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## The *SECOND MINNESOTA* in the WEST

KENNETH CARLEY

SO GREAT is the reputation of the First Minnesota Regiment that people who have not studied the role of the state's troops in the Civil War tend to assume that all the really heroic battles were fought by that gallant band. It is unfortunate that the truly brilliant record of this regiment has tended to obscure the deeds of other worthy Minnesota units. Notable among those deserving greater fame, in this writer's opinion, is the Second Minnesota, which served a four-year hitch in the Western theater of the Civil War and came to be rated among the better units in that arena. Its reputation rests largely on its steadiness in three battles—at Mill Springs, Kentucky; Chickamauga, Georgia; and Missionary Ridge near Chattanooga, Tennessee. This article attempts to describe the Second's part in those battles, placing special emphasis on the lesser-known encounter at Mill Springs.

The Second Regiment was mustered in June, 1861, after Governor Alexander Ramsey received a second call for troops. Its nucleus was composed of "overflow" companies raised for service with the First. Both Company A (Captain Judson W. Bishop) from Chatfield and Company B (Captain William Markham) from Rochester, for example, were originally intended for the First Regiment. These two units

were mustered in on the same day, June 26, and there was quite a bit of jockeying for position before Ramsey agreed that the Chatfield company should be designated "A" and the Rochester group "B."<sup>1</sup>

The energetic Bishop, who was eventually to command the Second Minnesota and become its chief historian, was a former railroad man turned newspaper editor. At the time of his enlistment, he was working on the *Chatfield Democrat*. Markham, a hard fighter who suffered a leg wound at Mill Springs, was later dismissed from the service and then reinstated.<sup>2</sup>

Appointed colonel of the regiment was fifty-one-year-old Horatio P. Van Cleve, a patriarchal West Pointer who lived at Long Prairie. A kindly, unostentatious man, he proved a good fighter. The lieutenant colonel was James George of Wasioja, a storytelling veteran of the Mexican War. Simeon Smith was chosen major, but he

<sup>1</sup> See William W. Folwell, *A History of Minnesota*, 2:88-91 (St. Paul, 1961); Alexander Ramsey to Bishop, May 2, 1861, as well as a series of letters exchanged by Ramsey, Bishop, and Horatio P. Van Cleve between August 1 and 31, 1861, all in the Bishop Papers in the Minnesota Historical Society. Bishop letters mentioned below are also in this collection.

<sup>2</sup> A sketch of Bishop's career may be found in the *St. Paul Pioneer Press*, March 20, 21, 1917; on Markham, see *Rochester Post-Bulletin*, October 26, 1961.



AN artist's view of the Second Minnesota storming Missionary Ridge

was soon replaced by short, combative Alexander Wilkin, a Mexican War veteran who had fought with the First Minnesota at Bull Run.<sup>3</sup>

The other eight companies of the Second were composed of soldiers from Dodge, Ramsey, Nicollet, Washington (mostly lumbermen), Brown, Blue Earth, and Goodhue counties. Thus the Second, like the First Minnesota, represented a sizable cross section of the state. Like the members

of the First, too, most of the men of the Second began their duty at frontier forts.<sup>4</sup>

The entire regiment assembled for the first time early in October, 1861, when the six companies garrisoning Forts Abercrombie, Ripley, and Ridgely joined the other four at Fort Snelling. Sporting new blue uniforms instead of the makeshift, black and red outfits issued to the First Minnesota, some one thousand men of the Second left Fort Snelling by steamboat on the morning of October 14 "under orders for Washington, D.C."<sup>5</sup>

As far as Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, they traveled much the same water-and-rail "glory road" the First Minnesota had taken four months earlier. This included a march through St. Paul to the cheers of spectators, a Mississippi River "excursion" with enthusiastic welcomes at towns en route, and a railroad ride from La Crosse, Wisconsin, to Chicago. There the Second "encamped" in the vast Wigwam, the large temporary building in which Abraham Lincoln had been nominated for the presidency in 1860.

<sup>3</sup> Warren Upham and Rose B. Dunlap, *Minnesota Biographies*, 251, 804 (*Minnesota Historical Collections*, vol. 14); T. M. Newson, *Pen Pictures of St. Paul*, 176 (St. Paul, 1886).

<sup>4</sup> The material in this and succeeding paragraphs, as well as information on the Second not otherwise documented specifically in this article, is drawn from the two principal accounts of the regiment prepared by Bishop: *Story of a Regiment, Being a Narrative of the Service of the Second Regiment* (St. Paul, 1890); and "Narrative of the Second Regiment," in *Minnesota in the Civil and Indian Wars*, 1:79-122 (St. Paul, 1892).

<sup>5</sup> See John W. Harris, "Uniforming the First Minnesota," in *Gopher Historian*, 17:14 (Spring, 1963); William Bircher, *A Drummer-Boy's Diary*, 11 (St. Paul, 1889). The quotation is from Bishop, *Story of a Regiment*, 26.

From Chicago the men of the Second went by train to Pittsburgh, where they arrived on October 18. They were escorted to a hall in which were long tables "loaded down with eatables of every description, and . . . waited on by the most beautiful and patriotic young ladies of the city."<sup>6</sup> Spirits thus buoyed up were soon dashed when the Minnesotans learned that their destination had been changed from the nation's capital to Kentucky. This meant that the Second would not become part of the Army of the Potomac after all and would not fight alongside the First Minnesota, as some of the men may have hoped. Whatever name the regiment made for itself would have to be won in the West.

WHILE the Second Minnesota was moving eastward, General William T. Sherman, then commander of the Department of the Cumberland at Louisville, was howling for two hundred thousand men to hold Kentucky against what he thought was a serious Confederate threat to drive through to the Ohio River. Sherman, who was not yet the able leader he would later become under General Ulysses S. Grant, apparently was hoodwinked by the bold maneuvers of General Albert Sidney Johnston, head of the Confederate's Western Department. Actually, Johnston had an undermanned defense line from Columbus, Kentucky, on the Mississippi all the way east to the Mill Springs area, where Confederate General Felix K. Zollicoffer held a position in front of the Cumberland Gap.

