

The Memoirs of General Philip H. Sheridan, Volume I., Part 3 eBook

The Memoirs of General Philip H. Sheridan, Volume I., Part 3 by Philip Sheridan

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CHAPTER XVI.

At Chattanooga—the enemy fortifies Lookout mountain and Missionary ridge—reorganizing the army—removal of general Rosecrans—punishment of deserters—Grant at Chattanooga—the fight on Lookout mountain—A brave color-bearer—battle of Missionary ridge.

By 9 o'clock on the morning of September 22 my command took up a position within the heavy line of intrenchments at Chattanooga, the greater part of which defenses had been thrown up since the army commenced arriving there the day before. The enemy, having now somewhat recovered from the shock of the recent battle, followed carefully, and soon invested us close into our lines with a parallel system of rifle-pits. He also began at once to erect permanent lines of earthworks on Missionary Ridge and to establish himself strongly on Lookout Mountain. He then sent Wheeler's cavalry north of the Tennessee, and, aided greatly by the configuration of the ground, held us in a state of partial siege, which serious rains might convert into a complete investment. The occupation of Lookout Mountain broke our direct communication with Bridgeport—our sub-depot—and forced us to bring supplies by way of the Sequatchie Valley and Waldron's Ridge of the Cumberland Mountains, over a road most difficult even in the summer season, but now liable to be rendered impassable by autumn rains. The distance to Bridgeport by this circuitous route was sixty miles, and the numerous passes, coves, and small valleys through which the road ran offered tempting opportunities, for the destruction of trains, and the enemy was not slow to take advantage of them. Indeed, the situation was not promising, and General Rosecrans himself, in communicating with the President the day succeeding the battle of Chickamauga, expressed doubts of his ability to hold the gateway of the Cumberland Mountains.

The position taken up by my troops inside the lines of Chattanooga was near the old iron-works, under the shadow of Lookout Mountain. Here we were exposed to a continual fire from the enemy's batteries for many days, but as the men were well covered by secure though simple intrenchments, but little damage was done. My own headquarters were established on the grounds of Mr. William Crutchfield, a resident of the place, whose devotion to the Union cause knew no bounds, and who rendered me—and, in fact, at one time or another, nearly every general officer in the Army of the Cumberland—invaluable service in the way of information about the Confederate army. My headquarters camp frequently received shots from the point of Lookout Mountain also, but fortunately no casualties resulted from this plunging fire, though, I am free to confess, at first our nerves were often upset by the whirring of twenty-pounder shells dropped inconsiderately into our camp at untimely hours of the night.

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In a few days rain began to fall, and the mountain roads by which our supplies came were fast growing impracticable. Each succeeding train of wagons took longer to make the trip from Bridgeport, and the draft mules were dying by the hundreds. The artillery horses would soon go too, and there was every prospect that later the troops would starve unless something could be done. Luckily for my division, a company of the Second Kentucky Cavalry had attached itself to my headquarters, and, though there without authority, had been left undisturbed in view of a coming reorganization of the army incidental to the removal of McCook and Crittenden from the command of their respective corps, a measure that had been determined upon immediately after the battle of Chickamauga. Desiring to remain with me, Captain Lowell H. Thickstun, commanding this company, was ready for any duty I might find, for him, so I ordered him into the Sequatchie Valley for the purpose of collecting supplies for my troops, and sent my scout, Card along to guide him to the best locations. The company hid itself away in a deep cove in the upper end of the valley, and by keeping very quiet and paying for everything it took from the people, in a few days was enabled to send me large quantities of corn for my animals and food for the officers and men, which greatly supplemented the scanty supplies we were getting from the sub-depot at Bridgeport. In this way I carried men and animals through our beleaguerment in pretty fair condition, and of the turkeys, chickens, ducks, and eggs sent in for the messes of my officers we often had enough to divide liberally among those at different headquarters. Wheeler's cavalry never discovered my detached company, yet the chances of its capture were not small, sometimes giving much uneasiness; still, I concluded it was better to run all risks than to let the horses die of starvation in Chattanooga. Later, after the battle of Missionary Ridge, when I started to Knoxville, the company joined me in excellent shape, bringing with it an abundance of food, including a small herd of beef cattle.

The whole time my line remained near the iron-mills the shelling from Lookout was kept up, the screeching shots inquisitively asking in their well-known way, "Where are you? Where are you?" but it is strange to see how readily, soldiers can become accustomed to the sound of dangerous missiles under circumstances of familiarity, and this case was no exception to the rule. Few casualties occurred, and soon contempt took the place of nervousness, and as we could not reply in kind on account of the elevation required for our guns, the men responded by jeers and imprecations whenever a shell fell into their camp.

