



WOUNDED AT
RESACA

JOHN A. WELLS
IN THE CIVIL WAR

BY: VAN SHAVER

PREFACE

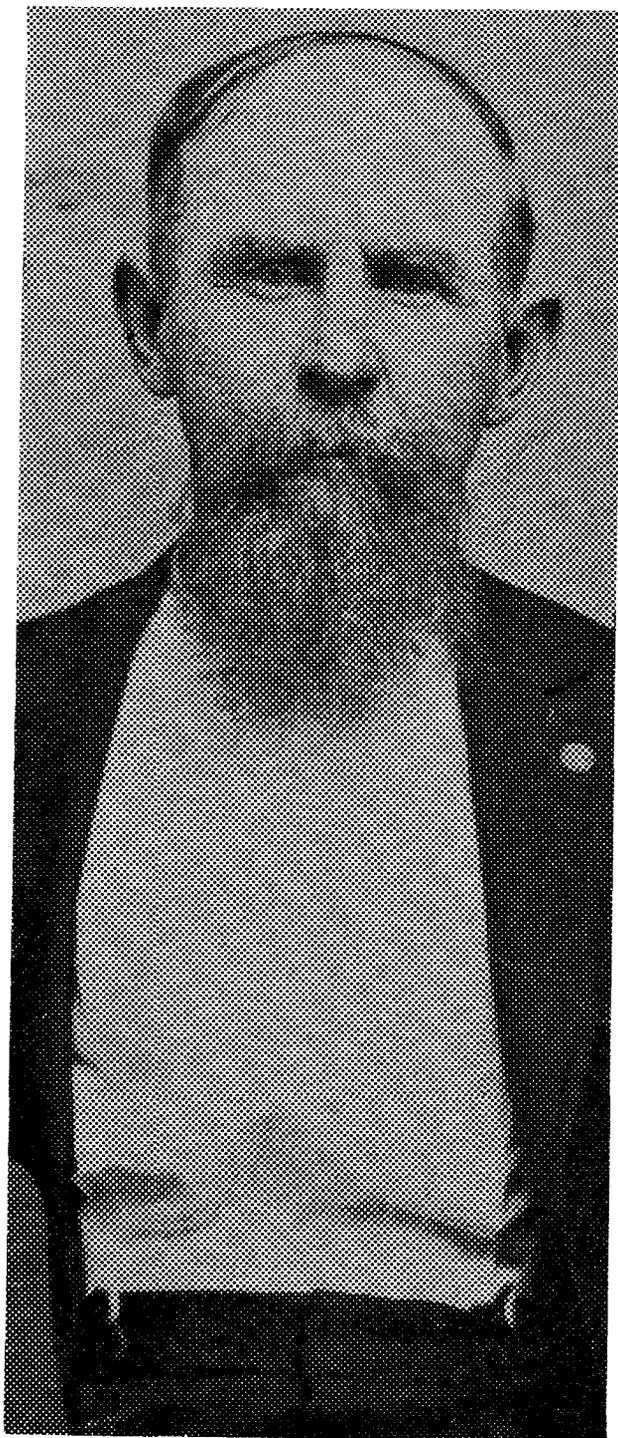
This being my first adventure in the field of research and publication on the life of someone who served in the Civil War, I do not claim to have done justice to this person or his life. I have spent many hours and traveled many miles in the pursuit of answers to my questions. Neither I nor anyone else will ever be able to convey to the readers how truly horrible and inhumane the conditions during the war were. In these next few pages I will merely attempt to try and tell of one man's odyssey of adventure, danger, and near-death experience, JOHN ALFRED WELLS, my great-great grandfather.

It has been said that time must be spent in the valley of despair to appreciate the mountain tops of happiness. The same could be said of history. Time must be spent in the past to appreciate the present.

Dedicated to Aunt Ruth
without whom none of this
would have been possible.
thank you for all of your help.

TO OUR FAMILY

For those members of our family who are direct descendants of John Wells. We must be thankful that he survived the war. Without him, none of us would be here. His survival from the type of wound he had was nothing short of a miracle. For those of you who do not know John A. Wells, he was Papa Wells' daddy. Papa was Mamaw McCown's daddy and we all know who belongs to Mamaw. This article I write to honor the generations of our family who past before us and to commit to the memories of the generations who will pass after us.



*Photo of John A. Wells
from the early 1890's*

JOHN A. WELLS' FUNERAL

**Veteran of Civil War Dies at Home
Near Loudon.**

Chattanooga Times Special.

LOUDON, Tenn., Dec. 6.—Funeral services over the remains of John A. Wells, brother of W. J. Wells, postmaster here during the Taft administration, who died at his country home near here Saturday, were held Sunday afternoon at 2 o'clock. Interment followed in New Providence cemetery, a short distance from his old boyhood home.

"Uncle Johnnie," as he was known by his many friends, was a veteran of the civil war, and was near 75 years of age. He always took a great delight in telling some of his experiences and hardships during the days of war.

Besides his widow, four sons and four daughters survive, together with a number of close relatives.

*Obituary from Chattanooga
Times 1914*

January 14, 1840

In the far eastern corner of Roane County, Tennessee, now Loudon County, in a quiet, spring fed valley, between Hines Valley and Hotchkiss Valley, lived the family of Moses Wells. Moses, his wife, Ailsey, and two daughters, Margaret and Elizabeth, must have been quiet relieved at the end of this day. The long awaited arrival of a new member to the family, had finally come. John Alfred had been born. Being the son of a farmer, John probably grew up learning the skills and the trades of a farmer. This vocation must have been appealing to him for this would be his main lively hood for the rest of his life, except for two years and two months.

