

The War After Time: Arrival



Sean McDonald

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Prologue

From out of the corner of his eye, he watched the flag near the front of the column. The time to move out was almost upon them. Not a moment too soon either. The light of the late afternoon November sky was beginning to fade as dusk settled on this field just south of the town of Franklin, Tennessee. This was the time when he was the most nervous. The wait before the beginning of a battle. Over three years of war and pre-battle jitters still affected him.

He turned to the soldier on his left and said, “Patrick, do you reckon we have much of a chance to get over yonder in one piece?” Pat O’Quinn had been a friend of his even before the war. Murphy’s father had owned a bookstore and Pat, a schoolteacher, had been a regular customer of theirs.

The reply was quick, “Nearly two miles over an open field into the teeth of the fieldworks those Damn Yankees have up. Sure ‘nuff we’ll be lucky if as many are left as Pickett had after his charge at Gettysburg, Jimmy old boy.”

Their discussion was ended before he could re-

spond. One of the sergeants called out, “No talkin’ in the ranks.”

At that moment the flag dropped. The attack was on.

From a few feet in front of him, the Colonel called out, “Column forward...Guide Right...March.”

His company commander repeated the command to march and James Murphy along with nearly 200 other members of the 5th Confederate Infantry stepped off towards the Union line. His regiment was the last in the column as it marched only a short distance to the right of the Columbia Turnpike. When they deployed into line of battle, their unit would be on the left flank of Granbury’s Brigade, and right up against the road. To their right would be another brigade from their division, Govan’s. Behind the first line would be a third brigade, Lowrey’s, which would act as the division reserve.

The fact they were marching into battle in column was unusual. Normally they would be marching forward already formed into a line of battle. Murphy remembered hearing that Longstreet had successfully attacked the Yankees like this a year ago at Chickamauga. Apparently, for today’s attack, their division commander, Major General Patrick Cleburne, had talked his superiors into

letting him move forward in column to present as small a target as possible as they advanced. In fact the whole army had been assembled this way. When they would switch to a line of battle, Murphy did not know.

One of the worst parts, of a long advance towards an enemy line, was the time it took to move forward. It left a soldier with a lot of time to think. Even though the Yankees had a forward position, which would have to be taken before the attack reached the main line, it would still be around twenty minutes before they reached those forward positions. Murphy knew it would feel like an eternity before they would arrive at the Federal positions.

This was going to be a tough fight. The Northern troops had had a nearly a full day to prepare while the Army of Tennessee had been advancing towards Franklin. Murphy cursed silently over this. They shouldn't have had to march all day then attack a strong defensive position like this. This fight should have happened the day before.

Yesterday they had gone around the flank of General Schofield's Army of the Ohio as it had been positioned just south of the town of Columbia. Cleburne's troops had been in the advance of the Confederate forces on the flanking movement.

Upon arriving at the town of Spring Hill the division advanced towards the Columbia Pike in an effort to split Schofield's forces in two. As the troops had advanced, they began taking fire from Union forces on their right. Granbury's brigade had advanced to only a few yards from the road when they were ordered to halt. They had been told the attack would resume when Major General John Brown's division moved into place on Cleburne's right. The sound of Brown's troops opening fire would be the signal to advance again. The only problem was, no one ever heard Brown's troops open fire. Darkness had fallen and the decision had been made not to attack. Cleburne's forces were ordered to make camp for the night. That decision was costly. Throughout the night, Schofield's forces passed down Columbia Pike and on to Franklin, by morning they were all safely by the Confederate positions.

Murphy's thoughts were interrupted by successive commands from the regiment's commander.

“By company...and to the right...and forward into line.”

These were the commands to form the line of battle. Quickly the troops of the 5th Confederate moved to their right, forming into two ranks facing

the Union position. They were just about to begin the assault on the advanced position. It was only then that he sensed the fire from the cannon in the main enemy defenses. How long had they been firing at them?

The change of formation into a line of battle only took a few moments to complete. Once the commander was satisfied the regiment was in position he called out “Forward...March... Guide Center.”

Murphy turned his head slightly to the right and out of the corner of his eye he could see the distinctive flag of Cleburne’s division, a white moon on a blue field, flying behind the next regiment over. The brigade began to advance.