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Meantime, orders having been issued for the organization of the army, additional troops were attached to my command, and it became the Second Division of the Fourth Army Corps, to which Major-General Gordon Granger was assigned as commander. This necessitated a change of position of the division, and I moved to ground behind our works, with my right resting on Fort Negley and my left extending well over toward Fort Wood, my front being parallel to Missionary Ridge. My division was now composed of twenty-five regiments, classified into brigades and demi-brigades, the former commanded by Brigadier-General G. D. Wagner, Colonel C. G. Harker, and Colonel F. T. Sherman; the latter, by Colonels Laiboldt, Miller, Wood, Walworth, and Opdyke. The demi-brigade was an awkward invention of Granger's; but at this time it was necessitated—perhaps by the depleted condition of our regiments, which compelled the massing of a great number of regimental organizations into a division to give it weight and force.

On October 16, 1863, General Grant had been assigned to the command of the "Military Division of the Mississippi," a geographical area which embraced the Departments of the Ohio, the Cumberland, and the Tennessee, thus effecting a consolidation of divided commands which might have been introduced most profitably at an earlier date. The same order that assigned General Grant relieved General Rosecrans, and placed General Thomas in command of the Army of the Cumberland. At the time of the reception of the order, Rosecrans was busy with preparations for a movement to open the direct road to Bridgeport—having received in the interval, since we came back to Chattanooga, considerable reinforcement by the arrival in his department of the Eleventh and Twelfth corps, under General Hooker, from the Army of the Potomac. With this force Rosecrans had already strengthened certain important points on the railroad between Nashville and Stevenson, and given orders to Hooker to concentrate at Bridgeport such portions of his command as were available, and to hold them in readiness to advance toward Chattanooga.

On the 19th of October, after turning the command over to Thomas, General Rosecrans quietly slipped away from the army. He submitted uncomplainingly to his removal, and modestly left us without fuss or demonstration; ever maintaining, though, that the battle of Chickamauga was in effect a victory, as it had ensured us, he said, the retention of Chattanooga. When his departure became known deep and almost universal regret was expressed, for he was enthusiastically esteemed and loved by the Army of the Cumberland, from the day he assumed command of it until he left it, notwithstanding the censure poured upon him after the battle of Chickamauga.

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The new position to which my division had been moved, in consequence of the reorganization, required little additional labor to strengthen it, and the routine of fatigue duty and drills was continued as before, its monotony occasionally broken by the excitement of an expected attack, or by amusements of various kinds that were calculated to keep the men in good spirits. Toward this result much was contributed by Mr. James E. Murdock, the actor, who came down from the North to recover the body of his son, killed at Chickamauga, and was quartered with me for the greater part of the time he was obliged to await the successful conclusion of his sad mission. He spent days, and even weeks, going about through the division giving recitations before the camp-fires, and in improvised chapels, which the men had constructed from refuse lumber and canvas. Suiting his selections to the occasion, he never failed to excite intense interest in the breasts of all present, and when circumstances finally separated him from us, all felt that a debt of gratitude was due him that could never be paid. The pleasure he gave, and the confident feeling that was now arising from expected reinforcements, was darkened, however, by one sad incident. Three men of my division had deserted their colors at the beginning of the siege and made their way north. They were soon arrested, and were brought back to stand trial for the worst offense that can be committed by a soldier, convicted of the crime, and ordered to be shot. To make the example effective I paraded the whole division for the execution, and on the 13th of November, in the presence of their former comrades, the culprits were sent, in accordance with the terms of their sentence, to render their account to the Almighty. It was the saddest spectacle I ever witnessed, but there could be no evasion, no mitigation of the full letter of the law; its timely enforcement was but justice to the brave spirits who had yet to fight the rebellion to the end.

General Grant arrived at Chattanooga on October 23, and began at once to carry out the plans that had been formed for opening the shorter or river road to Bridgeport. This object was successfully accomplished by the moving of Hooker's command to Rankin's and Brown's ferries in concert with a force from the Army of the Cumberland which was directed on the same points, so by the 27th of October direct communication with our depots was established. The four weeks which followed this cheering result were busy with the work of refitting and preparing for offensive operations as soon as General Sherman should reach us with his troops from West Tennessee. During this period of activity the enemy committed the serious fault of detaching Longstreet's corps—sending it to aid in the siege of Knoxville in East Tennessee—an error which has no justification whatever, unless it be based on the presumption that it was absolutely necessary that Longstreet should ultimately rejoin Lee's army in Virginia by way of Knoxville and Lynchburg, with a chance of picking up Burnside en route. Thus depleted, Bragg still held Missionary Ridge in strong force, but that part of his line which extended across the intervening valley to the northerly point of Lookout Mountain was much attenuated.