Although Sherman's demands for large reinforcements gave rise to charges that he was mentally deranged and should be replaced (he soon was), some troops—including the Second Minnesota—were sent to him. The Minnesota regiment enjoyed "a delightful voyage down the Ohio River" and landed at Louisville on October 22. Sherman ordered Colonel Van Cleve to proceed to Lebanon Junction some thirty miles south on the Louisville and Nashville Railroad. After a disheartening journey on

open flatcars in a cold rainstorm, the regiment arrived at 4:00 A.M. and set up camp. The men remained at Lebanon Junction for several weeks, guarding railroad bridges, doing picket duty, and drilling. The campground was damp and unhealthy, and the sick list got rather long.<sup>7</sup>

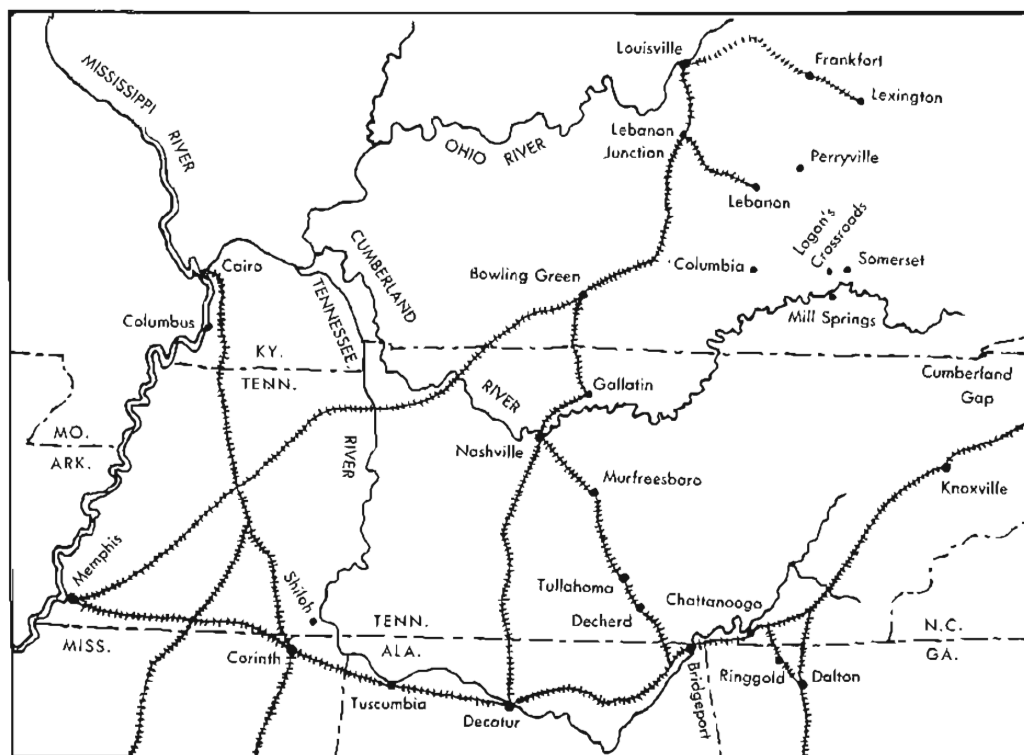
Meanwhile, a reorganization of the Union army was taking place that was to give the regiment new leaders. On November 15, General Don Carlos Buell, a methodical soldier, replaced Sherman and organized the troops in Kentucky into the Army of the Ohio. Early in December, General George H. Thomas, a stolid Virginian who had cast his lot with the Union, assumed command of the First Division of Buell's army. With two Ohio regiments—the Ninth and the Thirty-fifth—the Second Minnesota became the Third Brigade of this division. The Minnesota men were to enjoy a long and pleasant association with these Ohio troops. The soldiers of the Ninth Ohio were known as "the bully Dutchmen" because they were almost entirely Germans from Cincinnati, few of whom could speak English. The Ninth's colonel, Robert L. McCook, became the Third Brigade's commander.

On December 8, 1861, the Second was relieved at Lebanon Junction by the Third Minnesota Regiment. "We were as much rejoiced when we broke camp as when we left Abercrombie, for we were heartily sick of the place, and the business of guarding Bridges," one of the Second's soldiers wrote in a letter that appeared in the *Rochester City Post* of December 28, 1861.

THE SECOND moved by rail thirty-seven miles to Lebanon, Kentucky, where General Thomas had his headquarters. This was the beginning of the regiment's three-year service under "Pap" Thomas, who would be in turn its division, corps, and army commander. The Second came to admire the deliberate, hard-hitting Thomas both as a

<sup>6</sup> Bircher, *Diary*, 13.

<sup>7</sup> Bishop, in *Civil and Indian Wars*, 1:80.



WESTERN Kentucky and Tennessee, showing strategic railroads (hatched lines)

man and as a soldier. By doing its job well, the regiment helped to further Thomas' illustrious career.

Because Buell was under pressure from Washington to invade eastern Tennessee, where much Union sentiment existed, he rather lukewarmly agreed late in December that Thomas could advance in that direction. On New Year's Day, 1862, Thomas moved southward out of Lebanon with units of McCook's Third Brigade (including the Second Minnesota) and the Second Brigade, commanded by Colonel Mahlon D. Manson of the Tenth Indiana Regiment.

The Union column of some five thousand men was going after General Zollicoffer's Confederates who had set up an entrenched camp at Beech Grove, Kentucky, on the north bank of the Cumberland River opposite Mill Springs. Before taking on Zollicoffer, however, Thomas wished his First Brigade to join him. It was stationed at

Somerset, Kentucky, some fifteen miles northeast of Beech Grove and was commanded by Brigadier General Albin F. Schoepf.

Thomas' marchers had little difficulty as long as they stayed on the improved road to Columbia, Kentucky, but when they turned eastward toward Somerset on a dirt road, it began to rain and the going got increasingly tough. Each regiment had thirteen baggage wagons "loaded to their roofs" and considerable other equipment. The rain continued for ten days, and the men had to slog through slush and mud up to the wagons' axles on short, tedious marches. When the wagon trains bogged down, they had to sleep without shelter. "This, in midwinter, was a very discouraging experience to the volunteers then on their first campaign," wrote Bishop. Finally, after taking eight days to cover the last forty miles, the column halted on January 17, 1862, at Logan's Crossroads, some nine miles north of Zollicoffer's camp.<sup>8</sup> There

<sup>8</sup> Bishop, in *Civil and Indian Wars*, 1:82.

Thomas proposed to wait for Schoepf and the First Brigade.

Meanwhile, General George B. Crittenden, Zollicoffer's superior, came up from Knoxville, Tennessee, to take over command of the Confederates in front of Thomas. Crittenden had intended to move his force back across the Cumberland River to a less exposed position on the south bank, but the zealous Zollicoffer talked him into staying on the north side. Crittenden then decided to attack the Federals at Logan's Crossroads before Schoepf could join Thomas.<sup>9</sup>

