

After Action Report
140th Anniversary of the Battle of Bentonville, North Carolina
March 18th, 19th, and 20th, 2005

March 28, 2005

Officers and Soldiers of the Army of the Ohio,

I had the honor and privileged of commanding the detachment of the Army of the Ohio that went down to the Battle of Bentonville reenactment. This was one of the finest events that I have attended and for those that missed out, they missed a wonderful time. The Army of the Ohio was able to form a company of about twenty men: nine from the 30th OVI, four from the 64th, and five from the 121st. Lieutenant Martin Spang, of the 30th, served as my second-in-command, Jeff Craig, 121st, as my First Sergeant, and Gary Spang, 30th, as Second Sergeant. All arrived by Friday night. The 64th built a very nice lean-to, which grabbed a lot of attention and had a lot of pictures taken of it. I met with Colonel Kenner, commander of the Illinois Battalion, which was providing two companies to the battalion, and then, newly arrived, Colonel Mike Lavis of the Western Brigade, our battalion commander for the weekend. Col. Lavis greeted me cordially and was quite happy to have the AoO among his ranks. It was here that we also discovered that Major General Dana Heim could not attend and thus passed Federal command to Brigadier General Tony Daniels. I had a late supper, and being tired from the long trip, went to bed.

The Tactical

Saturday dawned early with Reveille sounded at 7AM. I formed the company for roll, and our numbers were increased when we were joined by Corporal Casey of the 76th OVI. Lt. Spang and I attended the early morning officer's call. The battalion was increased from 3 to 5 companies, with the addition of the 125th OVI, out of Georgia, and a group known as the Liberty Rifles. We were made the Third Company and placed in the center of the line. Formation was set at 8:30AM. Col. Lavis had originally wanted to march his battalion out early and perform a reconnaissance of the ground, for five years before, the rebs had prepared the ground ahead of time to enable them to strike Lavis' flank and rear, and he did not want that to occur again. However, discovering that the early part of the tactical was to be scripted, he abandoned the movement and allowed the men more time to prepare and eat breakfast, which for the 121st consisted of bacon and onions. At the appointed time, we formed up and had inspection, which was conducted by the event staff. We then marched off, our's being the last in line. It was a two mile march to the battlefield, much of it on paved roads. Remembrances of the grueling Spring Hill march came flooding back and the grumbling began. After a mile, we stopped on a portion of the actual battlefield, where General Daniels gave a rousing speech, and off we marched again. After another mile, we entered a sandy field and deployed into columns of companies, but finding that we had further to march, we reformed the column. Entering another field, Col. Lavis deployed the battalion into line of battle. The other two battalions were easily pushing the enemy cavalry rapidly back, and we advanced to their support. Suddenly, infantry appeared in the woods and assaulted the lead battalions. We fell in on the right of the line, the cavalry becoming our

problem. Col. Lavis deployed the 1st and 5th Companies, both of the Illinois Battalion, as skirmishers. Leapfrogging their lines, they quickly routed the rebel horsemen. Then, 3 rebel battalions emerged from the woods to our front. Our skirmishers held them back for awhile, but soon they advanced and we poured in a terrific fire. I ordered Lt. Spang to fire the company at his discretion and he did good execution. However, stand we could not, for we alone faced the 3 rebel battalions, while the other Federal battalions faced 8 more. The entire Federal line was collapsing, and Lavis ordered a retreat. We about-faced and retired, loading on the march. We then suddenly turned toward the pursuing rebels and fired a few volleys, retiring again when they came too close.

