

## Another Look at the 18<sup>th</sup> OVI at Chickamauga

*"All lies in jest, still a man hears what he wants to hear and disregards the rest."* Paul Simon in "The Boxer"

**Introduction.** As we study and try to follow Civil War events and those who participated in those events it is natural and understandable to try to make some vicarious connections. Those of us who live in the North might like to establish genealogical connections to the likes of Grant, Sherman, or Sheridan, or to find that their ancestors served in units such as the Black Hat Brigade. Southerners might be pleased to find an ancestor who served with Stonewall Jackson.

Unfortunately absolutely reliable factual accounts of the battles are often difficult to find and ascertain. A basic problem is many of the battlefields were so large that nobody, including the commanders at various levels, had comprehensive, accurate information during the battles. Furthermore there were very few, especially at the higher command levels, who were even motivated to provide conservatively understated accounts, whether such self-serving accounts were contained in after action reports, letters sent to their families, friends, or newspapers, or memoirs. And the prevarications frequently become worse as time passed and memories faded or as colleagues or adversaries died who have could provided corrected accounts in response. Regretfully we learn that some accounts, for instance in Grant's *Memoirs*, are sometimes contradicted by others without axes to grind or reputations to protect.

I had a great-great grandfather who was killed on the second day of Nashville while serving in the 18<sup>th</sup> Ohio Veterans Volunteer Infantry, not quite the same as the 18<sup>th</sup> OVI but close enough in nomenclature to try to find references to the 18<sup>th</sup> in various Western theater campaigns and battles. But there were other references; for instance during my sophomore year at Ohio University I boarded on Grosvenor Street and I am aware OU's alumni office is located in a home once owned and occupied by Charles Grosvenor a local attorney who became the third commander of the 18<sup>th</sup> OVI before being elected to Congress. Stanleys are part of my family tree, another point of curiosity about the 18<sup>th</sup> OVI but probably no actual connection.

Accordingly I was always mildly disappointed that I never saw any mention of the 18<sup>th</sup> OVI when reading three biographies of George Thomas as well as a detailed account of the Army of the Cumberland or a couple other histories of combat in the Western theater. Thus I paid little attention to a notice that a couple fellows were going to make a presentation this past spring to the local historical society about the 18<sup>th</sup> at Chickamauga, assuming there was not much to tell about that issue. Big mistake on my part!

**Some Background.** The 18<sup>th</sup> Ohio Volunteer Infantry was recruited from seven southeastern Ohio counties, including two companies from Athens County. It was a part of the Union Army of

the Ohio, renamed the Army of the Cumberland when William S. "Rosey" Rosecrans became its commanding general in late October, 1862, replacing Don Carlos Buell, who had a bad case of the "slows." George Thomas commanded one of the corps in Rosecrans' army and also served as his de facto second in command. Although Rosecrans seldom seemed to move as fast as the Washington authorities wanted, by the autumn of 1863 the Army of the Cumberland had advanced across Tennessee, that campaign including a horrific battle at Stones River and a derring-do capture at Tullahoma. (For a local point of reference, Braxton Bragg, the Confederate commander, was badly caught off guard at Tullahoma because a large part of his cavalry, led by John Hunt Morgan, was foolishly trying to gallivant across Southern Ohio instead of properly acting as Bragg's eyes and ears.)

Upon spreading his army over a sixty mile front to cross the Tennessee River into Georgia, Rosecrans over pursues against Bragg who is cleverly attempting to trap, capture, and/or destroy the Army of the Cumberland in detail, or in its smaller parts. Although these attempts are foiled in large part by the ineptitude or sheer insubordination of Bragg's subordinate commanders, Rosecrans nevertheless desperately tries to consolidate his army while protecting his escape routes back to Chattanooga to the north. For several days in September 1863 the opposing armies spar with Bragg mostly attempting to get around Rosecrans' left flank to prevent any escape to Chattanooga. By the morning of September 18 the armies are aligned in a roughly south to the north line approximately parallel to and mostly east of the Chickamauga Creek, supposedly Indian for River of Death.

