

Fannie Courtney-A View from the Other Side (1865)

The following was written by nineteen-year old Fannie in March 1865, four months after the Battle of Franklin, at the request of E. Root, Esq., U.S. Sanitary Commission in Nashville. It was part of "The Sanitary Reporter," U.S. Sanitary Commission, April 15, 1865, p. 181-182.

Fannie Courtney was a strong Union sympathizer despite having a brother and cousin riding in Gen. Nathan Bedford Forrest's regiment. Shortly after the war, she married Lt. Col. George Grummond, U.S. Army, and went with him to Fort Phil Kearny, where he was killed by Indians. Later, she married Colonel Henry B. Carrington and enjoyed the benefits of being the wife of a senior officer.

To: E. Root., U.S. Sanitary Commission, Nashville
From Frances Courtney

Dear Sir:

I hasten to give you an account of the Battle of Franklin, together with a statement of the facts concerning the hospitals and the wounded during the stay of the Rebels, a period of seventeen days, after the Battle. The details of the memorable engagement of November 30th will, of course, be according to my opportunity for personal observation, while terror stirred my soul. The other facts transpired in calmer moments, when my heart was filled with a holy sense of duty toward the suffering.

On the morning of the 30th of November the retreating army arrived at this place, tired and many almost exhausted. But, notwithstanding this, they commenced immediately throwing up breastworks. You would have been astonished to see how quick the work was completed... We felt great uneasiness of mind, fearing that there would be a great battle....

But we were doomed to disappointment; about half past three o'clock I was sitting at the dinner table, when I heard the roar of artillery. I ran into the yard to listen. There was a yell, the Rebels made a charge along the whole line. The bullets were falling so thick it was unsafe to remain longer. I stood within the door, and in a few minutes all was in perfect confusion. Men, women, and children were running in every direction, together with unmanageable teams, loose horses and mules. My position was no longer safe. I hastened to the cellar with the rest of my family and neighbors who sought protection with us...

About 10 o'clock suddenly the firing ceased for a few minutes. I heard persons in the sitting room above. It proved to be some Federal officers off duty for a time, who stopped to let us know how the Battle was going... I heard an awful groan, and within a few yards of me lay a Federal soldier who, (I supposed, had been wounded a short time before the firing ceased.) I sent one of the soldiers out to look after his comrade and to give him water. But he did not have to remain long; the wound proved to be mortal, and the poor man soon expired.

Another desperate charge! Such yells! I can never forget wounded Federal soldiers came in from the battlefield, and stopped in the yard, for they could go no farther. I called to the men outside to bring them into the cellar. Two were slightly wounded. The third was struck in the arm, and the main artery was cut. He was bleeding profusely. One of the neighbors ran up at the risk of his life and brought a bucket of water. My mother had some cotton near, I poured water on the wound for some time. I then put cotton on each side where the ball entered and came out, bound it up with my handkerchief, and with two others belonging to my sister and little brother, made for him a sling. He lay down to rest, but complained of being cold from loss of blood. I had nothing to cover him with. What was I to do? A thought struck me. I took off my woolen skirt and tucked it around him. His comrades decided to try to overtake an ambulance with him, and I suppose they did, as they did not return.

Soon a fire broke out in town... we thought of nothing else but being burned alive in the cellar, as there was no way of getting out if the fire continued to spread. The Rebels could see the

position of our forces, and consequently the fighting was more terrible. Several buildings were consumed, but thanks to a kind Providence, the fire was extinguished by the timely interference of soldiers, assisted by citizens. About thirteen charges in all were made by the Rebels.

At midnight the Federal Army began to retreat, the wagon trains being safe, and gradually the firing ceased. Oh! How grateful to God we felt that it was over... Then we emerged from our place of refuge. I dragged beds into my mother's room for us to rest there, as we wished to spend the remainder of the night of terror together. I could not sleep, for I longed to go to the battlefield to alleviate [*lessen*] suffering [and] do all in my power to make the wounded more comfortable until they could be brought to hospitals.

At 3 o'clock, again, such cannonading! What could it mean? It shook the earth, the house; everything seemed in motion above and below. It was a farewell salute sent by the rebels to the retreating army, now far away. I was so frightened I sprang up and aroused everyone to get to the cellar immediately or we should be killed. I remained close to the house, to do which, though it took me not more than two minutes, seemed an age. Just as I reached the cellar door a shell exploded close by, and had I been three seconds later in passing, I should have been struck by some of the fragments, which flew about. How grateful we felt to God that we were spared! But amidst our joy we thought of the dead ones who had fallen to find graves in a strange land, and of the suffering ones lying exposed on the field; of the desolate [*joyless*] homes, and the many hearts stricken with sorrow when the sad tidings should reach them...

Early the next morning after the Battle I went to the field. The sight was dreadful. It seemed that I could scarcely move for fear of stepping on men either dead or wounded. Some were cold and stiff, others with the lifeblood ebbing out, unconscious of all around, while others were writhing in agony, calling, "Water! Water!" I can hear them now.

... I could not look upon such sights long, but hurried back to care for the wounded. There were forty-four hospitals in total— three for the Federal wounded and the rest for the Confederates. Red flags were waving from unoccupied dwelling, the seminaries, churches, and every business house in town.

My Mother and I took charge of a hundred and twenty wounded men, who occupied the Presbyterian Church, it being the largest Federal hospital, and with what we could spare assisted at another which was in a house owned by my mother and near our own home. When we first went to the hospital, the wounded men told us they had nothing to eat for two days. We first furnished them with bread, meat and tea, and coffee, every little luxury we could prepare, for several days. Then they drew scanty [*very little*] rations from the Rebels, flour the color of ashes and a little poor beef not suitable for well men, much less for wounded. All the cooking was done, and in truth, everything eatable furnished, at our house.

We fed the men twice a day. Sometimes at 10 o'clock at night we would carry them something prepared with our own hands. Many had been robbed not only of their blankets and overcoats but of their coats, and were lying on the floor upon handfuls of straw, with nothing else to protect or cover them. We furnished them all the bedding we could spare, and made cotton pillows for all. There were no bandages to be had, and I made what I could out of my own underclothing. We would get up at daylight and with the help of servants commence cooking their breakfast. We never had time to rest, only as we sat down to eat something hurriedly, for as soon as we had finished feeding our patients in the morning, we had to return home to prepare the next meal...

Source: Warwick, Rick. *Williamson County: The Civil War as Seen through the Female Experience*. Nashville: Panacea Press, 2008. Used with permission.