

when Johnston felt compelled to forego the battle and retreat across the Etowah river. He said that after Polk's Corps had taken the position assigned to it on the left of Hood's Corps and in the rear of Cassville, Gen. S. G. French, one of the division generals of the corps, sent a message to Gen. Polk that his position was enfiladed, and that he could not hold it.

Gen. Polk thereupon sent his inspector general, Col. Sevier, to ascertain about it. This officer reported back that in his opinion Gen. French was warranted in his apprehension.

Gen. Polk requested Col. Sevier to proceed to Gen. Johnston's headquarters, and place the facts before him, which this officer did.

Gen. Johnston was loath to believe in the impossibility of holding that part of the line; for, though exposed, it could be made tenable by building traverses, and retiring the troops some little to the rear. He instructed Col. Sevier to have Gen. French to build traverses. This general considered them useless, and persisted in his inability to hold his position.

Col. Sevier reporting this back to Gen. Polk, in the absence of Capt. Walter J. Morris, engineer officer of Gen. Polk's Corps (off on some duty), the General sent Maj. Douglas West to the position of Gen. French's Division to have his opinion also, and to have him talk over the situation with this general. When Maj. West reached there, there was no firing from the enemy, and he could not form an opinion in that way. However he conversed with Gen. French on the subject, and returned, reporting Gen. French as highly wrought up about the exposure of his division. Gen. Polk then sent Maj. West to Gen. Johnston to state the result of his visit to Gen. French's position, and Gen. Johnston reiterated his opinion about the feasibility of holding the position with the use of traverses.

Upon reporting back the remarks of Gen. Johnston, Maj. West found that Capt. Morris had reached Gen. Polk's headquarters, and the captain in turn was sent to French's position to make a thorough survey and report of it. He made a very thorough one, and reported the position as very exposed for the defensive, but as admirable for the offensive. Gen. Polk, since the first report from Gen. French, appeared much annoyed at this unexpected weakness in his line, which, from the pertinacity of Gen. French, was growing into an obstacle to the impend-

ing battle, for which Gen. Polk shared the enthusiasm and confidence of the troops.

That evening about sunset Gen. Hood rode up to Gen. Polk's headquarters with Maj. Gen. French, and at his suggestion Gen. Johnston was asked to meet the three lieutenant generals at Polk's headquarters for the purpose of consulting that night on the situation.

At the appointed hour Gens. Johnston, Hood, and Polk met at the latter's headquarters. Gen. Hardee was not present, he not having been found in time, after diligent search. Gen. Hood arrived at the rendezvous accompanied by Gen. French, whose division rested upon his left in the line of battle. Gen. Polk had not asked Gen. French, who was of his corps, to be present at headquarters for the occasion, and Gen. Hood's action in bringing him was altogether gratuitous. Upon arriving with French, Gen. Hood excused his action by stating that he considered the situation so vital to himself and French that he had taken the liberty to ask Gen. French to come with him to the conference. After awaiting Gen. Hardee's arrival for a good while, Gens. Johnston, Polk, and Hood retired to the rough cabin house where Polk had established his headquarters, and Gen. French and the staff officers of the different generals remained outside, beyond earshot.

It was past midnight when the meeting broke up and the generals stepped out and called their escort and attending staff.

Gen. Polk immediately instructed Maj. West to issue orders to his division generals to move as soon as guides would be furnished them. Capt. Morris was ordered to procure these immediately. Gen. Polk communicated detailed instructions, but appeared deeply absorbed. In silence everything was carried out, and the corps had taken up the march and moved some distance before Maj. West was aware that the army was in retreat. He had been by the General's side or close in the rear of him from the moment of the termination of the conference, and the General had not spoken about it. Thus they had ridden a good while. The Major, respecting the General's silent mood, had not thought proper to inquire about the destination of the column. An officer of Gen. Hardee's staff, Capt. Thomas H. Hunt, was the first to inform Maj. West that the army was retreating because Gen. Polk at the conference had insisted that he could not

hold his position in the line of battle selected by Johnston. Stung by this statement, Maj. West denied it emphatically, and as his informant insisted on its correctness, Maj. West rode up to Gen. Polk, and asked him where the column was marching to. Gen. Polk said they were retreating to beyond the Etowah river. Maj. West then told him of the report that had reached him, and asked him if he was the cause of the abandonment of the intended battle at Cassville. Gen. Polk asked who had made the statement, and when told that it was a staff officer of Gen. Hardee, who also added that the impression prevailed along the column, and Maj. West asking that he be authorized to deny the report, Gen. Polk was silent for a moment, and then said to Maj. West: "To-morrow everything will be made as clear as day."

Gen. Polk never again spoke of this matter to the Major, although with him day and night during that long and terrible campaign, in which he lost his life at Pine Mountain on the 14th of July, 1864; but the impression left upon his staff officers was that the failure to give battle at Cassville was not due to any representations made by Gen. Polk, but to the objections made by Lieut. Gen. Hood, the left of whose line joined French's Division.

Gen. Polk had so little confidence in the representations of the weakness of the line at the point referred to that he did not go there in person.

