff banks upon which were planted heavy batteries supported strongly by infantry. Our line was drawn up in two columns, the rear to support. The armies were separated three quarters of a mile, the distance through corn and cotton-fields. Brown's Brigade, temporarily commanded by Gen. Pillow, was composed of four Tennessee Regiments – among them, on the right wing, the Hardshell, impatient for orders. At length the order, "Column Forward! Double Quick!" was given, when cheer after cheer from this regiment rent the heavens. The column advanced; the impetuosity and eagerness of the 26th threw the column into the form of a rainbow. Those devoted veterans have been proven – no fears are entertained of their success. On rising a slight elevation the enemy poured a deadly volley into their ranks, but quick, steady, the 26th moves on, returning the fire with deadly aim. Trained to shoot the squirrel, the turkey and the deer at full speed, they knew the use of the notch and bead. No steadier aim was ever taken in sport at the mark for a prize. Every fire lessened the enemies [sic] numbers and weakened their ranks. On the column moves – the Yanks waver, they fall back with stubbornness until they reach their second column, rally behind it, and assist to stay the storm that is rushing upon them and ploughing through their ranks. But, no. Our troops are fighting for liberty, driving a hated foe from our homes, and cannot stop. The Yanks must die or fly. On they move. The gaps in the Yankee army cannot be filled up as fast as they are made; the sure aim is fast [illegible] Abraham's soldiers a final discharge. The impetuous charge and terrific yells of Dixie's boys paralyze them until aroused by the close proximity of Southern bayonets, and they fall back stubbornly contesting eve[missing] than three hundred in action. This, added to the loss at Donelson – ten killed and eighty wounded, many fatally – makes a total of one hundred and ninety-four.

In traveling with this regiment two days and nights, after their retreat, with their faces again to the foe, the writer is pleased to assure your readers that their spirits are still unbroken. Though in many instances ragged and barefooted, they march on, they toil on their way to the prize for which they started. Well officered, the ranks composed of the best Tennessee blood, and from so many sad remembrances mutually endeared to each other, the Hardshell Regiment will fill a large chapter in history. Many instances of personal courage might be given, but where all acted so well, it would perhaps be invidious. Many other regiments equalled [sic] it in valor – none surpassed it. But, a sad reminiscence. Out of more than one thousand men, only from three to four hundred remain. Where are the rest? This [illegible] in [illegible] might dampen their ardor. But, no. The sentiment of officers and men is liberty or death – that they will live as freemen, or die as freemen in pursuit of liberty that others may possess it. Such is the Hardshell Regiment, the pride and ornament of East Tennessee, and wearing their hard-earned laurels with becoming modesty.

The name is suggested to the writer by the large number wounded so slightly.

HARDSHELL.