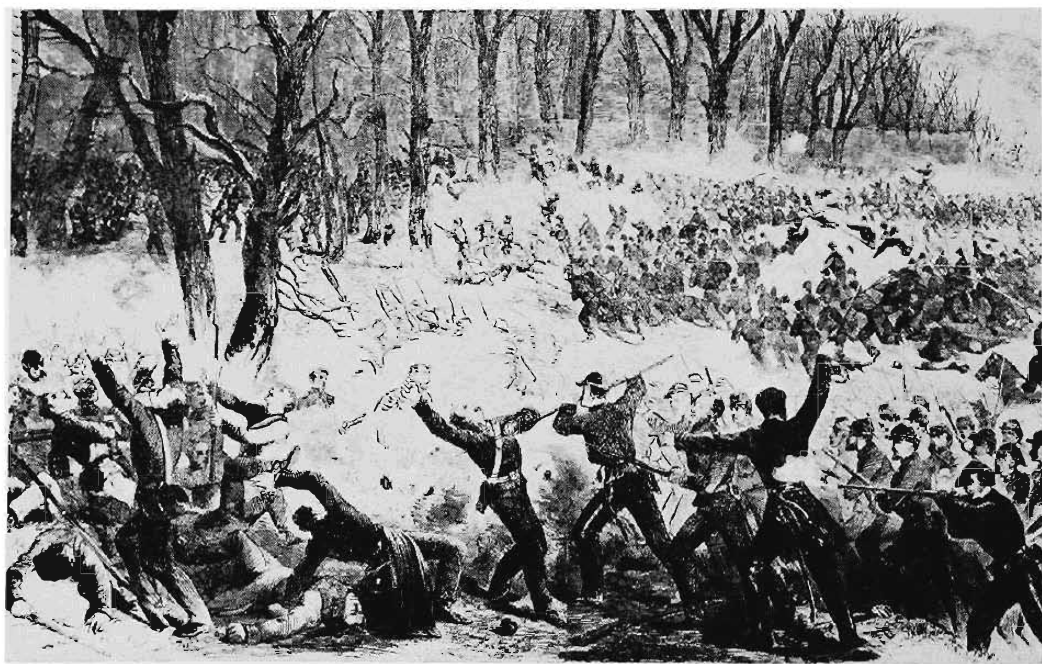
The inexperienced Confederate troops floundered northward through mud and darkness. Near daybreak on January 19 they stumbled on Yankee pickets out ahead of the Tenth Indiana's camp. The pickets raised the alarm, ruining the Confederates' chances for a surprise attack. Colonel Manson at once ordered the Tenth Indiana to meet the enemy, then rode in person a half mile to bring up the Fourth Kentucky Regiment in support of the Hoosiers. That done, Manson hurried to headquarters to tell

General Thomas of the Confederate attack and to warn the Second Minnesota and the Ninth Ohio encamped nearby.

When Colonel Van Cleve got the word, some of his men were seated around their campfires in a "drizzling rain" awaiting breakfast. Others were washing at a small brook or were "engaged in a strenuous effort" to get their feet into soggy boots. William Bircher, the drummer boy, sounded the long roll, which one member of the Second recalled as "a monotonous beating on the drum that puts action into men and brings them into line quicker than will any other call, not excepting even the bugle call to breakfast." Within moments

<sup>9</sup> General accounts of the Mill Springs battle consulted include: R. M. Kelly, "Holding Kentucky for the Union," in *Battles and Leaders of the Civil War*, 1:387-392 (New York, 1870); Stanley F. Horn, *The Army of Tennessee: A Military History*, 67-70 (Norman, Oklahoma, 1952); Freeman Cleaves, *Rock of Chickamauga: The Life of General George H. Thomas*, 90-100 (Norman, 1948); Kenneth P. Williams, *Lincoln Finds a General: A Military Study of the Civil War*, 3:159-177 (New York, 1952). The latter is somewhat unfavorable to Thomas.

*THE battle of Mill Springs as pictured in Harper's Weekly*



Van Cleve was astride his horse — a favorite young mare as new to battle as his troops — riding at the head of “nine companies of the Second Minnesota Infantry carrying 605 muskets on their shoulders . . . plowing through the mud and dripping rain at a dogs trot toward the junction with the Mill Springs road.” (Captain Bishop’s Company A had been sent off on picket duty and thus missed the fighting.)<sup>10</sup>

After marching about a mile, the Second Minnesota formed for battle line in a low meadow with the Ninth Ohio to its right. Out ahead about a half mile, the Tenth Indiana and the Fourth Kentucky continued to do battle with the enemy in an area of heavy woods and rolling fields. Mist and heavy smoke reduced visibility. In the confusion, Zollicoffer, who was nearsighted, mistakenly rode up to the Fourth Kentucky. He was shot and killed by the regiment’s commander, Colonel Speed S. Fry.

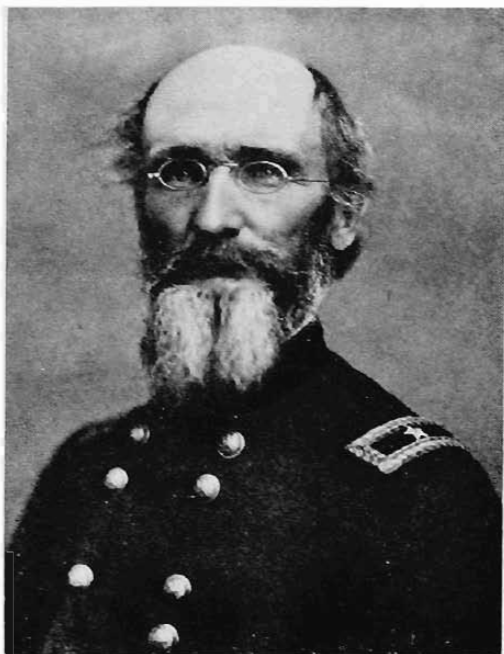
About this time the Indiana and Kentucky men began to run out of ammunition so Thomas ordered the Second Minnesota and the Ninth Ohio to relieve them. The Minnesotans moved up in good order through dense timber to the position near the Mill Springs road. While advancing, the Minnesotans came upon a rail fence overhung with low, spreading, beech trees and, to their surprise as well as the enemy’s, soon were engaged in a hot hand-to-hand battle with the Confederates.

Jeremiah C. Donahower of Company E explained that “because of the low hanging branches, and of the smoke from Minn[.] and rebel muskets that floated below the branches we could see nothing five paces in front, and men therefore got down on their knees” to take aim below the smoke.

<sup>10</sup>Quoted material is from Jeremiah C. Donahower, “Narrative of the Civil War,” 1:204, 205, 210, a three-volume manuscript in the Minnesota Historical Society. See also a letter from John H. Gibbons in the *St. Paul Press*, January 31, 1862.

<sup>11</sup>Donahower, “Narrative,” 1:207; McCook, in *Civil and Indian Wars*, 2:53; Van Cleve, *St. Paul Pioneer and Democrat*, February 2, 1862.

<sup>12</sup>*Pioneer and Democrat*, January 29, 1862.



HORATIO P. Van Cleve, 1864

McCook, the brigade commander, afterward reported that “the enemy and the Second Minnesota were poking their guns through the same fence.” Van Cleve wrote his wife: “We were so close on them that one of the men had his beard and whiskers singed by the fire of one of the muskets; . . . another caught hold of one of their muskets and jerked it through the fence: two stood and fired at each other, their muskets crossing; both fell dead. It is wonderful, that with so many balls flying, so few of us were hurt. We had twelve killed, and thirty-three wounded.”<sup>11</sup>

Acting like seasoned veterans instead of neophytes in their first battle, the Minnesotans apparently outshot the Confederates, who were hindered by wet flintlock muskets. They took an especially heavy toll of the Fifteenth Mississippi’s ranks and captured its flag. (Zollicoffer’s body, which lay near the Second Minnesota’s position, also yielded up trophies for the men. One of them sent a St. Paul newspaper editor a small piece of the general’s coat and part of his undershirt.)<sup>12</sup>

Such close-quarter fighting could not last long. After twenty or thirty minutes the Confederates were set up for a bayonet charge by the Ninth Ohio. The Rebels broke and ran, with the Federals in pursuit. Most of Crittenden's men managed to get across the Cumberland, but they left their wounded, guns, supplies, and entrenchments for Thomas' force. Because of the impossible condition of the roads and the disintegration of the enemy's forces, the Union men made little effort to chase the routed Confederates.