But for Gen. Hood's invitation, Maj. Gen. French would not have been called to the conference, and consequently when Gen. Hood urged the untenability of his line, and supported it by bringing one of Polk's division commanders (French) to confirm him, although Polk's other division commanders (Loring and Walthall) offered no objection, and in the absence of Lieut. Gen. Hardee, Gen. Polk could *only* reply upon the report of his chief topographical engineer, Capt. Morris, and Maj. Gen. French, and *sustain* Lieut. Gen. Hood in his opinion that the line could not be held after an attack.

Gen. Polk was too noble and patriotic to care for his personal fame, and made no effort during his life to put himself properly on record for his connection with the abandonment of the line at Cassville, for he was always ready to give battle or to take any responsibilities of his position. He fought for his cause, not for his reputation.

Another of this group of veterans had been of Hardee's Corps on that occasion. He recounted that his battery had been assigned by "Old Joe" to an important post on Hardee's line, the angle at which the left flank deflected back. Vividly he described his position—the knoll upon which his guns were planted, the open fields around, that gave promise of great slaughter of the foe when he undertook to carry the point. This prospect, and the pride arising from the very danger of their post, stimulated the men in their labors of entrenching, which was necessary at this end of the line of battle, where there were none of the natural advantages the troops of Polk and Hood derived from the hills on which they were posted. But all worked with an energy that arose to enthusiasm; for confidence in "Old Joe," confidence in the "Old Reliable," and confidence in themselves inspired the men of this company as it did those of the whole corps. The redoubt was nearly completed when about two o'clock in the morning Capt. Sid Hardee, of Gen. Hardee's staff, rode up and ordered the work to cease and the battery made ready to move. This officer then stated that the intention to fight a battle there was abandoned; that Polk and Hood had insisted that they could not hold their position in the line. He added that Gen. Hardee had objected to the retreat, and had offered to change positions with either of the other corps rather than forego giving battle.

In deep disappointment and disgust Hardee's men moved off, blaming Polk and Hood for compelling the abandonment of a field which seemed to be pregnant with a glorious victory.

The impressions of that night had remained ineffaceable, and the unfought battle had been a deep source of regret during the war, and of deep interest since; so much so since that it had led to a correspondence between one of the officers of the company and Gen. Johnston.

ONE OF HARDEE'S CORPS.

REPLY OF GEN. FRENCH TO "REMINISCENCES OF THE WAR."

WINTER PARK, FLA., December 12, 1893.

Editor *Picayune*.

A few days ago a friend sent me a copy of the *Weekly Picayune* of October 26 last, containing an article headed "Reminiscences of the War," that contains a number of errors, which I desire to correct so far as they relate to me, and I will refer to them in the order they are related in the paper. I quote:

1. "After Polk's Corps had taken the position assigned to it on the left of Hood's Corps and in the rear of Cassville, Gen. S. G. French, one of the division generals of the corps, sent a report to Gen. Polk that his position was enfiladed and that he could not hold it."

Any line can be enfiladed if the enemy be permitted, undisturbed, to approach near enough and establish batteries on the prolongation of that line. Therefore before any person can report a line enfiladed, the guns must be near enough to sweep it with shells. To report that a point near the center of a long line of battle cannot be held before the issue is made is mere conjecture, and not justifiable, and I have no recollection of having made such a report, and deem the writer is in error in his statement. A man would not cry out, "Help me, Cassius, or I sink," before entering the water.

2. The next assertion is that Gen. Polk "sent Col. Sevier to ascertain about it, and this officer reported back that, in his opinion, Gen. French was warranted in his apprehension. Gen. Polk thereupon requested Col. Sevier to proceed to Gen. Johnston's headquarters and place the facts before him, which that officer did. Gen. Johnston was loath to believe in the impossibility of holding that part of the line, etc., . . . and instructed Col. Sevier to have Gen. French build traverses. This general considered them useless, and persisted in his inability to hold the position."

In answer to this, I repeat that I have no recollection of having made to any human being the remarks here attributed to me. How, in the name of common sense, could any division officer report, much less persist, as stated? How would he know but that, if necessary during the battle, ample support would be sent him? I had one brigade and a half in reserve at that point of the line. As for traverses, I never heard them mentioned before, in reference to this line. And now, after your writer has sent Col. Sevier to me twice, he sends to me Maj. West, and it was before any firing had taken place, and he (West) could, very properly, "form no opinion unless he could witness the fire of the enemy's guns." West returned to Gen. Polk, reporting Gen. French highly wrought up about the exposure of his division, and Gen. Polk is made to send this officer likewise to hunt up Gen. Johnston, and after "reporting back the remarks

of Gen. Johnston, Maj. West found that Capt. Morris had reached Gen. Polk's headquarters," and the Captain in turn "was sent to French's position to make a thorough survey and report of it." He made a very thorough one, and reported the position very exposed for the defensive, but as admirable for the offensive.

I have Capt. Morris's report, but I do not find in it where he reported the line as admirable for the offensive. I will have occasion to refer to this report after a while. I merely wish to remark that when we find Capt. Morris at Col. Polk's headquarters we have something tangible in regard to time.

