

## William Babcock Hazen Entrenching on the Battlefield

William B. Hazen (1830-1887) was raised in Hiram, Ohio, a small farming community in Portage County. He was graduated from the United States Military Academy in 1855 and embarked on a career as a regular army officer. When the Civil War began, the governor commissioned him colonel of the 41st Ohio Infantry, and his regiment was with Buell's army and in the center of the fight on day two at Shiloh. Hazen commanded a brigade at Stones River, and in the month after the battle, his soldiers erected there a cut-stone monument to commemorate their dead. It is the oldest intact monument on a Civil War battlefield.



Brig. Gen. William Hazen



Hazen Monument at Stones River - NPS photo

Hazen commanded a division in the Fourth Corps, Army of the Cumberland, at Chickamauga and was instrumental in the crossing at Brown's Ferry that lifted the siege of Chattanooga. He transferred to divisional command in Fifteenth Corps, Army of the Tennessee, to conclude the Atlanta Campaign and for the March to the Sea.

It is fruitful today to peruse Hazen's reports in the *Official Records*. He was that rare officer who tried to draw larger conclusions from his battlefield experiences and who felt it his duty to lecture his superiors on numerous topics, including the deadly effects of the rifle-musket and the need to entrench on the battlefield. He continually provoked and alienated his fellow officers with his strong opinions, but, in hindsight, much of what he had to say is valuable for historians.

After the war, Hazen returned to Plains Indian warfare. In 1870, he was dispatched to Europe to observe the Franco-Prussian War. In 1880 he was promoted to Chief Signal Officer, where, as part of his duties, he worked to create a modern weather prediction system by coordinating telegraphic data from army posts across the country. Postwar, he carried on running arguments with just about everyone, including George Custer, William T. Sherman, and Secretary of War Robert Todd Lincoln. Ambrose Bierce called him "the best hated man I ever knew." Hazen is buried in Arlington National Cemetery.

In addition to his official reports, Hazen's writings include: *A Narrative of Military Service* (1885) and *The School and the Army in Germany and France with a Diary of Siege Life at Versailles* (1872). Edward S. Cooper published a biography of Hazen in 2005: *William Babcock Hazen: the Best Hated Man*.

**A Narrative of Military Service (1885)**  
by **William Babcock Hazen**  
**Excerpt from:** Chapter XXVII: Lessons of The War.

**S**o great a war as that of the Rebellion could not fail to be rich in valuable lessons, which, if not new, had been forgotten until recalled to mind by a fresh demonstration. I have always thought it a duty incumbent upon officers of large experience to give some formal expression to their views as to the military teachings of the war; and I regard this as specially important, because, in time of peace, much of our military control and administration is in the hands of men who do not take the field, and who are consequently lost sight of in war, to come again to the front when war ceases. This is a bar to the prompt recognition and adoption, when war begins, of many things the value of which has been tested and proved in actual service. Our written rules change very slowly. Thus the light equipment and simple belt for ammunition were not formally adopted until they had been in general use for nearly ten years. So also the necessity of teaching our troops the full use of the rifle seems to have been first perceived by persons outside of official circles. In all actual affairs it is as important to know what to avoid as what to adopt. I early learned to take account of the feelings, preferences, and prejudices of civilians, and to forego sometimes, out of deference to their opinions, things that I believed were proper and needful. Too absolute and abrupt an enforcement of discipline once nearly cost me my volunteer commission, and with it my opportunity for usefulness in the field. This chapter records, under appropriate heads, some of the results of my own practical observation and reflections. The theoretical composition, organization, control, and discipline of armies has been treated at length in my book entitled "The School and the Army in Germany and France."

### **Defensive Works for Infantry**

During the first year of the war the importance of a cover for infantry while under fire was not understood. This is to be accounted for by our general apathy as to all military matters, and by the fact that in the days of the old musket, then just disused, such defensive lines were not thought to be of much consequence. But they were necessary, even then, and are now indispensable. If such a line, which could have been easily constructed, had been made on our right at Stone River, and held by troops properly posted, the result of that battle must have been very different. At Chickamauga the work of logs, begun after daylight at the suggestion of Colonel Suman, and at first objected to by Johnson, the officer who suffered most at Stone River from the want of such a defence, had a most important bearing upon the fortunes of that day. The little damage done by Polk's corps proves this. With more effective fighting than the day before, I lost only thirteen men, against more than four hundred the previous day. (At the reunion of the soldiers of both armies at Chattanooga on the 19th of September, 1881, General Cheatham, when visiting the

battlefield, and speaking of this old crumbling line, said, " Only for this little work, we should have swept you from the field before noon." And I do not doubt it.)

Such remarkable results led me, after Jonesboro, to call attention to the subject in the following report : —

EAST POINT, GEORGIA, Sept. 10, 1864.