Roane County, Tennessee, regardless how remote or how far away it seemed, would not escape the troubled times that were coming, THE CIVIL WAR. For months and even years, the problems of the states governments had been coming to a boil. In the recent election of Abraham Lincoln, John A., now being 20 years old, would not have been old enough to vote. The southern states now felt their rights were lost. They began almost immediately to secede from the Union. Back on the farm at the Wells' house, the events of the time must undoubtedly have been a topic for concerned discussion, but probably seemed so far away that it surely would not effect, very much, Moses or his family. In the governments, things went from bad to worse. State after state from the south began to succeed from the Union. Tensions mounted and pressures grew until April 12, 1861, the day the Confederate Army attacked Fort Sumter. The war had begun.

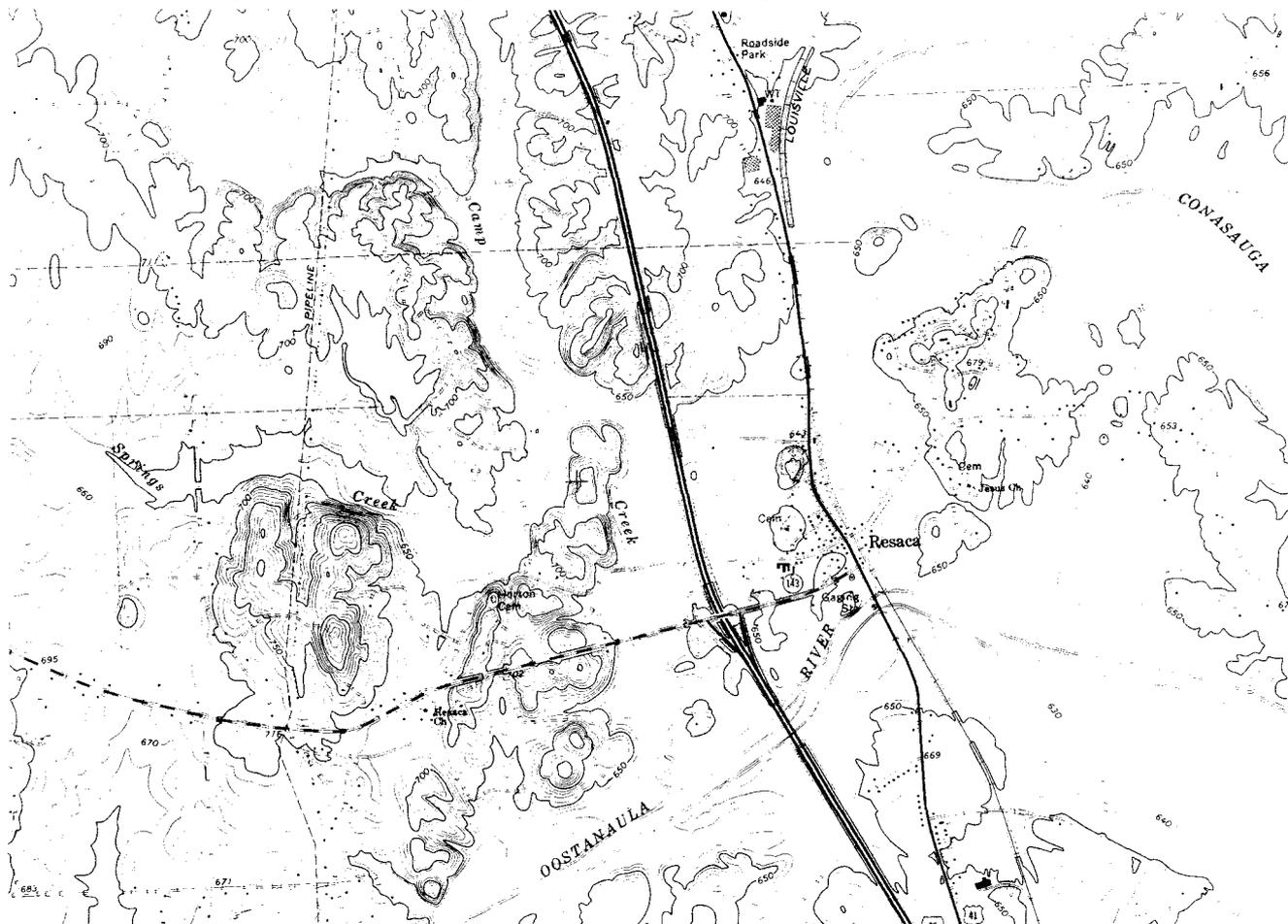
When the war began, most states were decidedly pro Union or Confederate, but east Tennessee and Roane County were evenly divided among the two groups and no one could stay neutral. The Wells' were no exception. They supported the Union cause, the Yankees. During the first two years of the war, the Confederates were in possession of east Tennessee. This was bad for the loyal Union citizens of the area. A poor farm boy from Roane County, Tennessee had two choices. He was drafted into the southern army or he could slip away and join the Union army.

