

# Twenty-seventh Kentucky Volunteer Infantry

By Col. John H. Ward

Before Kentucky as a state had called for any soldiers to sustain the Union cause, and perhaps before there was more than one organized regiment at Camp Dick Robinson on Kentucky soil, Major W. T. Ward, Edward H. Hobson and John H. Ward visited that camp. The night they arrived, Gen. Nelson (then the trusted agent of President Lincoln) send for Major Ward, whom he knew as a former soldier in the war Mexico. The next day Major Ward went to Washington city, and was commissioned as a brigadier-general of volunteers, and given authority to raise three regiments of infantry. About the 20th of September, 1861 he opened camp for recruits at Greensburg, Kentucky, within 24 miles of Gen. Buckner's rebel forces at Munfordville, with whom he had many encounters, losing men in killed, wounded and prisoners before we had a regimental organization and often before the company to which the men were attached had been organized. Many of our recruits came from inside the rebel lines, or very near to them, and had to fight on the way to camp. We had no arms except our private ones, and a few Home Guard muskets. We had no countenance from the state, as the governor (Magoffin) was in sympathy with the South, and no money except what we furnished from our own means, and they very limited. The men being without money wanted to leave one small month's pay with their families.

So we furnished that much to each recruit as long as we could, thus getting twenty or thirty men for a company, and forming a nucleus. We had no quartermaster nor commissary stores except what we gathered from the country, and for which we gave receipts to the people. I do not see how troops could have greater difficulties to encounter; certainly the men behaved as well as men could under the circumstances. Afterward, when the military commission was formed, and attempted to furnish some things to us, we thought ourselves well off by contrast. And as recruits were brought in, those who were in camp, and had left the \$13.00 of first month's pay with their needy families and received another month's pay for services, would loan it to their officers to be advanced to other recruits when they came in too fast for the small sums furnished by the military commission for that purpose. Here was tried and true patriotism that people and soldiers outside the border states knew nothing about. Under these difficulties, with the name of Gen. Ward to assist, Lt. Col. John H. Ward and Major James Carlisle recruited from the counties of Casey, Green, Taylor, Hart and Nelson, five companies, Col. C. D. Pennebaker with the aid of Col. Alfred Allen, and Mr. Larkin Proctor, recruited five other companies in Hardin, Grayson, Breckinridge and Meade counties, and also a few men were sent to us from about Covington; some of them coming from Madisonville, Ohio. It will be observed that this regiment had only nine companies in service. This will illustrate some of its difficulties. Capt. Lawrence H. Rousseau had written authority from Col. Ward to recruit a company for this regiment; he did so, and reported for orders and was ordered to come into camp, and perhaps started to do so. But at about that time Gen. Zollicoffer entered Eastern Kentucky, with a rebel army and Capt. Rousseau found it easier to reach Col. Hoskins' camp then recruiting the 12th Kentucky Infantry. He went there and served with him during that crisis. Col. Hoskins wished to retain him. Col.

Ward appealed to Gen. Sherman, then in command of the District of Kentucky, and the general said: "You are entitled to the company, but d--n it, neither of you shall have it," yet the company remained with Col. Hoskins and became Co. C of the 12th Kentucky Infantry.\*

The 27th Kentucky, rendezvoused at Elizabethtown, Kentucky, then went into camp at Grayson Springs, for most of the winter, '61-'62; part of it was with Gen. Mitchell's forces when Bowling Green was occupied in the spring of 1862. Then it was camped for a time at Mud River Lock on Green river, and went from there to the field of Shiloh, arriving after the battle and assisting in removing the dead. It was attached to the brigade of Gen. W. B. Hazen in Gen. Nelson's division. We had our first brigade drills on the field of Shiloh, with blood dried in pools in many places and after a rain emitting an unpleasant odor. We were with Gen. Nelson's division when it occupied Corinth. Then to luka and Rienzi, Mississippi, and to Tuscumbia and Florence and Athens, Alabama. And on the march of Buell's army to Louisville, Kentucky, in the summer of 1862. In September, pursued Bragg out of the state by way of London, Kentucky. We were at the battle of Perryville with the Gen. Crittenden's forces, but only engaged in skirmishing as the fight was to our left. After Bragg's retreat, we returned with Buell to the South, via Glasgow, Kentucky, and Gallatin, Tennessee, and with the army to Stone's River. We were sent from here back to Munfordsville, Kentucky, to recruit and were engaged in fights about that place. In September, 1863, were mounted and sent to join Burnside in East Tennessee. Col. Ward commanding the regiment and Col. Pennebaker the brigade.

