

"They're comin' on their all fours!"

An unknown eyewitness, fighting from the top of the breastworks defending New Orleans, describes the battle.¹

"Col. Smiley, from Bardstown, was the first one who gave us orders to fire from our part of the line; and then, I reckon, there was a pretty considerable noise.² There were also brass pieces on our right, the noisiest kind of varmints, that began blaring away as hard as they could, while the heavy iron cannon, toward the river, and some thousands of small arms, joined in the chorus and made the ground shake under our feet. Directly after the firing began, Capt. Patterson, I think he was from Knox County, Kentucky, but an Irishman born, came running along.³ He jumped upon the breastwork (sic) and stooping a moment to look through the darkness as well as he could, he shouted with a broad North of Ireland brogue, 'shoot low, boys! shoot low! rake them - rake them! They're comin' on their all fours!'



The Battle of New Orleans.
Eugene Louis Lami
1839.

The official report said the action lasted two hours and five minutes, but it did not seem half that length of time to me. It was so dark that little could be seen, until just about the time the battle ceased. The morning had dawned to be sure, but the smoke was so thick that every thing seemed to be covered up in it. Our men did not seem to apprehend any danger, but would load and fire as fast as they could, talking, swearing, and joking all the time. All ranks and sections were soon broken up. After the first shot, everyone loaded and banged away on his own hook.

Henry Spillman did not load and fire quite so often as some of the rest, but every time he did fire he would go up to the breastwork, look over until he could see something

¹ The Battle of New Orleans was actually fought at Chalmette in St. Bernard Parish.

² Major James Smiley of Bardstown.

³ Captain Robert Patterson, Kentucky Detached Militia, commanded by Lieutenant Colonel William Mitchusson. Appointed 20 November 1814, discharged 20 May 1815. TAG Report, p. 283.

to shoot at, and then take deliberate aim and crack away.⁴ Lieut. Ashby was as busy as a nailor⁵ and it was evident that, the River Raisin⁶ was uppermost in his mind all the time.⁷ He kept dashing about and every now and then he would call out, with an oath, "We'll pay you now for the River Raisin! We'll give you something to remember the River Raisin!" When the British came up to the opposite side of the breastwork, having no gun, he picked up an empty barrel and flung it at them. Then finding an iron bar, he jumped up on the works and hove that at them.

At one time I noticed, a little on our right, a curious kind of a chap named Ambrose Odd, one of Captain Higdon's company, and known among the men by the nickname of 'Sukey,' standing coolly on the top of the breastworks and peering into the darkness for something to shoot at.⁸ The balls were whistling around him and over our heads, as thick as hail, and Col. Slaughter coming along, ordered him to come down.⁹ The Colonel told him there was policy in war, and that he was exposing himself too much. Sukey turned around, holding up the flap of his old broad brimmed hat with one hand, to see who was speaking to him, and replied: 'Oh! never mind Colonel—here's Sukey—I don't want to waste my powder, and I'd like to know how I can shoot until I see something?' Pretty soon after, Sukey got his eye on a red coat, and, no doubt, made a hole through it, for he took deliberate aim, fired and then coolly came down to load again.

During the action, a number of the Tennessee men got mixed up with ours. One of them was killed about five or six yards from where I stood. I did not know his name. A ball passed through his head and he fell against Ensign Weller.¹⁰ I always thought, as did many others who were standing near, that he must have been accidentally (sic) shot by some of our own men. From the range of the British balls, they could hardly have passed over the breastwork without passing over our heads, unless we were standing very close to the works, which were a little over breast (sic) high, and five or six feet wide on the top. This man was standing a little back and rather behind Weller. After the battle, I could not see that any of the balls had struck the oak tree lower than ten or twelve feet from the ground. Above that height it was thickly peppered. This was the only man killed near where I was stationed.

⁴ Private Henry Spillman, Captain John Farmer's Company, Kentucky Detached Militia, commanded by Lieutenant Colonel Gabriel Slaughter. Enlisted 10 November 1814, discharged 10 May 1815. TAG Report, p. 291.

⁵ A nail-smith, maker of nails.

⁶ River Raisin is in reference to the River Raisin massacre of 22-23 January 1813, Frenchtown, Michigan Territory. "Remember the Raisin" became the battle-cry of soldiers in the Northwest Territory for the remainder of the war.