John A. somehow managed to stay at home for the first year of the war. But by February 26, 1862, having just turned 22 years old, John A. had slipped away to Barberville, Kentucky with several other Roane County boys to join the Union army. What a major step in the life of a young farm boy this must have been. The years delay in joining is a mystery. Maybe his mother did not want him to go, maybe he was afraid, maybe he just didn't know what to do. °

One could only ponder the reason. At any rate, John A. Wells described as being 5' 10" tall with a fair complexion, blue eyes, and light hair, was now a private in the United States Army and by taking the oath of loyalty, he promised to defend his country at all cost, even if this meant death. John A. and his friends and many other men and boys were grouped together to become the Fifth East Tennessee Volunteer Infantry, John A. being assigned to Company "D". A soldier's company and regiment became points of great pride for him. We must believe this to be true of John A. Many of the fellows of his group were probably new friends, some of them old friends, nevertheless, they would all become close friends and depend upon each other for their very lives. John A. having joined the army in February of '62, did not have to wait long before the call to march was sounded. By March of '62, he along with the rest of his regiment, the 5th East Tennessee were in Cumberland Gap, Tennessee. By October, he was in Ohio and West Virginia, then Louisville, Kentucky, then back to Ohio. John A. must have proven himself a worthy soldier for during this time he was promoted from Private to Corporal. By early 1863, he was back in Tennessee near Nashville. Keep in mind all of the traveling was done almost totally on foot, and during most of the time, John A. and his regiment were engaged with the enemy (the Rebels) in skirmishing or in battles. While stationed in middle Tennessee, he served time in Carthage, McMinnville, Chattanooga, Summerville, and Sale Creek. Home must have seemed a million miles away. While he had been away from home, Roane County and East Tennessee had been retaken by the Union army. How happy John A. must have been to learn back home his family being Union loyalist would now be safe from the Confederate Army who for so long had been in control of the region. One could only imagine the added hardships put upon the loyal Union citizens while under the control of the Rebels. In December of 1863, what had to be great news to John A. and his regiment, maybe even an early Christmas wish come true, the orders to march came down. This time, however, the march was to Kingston, Tennessee. The county seat of Roane County, home! How much easier the marching must have been knowing for the first time in more than a year and a half, you were headed toward home. There would be no furloughs, not time off. But even though you would still be on duty, you would be close to home. Probably close enough to steal a little time away to go to the house, say hello to Dad, get a big kiss and hug from Mother, see how sisters were doing, maybe even time for a good ole' home cooked meal like you hadn't had since you left home. Yes, the march to Kingston may well have turned into a foot race the last few miles. Arriving in Kingston on the third of December, things were looking pretty good for the Yanks. The Rebels were in retreat. Most of John A.'s time was spent rooting out isolated pockets of the enemy up and down the Tennessee River in Kingston, Loudon, Lenoirs, and Knoxville.

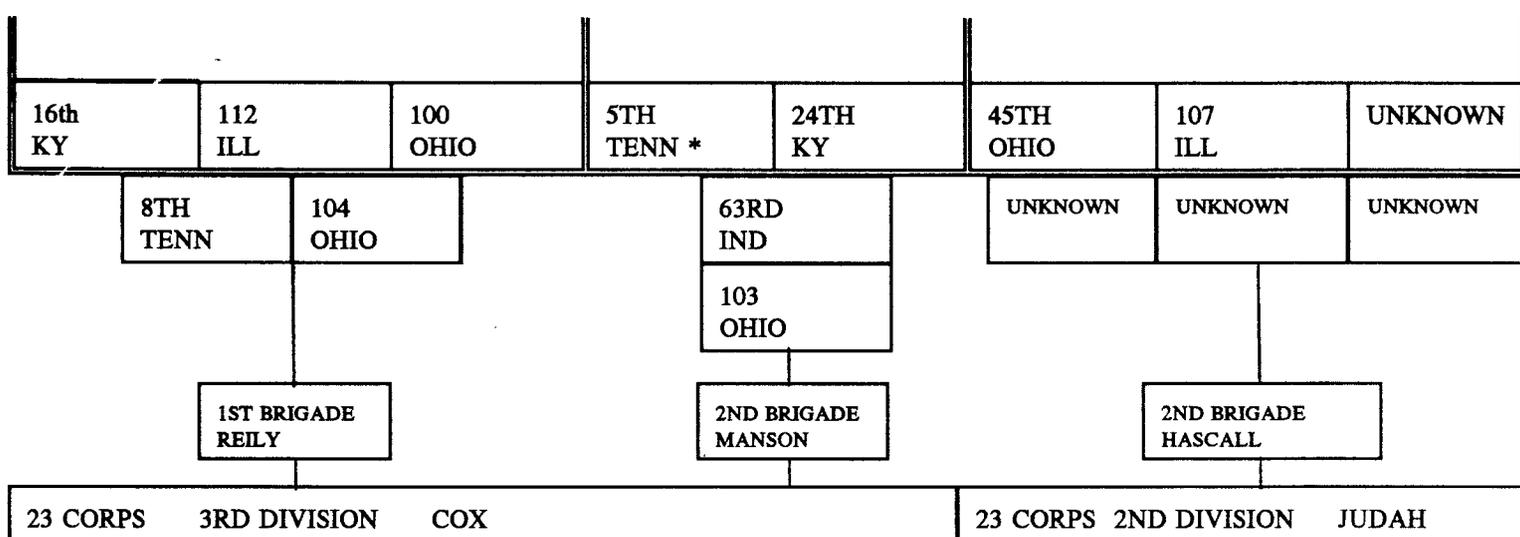
If there was anything good about the war for John A., it was the fact that he was getting to serve this close to home. This however ended after only four months when new orders were received. The march to Atlanta was on. Every soldier knew this would be a long, torturous campaign. The Yankees were now going to be driving deep into the heart of Dixie. The Rebels would fight unyieldingly for every inch of ground. This could only mean heavy losses on both sides. In April of 1864, John A. and his regiment were on the march south. Massing in Chattanooga with other corps fighting through Red Clay, Dalton, Rockyface, and Sugar Valley, Georgia. Then in May, reaching a sleepy little hamlet called Reseca. The town situated on the Oostanaula River, was of no major military importance, except the Rebels had chosen to make a determined stand near this town. The Rebels must be moved from the front of the ever advancing Union army. Some of the men chosen for this job, were soldiers of the 23rd Army Corp. The 23rd Army Corp had three divisions. The third division had three brigades, the second brigade had six regiments. One of the theses regiments was the Fifth East Tennessee Volunteer Infantry. This regiment had approximately 400 men. One of these men was John A. Wells. After having been in the war over two years and fighting in countless battles and skirmishes, surviving illness, starvation, and overwhelming fatigue, a soldier might find himself callus to the dangers of war. Overconfident he would survive. Maybe his fears grew with each fight. The answers to these questions, I do not know. I do know, however, that the soldiers on both sides of the conflict must have been some of the bravest men in all history, willing each to die for his cause. The battle for Reseca began on May 13th, 1864, near Sugar Valley three or four miles out. The Yankees moving in the direction of Reseca encountered the Rebel pickets and skirmishers some distance from Resaca. The Rebel skirmishers were driven back some two miles. As night fell, both armies were content to remain in the positions they had fought to hold or gain on this day. There would be no sleep for the men on either battle line tonight. Saturday, May 14, 1864, a date that must have stayed with John A. forever, came on as a mild warm day with clear weather. One Colonel was noted as saying, "It would be a good day to whip the Rebels"! Before daylight the orders were given to close ranks, form in line of battle and prepare to march. There would be no time for breakfast. At 7:00 am the Yankees were prepared to push forward toward Reseca. They were at once met by the Rebel skirmishers in their front, but like a wall of human bodies, the Yankees moved forward sweeping the Rebels before them until the Rebels reached their main line of defenses, rifle pits and fortifications. The Yankees halted for about an hour to reform their lines and at 11:45 am, began their assault on the fortifications. The Fifth East Tennessee, John A.'s regiment, was on the front line of the attack. The 23rd Corp, which John A. was a part, held the left end of the line of battle.