September 25th we joined Gen. Manson at Glasgow, Kentucky, from whence the march was through Cumberland county, Kentucky, crossing the Cumberland River at Neelie's Ferry; thence through Albany, Kentucky, into Fentress county, Tennessee. On the 4th of October we crossed Clinch river, and marched to the city of Knoxville. October 7th we passed through Knoxville and went up the Tennessee Valley as far as Rutledge. From thence we moved to rapidly back through Knoxville to Loudon, on the south side of the Tennessee river.

Our cavalry forces had been repulsed the previous day at Philadelphia. The 27th joined them and other mounted infantry in another attack on that place, and found there a strong force of infantry and artillery, and could make no impression upon them. The next day all our forces were ordered to cross the Tennessee river and fall back upon Knoxville.

On the march, the 27th was ordered to go about three miles east of the main command to Leiper's Ferry, where we were to recross to the south side of the river and hold the enemy in check on that side, and slowly fall back to Knoxville. Arriving at the ferry, I found a small boat, capable of carrying only twelve men and horses. I reported this by courier and that the regiment could not be gotten over that night. I put over Company D, while waiting the courier's return. I then received orders to leave Company D on that side, and let it hold out as skirmishers as long as it could, and to hasten to Knoxville, cross there on the pontoon bridge, and come down to join it. We started at once, but had gone only a short distance when a courier from the ferry informed me that Company D had been attacked by a heavy force and would be captured unless reinforced.

We returned as fast as our horses could go, dismounted, and were soon firing across the river and had another company under the bank on the south side as quickly as the small boat and a canoe could carry them over, then another company, and then to show

our severely pressed men that we were all coming, if necessary, I sent Company C with the colors, under Capt. Baily--acting as major--and Adjutant J. B. Speed, with orders for Baily with Company C to charge a hill to their left from which the enemy up a fire upon us as we crossed in the boats. Thinking they were skirmishers, we expected to drive them away.

Company C was quickly on the hill, but just over the crest, in place of a skirmish line they found a rebel regiment. The company was driven back to the river bank where the other two companies lay, with their flanks protected by the regiment's fire across the stream upon any enemy that might try to reach them by approaching up or downstream under the bluff banks. It had now begun raining steadily, was cold, and the boat, in taking the last company over, had broken an oar, so there was no retreat. Col. Ward crossed in a canoe, and as he gained the south bank, a force of mounted men, wearing blue overcoats, came down the road. Lieut. Roff and Adjutant Speed, feeling sure was Company D joining us, rushed toward them throwing up their caps and cheering, when they were startled by an order to surrender. They did not do so, but lost no time in joining us under the river bank. There were two regiments of rebels in front of us, and from the firing on the wooded cliff below us and not one eighth of a mile off, there was another, no doubt. Our situation was desperate--three companies fronting three regiments, a cold rain falling, the river full, not enough ammunition, and the oar of our only boat broken, and no known means to make another. We believed we were doomed; luckily, the small stream meandering through the meadow in front of us was overflowing, and no line of battle could form across it. The enemy could only charge us in column. They tried that three times, but our aim was too good, and they had to give it up. Yet, the forces on the hills above and below could see how few had crossed, and, as soon as dark gave them cover, they would doubtless charge and overpower us. The flag must be saved, but the boat with the broken oar was on the opposite side of the rapid and cold stream--could any man swim it without taking cramp and drowning? It was more than doubtful. The color-bearer, Sergt. Jno. T. Defevers, was fully informed, and agreed to try to save the colors as soon as it was dark, as then we expected the attack, and he might hope to escape the enemy's shots as he swam over. He tied the flag to two rails, so it would float even if he sank and at dark, at the word, moved, into the cold water, with many chances against him reaching the other side. We waited in silence for the charge that must overpower us; soon we heard our brave color-sergeant nearing the other bank--and all right--for he was cursing in the boatman for not getting some sort of an oar and coming back to us. Soon the boat came, and the canoe. These could not take us all; if the enemy heard part leaving, those left were certain to be killed or made prisoners. Col. Ward ordered Adjutant Speed to ask for eight men to volunteer from each of the three companies to remain with the colonel as a body guard while the rest were taken over. The men to recross the river, as they left the line, were to leave every cartridge with the twenty-four volunteers, as they would need it all, and more. Arrangements were soon made, the men were silently in the boat and canoe. In a whisper Col. Ward said: "Adjutant send back for us at once." Speed said: "Colonel, I am not going to leave you." The colonel replied: "Do you then refuse to obey orders?" "No," said the adjutant, "but in giving orders these twenty-four men who have volunteered to stay with you, if you raise your voice, so they can hear, the enemy will also hear and they will charge; and you will all be killed or captured. We can save them if the boat can return in time. I will go to one end of the line, and you to the other, and we will leave the center to the last--it is their only hope." The colonel said: "There is no time to discuss, take your place, and do as you have said." The boats were gone, and the orders were for each man left to fire at