Bragg has the luxury of knowing he is about to be reinforced by the imminent arrival of James Longstreet with a couple of his divisions detached from Lee's army in the East. The addition of Longstreet's divisions will give Bragg numerical superiority over Rosecrans, a rare advantage for Southern forces. Although there have been previous encounters between the armies, the Battle of Chickamauga is considered to have occurred September 19 & 20. On the first day the Southerners, still without Longstreet, complete their crossing of the Chickamauga and attempt to deceive the Northerners by feints and demonstrations at the southern portion of the battlefield while the Northerners are still in the progress of consolidating their forces. By the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> La Fayette Road has become the rough dividing line between the sides. After Longstreet arrives late on the 19<sup>th</sup>, Bragg divides his newly reinforced army into two wings with Polk in charge of the northern wing and Longstreet in command of the southern wing. Again Bragg's planned maneuvers are intended to cut off the Union's escape to Chattanooga and to force Rosecrans to retreat to the south where it can be captured and/or destroyed.

On the 20<sup>th</sup> Thomas continues to ask that brigades be redeployed to reinforce his sector on the Federal left. Due to a series of miscues from Rosecrans' headquarters a 600 yard gap is created in the right hand portion of the Union line. In the meanwhile Confederate army experiences its

typical command dysfunction and in-fighting to cause a delay in the launching of the right wing of Bragg's attack. Nevertheless by mid-morning Longstreet launches his attack coincidentally at the very point of the 600 yard gap in the Federal line. This causes Rosecrans and much of his army, including two corps commanders, to retreat in disorder back toward Chattanooga. However, the momentum of Longstreet's thrust carries the battle to the north toward Chattanooga instead to the south as Bragg intended. Thomas does not retreat, instead forming a semi-circular defense line around a hilltop, to be known as Snodgrass Hill. Unfortunately for Thomas, James Negley, commanding the division that includes the 18<sup>th</sup> OVI, loses his will to fight and heads back to Chattanooga, taking as many as 1,500 soldiers, 22 guns and the ammo train with him. Nevertheless Thomas maintains his position until dusk, thus preventing Longstreet from advancing further in pursuit of the rest of the Army of the Cumberland. As a result of this stand against great odds, George Thomas becomes forever known as the Rock of Chickamauga.

**Roundtable Presentation.** This much I knew from my readings about the Battle of Chickamauga as well as from a couple visits to that battlefield. Additionally I have included a description of the battle in my as-yet-unpublished manuscript about various pursuits during the Civil War.<sup>1</sup> Scheduling programs is one of the major tasks for our roundtable, and so it seemed like a windfall when we learned we had a chance for a repeat performance of last spring's presentation to the local historical society. The roundtable meeting had about a 50% increase in our average attendance, indicating an interest in trying to link at some level, perhaps ancestral in some cases, with the Civil War.

But I began to become apprehensive and skeptical when I heard the presentation would show how Athens County had played such a "pivotal" role in saving the Federal army. I reviewed my research materials without finding anything, although to be fair another roundtable member found reference to an 18<sup>th</sup> OVI battleground monument that reads in part: "... Assisted in the repulse of a brigade and the capture of General Adams; arrived upon the ridge at 1:00 pm. supported Lt. Smith's 4<sup>th</sup> U.S. Artillery. Participated at 5:00 p.m. in the repulse of General Gracie and in retaking the breast works; occupied this position till the army retired at night."

Because I wanted to learn what I must have missed about the 18<sup>th</sup>'s accomplishments, especially during Chickamauga, I tried to take fairly detailed notes during the roundtable presentation. Frankly I was disturbed by some inconsistencies between things said during the presentation and what is fairly well known by most Civil War buffs. For instance the snarky observation about George Thomas trotting his horse at an unusually fast pace did not occur during Chickamauga; instead that incident happened about a year later at Jonesboro! While

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<sup>1</sup> My generalized account of the two day battle cites nine sources.

such discrepancy is not significant in a tactical sense, it makes a reasonably knowledgeable listener wonder how much other mustard and relish was being added as embellishment.