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By the 18th of November General Grant had issued instructions covering his intended operations. They contemplated that Sherman's column, which was arriving by the north bank of the Tennessee, should cross the river on a pontoon bridge just below the mouth of Chickamauga Creek and carry the northern extremity of Missionary Ridge as far as the railroad tunnel; that the Army of the Cumberland—the centre—should co-operate with Sherman; and that Hooker with a mixed command should continue to hold Lookout Valley and operate on our extreme right as circumstances might warrant. Sherman crossed on the 24th to perform his allotted part of the programme, but in the meantime Grant becoming impressed with the idea that Bragg was endeavoring to get away, ordered Thomas to make a strong demonstration in his front, to determine the truth or falsity of the information that had been received. This task fell to the Fourth Corps, and at 12 o'clock on the 23d I was notified that Wood's division would make a reconnoissance to an elevated point in its front called Orchard Knob, and that I was to support it with my division and prevent Wood's right flank from being turned by an advance of the enemy on Moore's road or from the direction of Rossville. For this duty I marched my division out of the works about 2 p.m., and took up a position on Bushy Knob. Shortly after we reached this point Wood's division passed my left flank on its reconnoissance, and my command, moving in support of it, drove in the enemy's picket-line. Wood's took possession of Orchard Knob easily, and mine was halted on a low ridge to the right of the Knob, where I was directed by General Thomas to cover my front by a strong line of rifle-pits, and to put in position two batteries of the Fourth regular artillery that had joined me from the Eleventh Corps. After dark Wood began to feel uneasy about his right flank, for a gap existed between it and my left, so I moved in closer to him, taking up a line where I remained inactive till the 25th, but suffering some inconvenience from the enemy's shells.

On the 24th General Sherman made an attack for the purpose of carrying the north end of Missionary Ridge. His success was not complete, although at the time it was reported throughout the army to be so. It had the effect of disconcerting Bragg, however, and caused him to strengthen his right by withdrawing troops from his left, which circumstance led Hooker to advance on the northerly face of Lookout Mountain. At first, with good glasses, we could plainly see Hooker's troops driving the Confederates up the face of the mountain. All were soon lost to view in the dense timber, but emerged again on the open ground, across which the Confederates retreated at a lively pace, followed by the pursuing line, which was led by a color-bearer, who, far in advance, was bravely waving on his comrades. The gallantry of this man elicited much enthusiasm among us all, but as he was a considerable distance ahead of his

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comrades I expected to see his rashness punished at any moment by death or capture. He finally got quite near the retreating Confederates, when suddenly they made a dash at him, but he was fully alive to such a move, and ran back, apparently uninjured, to his friends. About this time a small squad of men reached the top of Lookout and planted the Stars and Stripes on its very crest. Just then a cloud settled down on the mountain, and a heavy bank of fog obscured its whole face.

After the view was lost the sharp rattle of musketry continued some time, but practically the fight had been already won by Hooker's men, the enemy only holding on with a rear-guard to assure his retreat across Chattanooga Valley to Missionary Ridge. Later we heard very heavy cannonading, and fearing that Hooker was in trouble I sent a staff-officer to find out whether he needed assistance, which I thought could be given by a demonstration toward Rossville. The officer soon returned with the report that Hooker was all right, that the cannonading was only a part of a little rear-guard fight, two sections of artillery making all the noise, the reverberations from point to point in the adjacent mountains echoing and reechoing till it seemed that at least fifty guns were engaged.

On the morning of the 25th of November Bragg's entire army was holding only the line of Missionary Ridge, and our troops, being now practically connected from Sherman to Hooker, confronted it with the Army of the Cumberland in the centre—bowed out along the front of Wood's division and mine. Early in the day Sherman, with great determination and persistence, made an attempt to carry the high ground near the tunnel, first gaining and then losing advantage, but his attack was not crowned with the success anticipated. Meanwhile Hooker and Palmer were swinging across Chattanooga Valley, using me as a pivot for the purpose of crossing Missionary Ridge in the neighborhood of Rossville. In the early part of the day I had driven in the Confederate pickets in my front, so as to prolong my line of battle on that of Wood, the necessity of continuing to refuse my right having been obviated by the capture of Lookout Mountain and the advance of Palmer.

About 2 o'clock orders came to carry the line at the foot of the ridge, attacking at a signal of six guns. I had few changes or new dispositions to make. Wagner's brigade, which was next to Wood's division, was formed in double lines, and Harker's brigade took the same formation on Wagner's right. Colonel F. T. Sherman's brigade came on Harker's right, formed in a column of attack, with a front of three regiments, he having nine. My whole front was covered with a heavy line of skirmishers. These dispositions made, my right rested a little distance south of Moore's road, my left joined Wood over toward Orchard Knob, while my centre was opposite Thurman's house—the headquarters of General Bragg—on Missionary Ridge. A small stream of water ran parallel to my front, as far as which the ground was covered by a thin patch of timber, and beyond the edge of the timber was an open plain to the foot of Missionary Ridge,

varying in width from four to nine hundred yards. At the foot of the ridge was the enemy's first line of rifle-pits; at a point midway up its face, another line, incomplete; and on the crest was a third line, in which Bragg had massed his artillery.



