

Commander attempted to blacken McCalla's Civil War record

Second of three parts

When Henry McCalla volunteered for the Union Army in 1861 and recruited his own company of Monroe County men, he may have had a romantic notion about what war was like. If so, the reality of the famous battle of Shiloh, Tenn., probably changed his viewpoint.

Writing to one of his brothers back in Bloomington on the day after the battle (April 8, 1862), McCalla relayed the news about the fate of some of his fellow Monroe Countians and added, "The carnage was frightful . . . The field of battle covers almost six miles . . . The day of the battle was my first outdoors service for three weeks, having been sick ever since we came to this place."

Recuperating or not, Capt. Mc-



Looking back

By Rose McIlveen

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Calla earned the appreciation Col. Charles Cruft, then in command of the 31st Indiana Infantry. In a military dispatch of April 10, the colonel wrote, "The commandants of companies, Captains Winans, Mewhinney, Wall, Fairbanks, J.T. Smith, *McCalla* . . . each acted nobly."

In another dispatch, after a battle at Corinth, Miss., in June, a Col. Thomas D. Sedgwick reported, "About 5 p.m. orders came from General Buell for me to hold the

ground then occupied by my brigade until after nightfall, then return to camp, leaving one regiment on the ground to deceive the enemy as to the force remaining, which I did, the 31st Indiana remaining on the ground until after midnight. The heroic conduct of the officers and men of my command on this occasion was not excelled even on the bloody field of Shiloh . . . Captain McCalla, commanding the 31st Indiana Regiment, and the gallant regiment under his command, behaved in the most orderly manner, obeying all orders and moving promptly to any part of the field when ordered."

In the Civil War, such glowing praise merited promotion, and it was certainly true in McCalla's case. On Oct. 2, 1862, he was given the rank of major.

What happened afterward is reflected in a Bloomington *Telephone* article in March 1903. Apparently, after his promotion, McCalla asked for permission to come back to Monroe County to get horse and "accoutrements." Continued the *Telephone*, "His commanding officer, who had formed a dislike for Capt. McCalla, refused the request. The captain determined to go anyway, and after telling his men where he was going and why, left without leave."

McCalla's commanding officer, who would have been either Col. John Osborn of Bowling Green in Owen County or Lt. Col. Charles M. Smith of Terre Haute, blackened the record by saying that McCalla "left in the face of the enemy when a battle was imminent," a deliberate lie. Actually, the Indiana 31st had been part of Buell's command,

stationed for a time in Louisville and later engaged in slow pursuit of Confederate Gen. Bragg's troops southward to Tennessee. The "battle" McCalla's commanding officer referred to did not take place until Dec. 31 (1862) and Jan. 1-2 (1863), almost three months after the request for leave.

Ironically, neither of McCalla's superior officers remained in the army for their three-year enlistment. Smith resigned in early February of 1863, and Osborn left the following July. And neither earned any paragraphs in their perspective county histories, while McCalla's service is not only mentioned in Monroe County histories, but there is nothing in the text to indicate that he had ever received a blemish on his record.

Next week: McCalla's exoneration