⁷ Lieutenant Willoughby Ashby, Captain John Farmer's Company, Kentucky Detached Militia, commanded by Lieutenant Colonel Gabriel Slaughter. Enlisted 10 November 1814, discharged 10 May 1815. TAG Report, p. 290.

⁸ Private Ambrose Audd, Captain Leonard P. Higdon's Company, Kentucky Detached Militia, commanded by Lieutenant Colonel Gabriel Slaughter. Enlisted 10 November 1814, for 6 months. TAG Report, p. 288.

⁹ Lieutenant Colonel Gabriel Slaughter. Born 12/12/1767, in Virginia. Farmer and soldier. Moved to Kentucky at an early age settling in Mercer County. Served as State legislator and was twice lieutenant governor, became governor upon death of George Madison, serving as governor 1816-1820. Died Mercer County, 09/19/1830.

¹⁰ 1st Sergeant David Weller, Captain John Farmer's Company, Kentucky Detached Militia, commanded by Lieutenant Colonel Gabriel Slaughter. Enlisted 11 November 1814, discharged 10 May 1815. TAG Report, p. 290.

It was near the close of the firing. About the time that I observed three or four men carrying his body away or directly after, there was a white flag raised on the opposite side of the breastwork and the firing ceased.

The white flag, before mentioned, was raised about ten or twelve feet from where I stood, close to the breastwork and a little to the right. It was a white handkerchief, or something of the kind, on a sword or stick. It was waved several times, and as soon as it was perceived, we ceased firing. Just then the wind got up a little and blew the smoke off, so that we could see the field. It then appeared that the flag had been raised by a British Officer wearing epaulets. It was told he was a Major. He stepped over the breastwork and came into our lines. Among the Tennesseans who had got mixed with us during the fight, there was a little fellow whose name I do not know; but he was a cadaverous looking chap and went by that of Paleface. As the British Officer came in, Paleface demanded his sword. He hesitated about giving it to him, probably thinking it was derogatory to his dignity, to surrender to a private all over begrimed with dust and powder and that some Officer should show him the courtesy to receive it. Just at that moment, Col. Smiley came up and cried, with a harsh oath, 'Give it up—give it up to him in a minute!' The British Officer quickly handed his weapon to Paleface, holding it in both hands and making a very polite bow.

A good many others came in just about the same time. Among them I noticed a very neatly dressed young man, standing on the edge of the breastwork, and offering his hand, as if for some one to assist him. He appeared to be about nineteen or twenty years old, and, as I should judge from his appearance, was an Irishman. He held his musket in one hand, while he was offering the other. I took hold of his musket and set it down, and then giving him my hand, he jumped down quite lightly. As soon as he got down, he began trying to take off his cartouch box, and then I noticed a red spot of blood on his clean white under jacket. I asked him if he was wounded, he said that he was and he feared pretty badly. While he was trying to disengage his accouterments (sic), Capt. Farmer came up, and said to him, 'Let me help you my man!' The Captain and myself then assisted him to take them off. He begged us not to take his canteen, which contained his water. We told him we did not wish to take anything but what was in his way and cumbersome to him. Just then one of the Tennesseans, who had run down to the river, as soon as the firing ceased, for water, came along with some in a tin coffee-pot. The wounded man observed him, asked if he would please give him a drop. 'O! Yes,' said the Tennessean, 'I will treat you to anything I've got.' The young man took the coffee-pot and swallowed two or three mouthfuls out of the spout. He then handed back the pot, and in an instant we observed him sinking backwards. We eased him down against the side of a tent, when he gave two or three gasps and was dead. He had been shot through the breast.

On the opposite side of the breastwork there was a ditch about ten feet wide, made by the excavation of the earth, of which the work was formed. In it, was about a foot or eighteen inches of water, and to make it the more difficult of passage, a quantity of thornbush had been cut and thrown into it. In this ditch a number of British soldiers were found at the close under the breastwork, as a shelter from our fire. These, of course, came in and surrendered.