any flash of an enemy's gun. We had spared our shots during the day; now twenty-four shots rang out every time one came from the enemy--they thought we were being reinforced and did not charge us. The boat and canoe returned, and soon we had the river between us and the enemy, with a loss of seven men prisoners in Company C's hill charge. But our horses had been moved, we could not find them, and it constantly grew colder. Wet, and without food, we were nearly frozen before we could get fires, and daylight was welcome indeed when it came, and we fell back toward Knoxville. As we fell back, however, we had to fight an overwhelming force. In these fights, through three days, we suffered severe loss. In one of them Gen. Sanders, commanding the cavalry, fell, and a most valuable officer was lost to our army.

Again the 27th, with Woford's division of cavalry was sent to the south side of the river, and this regiment with the First Kentucky Cavalry, the 12th Kentucky Cavalry and artillery, occupied the southeastern fort of the line of forts around Knoxville. This fort was known during the siege as Fort Ward, for Col. Ward, who was in command of it, and here his regiment with other troops and artillery sustained a charge, the same morning that the rebels met with the famous defeat at the fort just across the river known afterward as Fort Sanders. After the siege, where nearly all of our horses were starved to death, we moved after Longstreet to Bean's Station, East Tennessee, where the 27th Kentucky Infantry was placed in reserve in the large brick building which had been a hotel, at the crossroads. Gen. James M. Shackleford's cavalry had been pressing Longstreet's cavalry and had a sharp engagement about dark, and it was plain that we should have more fighting next day. Our cavalry was formed and moved forward soon after sunrise, but in place of encountering cavalry as we had expected, we found infantry and artillery in our front, and it was evident that we had more than we could manage. Our line first gave way on our extreme right when Col. Ward was ordered to send the five companies to reinforce it, but there was no withstanding the force in our front; our line was slowly but steadily forced back. After keeping up the fight until in the afternoon, our whole line that had been a fourth of a mile in front of the hotel was driven past it, and the four companies of the 27th Kentucky were left much in advance of all our other forces between the two armies. A section of our artillery was on an eminence to our rear a short distance, and held the rebel lines in check for some time, until the rebels placed three sections of artillery so that they could concentrate a fire on the position it held, when it too was forced to retire. For some time the four companies were alone in front of Longstreet's army; yet they received no orders to retreat. They had not fired a shot and no shots had been fired into the building. Soon a regiment with colors flying passed about two hundred yards in front of the hotel. The walls had been pierced with loopholes and the men and officers all placed in position. A few shots were exchanged between this regiment and the four companies of the 27th; and then we could see a second regiment with the rebel colors passing to our left, and yet a third regiment with colors and in fine order moving directly upon our front. This third regiment made a fine appearance as there was no obstruction between it and the hotel except a frame building about one hundred yards nearer it, and in which was Co. A, of the 27th Kentucky, which was ordered to fire the building when forced to leave it. Col. Ward saw that the object was for the regiment in his front to engage him, while the other two should join in his rear and cut off his retreat; this was understood by the officers and men also. And while there appeared small chance to escape, the companies could not leave without orders or overpowering force. The regiment in front of the four companies of the 27th advanced and the artillery in our rear opened upon it, and twice knocked down its colors, yet they were upheld almost instantly. As this regiment came within about two hundred yards and

laid down, evidently to avoid artillery fire, and to rest for the final rush on the hotel, Col. Ward ordered his men to place their sites at two hundred yards and try a shot or two at them, to see whether that was the proper position for the sights. It was, and these few shots called the attention of the rebel artillery to the fact that their enemy yet held the hotel, and soon the three sections were sending shells through the building. Our artillery had already been driven from its position. About the same time the regiment in our front arose and charged down upon us, and for some thirty minutes perhaps, the men in that old brick hotel with a tin roof were in the midst of as much noise as could be imagined. The rebel cannon first shot too high and knocked the upper walls and chimney over on to the roof, but soon they got our range, and sent shells through and through the rooms occupied by us, which bursting in and about the building, without rifles cracking constantly, and the rebel regiment, then in or behind a long stable just across the road, pouring a fire into us, made as hot a time as could well be.