**Further Review.** I started then to dig deeper into my personal resources, including *The History of the Hocking Valley* (1883), *Gateway to the Confederacy* (2014), *Blood, Sweat, and Glory* (2007), and *The Battles of Chickamauga and Chattanooga and the Organizations Engaged*, by Henry V. Boynton, commander of the 35<sup>th</sup> OVI and later a prominent battlefield preservationist. I found letters from William Parker Johnson, an Athens physician with the 18<sup>th</sup> in a book titled *Ohio's War*, edited by Christine Dee and published by the Ohio University Press in 2006. While poignant, Doctor Johnson's letters focus upon the lives and medical issues of his soldiers rather than upon tactical issues. Finally I decided to break down and purchase the Peter Cozzens' book, *This Terrible Sound: The Battle of Chickamauga* (1996) Urbana: University of Illinois Press, not only the ultimate reference for the Battle of Chickamauga but consistently found in any list of the best Civil War books. I also re-reviewed Steven Woodworth's *Six Armies in Tennessee: The Chickamauga and Chattanooga Campaigns*, published by Bison books in 1999.

My notes of our roundtable presentation are not comprehensive but some points bear further analysis. For instance when reviewing the *History of the Hocking Valley*, we see that the Athens County portion, H pp 168-78<sup>2</sup>, has almost no mention of the 18<sup>th</sup> or of Chickamauga! It does however take about three pages to describe Morgan's Raid. Furthermore Charles Grosvenor's short biographical sketch makes no mention of any involvement at Chickamauga, although it does state he rose to the command of the 18<sup>th</sup>. Since these biographical sketches were indeed autobiographical pieces, it might seem strange that the former commander of the 18<sup>th</sup> did not believe, 20 years after the fact, that his involvement in the second bloodiest battle of the war did not merit some mention.

On the other hand, the Vinton County portion of the *History of the Hocking Valley* is much more revealing about the 18<sup>th</sup>. First we learn that the 18<sup>th</sup> was organized by Timothy Stanley of Vinton County, not of Scioto County as we told during the roundtable presentation. (Another of those pesky factual inconsistencies?) Our neighbors in Vinton County also contributed two companies to the 18th. Vinton County's narrative, H pp 1186-1192, is fairly detailed about the regiment's early history, including its heavy engagement at Stone's River. However, again, the narrative about Chickamauga is very brief without any detail except to list two officers from Vinton County who were wounded. (Vinton County's section in the *HHV* also includes a nice narrative, H pp 1194-1197, about the 75<sup>th</sup> OVI, discussed in another article on this website.)

Boynton's little book includes brief descriptions of every unit's activities at Chickamauga. The descriptions remind me of Lake Woebegone where all the children are above average. In other

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<sup>2</sup> See glossary at the end of this article.

words, no unit admits to being repulsed or unable to continue fighting. In specific reference to the aforementioned monument for the 18<sup>th</sup> OVI, Boynton says of Gracie's Brigade, "At 3 o'clock September 20 the division [Preston's] was moved by the Lafayette road to Brotherton's, and at 4 p.m. it was sent through the Dyer fields to assist in the assault on Snodgrass Hill. The right of Gracies's brigade rested near the first spur south of the Snodgrass house, with Kelly next on the left and Trigg on the left of Kelly. The division was heavily engaged from 4.30 till sundown, and at dark Trigg and Kelly captured the left regiments of Steedman's division and gained the rear of Brannan's right."

And what does Boynton's little book have to say about the 18<sup>th</sup>? Not much, especially for something that was later asserted to be pivotal. "Early on the 20<sup>th</sup>, Beatty's brigade [another brigade in Negley's division] was sent to assist Baird on the extreme left, and after severe fighting was forced to the rear, in the direction of Snodgrass Hill. Stanley's brigade [including the 18<sup>th</sup> OVI] followed Beatty's into action on the left, and subsequently gained position on Snodgrass Hill." Not quite as dynamic as the description on the battlefield monument erected a few years later. It's interesting, but not very revealing, that one side, the Southerners, merely say their division was "heavily engaged," while the Northern version claims that its brigade "subsequently gained position." You would almost think they were describing a chess match wherein a bishop takes a rook.

***This Terrible Sound.*** When it finally arrived the Cozzens book was everything as advertised. It is thoroughly researched with an abundance of detail, some of which makes for daunting reading. The maps, although difficult to read, lend much understanding to the positions of units throughout the battle. Cozzens provides an extensive bibliography including a plethora of sources that he categorizes as "Autobiographies, Collected Works, Diaries, Letters, Memoirs, and Personal Narratives." It is not the sort of book I would ever want or try to read cover to cover but I made extensive use of its index to learn what Cozzens has to say about at least two major points: How was the 18<sup>th</sup> involved against a Confederate general Adams and what was the extent of the 18<sup>th</sup>'s involvement during crucial second day's battle?

