

## The Battle of Stones River 31 December 1862 to 2 January 1863

By Tim Stoy

The Battle of Stones River, 31 December 1862 to 2 January 1863, outside of Murfreesboro, Tennessee, is represented by the first red acorn on our Regiment's Distinctive Unit Insignia (DUI). The red acorn was the emblem of the XIVth Corps of the Army of the Cumberland during the Civil War, and our Regiment was part of that Corps at Stones River, Chickamauga, Chattanooga, and the Atlanta Campaign. Stones River counts as a near-run victory for the Army of the Cumberland and the battle was one of the bloodiest of the entire war.

The best book on the battle is No Better Place to Die by Peter Cozzens. I highly recommend this account of the campaign leading up to the battle, the battle itself, and its immediate aftermath and repercussions. Mark W. Johnson's book That Body of Brave Men provides a detailed overview of the actions of the Regular Brigade at Stones River, of which our Regiment's 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion was part. I also encourage anyone interested in the battle to visit the excellent website of Stones River National Battlefield Park <http://www.nps.gov/stri/index.htm> which contains excellent information on the battle, as well as individual stories which bring the reader closer to the actual soldiers who experienced this terrible battle.

History is too often just ink on paper, words attempting to describe human experience from the perspective of a third party observer. In military history we usually read of the great decisions made by generals and political leaders. Yet war remains the most basic and elemental human experience – we are reminded of this when we read of the Battle of Stones River.

1<sup>st</sup> Battalion entered the fight with 15 officers and 304 enlisted soldiers. In less than half a day of combat, 31 December 1862, the battalion lost 12 KIA, 77 WIA, and 17 MIA. The battalion commander, Major John H. King, was shot from his horse, wounded with three bullets in the arm. Three of 8 company commanders were killed or died of wounds – C CO's CPT William W. Wise, D CO's CPT Jacob B. Bell, and G CO's CPT Joseph F. York. A fourth, LT William B. Occleston of H CO was wounded. Our first acorn was paid for in blood.

Four of our soldiers KIA in the battle are buried at the Stones River National Cemetery – PVT Jacob Hexamer of H CO, PVT William Kappel of C CO, PVT William McCall of A CO, and PVT John Waugh of B CO. PVT Kappel had two brothers, Christian and John, who also served in the 15<sup>th</sup> US Infantry in this battle and would survive the war. All three enlisted at the same time end of August 1861 in Chillicothe, Ohio. What did the brothers experience when they learned their brother was killed? Did they find and identify the body? How did they tell their father? Their father enlisted one month after his sons did, at age 50, and served as a PVT with an Ohio Volunteer Infantry Regiment – he also survived the war. For more information on the Kappel family go to <http://www.nps.gov/stri/historyculture/regfunitestatesregimentalfiles.htm>.

The Kappel family's is just one of hundreds of thousands of soldier stories from the Civil War. A great deal of blood has flowed in our Regiment's history since that war, with successive generations of soldier stories added to the Regiment's "book". As the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary commemorations of the Civil War continue the next 4 years, let's look at our great Civil War history as the collection of human stories that it is, not just ink on paper.