



Diary of the action at Calico Ghost Town (2008)

71st Pennsylvania, Company B

2nd Lieutenant Jason Coffey, Commanding

Friday afternoon, the 15th of February.

The first detachment of the regiment arrived at the outskirts of the town, with the Division Adjutant. After First Sergeant Quinlan had established advanced pickets, and had begun to unload our tentage from the teamster's wagons, the remainder of Division Headquarters arrived. Troops began to trickle in from the march by Platoon, up the rough roads onto the mesa, just in time to help the First Sergeant get things setup. This would be an important fight for this small mining camp, as the Federal Government required it to purchase more arms and equipment. I arrived earlier than usual, but still after the bulk of the Company, with the rearguard Platoon. I had ordered a few detours to scout some of the terrain around the base of the mesa in case a withdrawal was required. As the First Sergeant's pickets were in good order, I retired to my tent.

Saturday morning, the 16th of February.

I awoke this morning with sore feet, reminding me of my status as a Junior Officer. I find the lack of a mount to be beneficial in keeping me in touch with the men's needs on the march. I would think that I would have been more use to this having marched to Salt Lake City before the war. The air was crisp, but more pleasant than on past travels through this area. It was good to see most of the Company in formation, although there were at least a handful of notable privates on Sick Call. I wish them all a fast recovery. I was also informed of the loss of our Camp Cook due to illness as well. The First Sergeant had to be ordered to keep the Camp Cook under guard so she could get some rest. Due to other vacancies in the chain of command, we authorized Private Ryan Johnson to be our acting 2nd Cpl. for this action.



Saturday afternoon, 16th of February

Today saw us fight through the town of Calico in at least two pushes. Prior to the engagement we were reviewed by the President, and our numbers were paraded in front of the enemy. I saw many stunned grey coats, as they were expecting much fewer numbers of troops. We were joined by equal numbers from the 7th Wisconsin, 10th New York, and 4th New Jersey.

In the first engagement we were marching on an area referred to as the Silver Bowl. Major De Luca ordered us out of the ravine, and into the bowl, as the first wave. As tends to happen, the enemy was prepared and eliminated the first Platoon we sent up after then. First Sergeant Quinlan took a detail to retrieve the wounded soldiers, as I rallied our remaining Platoons. This gave some time for the other Companies to take the Silver bowl, and us to fill in as the reserve. We pushed forward again, and replaced the depleted New Jersey troops on the line. We advanced past the jailhouse, and into the bowl area, taking cover behind a string of earthworks previously occupied by the Confederates. After some fire we attempted to press forward towards the Adobe, but casualties prevented the assault. We withdrew from the Silver Bowl, down the ravine, as a guard for the Division colours. So ended the first engagement.

Later that afternoon, we were able to access the west side of the mesa, and took up a position behind the school house. This battle fared much better for the Union forces, and our use as a reserve was almost not even required at all. The 10th New York, and the 7th Wisconsin, were able to defend a bridge, and keep the rebel forces piled on it. In the meantime we moved up behind the artillery to help

the 4th New Jersey. They were covering the south side of Artillery point by themselves, but filling the road with prone Confederates. After the 4th New Jersey took too many casualties, they withdrew to a safe position behind our lines. The 71st was then ordered to advance, and fire down onto the Confederate lines. Our volume of fire kept some of the Confederates pinned, but mostly forced their untimely retreat.

Saturday evening, 16th of February

With our forces having taken the town, we left a guard at the far end, and returned to Camp. A dance was held in the town streets, and order in the camp was held. The First Sergeant turned out the pickets, and I am retiring to my bunk.



Sunday morning, 17th of February

I reviewed the troops at first formation. They look slightly more ragged for wear than the previous day, but up to the task. Sick Call is again rough, and we are down at least a Platoon from casualties. Chaplin Holt was amongst the sick, and unable to provide ministry for the troops in the morning. My wife urged the local Minister, and helped with the service. I understand the service went well, as I was reviewing our hospital to see if any of the wounded were serviceable, and to thank those who were not for their services the day before.

Sunday afternoon, 17th of February

This morning the rebels poured down on our advanced guard, and forced them down into the Silver Bowl. We were able to clear the Church Service out of the area, and return the attendees to behind our lines. Our men broke from Inspection by General Grant, and paraded our strength before the Confederate Army. Again, they shook with fear as we prepared to sent them away.

Major De Luca ordered us as a reserve up by the railroad tracks, as rumors had abounded of the Confederates attacking us in the rear from the south end of town. As anticipated, the Kentucky Dismounts did indeed flank us, the fire from their fowling pieces was from so far away up the ridge, that we were able to ignore it. Our moment arose as the rebel column advanced into the Silver Bowl to hit us in the Flank. We rushed in after the 8th Alabama passed us by, and fired our entire company into their lines. After carefully mopping that up, I brought the men about, to protect the rear of the formation. The Confederates pressed into us, and Major De Luca ordered us into the Adobe with the 7th Wisconsin. We sent rotating Platoons forward, and kept up a rate of fire near that of a Gatling gun. Needless to say, they were forced out of the Silver Bowl, and back from which they came.

Our First Sergeant should be commended. We believe that he personally was responsible for wounding the Confederate Division Commander.



Sunday evening, 16th of February

I am writing this entry from my bed in the hospital area. The nurses have told me that my head wound was nothing more than glancing. Today we tried to hold the School House from the Confederate forces... but there were too many of them. We were forced back through the Artillery, having to spike the guns, and then down the hill. Many soldiers in the Company were mowed down in the fire from atop the hill. I tried to keep the ranks in order as we marched backwards, but it was difficult with all of the Non Commissioned Officers down. Finally we made it down the slope and prepared to withdraw down the road. For me this was the end of the battle, as I took a bullet from the 8th Alabama's Officer.

Monday, 17th of February

I am appending my Diary with my 1st Sergeants report. As I am still recovering in the Hospital, and hope to be able to lead the men in March at Picacho Pass.

1st Sgt's report:

On Monday the 71st along with the rest of the Union Division stood fast against Rebel assaults as we protected the Union guns on Artillery Point. After a spirited fight we pushed across the bridge following the 7th Wisconsin threw the Rebel camp and turning south captured 2 Confederate cannons and crews. Only later did we learn that General Lee was in the area and escaped being captured with the gun crews.

The company returned to camp and after dinner we rearmed and set up on the street north of our camp when the reb's started to push down the street. Along with the rest of the brigade we fought a delaying action and slowly and in good order retreated to the Silver Bowl.

A hot battle ensued, and after a brief cease fire, Lt Col Iverson had a meeting with the Confederate commander. Lt Col Iverson's blood was raised by the audacity of the Rebel demand for our surrender shot the traitor as he deserved. The Rebel units responded with a devastating fire and reaped many casualties upon the Union Army and many a lad was lost.

We were able to withdraw to camp and struck tents and moved off to the south to recruit and replenish.

YOS

1st Sgt Michael Quinlan (DeGregorio)

End of report.

2nd Lt Coffey, Commanding
71st Penn. Company B