The entire line was approximately three miles long, consisting of the 23rd Corp, the 14th Corp, the 15th Corp, and the 16th Corp.



Modern map of Resaca, GA. Showing the Union armies line of attack. (Note location of Interstate 75).

When the order to charge was given, the entire line moved forward together. They began their attack from a wooded ridge, a half mile in front of the Rebel defenses. Immediately after stepping out of the woods, the Rebels opened fire on them with three batteries of cannon. John A. with the rest of his brigade had to cross an open field 200 yards wide and at all times being exposed to the galling fire of artillery and small arms. One veteran commenting, "It was the hottest reception he had gotten since joining the army"! After crossing the open field, they passed over several small wooded ridges in succession and then through a deep, narrow channel, called Camp Creek. The creek being two to four feet deep with steep banks, lined with tangled willows. The men now moving on the double-quick, plunged into the creek and up the other side with hardly a moments halt. All the time, still being under fire.

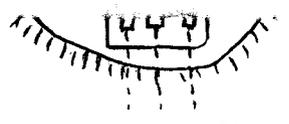


PARTIAL REGIMENTAL ALIGNMENT OF THE

*** John A. Wells' Regiment**

23RD CORPS AT THE TIME OF ATTACK

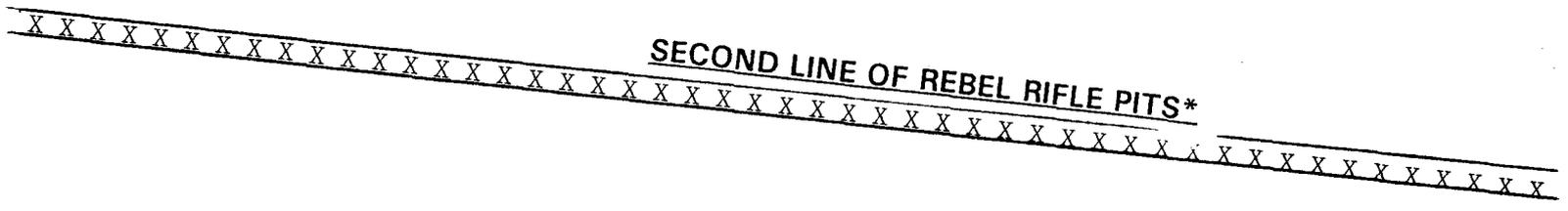
Down the line to the right, the other brigades and corps were not doing so well. Once in the creek, they found themselves pinned down by the enemies guns. Here, their advance was halted. Up the line, the regiments of the 1st and 2nd Brigade, John A.'s brigade, were still moving forward. The enemies fire growing more intense by the foot. One soldier recalled the firing, "As though it were raining lead, cannon balls, and mortar shells". With the right of the line bogged down in the creek, this left the left side of the line very exposed. The question might be asked, why didn't John A. and his men retreat? Because the command of charge had been given and that's just the way it was. The advancing attackers were the boys from Tennessee, Kentucky, Ohio, Indiana, and Illinois who together had pushed their way so far forward up the gentle slope toward the Rebels as to enter the rifle pits of the enemy capturing several as prisoners. Being so far ahead and having no support on the right, this left them exposed to the enemies fire on their left, front and right. The Yankees and Rebels were now occupied the same line of rifle pits, which allowed the Rebels to shoot straight into the right side of the Yankee line. This in all probability was the time when John A. was shot. The doctor's description of his wound was described as entering his right side and passing out his left side. The Yankees held this same ground for the next three hours. Their ammunition now all but gone, they sent URGENT messages by courier for more ammunition or reinforcements. In the mean time, they began taking ammunition of the dead and wounded. Late in the evening, they were finally relieved by portions of the 4th Army Corp. The help they had expected to come up on the right, never came. Now with night coming on, the Rebels were obliged to pull back a little to break off the engagement. When the fighting ceased, the dead and wounded Yankees and Rebels littered the ground. John A. lay somewhere among the weeds, hurt and bleeding, and very probably thinking he would soon be dead.