After severe loss, in killed and wounded, Capt. Baily of Company C, said to Col. Ward: "I think we should retreat, no one can expect you to hold this position longer under the circumstances." Col. Ward, replied: "It looks captain, as though our force was surprised by meeting infantry and artillery in place of cavalry and it may be we are left here to be captured while the other forces escape, like a tub is sometimes thrown to whale." Capt. Baily said: "We are certainly cut off, so we can get no orders to retreat, and I think you owe it to our men to use your own judgment and not let them be sacrificed." The colonel replied: "It may be you are right, we will hold out fifteen minutes longer, and then if no order comes, I will act on my own judgment." The time passed and the men were sent out in the dusk from the side door of the hotel, and told to rally and a certain ravine. They were so few, that the rebels who saw them thought they were only those who were skulking and did not fire, until Col. Ward and Adjutant Speed on horseback followed, when they opened fire on them, but it was getting so dark no damage was done. A regiment of Michigan cavalry had been sent with orders for Col. Ward to retreat, but it came in contact with one of the rebel regiments that passed his flank, and in the dusk and bushes they were each cautious, and their fighting gave Col. Ward and his four companies time to pass before the gap closed, that would have made him and them prisoners. After this the 27th marched on foot to Cumberland Gap, and then into Lee County, Virginia, where they camped for a time, and then were ordered to Mount Sterling, Kentucky, to be remounted. After reaching there Col. Ward, who did not like the mounted service, got an order sending him to join Sherman's army then beginning its advance upon Atlanta. The regiment joined the army at Pumpkin Vine creek, Georgia, and was with it in its almost continued battle from there until the fall of Atlanta, being in Strickland's brigade, Hascall's division, 23rd Army Corps.

After the fall of Atlanta, as the 27th Kentucky had already served over three years, it was sent back to Owensboro, Kentucky, to drive out of guerrillas in that part of the state, and reduce the country to order. The regiment here won a fine name for discipline and order even from the most decided rebels, and it was probably as well disciplined as any other volunteer regiment and the Union army. Col. Ward, the starting as a lieutenant colonel after Col. Pennebaker resigned, was commissioned colonel, but was not mustered as such, as the orders then required a regiment to contain eight hundred men before it could have a colonel mustered. The reports show that the 27th was in all of the engagements of the 23rd Corps during the months of May, June, July and August, participating in the fighting at Pumpkin Vine creek, Dallas, Kennesaw, and many other places. Crossing the Chattahoochee, we were in the battles around Atlanta. The loss of

the regiment in the campaign was sixty-six killed and wounded.

The men who composed the 27th Kentucky were young, many of them minors. They were from the country districts of Green river, and unfamiliar with everything military. Yet they were hardy and active, used to horseback riding and handling the rifle. There is a popular opinion that city boys are the best material for soldiers, but they could not be better than that composing this regiment. Within a year from enlistment the men were ready for any duty, and were as fine a body of soldiers as could be found in the service, patient under discipline, cheerfully enduring fatigue and exposure and exhibiting everywhere a bravery that was superb.

*The foregoing is the tribute of Col. Ward to his men. The writer of these sketches will add that the efficiency of the regiment was largely due to the excellence of its officers. Under the lead of Colonels Pennebaker and Ward, it could not fail to become a splendid organization. Col. Ward's continuous presence with the men was unusual. The regiment was never under fire, nor drilled as a battalion that Col. Ward was not in command, and a more gallant officer could not be found. Since the war he has shown the excellent qualities he displayed as a soldier. The adjutant of the regiment was James B. Speed, then and now a resident of Louisville. Though he was then under twenty years of age, he showed his efficiency as an officer, and gave evidence of the strong characteristics of his later manhood, which have placed him at the head of the businessmen of Louisville.*

*\* While the 27th was being organized, a call was made for 32 picked men to go on a scout from Greensburg, Kentucky, October 10, 1861, they were armed with new Enfield rifles and mounted. They started at 4 PM. After crossing the Green river, the company proceeded into Hart county. Being fired on by a picket, they dismounted and went forward. They soon heard the command "halt." In the darkness the men formed in line and cocked their muskets. Instantly a fire was poured into them from a force of about fifty men concealed along the fence, not four yards away. Tom Burch was killed, Capt. Smith Taylor mortally wounded, six others were wounded. There was but the one volley when both sides retreated. Among the wounded was L. P. N. Landrum, who received six balls in his body, and was left for dead. He slowly recovered, however, and, though crippled from his wounds, he became one of the leading tobacco merchants of Louisville.*