From the looks of things, Murphy concluded they were only about four hundred yards from the Union army’s advanced position. Things would start to move quickly now. As they moved closer, Murphy could see the point of the works was aimed right at his regiment. It was they who would make contact first with the defenses. Surprisingly, there was no fire coming from the Union troops. Then finally, just a short distance from the works, a volley was let loose by the Yankees. This was followed by a round of canister from the two guns that occupied the fortifications with the infantry.

That was that. Moments later, gray clad troops were climbing over the Union defenses and into the line of waiting troops on the other side, only there weren't very many troops manning the works. Murphy saw that most of the Federal troops were in full flight back to their main defensive line. What troops that were still there quickly threw down their weapons in surrender. A thought struck Murphy, maybe this won't be as tough as I thought.

New orders were shouted out almost immediately. "Double quick – March. Follow them into the works." This galvanized Murphy and the troops around him. If they could stay close enough to the fleeing enemy troops, they would mostly be safe from the fire directed at them. The Yankees wouldn't be able to shoot at them for fear of hitting their own troops.

As the regiment advanced at a much quickened pace, Murphy could see a unit from the next division over moving towards the same spot he and his unit were heading for. Since it was coming from the right, the other brigade was not protected by the Federal troops that were fleeing back to their lines. Union troops behind the main defensive works opened fire. Confederate soldiers began to fall rapidly. Before Murphy and his regiment had covered half the distance between the two sets of

defenses, the other brigade had pretty much disappeared. Murphy changed his mind once again, so much for it not being tough.

Things began to get real ugly soon after that. A shout went up from behind the brigade's line of battle, General Granbury was down. Shortly after that General Cleburne moved into view. All at once, the horse he was riding went down. The general deftly slid off it as it was dying and landed on his feet. He looked around for another horse he could mount. A nearby courier quickly dismounted from his horse and called to Cleburne. Before the general could reach the new mount, a cannonball cleaved it in two. Murphy watched as the general turned his head and looked towards the men of the 5th Confederate. Upon seeing them, he immediately made for Murphy's unit waving his kepi and calling for them to keep up the attack.

By now the regiment was just a short distance from where the fleeing Union troops were crossing over into the Federal defensive line. However, they were also approaching a portion of those defenses that was at a right angle to the Columbia Turnpike. This was the same spot where the fire that had decimated the other brigade had come from. Now that their field of fire towards Murphy's regiment was clear, they poured a devastating fire into the

rightmost regiments of the brigade.

Murphy's gaze turned back to their beloved division commander. As he did so a spurt of blood erupted from the back of General Cleburne and down he went very quickly. The regiment was just fifty yards from the Union line and now both its brigade and division leaders were down, either wounded or dead. Still, Murphy's regiment pressed forward with the attack.

Then, in the failing light, Murphy noticed that the point where they were heading was not as heavily fortified as the rest of the defensive line. In order to keep Columbia Pike open to the passage of troops from the advance position, there were only earth berms on either side of the road and some wooden rails hastily placed across the road itself. The position was covered by two pieces of artillery and that was all there was to the defenses. With a loud cheer the troops of the regiment poured across the berms and through the rails into the Unions positions.

On the Rebels pressed. They need to push deep enough in to split the Yankee line in two and then continue forward to the bridge that crossed the Harpeth River. If they could take it, they could trap the Union forces on this side of the river and the army would score the victory that had slipped

away from them the day before. Murphy felt the excitement welling up in him at the prospect of a decisive victory.

Just as quickly, the excitement that was ballooning up in him was deflated. Although the hole being ripped in the Union line was growing rapidly, he could see additional bluecoats moving towards them from positions back of the main line. The way was blocked by fresh troops that had been kept in reserve.

Murphy saw and heard a volley ring out from the fresh Union forces. A sharp pain tore at his chest. When he looked down, Murphy could see the red fluid that was his life's essence pouring out of his chest in a rapid manner. Looks like it was as tough as it could be, he thought. Murphy's thoughts then briefly turned to his wife and two children as he began to slump towards the ground. Before his thoughts could crystalize however, blackness engulfed his mind and he could think of nothing at all...

Chapter 1

A sound, that seemed to come from inside his head, was the first thing Murphy noticed. It had a vague familiarity to it, but he couldn't focus on the sound enough to get a handle on what it was. He could also sense a bright light shining on the outside of his eyelids. He tried to force open his eyes. Try as he might they would not open for him. This didn't make sense. He had felt himself dying. He had felt the Minie ball pierce his chest. From the way in which the blood had flowed out of the wound, he was certain it had hit him right in the heart. How could he sense things after that? Was this the afterlife?