THE Battle of Mill Springs, (sometimes called Logan's Crossroads, Fishing Creek, Somerset, or Beech Grove) was a relatively small one; Thomas and Crittenden each had only about four thousand men on the field. Nor do the casualties on both sides sound particularly impressive. Thomas reported his loss in action as 39 killed and 207 wounded among the four regiments and one unit of cavalry actively engaged; Crittenden reported 126 killed, 309 wounded, and 99 missing.<sup>13</sup>

But, small as it was, Mill Springs was important. The battle demolished for good the right extremity of General Johnston's line. Soon most of Kentucky would be in Union hands. Mill Springs also gave the North, and especially President Abraham Lincoln, a much-needed victory after a succession of defeats. The battle revealed, too, that in Thomas the Union had a promising general. The Second Minnesota received its baptism by fire, participated actively in the decisive fighting, and with other Union regiments could take just pride in its accomplishment. Throughout the battle General Thomas himself sat quietly on his horse "not more than twenty paces" to the rear of the Second's Company G. One writer noted that Thomas "gained a favorable opinion" of the Second and "expressed his confidence in its stability and fortitude." Another reported that after the fight General Thomas saw "one of our boys" carrying a goose. Thomas told the man to

"put down that goose," which he, of course, did at once. Then Thomas asked, "What regiment do you belong to?" When the soldier replied that he was with the Second Minnesota, Thomas said: "Pick him up! Pick him up! You've earned him."<sup>14</sup>

For the Second Minnesota, Mill Springs was beneficial in that it built *esprit de corps* as well as increased respect between officers and men. Before the battle there had been some grumbling against the regiment's officers. In a letter written on January 10 from a camp near Columbia, Joseph McAlpin of Company F commented: "I am sorry to say that much bad feeling exists in the regiment . . . and the men are determined to fight on their own hook, and not through any liking or respect for their officers who command them. Col. McCook, who commands the 9th Ohio . . . is every inch a soldier, and the constant wish of the 2d Regiment is, that it could be commanded by such a man, instead of a lady-like old gentleman, who is far more fit to be a Bishop than a Colonel." After the battle, however, the same writer said that Van Cleve "has risen in the regiment's estimation five hundred per cent. No man could have acted with more promptness. He has proved himself a true soldier; one without fear, and of general good discrimination."<sup>15</sup>

Several other enlisted men wrote letters to Minnesota newspapers praising the valor not only of Van Cleve but also of Lieutenant Colonel George and Major Wilkin. The latter, however, had some reservations about George. In a letter to his father, the outspoken Wilkin said that "Our Lt[.] Col[.] George is a good deal of a blower

<sup>13</sup> Kelly, in *Battles and Leaders*, 1:391; Bishop, in *Civil and Indian Wars*, 1:86; Crittenden, in United States War Department, *The War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies*, series 1, vol. 7, p. 108 (Washington, 1882).

<sup>14</sup> Donahower, "Narrative," 1:208, 209; *Stillwater Messenger*, February 11, 1862.

<sup>15</sup> *Pioneer and Democrat*, January 21, February 2, 1862.

& a politician. He dismounted some time before we got into action & did not take any unnecessary risks, but behaved pretty well. He is a clever man enough & I do not want what I have written mentioned." Wilkin also told his father that "our regiment did better service than any other," but Colonel McCook "does not of course give us more than equal credit with his own regiment the Ninth Ohio."<sup>16</sup>

Among the honors that came the Second Minnesota's way after Mill Springs was a flag presented in the name of the Loyal Ladies of the Louisville Soldiers Association. Van Cleve made a gracious acknowledgment. Back home, an artillery salute was fired from St. Paul's Capitol Square "in honor of the glorious victory of our arms at the recent battle of Somerset, Kentucky." One soldier of the Second, leaving nothing to chance, wrote the *St. Paul Pioneer and Democrat*: "The Minnesota First has had the run of the St. Paul papers quite long enough, and the Second begs to say that it is now their turn."<sup>17</sup>

But the real glory belongs to those for whom it was the last battle. The day following the fight Albert Parker of Company I wrote his parents in St. Anthony of the death of his nineteen-year-old brother, Samuel M. Parker. His simple letter seems to sum up eloquently the tragedy not only of the battle of Mill Springs but of the entire Civil War. "I am weary and lonesome and hardly know what to write to you," Parker began. "We have had a great battle with Zollicoffer's forces, one mile and a half from this camp, but I am safe and

well. . . . Dear father and mother! how can I tell you — (but you will hear it before this gets to you) — Samuel has gone to his God. He now sleeps the sleep that knows no waking on this earth, beneath the cold soil of Kentucky. He died charging bravely on the enemy, from a bayonet wound in the left groin, which passed through the kidneys. He died in about fifteen minutes after receiving the thrust. He died calmly and easily, without much pain. — One of the drummer boys offered to call the doctor, but he said, 'If you call him he will leave some poor fellow that will die, and it may as well be me, as any one.'<sup>18</sup>

The youthful soldier added that when his brother "was laid in his grave, he looked as natural as if asleep," and that he had placed "a board at the head" of his brother's grave, "with his name, regiment and company cut on it." The sorrowing boy concluded: "Oh! dear father and mother, may God help us to bear up under this our affliction. Good bye, my dear parents."

MORE THAN a year and a half was to pass before the Second Minnesota again engaged in a full-scale battle, but the regiment saw plenty of hard marching during that time. By the end of 1862, drummer boy William Bircher, who kept a daily account of distances, figured that the men had tramped 1,493 miles through Kentucky, Mississippi, and Tennessee.<sup>19</sup> Their travels began late in February when, with the rest of Thomas' division they proceeded by way of the Ohio and Cumberland rivers to Nashville, Tennessee. Then the men marched at the end of General Buell's column to Shiloh, where the Second arrived on April 8, the day after the Union forces won a narrow victory in a two-day battle there. The Minnesotans helped bury the dead on that battlefield.

The Second was next sent to Corinth, Mississippi, where it took part in the slow siege of that city, which fell on May 30. The division moved eastward during the

<sup>16</sup> For some letters of men in the Second, see *St. Paul Press*, January 31, February 4, 1862; *Pioneer and Democrat*, February 7, 1862. See also Alexander Wilkin to his father, February 2, 1862 (photographic copy) in the Wilkin Papers, in the Minnesota Historical Society. The originals are owned by the St. Paul Fire and Marine Insurance Company.

<sup>17</sup> *Civil and Indian Wars*, 2:90 (1899); *Press*, January 22, 1862; *Pioneer and Democrat*, February 11, 1862.

<sup>18</sup> *Minnesota State News* (St. Anthony), February 1, 1862.

<sup>19</sup> Bircher, *Diary*, 53.