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The enemy saw we were making dispositions for an attack, and in plain view of my whole division he prepared himself for resistance, marching regiments from his left flank with flying colors; and filling up the spaces not already occupied in his intrenchments. Seeing the enemy thus strengthening himself, it was plain that we would have to act quickly if we expected to accomplish much, and I already began to doubt the feasibility of our remaining in the first line of rifle-pits when we should have carried them. I discussed the order with Wagner, Harker, and Sherman, and they were similarly impressed, so while anxiously awaiting the signal I sent Captain Ransom of my staff to Granger, who was at Fort Wood, to ascertain if we were to carry the first line or the ridge beyond. Shortly after Ransom started the signal guns were fired, and I told my brigade commanders to go for the ridge.

Placing myself in front of Harker's brigade, between the line of battle and the skirmishers, accompanied by only an orderly so as not to attract the enemy's fire, we moved out. Under a terrible storm of shot and shell the line pressed forward steadily through the timber, and as it emerged on the plain took the double-quick and with fixed bayonets rushed at the enemy's first line. Not a shot was fired from our line of battle, and as it gained on my skirmishers they melted into and became one with it, and all three of my brigades went over the rifle-pits simultaneously. They then lay down on the face of the ridge, for a breathing-spell and for protection' from the terrible fire, of canister and musketry pouring over us from the guns on the crest. At the rifle-pits there had been little use for the bayonet, for most of the Confederate troops, disconcerted by the sudden rush, lay close in the ditch and surrendered, though some few fled up the slope to the next line. The prisoners were directed to move out to our rear, and as their intrenchments had now come under fire from the crest, they went with alacrity, and without guard or escort, toward Chattanooga.

After a short pause to get breath the ascent of the ridge began, and I rode, into the ditch of the intrenchments to drive out a few skulkers who were hiding there. Just at this time I was joined by Captain Ransom, who, having returned from Granger, told me that we were to carry only the line at the base, and that in coming back, when he struck the left of the division, knowing this interpretation of the order, he in his capacity as an aide-de-camp had directed Wagner, who was up on the face of the ridge, to return, and that in consequence Wagner was recalling his men to the base. I could not bear to order the recall of troops now so gallantly climbing the hill step by step, and believing we could take it, I immediately rode to Wagner's brigade and directed it to resume the attack. In the meantime Harker's and F. T. Sherman's troops were approaching the partial line of works midway of the ridge, and as I

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returned to the centre of their rear, they were being led by many stands of regimental colors. There seemed to be a rivalry as to which color should be farthest to the front; first one would go forward a few feet, then another would come up to it, the color-bearers vying with one another as to who should be foremost, until finally every standard was planted on the intermediate works. The enemy's fire from the crest during the ascent was terrific in the noise made, but as it was plunging, it over-shot and had little effect on those above the second line of pits, but was very uncomfortable for those below, so I deemed it advisable to seek another place, and Wagner's brigade having reassembled and again pressed up the ridge, I rode up the face to join my troops.

As soon as the men saw me, they surged forward and went over the works on the crest. The parapet of the intrenchment was too high for my horse to jump, so, riding a short distance to the left, I entered through a low place in the line. A few Confederates were found inside, but they turned the butts of their muskets toward me in token of surrender, for our men were now passing beyond them on both their flanks.

The right and right centre of my division gained the summit first, they being partially sheltered by a depression in the face of the ridge, the Confederates in their immediate front fleeing down the southern face. When I crossed the rifle-pits on the top the Confederates were still holding fast at Bragg's headquarters, and a battery located there opened fire along the crest; making things most uncomfortably hot. Seeing the danger to which I was exposed, for I was mounted, Colonel Joseph Conrad, of the Fifteenth Missouri, ran up and begged me to dismount. I accepted his excellent advice, and it probably saved my life; but poor Conrad was punished for his solicitude by being seriously wounded in the thigh at the moment he was thus contributing to my safety.

Wildly cheering, the men advanced along the ridge toward Bragg's headquarters, and soon drove the Confederates from this last position, capturing a number of prisoners, among them Breckenridge's and Bates's adjutant-generals, and the battery that had made such stout resistance on the crest—two guns which were named "Lady Breckenridge" and "Lady Buckner" General Bragg himself having barely time to escape before his headquarters were taken.

My whole division had now reached the summit, and Wagner and Harker—the latter slightly wounded—joined me as I was standing in the battery just secured. The enemy was rapidly retiring, and though many of his troops, with disorganized wagon-trains and several pieces of artillery, could be distinctly seen in much confusion about half a mile distant in the valley below, yet he was covering them with a pretty well organized line that continued to give us a desultory fire. Seeing this, I at once directed Wagner and Harker to take up the pursuit along Moore's road, which led to Chickamauga Station—Bragg's depot of supply—and as they progressed, I pushed Sherman's brigade along the road behind them. Wagner and Harker soon overtook the rearguard, and a slight

skirmish caused it to break, permitting nine guns and a large number of wagons which were endeavoring to get away in the stampede to fall into our hands.