Then a company of rebels entered the woods to our right in an attempt to flank us. Even when they have us outnumbered 3 to 1 they still had to hit our flank and rear. When these were spotted by the Second Company, Col. Lavis ordered one of the Illinois companies to head them off, but the rebs beat them to the position. Under protection of our flank company, we retreated once again. Escaping this brief trap, our battalion was ordered to reform at an edge of another woods where a couple of cannon had been placed. Reforming behind the guns, we took a moment to recover. Unfortunately, the rebels once again got into our flank and rear, while preparing to attack several lines deep against our front. Col. Lavis dealt with the immediate problem with the rear, and it took me some time to find him for orders. By the time I did, the rebs were launching there final assault. Hoping that we would have time to fortify our position before they got too close, I ordered the front rank to the edge of the woods to provide cover fire while the rear rank would bring forth brush and limbs for protection. Unfortunately, the enemy advanced quicker than expected and both ranks were sent to the firing line. Third and Fourth Companies spread out to face the attack. Our fire was able to hold the masses of the enemy at bay while the colonel routed the forces in our rear and recaptured one of the cannon. Here under heavy fire half my company fell. Before reaching our lines, the rebels stopped, and the battle was called to an end. We formed up and began the long march back to camp. Private Peaslee, 64th OVI, declared that he would not march on paved road again, and when we set foot on one, he, and the rest of the 64th, broke ranks and marched along the side. They were soon joined by the 30th, and while the formation broke, only one man straggled, and that was because his shoe was broken. By the time the march was over, most of the battalion was gone, others having other places to go. The few remaining returned to camp for lunch. It was already 12:30.

Morgan Stands Firm

After ravaging our haversacks for lunch, Lt. Spang and I attended the second officer's meeting. Our battalion order of battle was changed, with us being moved from the left flank to the right. It appeared that Col. Lavis had a friend who commanded the Carolina Legion that wanted to pay his respects in the form of hot lead and cold steel, and thus Gen. Daniels obliged. We formed up at 2:30, less than two hours after the 4 mile march and the battle in which we had to retreat over the same ground that we had advanced. Before we took our place, however, we were treated to the spectacle of watching the 11 rebel battalions, with band, march pass us. Then, from the rebel ranks waved a recognizing hand. A member of the 91st OVI, who had not heard that we were here, had fallen in with the enemy. It was quite an overwhelming display of force. Yet the men were ready, even anxious, for battle.

Our breastworks were already prepared for us upon our arrival, a crescent-shaped line of brush and limbs. The battle began with an artillery bombardment. I'm sure that we suffered worst from the concussion of our own artillery than the enemy did from its execution, for I saw little damage done to the enemy. Of course, they were in no condition to fire canister, being behind us, and any damage done by solid shot fired into the woods could not be seen. A company of dismounted cavalry deployed to our front and began an ineffective fire at our works. However, they were annoying and forced us to keep our heads down. Col. Lavis expressed the idea of throwing two companies of skirmishers out, routing the cavalry and capturing two exposed guns pounding our center. He, however, restrained himself for we all felt the masses of rebel infantry laying in the woods beyond our sight. When the cavalry had moved half way across the field, our feelings were confirmed when a battalion emerged from the woods. The cavalry, however, was our immediate concern. We fired volleys into them, when I observed, and my observations were confirmed by Lt. Spang, that the cavalry were advancing in rushes, so I ordered the company to fire by rank, waiting until each rank was fully loaded before firing the next. The colonel, on the other hand, wanted to remove the problem immediately. In this, he turned to the Third Company, ordering me to charge out of the breastworks, get on the flank of the enemy and cut them down. I was also cautioned not to move too far from the breastworks. I quickly obeyed and moved at the double quick. As we exited the fortification, a private from the 30th fell and bruised his eye. Lt. Spang saw that he made it back to the surgeon and he wasn't out of action very long. The results of my flank movement were less than desirable. As we charged out of the works, the cavalry extended their flank to cover our approach and I soon found that we were in a worst situation than before. We were fully exposed to the enemy fire and in their front instead of their flank. I could not charge and drive them from the field for their number was greater than my own. Lavis stated later that he was prepared to send me another company, and with these reinforcements and covering fire from three others, I could have attacked with an assurance of success. However, the colonel recalled my company back, and for what ever reason, so too were the enemy's cavalry.

At this time, we were placed in general reserve, and shortly after the left flank of our army retreated in mass confusion. I had orders from the general commanding that I should be ready to reinforce the left at a moment's notice. I believe the phrase was, "when we call for you, you'll already be needed." At the same time, Col. Lavis approached me with further orders. There was a company sized gap between the left of our battalion and the right of the center battalion. If the rebels pushed any closer, I was to pug that gap and stop them. I relayed this order to Lt. Spang, giving him the task of pugging the gap while I kept my eye on a staff officer positioned half way between myself and the general commanding and still a good distance so as not to be heard. Suddenly, I heard a jubilant rebel yell and, fearing the gap might be charged, turned to give the order to plug it. However, Lt. Spang, not lacks in his duties, was already leading the company, sword drawn, into the gap and poured such a devastating fire into them that within a couple of minutes the attack was broken and half the enemy lay dead and wounded before our lines. I praise the lieutenant for the swiftness with which he reacted, without waiting for my order, to the immediate danger at hand. As soon as this threat to our line dissolved, we were pulled out by the general commanding and ordered to the left. Once