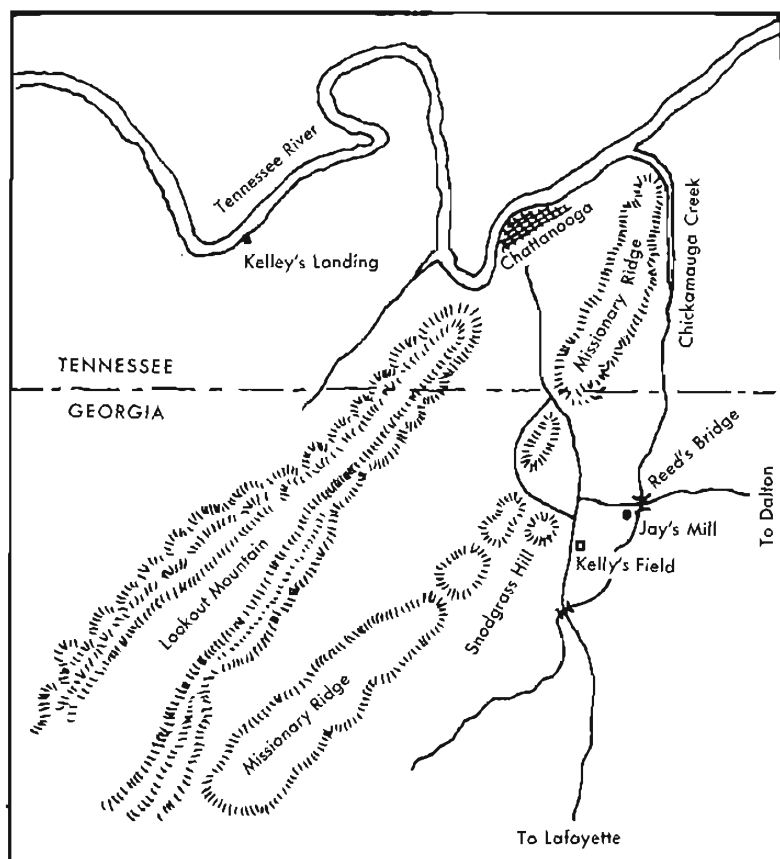
summer, and in late September and early October the Minnesota regiment was caught up in one of its toughest campaigns—a succession of forced marches northward across Tennessee and Kentucky, an area parched by protracted drought. Buell's Army of the Ohio and General Braxton Bragg's Confederate Army of Tennessee were engaged in a race for Louisville. The maneuver led on October 8 to the drawn battle of Perryville, Kentucky, in which the Second took but a minor part.<sup>20</sup>

In the last two months of 1862 the Second Minnesota was shuffled from place to place in Tennessee in futile pursuit of General John Hunt Morgan's Confederate cavalry. On December 31, stationed at Gallatin, Tennessee, the regiment heard the rumbling of a cannonade at Murfreesboro during the big battle there. The Second, however, missed taking part in this encounter. In March, 1863, after more march-

ing, the men went into camp at Triune, Tennessee, south of Nashville, where they remained for the next three months or so.

While the Second was doing all this moving about in 1862 a number of changes occurred among its leaders. During the spring, Van Cleve was promoted to brigadier general and was mustered out of the regiment. George became its colonel; Wilkin was named lieutenant colonel; and Bishop was promoted to major. On the division's eastward march during the summer, beloved and ailing General McCook of the Ninth Ohio, who had been the Second's long-time brigade commander, was mur-

<sup>20</sup> Although Perryville halted Bragg's Kentucky invasion, it was not the Union victory it should have been, and Buell was replaced by General William S. Rosecrans. The latter soon reorganized his troops into the Army of the Cumberland in which the former Army of the Ohio became the Fourteenth Corps.



THE rugged Chattanooga area, "gateway to Atlanta"

dered in cold blood by guerrillas near Decherd, Tennessee. Colonel Ferdinand Van Derveer of the Thirty-fifth Ohio then assumed command of the brigade. Late in August, Wilkin was transferred to the Ninth Minnesota, and Bishop moved up to lieutenant colonel of the Second.

ON JUNE 23, 1863, the Second Minnesota left its camp at Triune and, with the rest of the army, took part in the so-called Tullahoma campaign by which General William S. Rosecrans, with masterful strategy, maneuvered Bragg out of his strong positions in central Tennessee, forced him into Chattanooga — the gateway to Atlanta — and precipitated the battle of Chickamauga. The men of the Second were "pleased by the prospect of an early conflict." One of them commented that "we believed Bragg's main army was our objective, and that the pea coffee drinkers would soon be disputing our right of way."<sup>21</sup>

In mid-August, after much urging by authorities in Washington, Rosecrans started his Army of the Cumberland through the mountains toward the Tennessee River. By September 4 the army was across the river, marching in three widely separated columns (the northern one was some forty miles from the southern one) across rugged terrain toward Chattanooga and northern Georgia. In the center was Thomas' Fourteenth Corps composed of four divisions (including General John M. Brannan's, to which belonged Van Derveer's brigade consisting of the Eighty-seventh Indiana, the Second Minnesota, and the Ninth and Thirty-fifth Ohio).

The Union army's eastward march over mountainous country threatened Bragg's flank, and he moved southward out of Chattanooga. Although Rosecrans thought that Bragg was retreating to Atlanta, the Confederate commander was in reality preparing to do battle. Rosecrans slowly realized this and began bringing together his three separated corps. By September 18 the two



JUDSON W. Bishop

armies were concentrated in the valley of northward-flowing Chickamauga Creek a few miles south of Chattanooga. The two-day battle of Chickamauga was fought on September 19 and 20 in the oak and pine forests, thick underbrush, and small clearings along this creek.

There was considerable shifting of troops on the night of September 18 as both armies sought to get into position. Among Bragg's arriving reinforcements were two divisions of General James Longstreet's corps from General Robert E. Lee's famed Army of Northern Virginia.

Early on the morning of September 19, the Second Minnesota and the rest of the brigade halted near the Kelly house after a very chilly march northward. "We had been all night," wrote Bishop, "in moving less than five miles . . . and at eight o'clock our brigade halted, filed out of the road near Kelly's house and stacked arms, while the word was passed down the line, 'Twenty minutes for breakfast.' In five minutes hundreds of little fires were kindled and hundreds of little coffee cans were filled with

<sup>21</sup> Donahower, "Narrative," 2:75.

water from canteens and set to boil; in ten minutes the boiling coffee was lifted off, the luscious bacon was nicely browned and the ever toothsome hardtack had been toasted; when comes an aid at a furious gallop down the dusty road." He ordered the hungry men to move on again at once, and one said that some of them "fell into line with a musket in one hand and a tin cup of hot coffee in the other," drinking "their coffee seasoned with the dust of the road as they walked." Bishop wrote that "Some desperate emergency was of course to be presumed, but to meet it with empty bellies at that moment was a severe trial of our patriotism."<sup>22</sup>