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About a mile and a half beyond Missionary Ridge, Moore's road passed over a second ridge or high range of hills, and here the enemy had determined to make a stand for that purpose, posting eight pieces of artillery with such supporting force as he could rally. He was immediately attacked by Harker and Wagner, but the position was strong, the ridge being rugged and difficult of ascent, and after the first onset our men recoiled. A staff-officer from Colonel Wood's demi-brigade informing me at this juncture that that command was too weak to carry the position in its front, I ordered the Fifteenth Indiana and the Twenty-Sixth Ohio to advance to Wood's aid, and then hastening to the front I found his men clinging to the face of the ridge, contending stubbornly with the rear-guard of the enemy. Directing Harker to put Opdyke's demi-brigade in on the right, I informed Wagner that it was necessary to flank the enemy by carrying the high bluff on our left where the ridge terminated, that I had designated the Twenty-Sixth Ohio and Fifteenth Indiana for the work, and that I wished him to join them.

It was now dusk, but the two regiments engaged in the flanking movement pushed on to gain the bluff. Just as they reached the crest of the ridge the moon rose from behind, enlarged by the refraction of the atmosphere, and as the attacking column passed along the summit it crossed the moon's disk and disclosed to us below a most interesting panorama, every figure nearly being thrown out in full relief. The enemy, now outflanked on left and right, abandoned his ground, leaving us two pieces of artillery and a number of wagons. After this ridge was captured I found that no other troops than mine were pursuing the enemy, so I called a halt lest I might become too much isolated. Having previously studied the topography of the country thoroughly, I knew that if I pressed on my line of march would carry me back to Chickamauga station, where we would be in rear of the Confederates that had been fighting General Sherman, and that there was a possibility of capturing them by such action; but I did not feel warranted in marching there alone, so I rode back to Missionary Ridge to ask for more troops, and upon arriving there I found Granger in command, General Thomas having gone back to Chattanooga.

Granger was at Bragg's late headquarters in bed. I informed him of my situation and implored him to follow me up with the Army of the Cumberland, but he declined, saying that he thought we had done well enough. I still insisting, he told me finally to push on to the crossing of Chickamauga Creek, and if I, encountered the enemy he would order troops to my support. I returned to my division about 12 o'clock at night, got it under way, and reached the crossing, about half a mile from the station, at 2 o'clock on the morning of the 26th, and there found the bridge destroyed, but that the creek was fordable. I did not encounter the enemy in

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any force, but feared to go farther without assistance. This I thought I might bring up by practicing a little deception, so I caused two regiments to simulate an engagement by opening fire, hoping that this would alarm Granger and oblige him to respond with troops, but my scheme failed. General Granger afterward told me that he had heard the volleys, but suspected their purpose, knowing that they were not occasioned by a fight, since they were too regular in their delivery.

I was much disappointed that my pursuit had not been supported, for I felt that great results were in store for us should the enemy be vigorously followed. Had the troops under Granger's command been pushed out with mine when Missionary Ridge was gained, we could have reached Chickamauga Station by 12 o'clock the night of the 25th; or had they been sent even later, when I called for them, we could have got there by daylight and worked incalculable danger to the Confederates, for the force that had confronted Sherman did not pass Chickamauga Station in their retreat till after daylight on the morning of the 26th.

My course in following so close was dictated by a thorough knowledge of the topography of the country and a familiarity with its roads, bypaths, and farm-houses, gained with the assistance of Mr. Crutchfield; and sure my column was heading in the right direction, though night had fallen I thought that an active pursuit would almost certainly complete the destruction of Bragg's army. When General Grant came by my bivouac at the crossing of Chickamauga Creek on the 26th, he realized what might have been accomplished had the successful assault on Missionary Ridge been supplemented by vigorous efforts on the part of some high officers, who were more interested in gleaning that portion of the battle-field over which my command had passed than in destroying a panic-stricken enemy.

Although it cannot be said that the result of the two days' operations was reached by the methods which General Grant had indicated in his instructions preceding the battle, yet the general outcome was unquestionably due to his genius, for the manoeuvring of Sherman's and Hooker's commands created the opportunity for Thomas's corps of the Army of the Cumberland to carry the ridge at the centre. In directing Sherman to attack the north end of the ridge, Grant disconcerted Bragg—who was thus made to fear the loss of his depot of supplies at Chickamauga Station—and compelled him to resist stoutly; and stout resistance to Sherman meant the withdrawal of the Confederates from Lookout Mountain. While this attack was in process of execution advantage was taken of it by Hooker in a well-planned and well-fought battle, but to my mind an unnecessary one, for our possession of Lookout was the inevitable result that must follow from Sherman's threatening attitude. The assault on Missionary Ridge by Granger's and Palmer's corps was not premeditated by Grant, he directing only the line at its base to be carried, but when this fell into our hands the situation demanded our getting the one at the top also.