***More Specifics.*** (It might be helpful to refer to the maps from the Civil War Trust, which has a link with this website) The 18<sup>th</sup> OVI was part of Negley's division, one of twelve divisions in the Army of the Cumberland, and one of four in Thomas' corps. Throughout the entire Chickamauga campaign Negley's division was whipsawed from position to position. Reference should be made to Negley's report, found at this website's link to The Civil War Archives, but keep in mind that such reports tend to be self serving. For instance of how much Negley had to move his division, prior to the outbreak of serious fighting, Negley is posted to the south of Rosecrans' main force. When Thomas arrives at Rosecrans' headquarters late on September 18 Rosecrans directs Thomas to leave Negley to cover the creek south of Lee & Gordon's Mill and

lead Thomas' other three divisions on a night march northward up Dry Valley Road that merges with La Fayette Road. W pg 85.

By early next morning, the 19<sup>th</sup>, after a difficult night march, Baird's division has reached its destination in Kelly field -- a half mile east by northeast of Snodgrass House, C pg 329 -- while two of Thomas' other divisions are not far behind. The overnight redeployment of these three divisions "had changed the course of the battle." W pg 85.

10:30 am – Rosey orders Alex McCook to assume command of the right wing of the army, which by then has dwindled to his cousin Edward McCook's cavalry division, Negley's infantry division at Glass's Mill and Sheridan. C pg 140.

11:30 am – At Jay's Mill, west of Reed's bridge that crosses the Chickamauga, the Battle of Chickamauga starts in earnest when both sides begin feeding more reinforcements to the unexpected fighting. Bragg surrenders his initiative and begins to match the Federals wherever they might appear. C pp 128-29.

For the rest of the 19<sup>th</sup> fighting erupts in several locations as the Confederates advance toward La Fayette Road. During the late morning or early afternoon some of the most horrific fighting is occurring at Viniard field immediately east of La Fayette Road. At the same time a couple of miles to the south Breckinridge's division skirmishes with Negley's division at Glass's Mill. W pg 94. (My emphasis added.) Per Woodworth a Confederate victory at Viniard would produce at best a minor victory, "... nothing that would happen at Viniard farm could result in more than Negley, still deployed south of Lee & Gordon's Mill, being cut off and destroyed." According to Woodworth that would be a small dividend for the Confederate investment of manpower at Viniard. W pg 94.

Cozzens notes that during the afternoon of the 19<sup>th</sup> opportunities to exploit Federal gaps would slip away because of Bragg's inability to respond to a changing situation. C pg 170. "Early that morning, after a bloody artillery duel, Ben Hardin Helm's brigade had crossed Chickamauga Creek at Glass's Mill and driven in John Beatty's infantry as part of a demonstration to convince the Federals that the real Confederate attack would come from the south" C pg 170. (My emphasis added.) From the west bank, Hill and Breckinridge see the clouds of dust raised by Rosecrans' infantry as it heads north.

D.H. Hill, the Confederate commander of this sector of the line, described it as follows: "On the 19<sup>th</sup> I ordered an attack at [Glass's Mill]. Slocomb's battery had a bloody artillery with the one on the west of the river [*sic*], and, under cover of the artillery fire, Helm's brigade of Breckinridge's division was crossed over, and attacked Negley's division and drove it off. ... The clouds of dust rolling down the valley revealed the precipitate retirement of the foe, not on account of our pressure upon him, but on account of the urgency of the order to hurry to their

left.” D.H.Hill in *Hearts Touched by Fire*, as edited in 2011, pp 704-05. Indeed, Woodworth reports that Negley’s division is summoned from Glass’s Mill and, leaving Beatty’s brigade at Glass’s Mill, will eventually take a position along the tree line at the western edge of Brotherton field, perhaps twelve miles to the north. W pg 99.

Incidentally, David Powell, in *Failure in the Saddle* (2010), notes that one of the larger cavalry actions in the Western theater occurred the next day at Glass’s Mill when Wheeler’s large gray cavalry divisions almost had George Crooks much smaller blue cavalry units trapped. However, Crook was able to escape to nearby Crawfish Springs before Wheeler was ordered to Lee & Gordon Mill. Pg 162.

