



**Sgt. George Harlan**  
**65<sup>th</sup> Ohio Infantry**

(Note from Tim Brookes: *When my brief survey of Alliance, Ohio photographer Emmor Crew was published in the May-June '92 issue of MI I received a frantic phone call from Ken Bandy, a fellow Civil War enthusiast and attorney from western Columbiana County, who kept asking, "Do you know who that unidentified Sergeant is?" I didn't know, and it cost me a CdV to find out, but with the result that we now have a heroic and tragic tale to accompany the image.*)

Shortly after the completion of the fall harvest of 1861, a 19 year old Columbiana County, Ohio man named George Washington Harlan – the oldest of five children and his father's right-hand man on the family's 100 acre farm – enlisted in a

brigade being raised by U.S. Senator John Sherman. Harlan and his neighbors from the area adjoining Alliance and Salem would eventually be designated as Company B, 65<sup>th</sup> Ohio Volunteer Infantry.

Trained at Camp Buckingham near Mansfield, the 65<sup>th</sup>'s first Colonel was a 25 year old West Pointer named Charles Harker. Under his tutelage the regiment quickly took a more regular army style than many other volunteer organizations. George Harlan was appointed third corporal of his company on November 5<sup>th</sup>.

Operating with the Army of the Ohio in 1862, Harlan and the 65<sup>th</sup> became seasoned soldiers, with appearances at Shiloh, Corinth and Perryville. It was not until December 31, 1862, during the early afternoon of the battle of Stones River that the 65<sup>th</sup> Ohio engaged in severe and extended combat. Opposing Johnson's and Liddell's brigades of Cleburne's Division in the fields south of the Widow Burris house, Harker's brigade suffered heavy casualties defending the critical Nashville Turnpike. Company B had been reduced by the year's campaigning to 43 men engaged that day. When the day was done, 34 of those men had been killed or wounded.

Remarkably, George Harlan was one of the nine men of Company B who remained unscathed. He was promoted on the field to Sergeant the next day, January 1, 1863.

The brigade history written by Wilbur Hinman states that the 65<sup>th</sup> Ohio received a new stand of colors in late April 1863, and evidence indicates that George Harlan was entrusted with these colors on May 2<sup>nd</sup>, just prior to the Tullahoma and Chattanooga campaigns. These

thrusts culminated in the battle of Chickamauga on September 19 and 20, 1863.

On the second day of the battle, Harker's brigade was part of Wood's division, which received the fateful order to support another part of the line, leaving the critical gap in the center of the Union battleline. Longstreet's assault hit that gap at almost the same moment, shattering the second of Wood's two brigades. Harker's men, who had cleared the gap before the Confederate assault, immediately turned back and delivered an unsupported counterattack through the north end of the Dyer farm field, driving back Robertson's Texas brigade and Sheffield's Alabamians in considerable disorder. Harker's regiments halted in a single line of battle extending from a copse of trees on their left to a prominent knoll on their right. As the right-most regiment of the line, the 65<sup>th</sup> Ohio occupied this relatively open knoll.

In front of them the Dyer field was a scene of violence and confusion, dust and smoke, disorganized units and fleeing men. Harker and Wood, not knowing the extent of the disaster on the southern end of the Federal line, were expecting part of McCook's corps from that direction; thus they were thoroughly confused by the sight of a strong line of battle moving parallel to theirs and seemingly dressed in blue and with indistinguishable flags. The unknown soldiers in the "blurred and greasy and dusty uniforms so resembling our own when travel-stained," according to Wood, were Kershaw's South Carolinians who had recently received new uniforms consisting of dark bluish shell jackets and light blue trousers. Such color and uniformity contrasted sharply with the usual motley appearance of the western Confederates.

To avoid firing on troops that might be Union, Harker and Wood ordered their men to cease firing and lie down while their regimental color bearers were told to "keep the flags well up," lifting the banners high and waving them from side to side to positively identify Harker's men. The most prominent of the national colors along the line were those flaunted from the height of the open knoll by Sergeant George Harlan.

That Harlan did his dangerous duty well is evidenced by at least three Confederate reports of the battle. General Joseph Kershaw, commanding the South Carolina brigade, reported that the Federal "colors were ostentatiously displayed along the lines." General Bushrod Johnson, who led the initial sweep through the Dyer field and then returned, saw the "upon the eminence... the United States flag now floating, the position having been reoccupied by the enemy." Years later, Private John Cox of the 2<sup>nd</sup> South Carolina recollected in the *Confederate Veteran* that the Yanks were "on top of the knob and waved their flags as if to say, 'Come on.' "

Initially there was indiscriminate firing from the various Confederate units on the field. Then the line of skirmishers advancing in front of Kershaw's brigade opened with a heavier fire directed at the exposed color bearers, who began to topple. Harlan "bravely faced the storm of bullets that greeted him on every side," said Thomas Powell, the senior captain who wrote the 65<sup>th</sup> Ohio's after-action report. Once the identity of the advancing

Confederates was clearly established, Harker's brigade returned fire and the two brigades locked in desperate combat for at least thirty minutes. Both sides suffered heavy casualties before the Federal line was outflanked and forced back. But the sacrifice of Harker's brigade in the Dyer field, first against the Texans and then the South Carolinians, was not in vain. They had bought with their blood the critical time necessary for General George Thomas to organize the defense of Snodgrass Hill and Horseshoe Ridge, thereby saving the Army of the Cumberland from total destruction.

Some of that blood on the Dyer field was George Harlan's, "who was," according to the brigade historian, "severely wounded in the arm but clung to the flag, which was soon stained with his blood." Captain Powell wrote that Harlan "even after being severely wounded, stood at his post till ordered to the rear."