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I took into the action an effective force of 6,000, and lost 123 officers and 1,181 men killed and wounded. These casualties speak louder than words of the character of the fight, and plainly tell where the enemy struggled most stubbornly for these figures comprise one-third the casualties of the entire body of Union troops —Sherman's and all included. My division captured 1,762 prisoners and, in all, seventeen pieces of artillery. Six of these guns I turned over with caissons complete; eleven were hauled off the field and appropriated by an officer of high rank—General Hazen. I have no disposition to renew the controversy which grew out of this matter. At the time the occurrence took place I made the charge in a plain official report, which was accepted as correct by the corps and army commanders, from General Granger up to General Grant. General Hazen took no notice of this report then, though well aware of its existence. Nearly a quarter of a century later, however, he endeavored to justify his retention of the guns by trying to show that his brigade was the first to reach the crest of Missionary Ridge, and that he was therefore entitled to them. This claim of being the first to mount the ridge is made by other brigades than Hazen's, with equal if not greater force, so the absurdity of his deduction is apparent:

Note: In a book published by General Hazen in 1885, he endeavored to show, by a number of letters from subordinate officers of his command, written at his solicitation from fifteen to twenty years after the occurrence, that his brigade was the first to mount Missionary Ridge, and that it was entitled to possess these guns. The doubtful character of testimony dimmed by the lapse of many years has long been conceded, and I am content to let the controversy stand the test of history, based on the conclusions of General Grant, as he drew them from official reports made when the circumstances were fresh in the minds of all.

General Grant says: "To Sheridan's prompt movement, the Army of the Cumberland and the nation are indebted for the bulk of the capture of prisoners, artillery, and small-arms that day. Except for his prompt pursuit, so much in this way would not have been accomplished."

General Thomas says: "We captured all their cannon and ammunition before they could be removed or destroyed. After halting a few moments to reorganize the troops, who had become somewhat scattered in the assault of the hill, General Sheridan pushed forward in pursuit, and drove those in his front who had escaped capture across Chickamauga Creek."

Report of colonel Francis T. Sherman, commanding first brigade: "When within ten yards of the crest, our men seemed to be thrown forward as if by some powerful engine, and the old flag was planted firmly and surely on the last line of works of the enemy, followed by the men, taking one battery of artillery."

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Report of colonel Michael Gooding, twenty-second Indiana:"I pushed men up to the second line of works as fast as possible; on and on, clear to the top, and over the ridge they went, to the hollow beyond, killing and wounding numbers of the enemy as we advanced, and leaving the rebel battery in our rear. We captured great numbers of prisoners, and sent them to the rear without guards, as we deemed the pursuit of the enemy of greater importance.... "I cannot give too much praise to Captain Powers, Company "H," Lieutenant Smith, Company "K," Lieutenant Gooding, Company "A," and Second Lieutenant Moser, Company "G," for their assistance, and for the gallant manner in which they encouraged their men up the side of the mountain, and charging the enemy's works right up to the muzzles of their guns."

Report of colonel Jason Marsh, seventy-fourth Illinois:"The first on the enemy's works, and almost simultaneously, were Lieutenant Clement, Company "A," Captain Stegner, Company "I," Captain Bacon, Company "G," and Captain Leffingwell, with some of their men. The enemy was still in considerable force behind their works; but, for some unaccountable reason, they either fled or surrendered instantly upon the first few of our men reaching them—not even trying to defend their battery, which was immediately captured by Captain Stegner."

Report of lieutenant-colonel Porter C. Olson, thirty-sixth Illinois:"In connection with other regiments of this brigade, we assisted in capturing several pieces of artillery, a number of caissons, and a great quantity of small-arms."

Report of colonel John Q. Lane:"At the house known as Bragg's headquarters, the enemy were driven from three guns, which fell into our hands."

Report of brigadier-general G. D. Wagner, second brigade:"I ordered the command to storm the ridge, bringing up the Fifteenth Indiana and Ninety-seventh Ohio, which had not yet been engaged, although suffering from the enemy's artillery. The result is a matter of history, as we gained the ridge, capturing artillery, prisoners, and small-arms; to what amount, however, I do not know, as we pushed on after the enemy as soon as I had re-formed the command.Captain Tinney, with his usual gallantry, dashed up the line with the first troops, and with the aid of an orderly (George Dusenbury, Fifteenth Indiana), turned the loaded gun of the enemy on his retreating ranks."

Report of Captain Benjamin F. Hegler, fifteenth Indiana:"Our captures amounted to prisoners not counted, representing many different regiments; several pieces of artillery, and some wagons."



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Report of lieutenant-colonel Elias Neff, fortieth Indiana:"As the regiment reached the top of the ridge and swept forward, the right passed through, without stopping to take possession, the battery at General Bragg's headquarters that had fired so venomously during the whole contest."

