BURNSIDE,- RELIEF OF AT KNOXVILLE.

Copy of Letter to Colonel F. A. Seeley.

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HEADQUARTERS, DEPARTMENT OF WEST POINT,

UNITED STATES MILITARY ACADEMY,

West Point, N. Y., March 29, 1884.

Colonel F. A. Seely,
Washington, D.C.

Dear Colonel:

Before receiving your letter I had sent to Genl. Boughton an extract from my official report of the campaign made for the relief of Knoxville.

The patient endurance, the actual want and suffering, and the pluck and energy displayed by our troops in that Winter campaign for the relief of Burnside at Knoxville is a portion of our War history of which but little has been said.

My report says: "The corps had endured the extreme fatigue "of a three days battle; engaged in the pursuit for two days; "effectually destroyed the Railroad communication between "Longstreet and Bragg, and then turned Northward and made a march of a hundred and twenty miles to the re- "lief of Burnside, and then immediately returned to its "old camp. And when we consider that this was accom- "plished under such unfavorable circumstances, as wretched "roads, no transportation, few blankets and tents, with rivers

"to cross without bridge trains, and supplies to be collected from
"the country, why may we not speak of our soldiers with
"pride as equal to any in the world?"

I remember well the circumstances of the building of the bridge at Davis' Ford on the little Tennessee.

The plan had been for my corps to march to Morgantown, where General Blair was building a bridge, and cross the river in rear of his corps. This would not only have delayed me but have forced an additional march upon my troops.

This was all avoided by the bridge constructed from the abandoned wagons; the successful accomplishment was due to the indomitable energy, ability and zealous cooperation of those charged with the work.

General Boughton and his command labored diligently throughout the night in the most praiseworthy manner; and to them is due the heartiest commendation for making possible the crossing of the corps the next morning.

I always have felt like expressing my personal thanks to Genl. Boughton and his regiment the 143d New York for that night's arduous work.

In the matter of dates however, I find that mine agree with General Boughtons and not with yours.

Of the action at Resaca on May 14th I well remember

the attack upon my left flank by which Genl. Craft's brigade was thrown back in some disorder, and the good work done by the 5th Indiana Battery (Capt. Simonson's); and I was aware that the 20th Corps, promptly sent by General George H. Thomas at my request, reached the scene just in time to prevent the enemy from making any charge upon the battery. In anticipation of the very attack that was made, Simonson's battery had been placed upon the first open ground in rear of the wooded hill occupied by my line. When this attack came, Crafts brigade, on the extreme left of the whole line of battle, was outflanked and of course completely overwhelmed; it was driven down the steep wooded hill into the open ground below and there attempts were made to reform the line, but though twice brought together in front of the battery, which was on the rising open ground farther to the rear, it could not long be held there and so fell behind the battery.

I shall never forget the gallant first made by that battery. It kept back the approaching enemy at the foot of the wooded hill with a continuous volume of grape and canister, and in the deepening darkness seemed a line of belching fire.

It was at this point that the head of column of the 20th Corps arrived upon the ground and covered the battery,

charging the hostile forces in the darkness, and never stopping, I believe, until they were driven up the hill and beyond our old position.

The line that covered the battery must have been from Gen. Boughton's command. I wish I could have known it then, for my intimate acquaintance with and love for my old troops, already merged into the 20th Corps, would have made their presence, at such a time and under such circumstances, peculiarly agreeable to me.

I do not forget the interprise and energy of the detachment to which General Boughton belonged which crossed to the enemy's side of the river, marched to Shellmound and accomplished a daring reconnaissance.

It was at this time that the locomotive was secured from the enemy and brought back to our vicinity for our subsequent use. Your own constant assistance as Quartermaster in our operations is not forgotten by me. You have a consciousness of duty well done even if the record seems too meagre and incomplete as I doubt not it does. The praises of men are, in my judgment usually misleading, for they overdo or they underdo, and are too often full of mistakes when best intended, but we have One above who weighs us and judges without error and who makes up for our deficiences by his merciful kindness.

Nothing could be more gratifying to me than to find,

as I now do, our beloved friend and co-worker, General Boughton, in full sympathy and unison with this ever present and All Beneficient Friend of friends.

Very truly Yours,

O. O. Howard

Brig. and Bvt. Major General U.S.A.

Relief of Burnside
at Knoxville