By 5:30 pm Rosecrans is waiting for Negley. Rosey points toward Dyer field where Rosey says the enemy is. C pg 257. Negley deploys Stanley and Sirwell, on west side of Lytle’s hill; upon reaching the crest they see Clayton’s Alabamans on the far side of Dyer’s hill. Brennan comes to support causing Clayton to withdraw “at a leisurely pace.” Negley settles into the western edge of Brotherton field, restoring the lines at the cost of two killed and three wounded. C pg 258.

In his report, Negley’s version is that he discovered a gap to the left of Rosey’s headquarters through which the enemy was moving to threaten Thomas’s rear. Stanley, with Sirwell in support, was sent. At about 6:00 pm Stanley and Sirwell were ordered to push back so as to connect our line with troops to the left. A sharp engagement ensued and lasted until 7:30 pm when a connection was re-established. (From looking at the Civil War Trust map of the battlefield at this point, it would appear there was only a minimal threat to Thomas’ rear.)

Shortly after sunrise the next morning, September 20, at Thomas’s request, Rosecrans pulls Negley out of the west side of Brotherton. Negley’s place at Brotherton should be taken by Wood’s division but is late leading Rosey to reprimand Wood in front of Wood’s staff. (This is at least the conventional version; however another milder version is detailed at page 146 in an essay, “A Tale of Two Orders” by William Glenn Robertson found in *Gateway to the Confederacy* (2014) LSU Press.) While waiting for Negley, Thomas starts shifting his other units still further north. Soldiers from all divisions on the Federal left start building breastworks or log barricades. W pg 106. Confederate soldiers report they heard the axes throughout the night.

8:00 am – Negley says he is ordered to report to Thomas. Beatty goes ahead but Negley’s two other brigades remain until relieved at 9:30 am. Negley further says that when the enemy took advantage of the change he, Negley, has to send one brigade back thus completely destroying the unity of his command.

9:30 am – Thomas’ position is complete and densely manned behind log barricades. About that same time the Confederates attack Thomas’ extreme left. This attack is led by Adams and Stovall who encounter only a weak line of skirmishers from Beatty’s brigade, first to arrive upon

the scene but dangerously stretched from the edge of the breastworks to the intersection of Reed's Bridge Road and La Fayette Road. Beatty's brigade is badly wounded with some component units unable to fight for the rest of the day. W pg 106.

10:00 am -- Stanley's brigade is starting to move north from Dyer woods north along the Glenn-Kelly road. C pg 327.

11:00 am – The 18<sup>th</sup> OVI, astride the Glenn-Kelly road, now faces Adams of Breckinridge's division to the north, west of the La Fayette road. C pg 330. Adams' brigade, running through the underbrush, runs into Stanley's brigade which hurls Adams back out of the Union position. Adams is wounded. W pg 106.

Shortly before noon Van Derveer's brigade of Brannon's division forces Adams' brigade to retreat after it has been badly mauled by artillery and after Stovall, another brigade in Breckinridge's division, leaves the field, thus isolating Adams' crippled brigade. Stanley – now in brigade command, Grosvenor has become the 18<sup>th</sup>'s third commander -- then orders his regiments, primarily the 19<sup>th</sup> Illinois, to join the pursuit before it loses its steam. C pp 335-336. Breckinridge summarized that portion of the battle as: "Adams had advanced still further [than Breckinridge's other brigade], being actually in rear of [the Federals'] entrenchments. A good supporting line in my division at this moment would probably have produced decisive results."

Shortly after participating in the pursuit of Breckinridge's division sometime around noon, the 18<sup>th</sup> OVI, along with the rest of Stanley's brigade, becomes isolated when returning to Snodgrass Hill and is overwhelmed, suffering heavy casualties, by a small Confederate force that manages to outflank the Yankees. Notwithstanding his terrific losses, Stanley is able to hold together his badly battered brigade to return to Snodgrass Hill. C pg 355. At approximately 1:15 pm Stanley leads a column of his brigade, now reduced to fewer than 500 effectives, to push Confederates from the crest of the hill south of the Snodgrass House. However, the 18<sup>th</sup>, now reduced to only 100 men after the previous attack, remains in reserve at the Snodgrass house. Stanley is shot in the shoulder and knocked from his horse almost immediately as he approaches the crest of the hill. C pg 429. Stanley is replaced by William Stoughton of the 11<sup>th</sup> Mich.

