BURNSIDE.— RELIEF OP 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, 1863

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

Dear Colonel:

Before receiving your letter I had sent to Genl. Boughen 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 skill and energy displayed by our troops in that winter campaign for the relief of Purnside at Knoxville is a portion of our war history of which but little has been said.

My report says: "The troops 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 relief of Purnside, and then immediately returned to its old camp. And when we consider that this was accomplished under such unfavorable circumstances, as untested 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 troops to march to Morgantown, where General Blair was building a bridge, and cross the river in rear of his troops. This would not only have delayed me but have forced an additional march upon my troops.

This was all avoided by the bridge constructed by 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 worked all night in the most praiseworthy manner, and to them is due the heaviest commendation for making possible the crossing of the enemy the next morning.

I always felt like expressing my personal thanks to General Boughton and his regiment, the 179th N.Y., for that night's arduous work.

In the matter of dates however, I find that I have agreed with General Boughton's and not with yours.

Of the action at Resaca on May 19th I well remember...
The attack upon my left flank by which Gen'l Craft's brigade was thrown back in some disorder, and the good work done by the 5th Indiana Battery (Capt. Simmons); 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, Simmons's battery was placed upon the first open ground in rear of the wooded hill occupied by my line. When this attack came, Craft's 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 three times reform. In front of the battery, which was on the rising open ground farther to the rear, it could not be held there and fell behind the battery.

I shall never forget the gallant work performed by that battery. It kept up the approach of enemy at the foot of the wooded hill with a perfect 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 drawn up the hill and beyond our old
position.

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

I do not forget the enterprise and energy of the detachment
to which Colonel Broughton belonged which crossed to the enemy's side
of the river, marched to Shellmund 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 in our operations is not
forgotten by me. You have a consciousness of duty well
done even if the record seems too meager and incomplete as
I doubt not it is. 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 deficiencies by his merciful kindness.

Nothing could be more gratifying to me than to find,
as I now do, our beloved friend and comrade, General
Magoon, in full sympathy and union with this ever
present and all Beneficient Friend of friends.

Very Truly Yours,
O.O. Howard
Brig. and Brig. Major General U.S.A