Lieut.-Colonel R. R. TOWNS, Assist. Adj.-Gen. 15th Army Corps:

I must also ask the indulgence of my commander for calling attention in this report to the subject of attacks on the front of an enemy in position. I cite, as an evidence of the disproportion of advantage in these contests in favor of the assailed, the battle of the 28th of July, when the enemy left in front of this division three hundred and twenty of his dead, while the killed of this command on the same front were but twelve; and the battle of the 31st of August, when he left over two hundred dead, and killed but eleven. Since the accurate-shooting rifle has replaced the random-firing musket, since troops now, when in position, protect their persons by shelter, and since they can no longer be scared away from the line, but see safety in maintaining it, this remarkable result has followed.

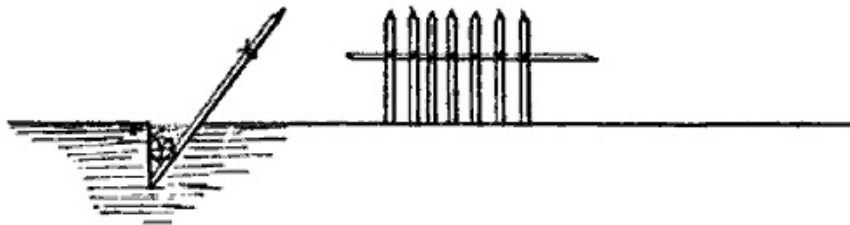
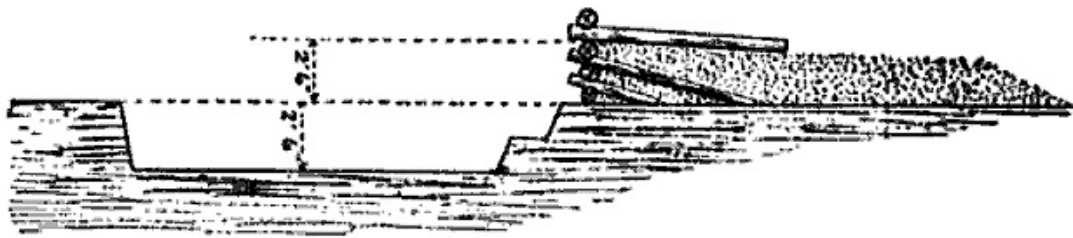
The methods of construction and dimensions of these covers were formulated in the following order : —

NEAR JONESBORO, GEORGIA, Sept. 4, 1864.

Hereafter when this command constructs breastworks the following specifications will be observed: — A revetment along the line determined upon, either of logs notched into each other, or of rails placed between strong stakes, or of stone, or sods, or any material that may be convenient, will be placed 2 ½ feet high; then, on the rear side of the works, an excavation will be made 2 ½ feet deep, a step being left on the front side 1 ½ feet high. No earth to be broken in front of the works. This excavation will be wide enough to furnish all the earth required in front. Head-logs will be added, if needed.

This construction gave a quick and excellent cover against infantry and field artillery. The rapidity with which such lines were made, when the working parties knew precisely what to do, was astonishing. Almost any material makes a sufficiently firm revetment of two and a half feet, and the step permits volley-firing by rank over the head-log. Security of person gives the soldier composure and deliberation. He aims carefully, and fires at his mark; while without cover he is excited, seldom aims at all, and often fires high in the air. The great improvements that have taken place since the close of our war in the range, accuracy, and rapidity of fire of small arms have increased the importance of this defence. The Turks, depending upon long range and rapidity rather than accuracy of fire, succeeded so long as they could induce their enemy to attack in front. In future this sort of attack must generally be avoided.

A row of stakes, six feet long, strong enough not to be broken by the hand, and so constructed that an advancing line cannot pull them out nor overturn them, will stop any advance of an enemy if placed at point-blank range. Such a line is constructed by cutting a triangular trench two feet in depth, with the side next the works vertical, and the other at an angle of forty-five degrees. Stakes are placed six inches apart, sloping with the angle of the trench. A long piece of round timber is then placed in the trench, on the ends of the stakes, which are bound to it by telegraph-wire. The trench should be partially filled before the timber is placed in position, and should afterward be filled up and strongly rammed. Then near the top of the stakes a strong withe is woven in and out, and wired. The ordinary row of stakes is a very slight impediment; but such a construction as I have above described will check any attack long enough to enable the force assailed to break up and destroy the assaulting troops. The stakes cannot be pulled out singly, nor can the row be overturned bodily; and it affords no cover to the enemy, which is an objection to ordinary entanglements of brush and trees. The fastenings that join chevaux-de-frise can be parted with a single blow of a hatchet, and the work then removed. These defences here described admitted of variation, according to time and material at hand; but the prescribed dimensions were observed, and as every one knew just what to do, the lines were constructed with great rapidity.



**FIELD-WORKS.**