When the smoke had cleared away and we could obtain a fair view of the field, it looked, at the first glance, like a sea of blood. It was not blood itself which gave it this

appearance but the red coats in which the British soldiers were dressed. Straight out before our position, for about the width of space which we supposed had been occupied by the British column, the field was entirely covered with prostrate bodies. In some places they were laying in piles of several, one on the top of the other. On either side, there was an interval more thinly sprinkled with the slain; and then two other dense rows, one near the levee and the other towards the swamp. About two hundred yards off, directly in front of our position, lay a large dapple gray horse, which we understood to have been Pakenham's.¹¹

Something about half way between the body of the horse and our breastwork there was a very large pile of dead, and at this spot, as I was afterward told, Pakenham had been killed; his horse having staggered off to a considerable distance before he fell. I have no doubt that I could not have walked on the bodies from the edge of the ditch to where the horse was laying, without touching the ground. I did not notice any other horse on the field.

The Battle of New Orleans and the Death of Major General Pakenham
Joseph Yeager
1839.



When we first got a fair view of the field in our front, individuals could be seen in every possible attitude. Some laying quite dead, others mortally wounded, pitching and tumbling about in the agonies of death. Some had their heads shot off, some their legs, some their arms. Some were laughing, some crying, some groaning, and some screaming. There was every variety of sight and sound. Among those that were on the ground, however, there were some that were neither dead nor wounded. A great many had thrown themselves down behind piles of slain, for protection. As the firing ceased,

¹¹ Major General Sir Edward Pakenham, commander of British forces at New Orleans. In 1814, Pakenham, having been promoted to the rank of major-general, accepted an offer to replace General Robert Ross as commander of the British North American army, after Ross was killed by a sniper. The next year during the battle of New Orleans, he was soundly defeated by Colonel (later General) Andrew Jackson. While rallying his troops near the enemy line, his horse was shot out from under him. As he mounted another horse, two bullets ripped through him, killing him almost immediately at the age of 36. His last words were reputed to be "Lost for the lack of courage". There is a statue in his memory at the South Transept of St Paul's Cathedral in London. His body was returned in a casket of rum and buried in the Pakenham family vault in Killucan in Westmeath, Ireland.

these men were every now and then jumping up and either running off or coming in and giving themselves up.

Among those that were running off, we observed one stout looking fellow, in a red coat, who would every now and then stop and display some gestures toward us, that were rather the opposite of complimentary. Perhaps fifty guns were fired at him, but he was a good way off, without effect. 'Hurra, Paleface! load quick and give him a shot. The infernal rascal is patting his butt at us!' Sure enough, Paleface rammed home his bullet, and taking a long sight, he let drive. The fellow, by this time, was from two to three hundred yards off, and somewhat to the left of Pakenham's horse. Paleface said as he drew sight on him and then run it along up his back until the sight was lost over his head, to allow for the sinking of the ball in so great a distance, and then let go. As soon as the gun cracked, the fellow was seen to stagger. He ran forward a few steps, and then pitched down on his head, and moved no more. As soon as he fell, George Huffman, a big stout Dutchman, belonging to our Company, asked the Captain if he might go and see where Paleface hit him.¹² The Captain said he didn't care and George jumping from the breastwork over the ditch, ran over the dead and wounded until he came to the place where the fellow was lying. George rolled over the body until he could see the face and then, turning round to us, shouted at the top of his voice, 'Mine Gott! he is a nagar!' He was a mulatto and he was quite dead. Paleface's ball had entered between the shoulders, and passed out through his breast.¹³ George, as he came back, brought three or four muskets which he had picked up. By this time, our men were running out in all directions, picking up muskets and sometimes watches and other plunder. One man who had got a little too far out on the field was fired at from the British breastwork and wounded in the arm. He came running back a good deal faster than he had gone out. He was not much hurt but pretty well scared."

References:

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¹² Private George Huffman, Captain John Farmer's Company, Kentucky Detached Militia, commanded by Lieutenant Colonel Gabriel Slaughter. Enlisted 10 November 1814, discharged 10 May 1815. TAG Report, p. 291.

¹³ Among the British forces were the First and Fifth West India Regiments, made up of about one thousand black soldiers from Jamaica, Barbados, and the Bahamas. Some of these units recruited and trained American slaves who escaped to British lines, attracted by the promise of freedom.