



Ten Feet Tall and Big in Proportion

By Tony Patton, Resaca Battlefield Historic Site, June 22, 2020
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George Blakeslee



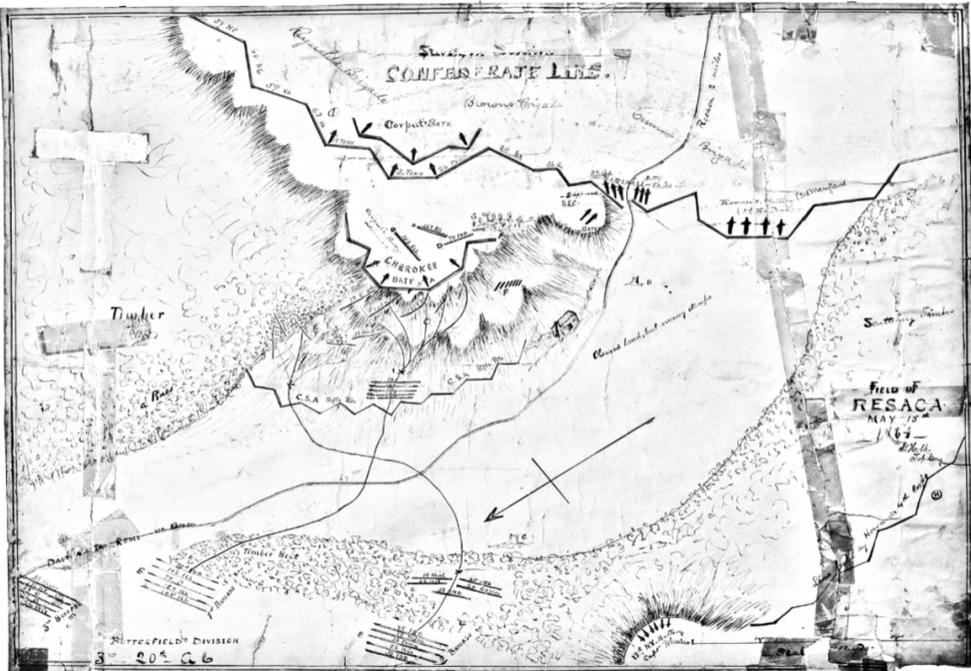
Wesley Conner

In 1899, Wesley Conner, who enlisted in the Cherokee Artillery and served as a gunner for piece number 2 of Van Den Corput's 4-gun battery during the Battle of Resaca in Georgia, started corresponding with former adversary, George H. Blakeslee of the 129th Illinois Infantry. By then, Conner was superintendent of the Georgia School for the Deaf, where he worked for 49 years, and Blakeslee was living in Lomax, Nebraska. Sharing memories of the 1864 battle, this is what they had to say.

Conner wrote on January 3, 1899: "On the morning of Sunday the 15th of May we were placed out on the brow or brink of the hill... about seventy-five yards in front of our infantry line, and instructed to throw up works for our guns. Between one and two o'clock the Federals brought out a line as if preparing to advance, and we pitched into them with our guns, and were giving them the best we had, when the first thing we knew the pickets came running past our guns with the announcement that the Yankees were right on us—and some of them had passed our first gun before I left my gun ... in fact two or three were parting the brush (used for concealment) in front of my gun, and I shall never forget how they looked as they came through. Each of them seemed to be about ten feet tall and big in proportion. I left my gun double shotted with canister, as two friction primers in succession had failed to do their work."

Van Den Corput's Battery, also known as the Cherokee Artillery, would suffer 27 casualties at Resaca.

In a reply letter dated January 8, 1899, Blakeslee, who was part of the attacking force, wrote: "I am just in receipt of your good letter of the 3rd inst. and I hasten to write you a few words ... I know we got some of your men while they were still working the guns ..." (Once the Union troops poured over the works at the battery, they were soon driven out by rifle fire from the main Confederate line behind the battery.) "Soon all but 27 of my regiment came back and got behind the dirt pile. T'was then that Sgt. Hess jumped upon one of the Napoleons and swung out the colors; a moment later a rifle ball struck him fair in the head and he fell in the folds of our flag, and his blood discolors it today. Let me tell you something of this man. When about 8 rods from your line, a rifle ball struck him in the wrist, shattering his arm and cutting through the staff. He never dropped the flag, but catching it in his left hand went forward ... I would very much like to meet you, but think I might prove a bore to you by my tales of Resaca and elsewhere."



Field of Resaca on May 15, 1864, by George Blakeslee

After the fighting that day, George Blakeslee drew an incredibly accurate map of the battlefield as the Federals held the field after the Confederate retreat late on the night of the 15th/early morning of the 16th. Blakeslee was a topographical engineer, and even talked to some Confederate prisoners about the position of their troops during the battle. Blakeslee also drew some wonderfully detailed maps of his unit's locations and movements during the Atlanta Campaign (several of which can be viewed at the Library of Congress website).

These two men had a great respect for each other, and that certainly comes across in their correspondence. Copies of the Conner-Blakeslee letters are located at the Rome Area History Museum in Rome, Georgia.

Historian Bob Jenkins will be leading the BGES tour, "[The Battles around Resaca—Chapter 2 of the 1864 Georgia Campaign](#)," and as of today it is scheduled for November 2020.



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