Report of lieutenant-colonel J. Moore, fifty-eighth Indiana:"In passing to the front from Missionary Ridge, we saw several pieces of artillery which had been abandoned by the enemy, though I did not leave any one in charge of them."

Report of major C. M. Hammond, one hundredth Illinois:"I immediately organized my regiment, and while so doing discovered a number of pieces of artillery in a ravine on my left. I sent Lieutenant Stewart, of Company A, to see if these guns which the enemy had abandoned could not be turned upon them. He returned and reported them to be four ten-pound Parrotts and two brass Napoleons; also that it would require a number of men to place them in position. I ordered him to report the same to General Wagner, and ask permission, but before receiving a reply was ordered by you to move forward my regiment on the left of the Fifty-Eighth Indiana Volunteers."

Report of colonel Charles G. Harker, third brigade:"My right and Colonel Sherman's left interlocked, so to speak, as we approached the summit, and it was near this point that I saw the first part of my line gain the crest. This was done by a few brave men of my own and Colonel Sherman's command driving the enemy from his intrenchments. The gap thus opened, our men rushed rapidly in, and the enemy, loth to give up their position, still remained, firing at my command toward the left, and the battery in front of the house known as General Bragg's headquarters was still firing at the troops, and was captured by our men while the gunners were still at their posts...."We captured and sent to division and corps headquarters 503 prisoners and a large number of small-arms. In regard to the number of pieces of artillery, it will probably be difficult to reconcile the reports of my regimental commanders with the reports of other regiments and brigades who fought so nobly with my own command, and who alike are entitled to share the honors and glories of the day. More anxious to follow the enemy than to appropriate trophies already secured, we pushed to the front, while the place we occupied on ascending the hill was soon occupied by other troops, who, I have learned, claim the artillery as having fallen into their own hands. It must therefore remain with the division and corps commanders, who knew the relative position of each brigade and division, to accord to each the trophies to which they are due."From my personal observation I can claim a battery of six guns captured by a portion of my brigade."



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Report of colonel Emerson Opdyke, first demi-brigade:"My command captured Bragg's headquarters, house, and the six guns which were near there; one of these I ordered turned upon the enemy, which was done with effect."

Report of colonel H. C. Dunlap, third Kentucky:"The point at which the centre of my regiment reached the crest was at the stable to the left of the house said to be Bragg's headquarters, and immediately in front of the road which leads down the southern slope of the ridge. One piece of the abandoned battery, was to the left of this point, the remainder to the right, near by."

Report of lieutenant-colonel W. A. BULLITT, sixty-fifth Ohio:"The position in which my regiment found itself was immediately in front of a battery, which belched forth a stream of canister upon us with terrible rapidity. In addition to this, the enemy, whenever driven from other points, rallied around this battery, and defended it with desperation. It cost a struggle to take it; but we finally succeeded, and the colors of the Sixty-fifth Ohio were the first planted upon the yet smoking guns. Captain Smith, of my regiment, was placed in charge of the captured battery, which consisted of 5 guns, 3 caissons, and 17 horses."

Report of Captain E. P. Bates, one hundred and twenty-fifth Ohio:"Perceiving that the ridge across which my regiment extended was commanded to the very crest by a battery in front, also by those to right and left, I directed the men to pass up the gorges on either side. About forty men, with Captain Parks and Lieutenant Stinger, passed to the left, the balance to the right, and boldly charged on, till, foremost with those of other regiments, they stood on the strongest point of the enemy's works, masters alike of his guns and position.... Captain Parks reports his skirmish-line to have charged upon and captured one gun, that otherwise would have been hauled off."

Report of colonel Allen Buckner, seventy-ninth Illinois:"The right of the regiment rested on the left of the road, where it crossed the rebel fortification, leading up the hill toward Bragg's headquarters. We took a right oblique direction through a peach orchard until arriving at the woods and logs on the side of the ridge, when I ordered the men to commence firing, which they did with good effect, and continued it all the way up until the heights were gained. At this point the left of the regiment was near the right of the house, and I claim that my officers and men captured two large brass pieces, literally punching the cannoniers from their guns. Privates John Fregan and Jasper Patterson, from Company "A," rushed down the hill, captured one caisson, with a cannonier and six horses, and brought them back."



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Report of colonel J. R. Miles, twenty-seventh Illinois:"The regiment, without faltering, finally, at about 4.30 P.M., gained the enemy's works in conjunction with a party of the Thirty-sixth Illinois, who were immediately on our right. The regiment, or a portion of it, proceeded to the left, down the ridge, for nearly or quite a quarter of a mile capturing three or four pieces of cannon, driving the gunners from them."

CHAPTER XVII.