A march of about a mile brought the brigade to a road leading through oak

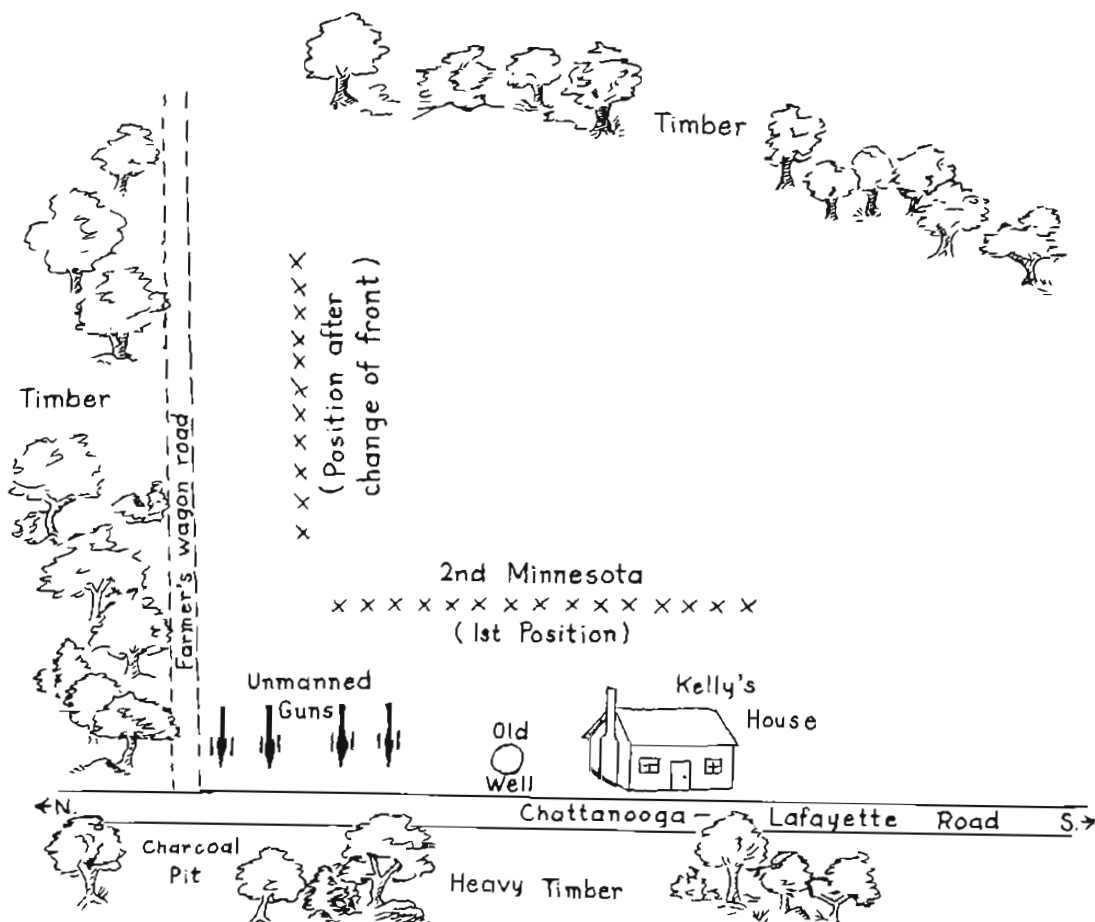
woods to Jay's sawmill and, farther on, to Reed's bridge over Chickamauga Creek. There the Second encountered General Brannan "who greeted us with a smile full of good cheer . . . and his greeting said plainly, the Johnnies are in the woods ahead, hit them hard."<sup>23</sup>

At this point the brigade was on the extreme left of the Union army's line. It had been sent there in a hurry to capture what Thomas had been informed was a single Confederate division isolated on the west side of the creek. Actually, Bragg was trying to get between the Union army and Chattanooga by extending his right be-

<sup>22</sup> Bishop, in *Civil and Indian Wars*, 1:97; Donahower, "Narrative," 2:106, 107.

<sup>23</sup> Donahower, "Narrative," 2:107.

THE action in Kelly's field, drawn from a diagram in the Donahower Papers



yond the Union left. The men of the Second found, said Bishop, that Bragg had "nearly the entire Confederate army" in position opposite them.<sup>24</sup>

The appearance of Brannan's division, to which the Second belonged, ruined the Confederate general's plan and opened the battle of Chickamauga. Soon the Minnesota and Thirty-fifth Ohio regiments were engaged in a shooting match with the enemy, which included some dismounted cavalry under famed General Nathan Bedford Forrest. Van Derveer's brigade held hard in an isolated position and at one point beat back Confederates who had routed some regulars on its left.

This initial action set the pattern for the fighting down the line on September 19 as both sides brought up units. Before the day ended, almost all the divisions in both armies were involved in an inconclusive fight. The action near Jay's mill cost the Second Minnesota, which began the battle with 384 men, 8 killed and 41 wounded — "none missing," noted Bishop. The regiment bivouacked for the night in a cornfield "along the wooded base of Missionary Ridge."<sup>25</sup>

"SUNDAY MORNING, the 20th, the sun

<sup>24</sup> The quotation is from Bishop, in *Civil and Indian Wars*, 1:98. For other accounts of the Second Minnesota's role in the Chickamauga campaign, see Bishop's *Story of a Regiment*, 91–112, and his "Van Derveer's Brigade at Chickamauga," in *Glimpses of the Nation's Struggle: Papers Read Before the Minnesota Commandery of the Military Order of the Loyal Legion of the United States*, 1903–08, Sixth Series, 53–74 (Minneapolis, 1909); Donahower, "Narrative," 2:106–150; Folwell, *Minnesota*, 2:316–321. The best general account is Glenn Tucker, *Chickamauga: Bloody Battle in the West* (Indianapolis, 1961).

<sup>25</sup> Bishop, in *Civil and Indian Wars*, 1:99; Donahower, "Narrative," 2:124.

<sup>26</sup> *Civil and Indian Wars*, 1:100.

<sup>27</sup> Bishop, in *Civil and Indian Wars*, 1:100. See also Donahower, "Narrative," 2:129–134, for a version differing in details.

<sup>28</sup> Pendergast to his brother and sister, September 28, 1863 (microfilm copy), in the Lewis Harrington Papers, in the Minnesota Historical Society. The originals are held by Lewis H. Merrill, Hutchinson, Minnesota. See also *Press*, October 9, 1863.

rose looking fiery red and twice as large as usual, through the dense smoke which had settled over the battle ground," wrote a correspondent in the *St. Paul Press* of October 9, 1863. Bishop said that "all was quiet as the grave; the stillness was in fact oppressive."<sup>26</sup>

Before noon the Second Minnesota and the rest of its brigade were ordered to fall in to the left of the line in Kelly's cornfield. "Before us was a large, open field, bounded on the north by a strip of woods," wrote Bishop. "As we halted . . . and began looking around for the enemy, whose appearance we expected in our front (eastward), the air was suddenly filled with bullets, and a line of gray smoke appeared along the edge of the woods to our left." The brigade instantly made a change of front to face the threat from the north but suffered its heaviest losses of the war completing the maneuver. About a third of the regiment's number were killed or wounded in the action at Kelly's field.<sup>27</sup>

The attacking Confederates belonged to General John C. Breckinridge's division, which had passed around the left flank of the Union army to threaten the rear. The Minnesotans and others lay on the ground to fire. Timothy H. Pendergast of Company K wrote afterward that this spot "was just about the hottest that I was ever in. I never felt more friendly to mother earth than I did there." He also said the firing became so intense that the usually brave Ninth Ohio men broke for the rear. He and others of the Second Minnesota helped rally them. A *St. Paul Press* correspondent visited the field an hour after the men left and "could trace the line the Second Minnesota occupied by the dead."<sup>28</sup>

After Van Derveer's brigade and other troops of Thomas' corps had repulsed attacks on the left, Bragg decided to have General Longstreet assail the Union right. By pure chance Longstreet struck a hole where an entire division had been pulled from the general line of battle because of confusion in orders. The Confederates



THOMAS' men repulsing the Confederate forces at Snodgrass Hill

poured through the gap and sent General Rosecrans, several other generals (including the Second's first commander, Van Cleve), and much of the army's right and center packing in the direction of Chattanooga.