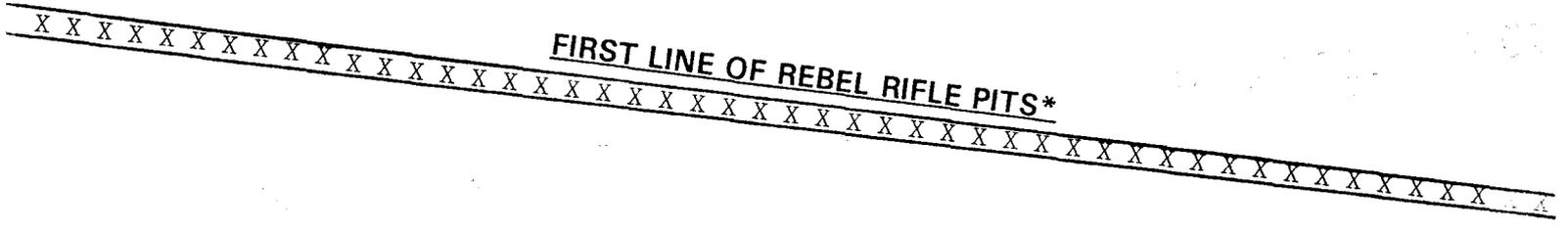
REBEL CANNON



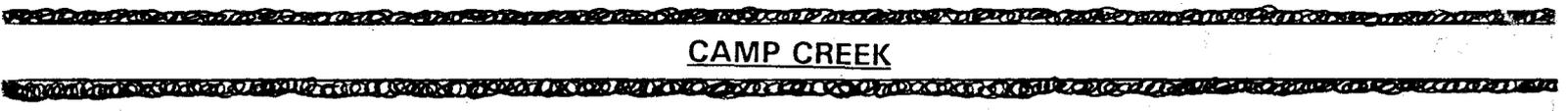
REBEL CANNON



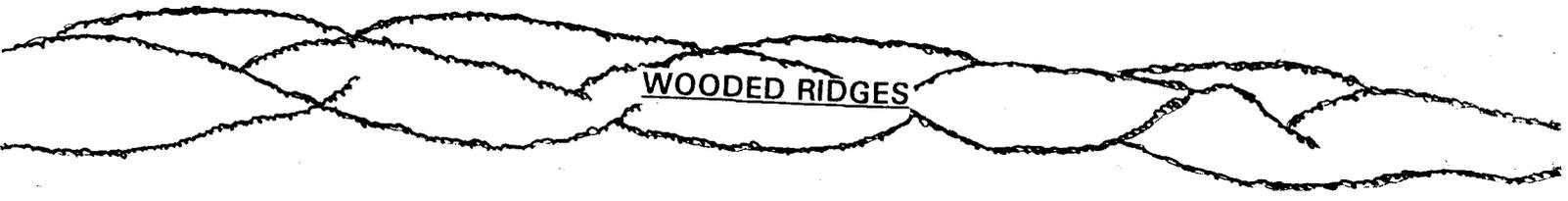
SECOND LINE OF REBEL RIFLE PITS*



FIRST LINE OF REBEL RIFLE PITS*

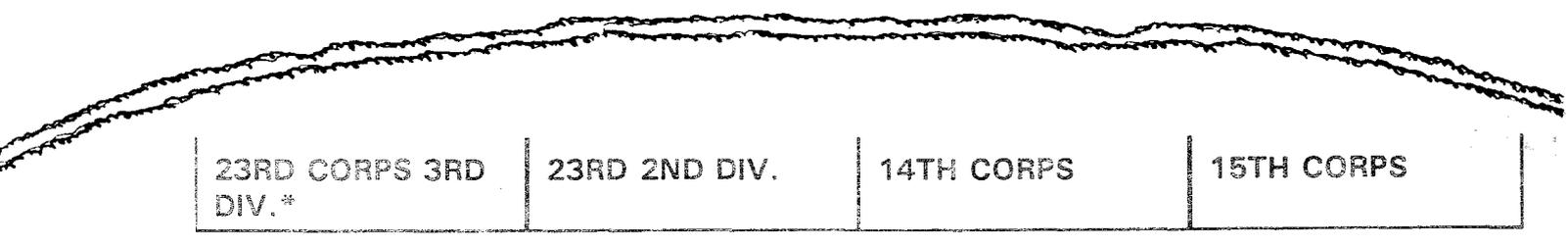


CAMP CREEK



WOODED RIDGES

OPEN FIELD



23RD CORPS 3RD DIV.*	23RD 2ND DIV.	14TH CORPS	15TH CORPS
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WOODED RIDGE WHERE THE ATTACK BEGAN

RIFLE PITS WERE LONG DEEP DITCHES THAT THE SOLDIERS COULD STAND OR LAY DOWN IN WHILE FIRING THEIR GUNS.