3. And the article goes on to state that "Gen. Polk, since the first report from Gen. French, appeared much annoyed at this unexpected weakness in his line, which from the pertinacity of Gen. French was growing into an obstacle to the impending battle, for which Gen. Polk shared the enthusiasm and confidence of the troops."

Now, contrast this with what the writer says farther on when he tells us: "Gen. Polk had so little confidence in the representations of the weakness of his line at the point referred to that he did not go there in person."

It is not always safe to divine what is passing through a man's mind from appearances, and, having "little confidence in the representations," the deduction of "annoyance" may not be correct which is attributed to Gen. Polk. Now, inasmuch as Gen. Polk was present (when Gen. F. A. Shoupe "pointed out the fact to Gen. Johnston that his line would be enfiladed before the troops were posted, and suggested a change of position) and strongly supported Shoupe's objections," he must have been early apprised of the general condition of the line before he received the alleged report from me, which the writer explicitly affirms was sustained by Cols. Sevier, West, and Morris; hence the weakness of his line was not unexpected, and should not "have grown into an obstacle to the impending battle." Gen. Shoupe's letter will be found in Hood's book, page 105.

4. In writing about the conference I find the account thus: "That evening about sunset Gen. Hood arrived at the rendezvous, accompanied by Gen. French, whose division rested on his left in line of battle. Gen. Polk had not asked Gen. French—who was of his corps—to be present for the occasion, and Gen.

Hood's action in bringing him was altogether gratuitous. On arriving with French, Gen. Hood excused his action by stating that he considered the situation so vital to himself and French that he had taken the liberty to ask Gen. French to come with him to the conference."

This shows that Polk and Hood had decided (at a consultation in advance) to hold a conference before I went with Hood to the rendezvous, to which they invited Johnston. About my being there, I have this to say, and the facts are these: The little firing that had taken place almost ceased awhile before dark; so, taking a staff officer with me, we went to our wagon to get dinner, and while returning to my command we met Gen. Hood on his way to Gen. Johnston's. We halted, and while conversing he told me that his line was enfiladed by the batteries of the enemy in position, and that he was going to see Gen. Johnston at Gen. Polk's, and asked me to ride with him to get supper, etc. His meeting me, therefore, was purely accidental, and this place where we met was near by Polk's quarters.

So I went with him, socially, without any special object in view. He said nothing to me about a conference to be held on the situation, called by him and Gen. Polk.

Soon after supper Gens. Johnston, Polk, and Hood went to Gen. Polk's office, and Gen. Johnston asked me to go with them.

The matter presented to the meeting was: "Can we win the battle on the morrow? Can we hold our line?" Hood said he thought not, for if attacked in the morning he would not be able to hold his line, because it was enfiladed by the guns of the enemy, now in position, and that Gen. Polk's line was also enfiladed, and could not be held against a vigorous attack, or words to that effect.

Gen. Polk confirmed Hood's statement in regard to his line. Gen. Johnston maintained the contrary. Of course I took no part in the discussion. When asked, I explained how my line curved, near the end, to the left, sufficient to be enfiladed by one battery on the extreme left of the enemy's line. I have no recollection of being asked if I could hold my part of the line, but had the question been asked me, I am quite sure it would have been suppositively in the affirmative.

As the whole includes all the parts, so, the discussion being on Polk's and Hood's lines in their entirety, the parts were embraced

therein, and not specifically referred to, being minor considerations.

Gen. Johnston argued for the maintenance of his plans very firmly. When a silence occurred in the discussion, I arose and asked permission to leave, stating that I wished to go to my line and fortify it. On reaching my division, I set every one to work strengthening the line and getting ready for the impending battle, that I felt sure would begin in the morning. While we were thus busily at work, and at about the hour of 11 P.M., an officer riding along my line stopped and told me that the work would be useless, and "intimated" (that is the word written in my diary) "that the army would be withdrawn or fall back to-night!" Soon after, the order came to move back on the Cartersville road. The receipt of the order was a surprise to me, notwithstanding the intimation that had been made to me.

5. Toward the conclusion of the article it reads:

"Gen. Polk had so little confidence in the representations of the weakness of the line at the point referred to that he did not go there in person. But for Hood's invitation, Gen. French would not have been called to the conference, and, consequently, when Gen. Hood urged the untenability of his line, and supported it by bringing one of Polk's division commanders—French—to confirm him, Gen. Polk could only rely upon the report of his chief engineer—Capt. Morris—and Maj. Gen. French, and *sustain* Lieut. Gen. Hood in his opinion that the line could not be held after an attack."

This paragraph is adroitly constructed, and apparently not intended to be clear. It first accuses Gen. Polk of having little confidence in the representations of Sevier, West, and French, as alleged to have been made to him; but when Gen. Hood brings French to the conference, his testimony is so potent as to make Polk *change his opinions* and *sustain* Hood, who urged the untenability of his (Polk's) line.

This is all wrong. Hood did not take me to the conference. I did not support or confirm Hood in his representations. I have never said I could not hold my part of the line, and it would have been presumption to do so. The commanding general would see that the line at that point was defended.

This paragraph also represents Gen. Polk as going to the conference apparently prepared to defend his line; but when he lis-