The defeat would have had more serious consequences had not General Thomas at this juncture become "the Rock of Chickamauga." In the early afternoon he collected as many troops as he could for a stand on Snodgrass Hill, some hundred feet above Chickamauga Valley. After the fighting in Kelly's field, Thomas' aid met the Second Minnesota and the remainder of Van Derveer's brigade and conducted them to Snodgrass Hill. "General Thomas rode down to meet us and sat upon his horse and looked the men over as we marched past him and up the slope of the ridge," said Bishop. "Undoubtedly he was glad to see, in this emergency, the regiments that, under his eye, had fought and won Mill Springs, and he said to the writer that he was 'glad to see us in such good order.'"<sup>22</sup>

All through the long afternoon—from 2:30 P.M. to about 7:30 P.M.—Van Derveer's brigade repulsed repeated assaults on the ridge by Longstreet's men. The Second Minnesota took the place of the Twenty-first Ohio after the latter ran out of ammunition. Time after time the Confederates charged up the slope and were mowed down.

Of the Rebel advances, Bishop wrote: "Ranks followed ranks in close order, moving briskly and bravely toward us. It was theirs to advance; ours, now, to stand and repel. Again the order was passed to aim carefully and make every shot count, and the deadly work began. The front ranks melted away under the rapid fire of our men, those following bowed their heads to the storm of bullets and pressed on, some of them falling at every step, until, the supporting touch of elbows being lost, the survivors hesitate, halt, and then turning, start back with a rush that carries away to the rear all

<sup>22</sup> *Civil and Indian Wars*, 1:100.

that escape the bullets. . . . This was all repeated again and again, until the slope was so covered with dead and wounded men that, looking from our position, we could hardly see the ground."<sup>30</sup>

Thomas' troops were running out of ammunition, however, and the situation was becoming critical. At one point the Second Minnesota had less than a hundred cartridges for 250 guns. Then, just in the nick of time, two brigades of General Gordon Granger's Reserve Corps arrived, permitting Thomas' heroic troops to retire in good order at twilight. Van Derveer's brigade was about the last to leave the field.

The Second Minnesota, led by George, had fought hard and well in three places over the two days and had a hand in both the beginning and end of the battle. Its losses at Chickamauga were 45 killed, 103 wounded, and 14 captured (at Kelly's field) — 162 casualties out of 384 men engaged, or a total of forty-two per cent. In his official report, Van Derveer said: "It is a noticeable fact that the Second Minnesota had not a single man among the missing or a straggler during the two days' engagement."<sup>31</sup>

In the entire bloody battle the Union army of about 58,000 men lost some 16,000 in killed, wounded, or missing. The Confederates had about 18,500 casualties in an army of some 66,000.<sup>32</sup> The victory, less than three months after the bitter defeats at Gettysburg and Vicksburg, gave the South new hope. But Chickamauga was a Pyrrhic triumph, thanks to Thomas' stand and Bragg's failure to follow up effectively.

THE Confederates did, however, besiege and cut the supply lines of the Union force

that holed up in Chattanooga to lick its wounds. Bragg's men took over scenic Lookout Mountain, rising 1,500 feet above a U-shaped curve in the Tennessee River southwest of Chattanooga. They also fortified Missionary Ridge, a long range that rose abruptly several hundred feet above the plain east and southeast of the city. With its supply lines cut, the Union army got only a trickle of food.

"General Bragg set his cavalry in motion with orders to cut the slender thread of hope left for feeding of the Union army," wrote Donahower. Men went on half and then quarter rations and thousands of mules and other animals died. Donahower said that the few horses "retained at Chattanooga soon became too weak to walk to the usual watering place, and as they stood day after day in line along their picket rope with their noses near the ground, growing leaner and weaker, they drew our sympathy, but we could do nothing for them." He added: "The Soldiers in the beleaguered city fared better than the horses and mules did because they did have coffee and a few crackers each day, and about three ounces of bacon every other day."<sup>33</sup>

But relief was on the way. General Grant, appointed commander of the armies of the West, arrived in Chattanooga on October 23, 1863. Thomas replaced Rosecrans as head of the Army of the Cumberland. Sherman took Grant's place as commander of the Army of the Tennessee and brought part of that force to Chattanooga. General Joseph Hooker also arrived after a long journey with a detachment from the Army of the Potomac.

Late in October a water-land supply line was opened again by Minnesota's ingenious William G. Le Duc of the Quartermaster Corps, and the build-up was on to dislodge Bragg and his forces from the nearby heights.<sup>34</sup> By November 11 Bishop could write to his sister: "The 'situation' here has considerably improved within a few days. We have possession now of the River from Bridgeport to the foot of Lookout Mountain.

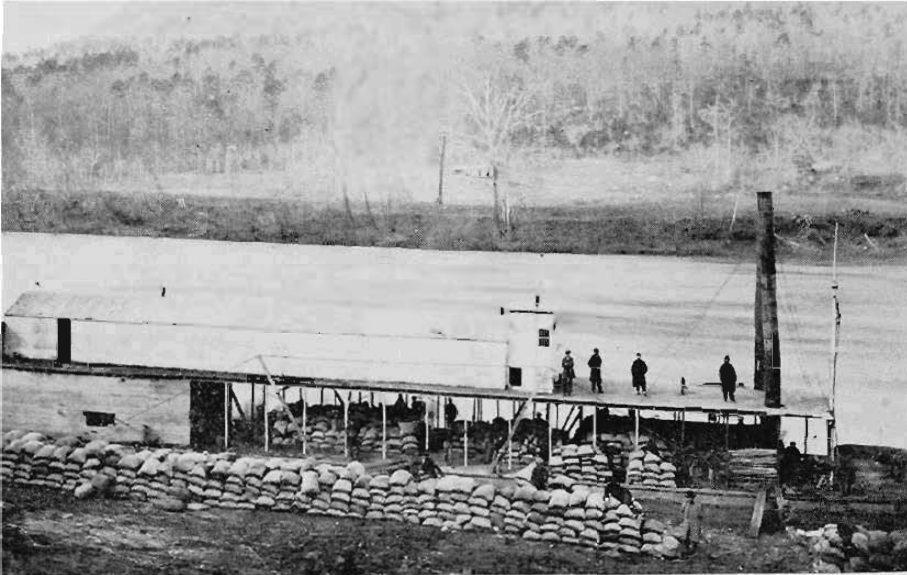
<sup>30</sup> *Civil and Indian Wars*, 1:100.