SUGAR VALLEY

*JOHN A. WELLS WAS WITH THE 23RD CORPS 3RD DIV. ATTACK ON DEFENSIVE POSITION



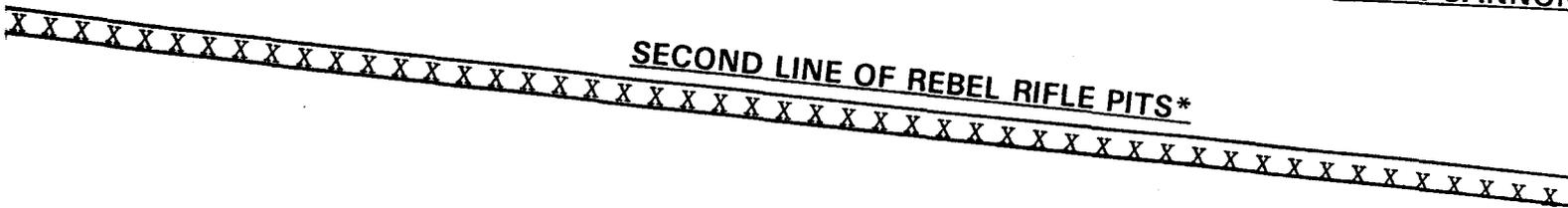
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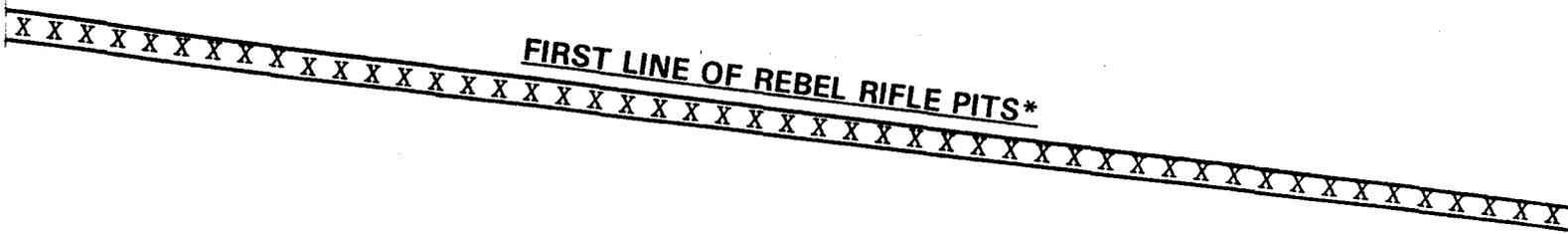
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REBEL CANNON



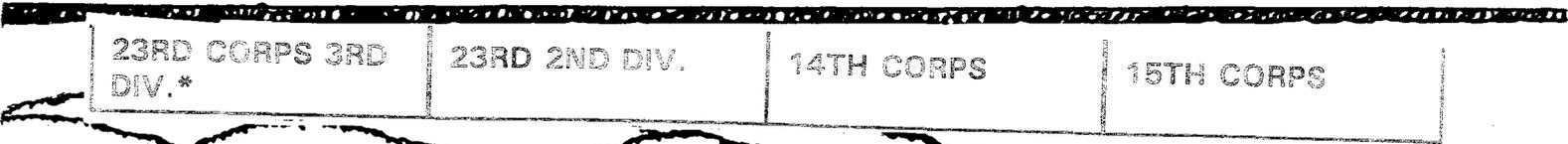
SECOND LINE OF REBEL RIFLE PITS*



FIRST LINE OF REBEL RIFLE PITS*



CAMP CREEK

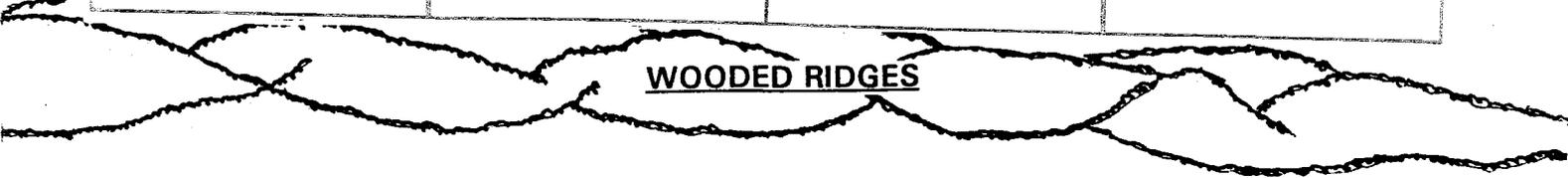


23RD CORPS 3RD DIV.*

23RD 2ND DIV.

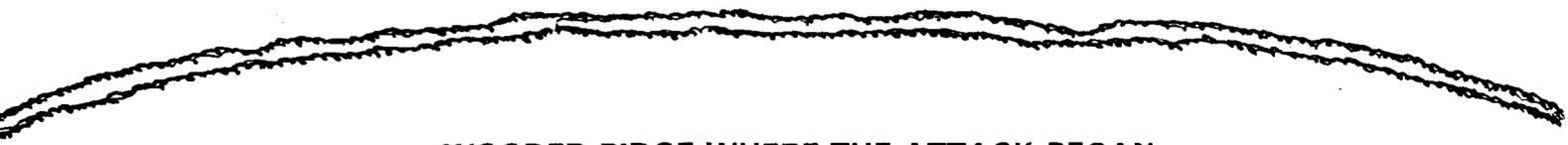
14TH CORPS

15TH CORPS



WOODED RIDGES

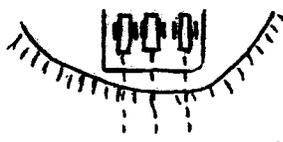
OPEN FIELD



WOODED RIDGE WHERE THE ATTACK BEGAN

SUGAR VALLEY

*JOHN A. WELLS WAS WITH THE 23RD CORPS 3RD DIV.