again, we flew into the thickest of the fight at the double. Reaching the end of the line, we held our position until the enemy fell back. Then, two enemy battalions appeared in our rear, quickly capturing our guns. The Federal battalion to our right refused their line, and I reformed the company one this new line until we were ordered over the breastworks. The men leaped over the works quickly and fought until our ammunition nearly ran out. Supporting our position was a squad of Henry Rifles, whose fire was less devastating than expected, with one man wasting five rounds on a single soldier. With a fourth of my company down and our ammunition almost out, we watched Col. Lavis lead a counterattack which forced the rebs to retreat. As they ran by us in column, Gen. Daniels ordered us to finish them off, and thus we fired what was left of our ammunition into the retreating enemy. We reformed the battalion and marched back to camp.

Bad Sugar

There are always those incidents that occur behind the lines that will outlast any memories of countless engagements. There were those involved in this event that would give a much better rendition than I, but I will endeavor to relate it. After settling down to dinner and rest, the boys were much rejuvenated by nightfall. Much of the 30th were sitting around their campfire enjoying an evening cup of coffee, when somebody requested a some sugar to enliven his brew. One soldier, Scheck I believe it was, stated that he had a bag of sugar. He retrieved the bag and began to generously dish out the sweetener to his comrades. As this went on around the fire, someone tasted his altered coffee and declared it was terrible. Tasting their own, the rest agreed, and one decided that he would try the sugar before adding it to his own. Tasting it first hand, he said that the sugar had gone bad. At this, Scheck tossed the bad sugar into the fire, and a sudden ball of flame exploded from it, ending any night vision that we had adjusted to. All we saw were embers floating in the air, which turned out upon further investigation to have landed on one of the soldiers standing near the fire and he was trying to put them out. We shouted for him to drop and roll on the ground as a pard rushed to his aid, until at least this friend was notified that embers had landed on his tent, where upon he abandoned his comrade and rushed to save his property. In the end, luckily, no one was hurt, but Lt. Spang reported that the blast of about 10oz. of black powder blew his hat off. We inquired of the soldier if that was his powder, what did he load his cartridges with.

Building and Holding the Line

We awoke on Sunday at about 6, Reveille not being set until until 8 o'clock. We had a leisurely breakfast and swapped stories with Col. Lavis, who visited us that morning. Our numbers were further increased that morning with the arrival of our friend from the 91st, who came to his senses and returned his allegiance to the Union. Sergt. Spang and I both had plans to have short ceremonies to the fallen of the 30th and 121st OVI's respectfully, both of which fought their last battle here. We decided on 11AM after officer's call, which, I was notified by the battalion adjutant, was at 10:30AM. However, officer's call was actually fifteen till 11AM. The delay caused Sergt. Spang to go ahead with their ceremony on time, so I can not say how it went. At the officer's meeting, our battalion was moved back to the left of the line. Formation was slated at 12 noon for weapon's inspection. We were also informed by the captain of the Liberty Rifles that most of them were leaving. So we would be down to four companies, and under the reorganization, the AoO was made Second Company. We were also joined by

two rebel battalions who reaffirmed their loyalty to the Union and took up arms against their former comrades. As the meeting was dismissed, the event inspectors arrived and wanted to inspect weapon immediately. The officers were dismissed to form their commands. When I returned to camp, I found the 30th missing, attending the aforementioned ceremony, and a few others who took some things back to their vehicles. After they slowly trickled in, I formed the company and we had a quick inspection. After that, the 121st, joined by our friends from the 64th and 91st, with flags unfurled, marched out to Sunday's battlefield and had a brief salute to the fallen of the 121st OVI. I appreciate all those who attended.