Murphy could feel no pain now. What did that mean? He struggled to make his eyelids respond to his mind, but his body would not obey. Did he actually have a body? He thought so. His mind seemed to sense that he was laying on something. It wasn't the hard earth, so he wasn't where he had fallen after being shot. It also wasn't a feeling of softness, so it wasn't a nice bed either. What it was, he could not be certain.

Murphy continued to command his mind to

try and force his eyes to open. Did he sense some movement? He wasn't sure. Try it again. Yes, he felt they had moved slightly. It was as if his mind was trying to get his body to remember what the commands it was giving meant. He could tell that his eyes were beginning to open. As soon as his eyelids had opened far enough, he could sense the bright white light above him. There seemed to be some areas where the light was more intense than others. It wasn't like candlelight, or light coming through a window from outside. This was something different. Was he in heaven? Maybe. He had to find out. That meant he would have to explore where he was.

He forced his mind to open his eyes all the way. There, that time it worked and they opened fully. The light seemed to come from something directly above him. Was it the ceiling of the room? If so, it looked like no other ceiling he had ever seen before. It was almost as bright as the parts where the light itself was coming from. He tried to move his eyes right, then left. He thought he could see others on either side of him. They were laying on platforms of some sort. It appeared they were not covered by any sort of clothing. Was he naked as well?

What did his body look like? Would he see the

wound where the ball had pierced his chest? He was beginning to think that he would not.

The sound that seemed to be coming from inside his head was starting to clear up. It sounded like a voice. What was it saying? Was it speaking English? His mind was still not able to fully focus on it.

Murphy tried to raise his head. At first it would not move. Again he thought it felt like his body was trying to learn to do what his mind was telling it for the first time. Slowly he felt his head begin to lift up from where it had been laying. He could see more of the platforms around him. All of them had bodies lying on them. From what could be seen from where he was positioned, all the bodies around him appeared to be men.

He had to know if he was whole. Murphy looked down along his body. There was no sign of a hole in his chest. There wasn't even a sign of a scar. From what he could see there was no sign he had been wounded at all. Murphy decided it was time to try and move other parts of his body. First he tried to move his right arm. That's it. No, the wound he had suffered from a shell fragment at Shiloh was gone as well.

He decided it was time to try and sit up. Murphy willed his body to rise up at the waist. It was

getting easier for him to make his body respond to what his mind was telling it to do. There was some struggle, but he was able to raise himself up after a moment. Now it was time to swing around so that his legs would hang off the platform. His body responded a little faster. Before he knew it, Murphy was sitting on the edge of the platform. It was then he noticed many of the other bodies were moving as well. Some had not yet tried to sit up, but were moving about on their platform. Others were moving around in order to get off the platforms and onto the floor.

Murphy guessed it was time for him to try it. First he placed his arms on the platform to either side of him. He then tried to place weight on them. They didn't give way when he did, and he figured that was a good sign. He pushed himself closer to the edge. While keeping his hands on the bed, Murphy let his feet touch the floor. For a second he thought they would give out, but they held. After a moment he took his hands off the bed. He stayed upright even though he swayed around for a little bit until he gained his balance.

Now it was time for him to try and take a few steps. Keeping an arm near the edge of the platform, Murphy picked up his right foot, moved it forward, and set it down. Next he tried the left leg.

His legs moved in slow motion, but they worked. With each step he took, it became easier for him to take the next step. Slowly he circled the platform until he gained more and more confidence in his ability to walk.

As Murphy completed his trip around the platform, he came face to face with another one of the men in the room. The other man was attempting the same thing he had been doing, namely beginning to walk. Murphy tried to work his mouth in an attempt to talk to the man in front of him. Before Murphy could make the first words could come out of his mouth, the voice in his head burst forth in crystal clarity. He realized why it had sounded familiar. The voice was speaking in a style that reminded him of the drill masters who had greeted him when he had first become a soldier. At the same time the words were very different from what he had heard then, although they were definitely in English. What the voice was screaming inside his head was easy to follow, "What are you ladies waiting for, an engraved invitation? This may be after the time you originally came from, but you are still soldiers. Now start acting like soldiers and move with a purpose. You have five minutes to shake out the cobwebs and follow the green line in single file to your first destination,

you filthy maggots. Now move it, move it, move it."