*The incident is known as the "Cy Hutchinson affair," and is mentioned to illustrate the fact that the Kentucky soldiers, even before organization into their regiments, were actively employed against the enemy.*

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**From Dyer's Compendium:**

## **27th Regiment Infantry**

Organized at Rochester, Ky., December 16, 1861, to March 21, 1862. Attached to 19th Brigade, 4th Division, Army of Ohio, to September, 1862. 19th Brigade, 4th Division, 2nd Army Corps, Army of Ohio, to November, 1862. 2nd Brigade, 2nd Division, Left Wing

14th Army Corps, Army of the Cumberland, November, 1862. District of Western Kentucky, Dept. of Ohio, to June, 1863. Unattached, 2nd Division, 23rd Army Corps, Army of Ohio, to August, 1863. Unattached, Munfordsville, Ky., 1st Division, 23rd Army Corps, to October, 1863. 1st Brigade, 4th Division, 23rd Army Corps, to November, 1863. 3rd Brigade, 1st Division, Cavalry Corps, Dept. of Ohio, to April, 1864. 3rd Brigade, 4th Division, 23rd Army Corps, to June, 1864. 3rd Brigade, 2nd Division, 23rd Army Corps, to December, 1864. 2nd Division, District of Kentucky and Dept. of Kentucky, to March, 1865.

SERVICE.--At Elizabethtown and Grayson Springs, Ky., until March, 1862. Ordered to Nashville, Tenn., thence march to Savannah, Tenn. Battle of Shiloh, Tenn., April 7. Advance on and siege of Corinth, Miss., April 29-May 30. Occupation of Corinth May 30 and pursuit to Booneville May 31-June 12. Buell's Campaign in Northern Alabama and Middle Tennessee June to August. At Athens, Ala., until July 17, and at Murfreesboro, Tenn., until August 17. March to Louisville, Ky., in pursuit of Bragg August 21-September 26. Pursuit of Bragg into Kentucky October 1-22. Battles of Perryville October 8; Danville October 11. Near Crab Orchard October 15. Big Rockcastle River October 16. March to Nashville, Tenn., October 22-November 7. Ordered to Munfordsville, Ky., November 24, and post duty there and guarding line of the Louisville & Nashville Railroad until September, 1863. Operations against Morgan December 22, 1862, to January 2, 1863. Joined Manson at Glasgow, Ky., and march to Knoxville, Tenn., September, 1863. Burnside's Campaign in East Tennessee October 4-17. Duty at Loudon, Tenn., until November 14. Knoxville Campaign November 4-December 23. Action at Philadelphia October 24. Leiper's Ferry, Holston River, October 26-28. Rockford November 14. Stock Creek and Holston River November 15. Kingston and near Knoxville November 16. Siege of Knoxville November 17-December 5. About Bean's Station December 9-13. Russellville December 10. Bean's Station December 13-15. Rutledge December 16. Blain's Cross Roads December 16-19. Scout to Bean Station December 29-30. Operations about Dandridge January 26-28, 1864. Fair Garden January 27. Ordered to Mr. Sterling, Ky., February, 1864. March to Kingston, Ga., and Join Sherman's Army May 23. Atlanta (Ga.) Campaign May 23-September 8. Kingston May 24. Battles about Dallas, New Hope Church and Allatoona Hills May 25-June 5. Operations about Marietta and against Kenesaw Mountain June 10-July 2. Pine Mountain June 11-14. Lost Mountain June 15-17. Muddy Creek June 17. Noyes Creek June 19. Kolb's Farm June 22. Assault on Kenesaw June 27. Nickajack Creek July 2-5. Chattahoochie River July 6-17. Decatur July 19. Howard House July 20. Siege of Atlanta July 22-August 25. Utoy Creek August 5-7. Flank movement on Jonesboro August 25-30. Battle of Jonesboro August 31-September 1. Lovejoy Station September 2-6. Operations against Hood in North Georgia and North Alabama: September 29-November 3. Ordered to Kentucky November 14. Duty at Louisville and at Owensboro, Ky., operating against guerrillas until March, 1865. Mustered out March 29, 1865.

Regiment lost during service 1 Officer and 34 Enlisted men killed and mortally wounded and 1 Officer and 181 Enlisted men by disease. Total 217.