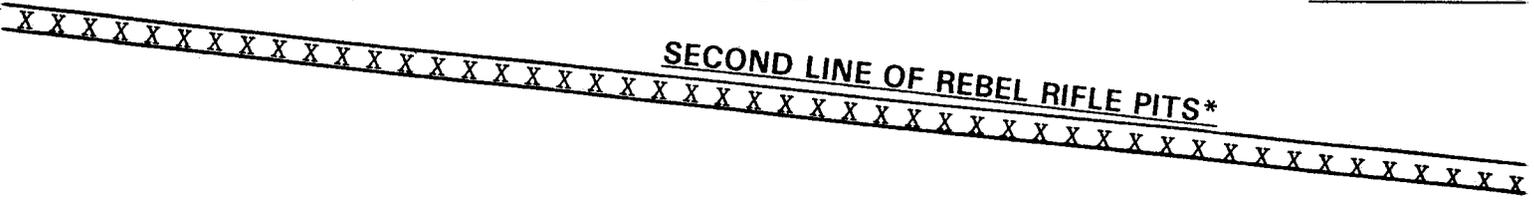
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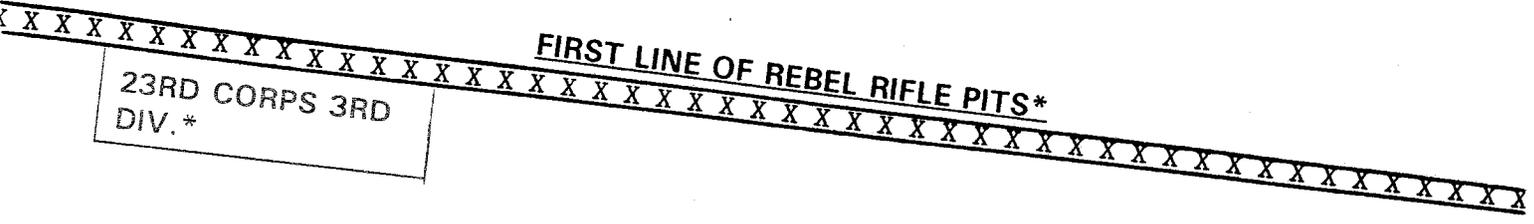
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SECOND LINE OF REBEL RIFLE PITS*

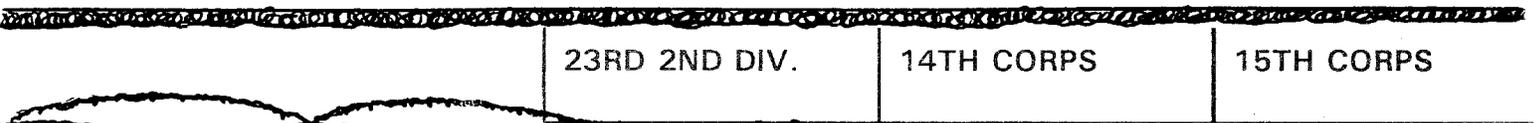


FIRST LINE OF REBEL RIFLE PITS*

23RD CORPS 3RD DIV.*



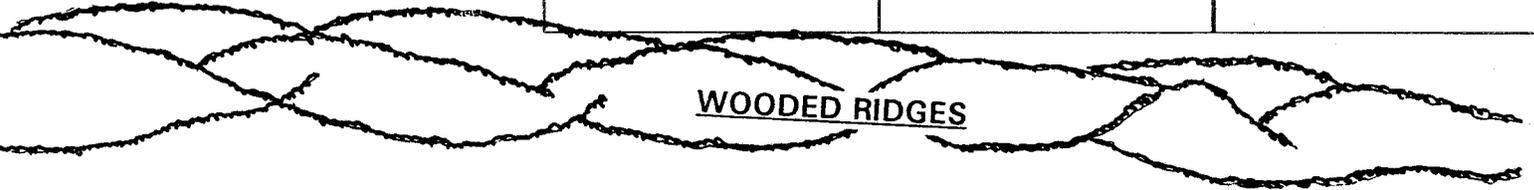
CAMP CREEK



23RD 2ND DIV.

14TH CORPS

15TH CORPS



WOODED RIDGES

OPEN FIELD



WOODED RIDGE WHERE THE ATTACK BEGAN

SUGAR VALLEY

*JOHN A. WELLS WAS WITH THE 23RD CORPS 3RD DIV.

Every soldier knew when you were gut shot, as to say, hit in the torso as John A. was, the chances for survival were nearly impossible. If you didn't die immediately, you would surely die a horrible, suffering death in days or weeks to come from the infection or internal bleeding as the medical profession in those days had no way of treating internal wounds. The stretcher bearers and ambulance wagons of the 23rd Corp, now came up to the front lines to collect the dead, and wounded, John A. being in this group. In this engagement of three to four hours, the 3rd division of the 23rd Corp alone lost 1,330 men killed, wounded, or missing. The 5th East Tennessee, John A.'s regiment lost of its approximate 400 men, 98 killed, wounded, or missing. Much of his regiment was made up of the boys of Roane County, so many of the killed and wounded were probably his close friends. The war for John A., now 24 years old was over, but his recovery was just beginning. As fate would have it, in the night after the battle, the Rebels in and around Reseca, quietly evacuated their defenses and retreated south toward Calhoun to fight another day. After being put in the ambulance wagon, John A. was taken to a field hospital which was a farm house in rear of the army. From this hospital, he was moved to the railroad depot in Reseca the next day. From Reseca he was moved, along with many other wounded, by train to Chattanooga, Tennessee, and from there to a hospital in Louisville, Kentucky, where he would remain for eight months. In January 1865, he was sent to a convalescent hospital in Covington, Kentucky, where he would remain until he was discharged at the end of his term of service on March 24, 1865. The war would end one month later with Lee's surrender to Grant at Appomattox. Surely there would never be another war like this one. The war that was supposed to last two or three months, had lasted over four years, cost billions of dollars and had taken the lives of more than 600,000 of America's finest young men. The war now being over, the gallant warriors, aged and worn, by the sights and scenes of the past four years, would now go home. Back to the lives that were interrupted by the war. The transition from farmer to fighter back to farmer would be, I suppose, a bit traumatic. Life back on the farm would seem to be somewhat dull, but what a sweet dull life it would now be. No more fighting and dying, no more going hungry, no more fearing for your life every minute of the day and night. Yes, how much John A. could now appreciate the simple life of a farmer. Three years after the war at age 28, John A. would take a wife, Margaret Elizabeth Blackburn. He bought a small farm near his father's home and over the next 26 years, he would father ten children. John A. lived to the grand old age of 74 and on December 5, 1914, John Alfred Wells slipped quietly from this world into the arms of God taking with him his memories of his time in the Civil War and the day he was WOUNDED AT RESECA!!