2:15 pm – The 18<sup>th</sup> is alone and resting west of Snodgrass House. Stoughton's two other regiments, the 11<sup>th</sup> Mich and 19<sup>th</sup> Illinois, are in line facing eastward toward Snodgrass road.

At 4:15 pm – the 18<sup>th</sup> OVI remains in its previous position as the 11<sup>th</sup> Mich and 19<sup>th</sup> Illinois withdraw in the face of Gracie's attack. C pg 473. Gracie's Alabamans capture a portion of Snodgrass Hill at about 5:00 pm after "one of the heaviest attacks of the war on a single point." C pp 474, 475.

By 5:30 pm -- a half hour before sunset -- the soldiers on both sides are nearing exhaustion after six hours of continuous combat while running low on ammunition with many rifles so fouled as to be useless. The exact time of the order is not clear, but sometime in this time frame -- Cozzens believes it is before Gracie captures the hill -- George Thomas gives his order to retire from the field. Gracie's Confederate brigade is also beginning to withdraw from its hilltop position, captured about a half hour earlier, when the 18<sup>th</sup> is ordered to counterattack. The boys from Southeast Ohio charge up the northern slope of the hill to reclaim the breastworks just as the Confederates fire their last rounds before stumbling down the hill's southern slope. C pg 480.

7:00 pm -- Stoughton's brigade is withdrawing from Snodgrass Hill. C pg 504.

Evaluating the Claims... The presentation during our roundtable asserted that the 18<sup>th</sup> had attacked General Adams' division causing to become "dissolved". (Boynton's book, as does Cozzens,' showed that Adams does not command a division. Instead he commands a brigade in Breckinridge's division, another of those annoying factual discrepancies.) In addition to Breckinridge's report, previously quoted, Cozzens adds his comment that: "That no supporting line came up to exploit Adams and Stovall was a consequence of the laxity, acrimony, and incompetence that characterized the direction of the Confederate Right Wing. Polk and Hill [the Right Wing commanders] must bear the responsibility for this sorry state of affairs." C pg 349. Although Breckinridge's division is unable to participate further in the afternoon's battle it will still be able to join in the general attack on the Union positions as they are beginning to withdraw at sundown. Hardly dissolved, and certainly not by Federal infantry, including the 18<sup>th</sup> OVI.

(As a side note, CSA General Dan Adams is wounded when a minie` ball shatters his left humerus. (Adams is a Kentuckian who has lost an eye at Shiloh and has been wounded at Stone's River.) Cozzens' description is not clear but it seems likely the shot is fired by someone from either the 11<sup>th</sup> Michigan or the 11<sup>th</sup> Illinois, the other regiments in Stanley's brigade. On foot Adams trails behind his troops until loss of blood forces him to sit under a tree and rest. Stanley comes upon Adams who asks for a stretcher but Stanley wants to keep up with his men, leaving Adams helpless and easy prey to anyone wanting to claim him, and his personal property, as a prize. Finally the 105<sup>th</sup> OVI's Lt. Albion Tourgee, whom we have briefly met in another roundtable session, comes upon Adams to lift Adams upon Tourgee's horse and to see that the Confederate general is protected and well treated. C pg 336.)

But the key questions are whether the 18<sup>th</sup> was really one of the best units in the Army of the Cumberland, and whether the boys from Athens played a pivotal role in preventing the total elimination of the Army of the Cumberland at Chickamauga. To be frank, both claims are unfounded at best and spurious at the worst. Regarding the first claim, the Larry Daniels

extensive history of the Army of the Cumberland, *Days of Glory*, makes only two mentions of the 18<sup>th</sup> OVI, the first being as follows: On May 2, 1862 Turchin's Eighth Federal Brigade entered Athens, Alabama in a nasty mood "The 18<sup>th</sup> Ohio had been chased out by Confederate cavalry, with some local citizens taking sniping shots from their dwellings. Turchin, a former czarist officer, announced that he would shut his eyes for two hours, implying the troops had free license in the town. His men took their cue, looting Athens, raping several black women, and so traumatizing one pregnant white woman that she later miscarried and died." D pg 98. Although the 18<sup>th</sup> OVI was then part of Turchin's brigade, it is not clear whether it took part in the two hour revenge upon Athens, most of that blame being cast upon other regiments in the brigade. However as a result of the Athens incident it was revealed that two months earlier the same brigade had plundered several houses in Bowling Green, Kentucky. Daniels' other mention of the 18<sup>th</sup> was to the effect that it concentrated at Cowan, Tennessee, to beef up security of a vital railroad tunnel. D pg 102. These brief mentions, one which is not very favorable, in a 433 page history are not indicative of a "best" unit in the army.