Harlan's left forearm was broken by a rifle ball which coursed down into the elbow joint. Company muster records show him first in the field hospital at Stevenson, Alabama and later at the Cumberland general hospital in Nashville. Recovery was slow. A hospital muster roll for March-April 1864 indicates Harlan received a furlough. It is likely that the Crew's Studio photo was taken in Alliance during this time.

The Sergeant returned to his company in September while still partially disabled. He was discharged on the expiration of his

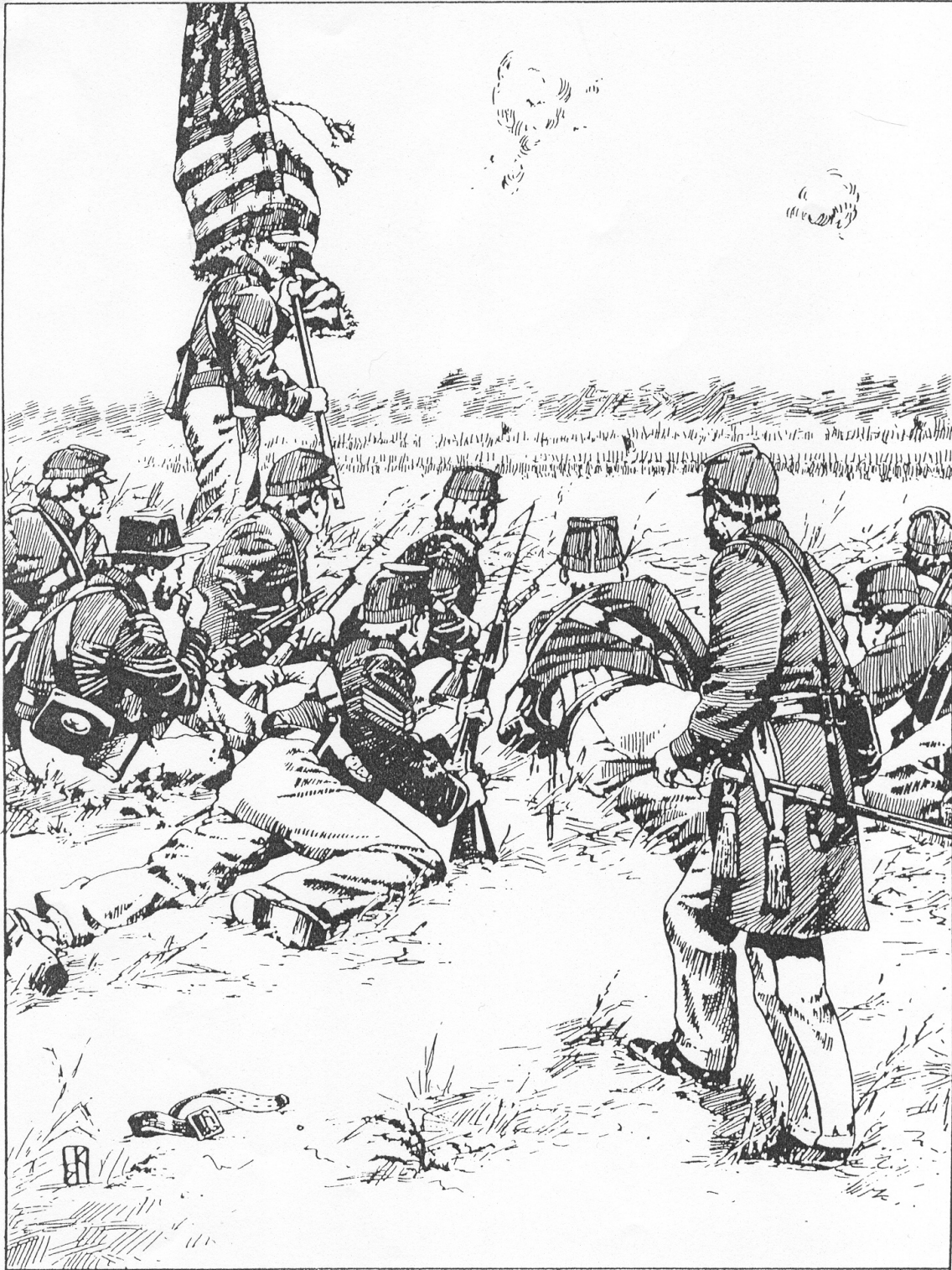
term at Nashville on December 13, 1864. Beginning on August 3, 1865, Harlan received a pension of \$4 per month.

Ironically, the federal government would not have to pay for Harlan's disability for long. On September 21, 1865, while helping in the fields during harvest, he was killed in a threshing machine accident. It was two years since he had stood on the knoll above the Dyer field facing all that hostile fire and surviving, only to die at home on the family farm he probably doubted ever seeing again that fateful afternoon at Chickamauga.

**- Kenneth L. Bandy**



***New headstone obtained by the author for George Harlan's grave, which was previously unmarked. Both photos courtesy Mr. Bandy.***



“Keep the flags well up.” Sergeant George Harlan waves the colors of the Sixty-fifth Ohio atop the knoll.



Turn of the century postcard showing the open knoll above the Dyer Field where Sgt. Harlan waved the colors of the 65<sup>th</sup> Ohio. The regiment's center of position marker is the small one at center of the picture slightly obscured by the tree. The South Carolina State Monument was placed on the top of the open knoll to commemorate Kershaw's soldiers' gallantry here against Harlan and in their late attacks against Snodgrass Hill to the right of this picture. Schultz's Ohio Battery was not present on the site of their monument at the time of the Harlan-Kershaw fight in the Dyer Field – Ken Bandy.