<sup>31</sup> Bishop, in *Glimpses of the Nation's Struggle*, 73, 74.

<sup>32</sup> James R. Sullivan, *Chickamauga and Chattanooga Battlefields*, 24 (National Park Service, *Historical Handbooks* No. 25 — Washington, 1956).

<sup>33</sup> Donahower, "Narrative," 2:167, 170, 171.

<sup>34</sup> On Le Duc's role in opening the route, see his account, "The Little Steamboat that Opened the 'Cracker Line,'" in *Battles and Leaders*, 3:676-678.



THE first steamer  
arrives at  
Kelley's Landing  
to open the  
Union supply line

3 miles below here and steamers are running with supplies to that point. Rations are plenty now."

The Army of the Cumberland was not happy, however, about the way Grant planned to go after the Confederates. Sensitive over their defeat at Chickamauga and eager to make amends, Thomas' men could see that if Grant had his way Sherman and Hooker would be the "stars." On November 24, Hooker captured Lookout Mountain on the Confederate left. Disgruntled, Bishop told his mother in a letter written on December 3, 1863, that the Second "had a fine opportunity to *see* a battle," and that the men had watched Hooker's attack through field glasses.

The following day Sherman assaulted Missionary Ridge from the north, but was repulsed by Bragg's men. Grant then asked Thomas' Army of the Cumberland to make a diversionary move on the Confederate center at Missionary Ridge. The men were to take only the enemy's first line of rifle pits at the foot of the formidable hill and then stop for further orders. As the blue-coated ranks swept toward the ridge from a position on the plain approximately a mile in front of it, Thomas' men numbered about twenty thousand in sixty regiments and four divisions.

On the left of the swiftly moving army was the Second Minnesota's division, now commanded by General Absalom Baird.

The regiment's brigade (still under Van Derveer) was in the center of the division and formed in two lines of three regiments each. Out in front of the whole advancing brigade, with two companies deployed as skirmishers, was the Second Minnesota, led by Bishop. At 4:00 P.M. the Minnesotans drove the Confederates from rifle pits on a secondary ridge in front of the main one and were under fire alone there for twenty minutes until the rest of the brigade came up.<sup>35</sup>

Then, in a spectacular setting, occurred one of the war's most spectacular actions. Thomas' divisions stormed the Confederate line as ordered, but they did not stop. Apparently without orders, they continued to clamber right up the steep, craggy side of the ridge, keeping so close to some of the retreating Confederates that enemy gunners above could not fire for fear of hitting their own men. The Second Minnesota roared over the top at about the same time as several other regiments and took two of the five Napoleon guns credited to Van Derveer's brigade. Holder Jacobus, color sergeant of Company E, crossed lances with a Confederate color bearer over one of the cannon and then fell wounded. Six of the

<sup>35</sup> For accounts of the Second Minnesota at Missionary Ridge, see Bishop, *Story of a Regiment*, 113-127; *Civil and Indian Wars*, 1:102-106; George A. J. Overton in *Press*, December 11, 1863; Donahower, "Narrative," 2:213-239; and Kenneth Carley, *Minnesota in the Civil War*, 31-54 (Minneapolis, 1961).



seven members of the regiment's color guard were casualties. In a masterpiece of understatement, Bishop wrote laconically a few days after the battle: "After about 20 minutes hard climbing under fire we reached the top and after a severe hand to hand fighting of about ten minutes we drove the enemy off entirely."<sup>36</sup>

Among the 185 men of the Second Minnesota who charged up Missionary Ridge (150 more were on detached service), 8 were killed and 31 wounded.<sup>37</sup> In a brief note to his mother, dated November 30, 1863, Bishop said: "My Regiment led the Brigade to which we belong in the assault and so suffered more than the other Regiments." He concluded proudly, "Men never behaved better in any battle."

Although some Confederates fought a delaying action at the top of the ridge, most of them retreated hurriedly southward in the direction of Dalton, Georgia. Missionary Ridge was a decisive victory for the North, and it set the stage for Sherman's later drive to cut the Confederacy in two.

THE FOLLOWING CHRISTMAS about eighty per cent of the Second regiment re-enlisted for three years and got a well-deserved thirty-day furlough. When they returned to Minnesota, traveling northward from La Crosse by sleigh, they were greeted at Winona by the ringing of church bells

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<sup>36</sup> Bishop and Van Derveer, in *Civil and Indian Wars*, 2:402-404, 406; Bishop to his mother, December 3, 1863.

<sup>37</sup> Bishop, in *Civil and Indian Wars*, 2:402.

<sup>38</sup> *Chatfield Democrat*, February 13, 1864.

<sup>39</sup> Bishop, in *Civil and Indian Wars*, 1:107. The regiment's last year of service is discussed on pages 108-121 of the same volume.

<sup>40</sup> On the placing of these markers, see Bishop to William R. Marshall, October 15, 1894, Bishop Papers.

THE PICTURE on page 259 is from a painting by Douglas Volk which hangs in the Minnesota State Capitol. The drawings on pages 262 and 270 are from *Harper's Weekly* for February 8, 1862, and October 31, 1863. The portraits of Van Cleve and Bishop and the photograph opposite are from the collection of the Minnesota Historical Society. All maps are the work of the editor.

and a celebration. The *Winona Republican* of January 23, 1864, reported that the "ladies of the Soldiers' Aid Society, with prudent forethought, had prepared . . . an excellent dinner" for the returning veterans. The writer went on to say that "The men are mostly a fine healthy, and robust set, who look none the worse for having passed through the iron hail of Mill Springs, Chickamauga, Chattanooga, and other memorable and victorious battles. . . . Brave soldiers!" he concluded, "you have nobly done your duty. . . . May the garlands of victory never wither upon your brows!" The Chatfield company was gloriously feted by its home town with a grand reception, a dinner, and a ball that lasted well into the night.<sup>38</sup>

The regiment reassembled at Fort Snelling on February 29, 1864, "showing besides the three hundred veterans, about one hundred and fifty recruits." That afternoon the men marched from the fort to St. Anthony "where a grand reception, supper and ball were given" at the Winslow House in the regiment's honor. "The ball lasted all night," wrote Bishop, "and ended with a hot breakfast at seven o'clock, after which the boys marched back to the fort, eight miles, arriving quite rested and refreshed." By April 10 the regiment had rejoined its old brigade at Ringgold, Georgia. The Second then participated in the Atlanta campaign, made the march to the sea and through the Carolinas, took part in the grand review of the Union armies in Washington on May 24, 1865, and was discharged the following July 20 at Fort Snelling after four years of valiant service.<sup>39</sup>

In this centennial year of the battle of Gettysburg, many Minnesotans doubtless will pay homage to the First Regiment by viewing the monument commemorating its famous charge. Be it remembered that 1963 is also the hundredth anniversary of the Second's heroic deeds at Chickamauga and Missionary Ridge. Appropriate markers recording the accomplishments of the regiment stand on the sites of these battles, where the men of the Second Minnesota literally rose to glory.<sup>40</sup>





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