CASUALTY SHEET.

Name, *John Wells,*
 Rank, *Captain,* Company *D.,* Regiment, *5*
 Arm, *Inf.,* State, *Tenn.,*
 Place of casualty, *Resaca, Ga.*
 Nature of casualty, *Bullet wound of left arm (flesh.)*
 Date of casualty, *May 14, 1864.*

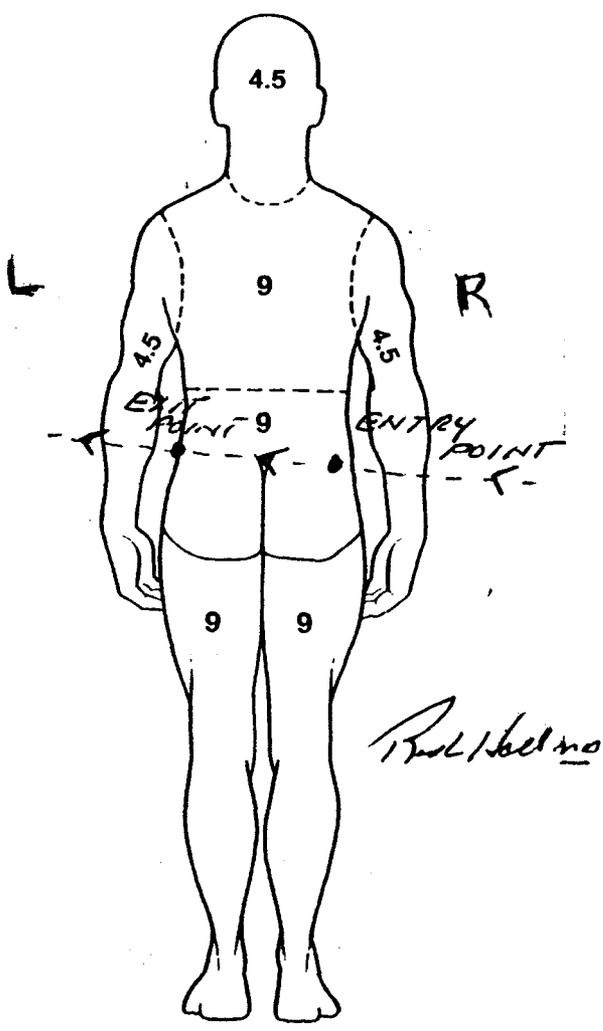
FROM WHAT SOURCE THIS INFORMATION WAS OBTAINED.

Report of Killed, Wounded, and Missing of the _____ Regiment,
 Brigade, *3* Division, *23* Corps, dated _____
L. D. Griswold, Surg. in charge of 1st Regt. 39th In. 23rd
(Ordered 50, Nos. 12413.)

J. M. W. A. S.
 Clerk.

6.28.77

Wegdy
 of Captain *John A. Well* of the *5th Tenn Inf* Regiment of United States
 Company, (*9*) was enlisted by *Col Shelby* of
 the *5th* Regiment of *Inf* at *Barbersville Ky*
 on the *7th* day of *March* 1862, to serve *three* years; he was born
 in *Rome Co* in the State of *Tennessee* is *twenty five*
 years of age, *5* feet *10* inches high, *fair* complexion, *blue* eyes,
light hair, and by occupation when enlisted a *Farmer*. During the last two
 months said soldier has been unfit for duty *60* days.* *This soldier was wounded*
May 14th 1864 in the engagement at Resaca Georgia
The ball entering the right ilium near the
superior posterior angle and passed out just above the
crest of the left ilium near the middle of
the crest
 STATION: *Covington Ky*
 DATE: *March 9th 1865* *Horner Guze*
Chargen in charge
Commanding Company



Doctors report (above) of John A. Well's wound. "The ball entering the right ileum near the superior posterior angle and passed out just above the left ileum near the middle of the crest". From doctors report March 9th, 1865.

Diagram of entry and exit point of bullet. Provided by Dr. Robert L. Hall, MD Knoxville - 1993

AUTHORITIES

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A Compendium of the War of the Rebellion

Tennessean's in the Civil War, Volume 1 and 2

Tennessee Census Index - 1850, 1860, 1870

Official Military Atlas of the Civil War

Tennessee State Archives

National Archives

Tennessee Valley Authority Mapping Services

Mrs. Ruth Dutton

Dr. Robert L. Hall, M.D.

Thanks to:

Sarah Shaver, my wife

Janie Bluford, my sister

John Sealy, my friend