This lack of recognition is further reflected in *Blood, Tears, & Glory* -- immodestly subtitled *How Ohioans Won the Civil War* -- that mentions 64 other infantry regiments from Ohio but not the 18<sup>th</sup> OVI! Indeed it is difficult, if not almost impossible, to find any mention of the 18<sup>th</sup> in the text of any other writings except in the Cozzens book about Chickamauga, *This Terrible Sound*. And does Cozzens lend any support to the contention that the 18<sup>th</sup> played a pivotal role in saving the Army of the Cumberland? Not hardly.

The term "pivotal" is admittedly subjective. One man's pivot may be another man's stumble. But we should remember that at Snodgrass Hill, and its extension along Horseshoe Ridge, there were several individual battles, some bigger than others, occurring almost continuously throughout that fateful day of September 20. Both sides attacked and counterattacked, advanced and withdrew. Longstreet estimated there were 25 assaults against Snodgrass Hill, perhaps an exaggeration and probably including attacks against Horseshoe Ridge. Certainly one of the most significant counterattacks occurred when Gordon Granger marched to the sound of battle to bring two of Steedman's brigades, and more ammunition, to engage in the fighting at Horseshoe Ridge. Without the arrival of those additional soldiers and the extra ammunition George Thomas's valiant stand almost certainly would have been in vain. But did the 18<sup>th</sup> participate in what now might legitimately be called a tipping point of the battle?

After shortly participating in the pursuit of Breckinridge's division sometime around noon, the 18<sup>th</sup> OVI, along with the rest of Stanley's brigade, becomes isolated when returning to Snodgrass Hill and is overwhelmed, suffering heavy casualties, by a small Confederate force that manages to outflank the Yankees. Notwithstanding his terrific losses, Stanley is able to hold together his badly battered brigade to return to Snodgrass Hill. C pg 355. At approximately

1:15 pm Stanley leads a column of his brigade, now reduced to fewer than 500 effectives, to push Confederates from the crest of a hill. However, the 18<sup>th</sup>, now reduced to only 100 men after the previous attack, remains in reserve at the Snodgrass house. Stanley is shot in the shoulder and knocked from his horse almost immediately as he approaches the crest of the hill. C pg 429.

**Engagement with Gracie.** For most of the rest of the afternoon the 18<sup>th</sup> remains in reserve beside Smith's artillery battery. Gracie's Alabamans captures a hill close to the Snodgrass house at about 5:00 pm after one of the bloodiest attacks of the war on a single point. C pg 474. By 5:30 pm -- a half hour before sunset -- the soldiers on both sides are nearing exhaustion after six hours of continuous combat while they are running low on ammunition with many rifles are so fouled as to be useless. The exact time of the order is not clear, but sometime in this time frame -- Cozzens believes it is before Gracie captures the hill -- George Thomas gives his order to retire from the field. Gracie's Confederate brigade is beginning to withdraw from its hilltop position, captured about a half hour earlier, when the 18<sup>th</sup> is ordered to counterattack. The boys from Southeast Ohio charge up the northern slope of the hill to reclaim the breastworks just as the Confederates fire their last rounds before stumbling down the hill's southern slope. C pg 480. Thus while the 18<sup>th</sup> provides some mop up action, it is hardly pivotal if only (1) because Thomas has already ordered the withdrawal of his army, (2) because Gracie has already begun to withdraw from the breastworks atop the hill, and (3) because other battles continue in the twilight all along the battle line, some as late as 10:00 pm.

**Other Athenians at Chickamauga.** By the way, the website for the Athens County Historical Society (<http://athenshistory.org/exhibits/18th-regiment-ohio-volunteer-infantry/>) claims soldiers from Athens were in three other regiments at Chickamauga, these regiments being the 38<sup>th</sup> OVI, the 90<sup>th</sup> OVI, and the 92<sup>nd</sup> OVI. The 38<sup>th</sup> was not heavily engaged except on the 19<sup>th</sup> but the 90<sup>th</sup> and 92<sup>nd</sup> saw significant combat late in the day on the 20<sup>th</sup>, the 92<sup>nd</sup> seeing the bulk of the action in a successful charge led by its brigade commander, none other than John Turchin.