At 12:30, we formed for battle and marched onto the field. It was a rolling, open field, with no cover. Once formed into line, the order came down to dig. The men went into it with a will. Using bayonets, plates, canteen halves, and cups, they dug two trenches and heaped the dirt in the middle. I will always remember Private Peaslee happily working away at the dirt. Others gathered limbs to pile on for extra fortification, and here a problem developed. The engineer wanted us to take the few limbs we found and form an abatis 30 yards out in front and about six inches high. It would have been a formidable obstacle for a battalion led by Papa Smurf, but little use against the rebel army before us. Repeatedly, he gave orders for us to remove the limbs from strengthening our trench to form this obstacle. His orders were just as often ignored by our men, with the simple suggestion of bring the matter to Col. Lavis. He once accosted Lt. Spang, telling him that he needed to read the manual. Spang replied that they were following orders and that he should seek out the colonel. Finally, the engineer went to Lavis and told him how to build his trench. Lavis replied that he preferred the current construction, whereby the engineer told him to read his manual. This banter went on for a few minutes, when the engineer stated that this would make a good article to Camp Chase Gazette. At this threat, the colonel exploded and ordered the man out of his line, saying that he would not be bullied. As the engineer left defeated, Lavis announced that he did not even read Camp Chase. Applause grew into wild acclamation by the whole battalion. The pompous engineer never again returned to our line.

In less than an hour, the men had turned a clear, open field into a strong line of works. At 1:30PM, the guns roared to life and the rebels began their assault. The right and center were strongly attacked. We were able to provide flanking fire throughout much of the fight, until we were attacked by a single battalion. With our fortifications and two rifled guns on our left, we decimated the enemy, and sent the fugitives running. Another battalion soon came up and met with the same result as the previous one. We left the field covered in the enemy dead, not a single one within 50 yards of our works, well short of where the proposed abatis was to be constructed. During these assaults, we were under much of the fire directed against the battalion, and our losses were one private killed, one wounded, and the loss of both Sergt. Spang and Sergt. Craig, who were exposing themselves to the hottest fire. The remnants of the enemy attempted to reform for a final assault, but Col. Lavis threw forth his reserves, First Company (125th OVI), and they, along with one gun and a squad of dismounted cavalry, dispersed the enemy on the left. The enemy on the right and center made one final charge, and Lt. Spang redirected the company's fire and destroyed the flank of the charging force.

With the enemy thus broken, the battle ended. Private Peaslee asked permission to tend to the enemy wounded and it was granted. In the act of this mission of mercy, Peaslee captured a set of fallen rebel colors (with permission of the bearer) that lay in front of our position. In the act of brearing them back, a wounded rebel soldier, seeing this, fired and wounded Peaslee. Calm was once again restored to the battlefield. Unfortunately, one of our recently converted soldiers, a boy in all the sense of the word, ran up and snatched those colors and ran back into our lines. At this, several wounded rebels, finding there wounds not that serious, pursued the former rebel. The boy, in a foolish effort to kept the flag for himself, was tackled by his pursuers, and from there, a fight began, when the boy's sergeant came to his aid. Luckily, there were enough officers on hand to restore order.

Thus ended the 140th Anniversary of the Battle of Bentonville. Col. Lavis expressed his thanks for the service of the Army of the Ohio and had nothing but compliments for this command. It was an honor and a privilege to serve under him. The men liked his careful attention, his friendly attitude, and his easy-going manner. I would like to thank First Sergeant Gary Spang for his service as second sergeant. He always had the 30th OVI ready for action whenever I needed them. First Sergeant Jeff Craig also did well as orderly sergeant for the company. He has not had many opportunities to act in this position and he did credit to himself and the company. I would like to tender a great thanks to Lieutenant Martin Spang for all his assistance on and off the field. He kept up a deadly fire upon the enemy, which allowed me to observe the condition of my men, the situation which surrounded us, and to be ready for any orders that might come from the colonel. He is a good officer and worthy of a command of his own. I thank Col. Ruley for offering me the command of this detachment. I hope that I fulfilled all the confidences that he placed in me. I would finally like to thank the men of my company. They had no opportunity to drill that weekend but performed all the movements asked of them with the speed and determination of the veteran soldiers we have bragged of them so much being. I thank them for giving me the chance to command them and for all their hard work. I could not have asked for a better company of soldiers, and they made this one of the highlights of my career.

I hope everyone had a good time and made it home safely.

I remain your most obedient servent,
Jared D. Haudenschild,
Captain, Company H, 121st Regiment,
Ohio Volunteer Infantry,
Commanding detachment,
Army of the Ohio.

Victory Belongs to the Brave!

Motto of the 121st OVI.