A question remains in my mind at least as to why, as previously described, so little was written about the 18<sup>th</sup> OVI at Chickamauga. Normally soldiers and officers are eager to publicize their accomplishments, especially in relation to a battle as famous as was Chickamauga. But could the severe battering the regiment took in the early afternoon upon returning to Snodgrass Hill after it pursued Adams' have been so traumatic that it became difficult to discuss or possibly even remember in future years? A regiment left with only 100 soldiers would have been severely wounded, mentally as well as physically, if not almost incapacitated, and the loss of so many comrades might possibly have left psychological scars not easily healed. Perhaps the

18<sup>th</sup>'s experience at Chickamauga was so devastating they simply didn't want to talk or write about it. But that's a question that requires much more factual information to answer.

**Conclusion.** Chickamauga, the second bloodiest battle of the Rebellion, was a big deal whose significance has been somewhat forgotten over the past 150 or so years, in large part because despite its horrendous butchers' bill it was not decisive. In other words, the vanquished survived to fight another day. Although it was one of the biggest Confederate victories in the Western theater, D.H. Hill lamented that "... the *elan* of the Southern soldier was never seen after Chickamauga – that brilliant dash which had distinguished him was gone forever."

Ohio was an important participant in that battle, providing approximately 50 percent of the Union's soldiers in contrast with Ohio's 5% participation at Gettysburg. Additionally, many of the key commanders, including Rosecrans, Crook, Hazen, Beatty, Garfield, Lytle, Alex McCook, Opdycke, and Steedman, had Ohio roots. But any appreciation of that battle does not justify or should encourage mythologizing those who were there and fought, no matter how much vicarious satisfaction that might create. Our understanding of the entire conflict and of the gallant soldiers who fought and sacrificed so much deserves nothing less than an honest, objective appraisal of those events.

An objective appraisal does not give any reason to cast aspersions upon or disparage the record of the 18<sup>th</sup> OVI or to criticize its officers and soldiers. For all we can tell they were as courageous and fulfilled their duties and responsibilities as did most other regiments on either side of the conflict. To be fair the regiment helped hold the line in the first day at Stone's River and later was part of a mop up action against Breckinridge's division after it had been decimated by a 56 piece artillery barrage. The descendants of the 18<sup>th</sup> OVI, as well as the citizens of the seven counties that provided companies to form the 18<sup>th</sup> should proudly honor the services rendered by that regiment as they should for any other regiment.

But it's a stretch beyond credulity to suggest they were one of the best regiments in the Army of the Cumberland. For that matter they don't appear to have been any better than, if even as good as, the other regiments in their own brigade. And specifically at Chickamauga the regiment was not pivotal in the sense of prevailing in any of the key or crucial sections of the battle, especially the make-or-break second day; indeed there is at least some suggestion that the regiment was badly mauled upon its return from one relatively minor pursuit. The engagements at Glass's Mill, Brotherton, and even at the end of the day at Snodgrass Hill were ones where either or both sides were already going to withdraw, almost regardless of the other side's tactical superiority. The timely repulse of Adams's Rebel brigade, the 18<sup>th</sup>'s most significant tactical achievement, was a joint effort between two Union brigades, Stanley and

Sirwell, made possible in large part because of the lack of support from the Confederate high command to an isolated, and thus vulnerable, brigade.

As much as we might want to connect to significant parts of history we must still resist the temptation to fudge facts or alter well sustained historical opinions in order to bootstrap those connections. Neither should we permit entertaining features override basic historical analyses. Because the facts simply don't support any further aggrandizement of a decent but otherwise ordinary regiment, let's please stick with well established facts of the matter to leave well enough alone.

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#### Glossary

C = Cozzens, Peter *This Terrible Sound: The Battle of Chickamauga*

D = Daniels, Larry *Days of Glory: The Army of the Cumberland, 1861-1865*

H = *History of the Hocking Valley*

W = Woodworth, Steven *Six Armies in Tennessee*