Ordered to return to Chattanooga—march to Knoxville—collecting subsistence stores—A clever stratagem—A bridge of wagons—looking out for the personal comfort of the soldiers—A leave of absence—ordered to Washington—parting with Sheridan's division.

The day after the battle of Missionary Ridge I was ordered in the evening to return to Chattanooga, and from the limited supply of stores to be had there outfit my command to march to the relief of Knoxville, where General Burnside was still holding out against the besieging forces of General Longstreet. When we left Murfreesboro' in the preceding June, the men's knapsacks and extra clothing, as well as all our camp equipage, had been left behind, and these articles had not yet reached us, so we were poorly prepared for a winter campaign in the mountains of East Tennessee. There was but little clothing to be obtained in Chattanooga, and my command received only a few overcoats and a small supply of India-rubber ponchos. We could get no shoes, although we stood in great need of them, for the extra pair with which each man had started out from Murfreesboro' was now much the worse for wear. The necessity for succoring Knoxville was urgent, however, so we speedily refitted as thoroughly as was possible with the limited means at hand. My division teams were in very fair condition in consequence of the forage we had procured in the Sequatchie Valley, so I left the train behind to bring up clothing when any should arrive in Chattanooga.

Under these circumstances, on the 29th of November the Fourth Corps (Granger's) took up the line of march for Knoxville, my men carrying in their haversacks four days' rations, depending for a further supply of food on a small steamboat loaded with subsistence stores, which was to proceed up the Tennessee River and keep abreast of the column.

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Not far from Philadelphia, Tennessee, the columns of General Sherman's army, which had kept a greater distance from the river than Granger's corps, so as to be able to subsist on the country, came in toward our right and the whole relieving force was directed on Marysville, about fifteen miles southwest of Knoxville. We got to Marysville December 5, and learned the same day that Longstreet had shortly before attempted to take Knoxville by a desperate assault, but signally failing, had raised the siege and retired toward Bean's Station on the Rutledge, Rogersville, and Bristol road, leading to Virginia. From Marysville General Sherman's troops returned to Chattanooga, while Granger's corps continued on toward Knoxville, to take part in the pursuit of Longstreet.

Burnside's army was deficient in subsistence, though not to the extent that we had supposed before leaving Chattanooga. It had eaten out the country in the immediate vicinity of Knoxville, however; therefore my division did not cross the Holstein River, but was required, in order to maintain itself, to proceed to the region of the French Broad River. To this end I moved to Sevierville, and making this village my headquarters, the division was spread out over the French Broad country, between Big Pigeon and Little Pigeon rivers, where we soon had all the mills in operation, grinding out plenty of flour and meal. The whole region was rich in provender of all kinds, and as the people with rare exceptions were enthusiastically loyal, we in a little while got more than enough food for ourselves, and by means of flatboats began sending the surplus down the river to the troops at Knoxville.

The intense loyalty of this part of Tennessee exceeded that of any other section I was in during the war. The people could not do too much to aid the Union cause, and brought us an abundance of everything needful. The women were especially loyal, and as many of their sons and husbands, who had been compelled to "refugee" on account of their loyal sentiments, returned with us, numbers of the women went into ecstasies of joy when this part of the Union army appeared among them. So long as we remained in the French Broad region, we lived on the fat of the land, but unluckily our stay was to be of short duration, for Longstreet's activity kept the department commander in a state of constant alarm.

Soon after getting the mills well running, and when the shipment of their surplus product down the river by flatboats had begun, I was ordered to move to Knoxville, on account of demonstrations by Longstreet from the direction of Blain's crossroads. On arriving at Knoxville, an inspection of my command, showed that the shoes of many of the men were entirely worn out, the poor fellows having been obliged to protect their feet with a sort of moccasin, made from their blankets or from such other material as they could procure. About six hundred of the command were in this condition, plainly not suitably shod to withstand the frequent storms of sleet and snow. These men I left in Knoxville to await the arrival of my train, which I now learned was en route from Chattanooga with shoes, overcoats, and other clothing, and with the rest of the division proceeded to Strawberry Plains, which we reached the latter part of December.

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Mid-winter was now upon us, and the weather in this mountain region of East Tennessee was very cold, snow often falling to the depth of several inches. The thin and scanty clothing of the men afforded little protection, and while in bivouac their only shelter was the ponchos with which they had been provided before leaving Chattanooga; there was not a tent in the command. Hence great suffering resulted, which I anxiously hoped would be relieved shortly by the arrival of my train with supplies. In the course of time the wagons reached Knoxville, but my troops derived little comfort from this fact, for the train was stopped by General Foster, who had succeeded Burnside in command of the department, its contents distributed pro rata to the different organizations of the entire army, and I received but a small share. This was very disappointing, not to say exasperating, but I could not complain of unfairness, for every command in the army was suffering to the same extent as mine, and yet it did seem that a little forethought and exertion on the part of some of the other superior officers, whose transportation was in tolerable condition, might have ameliorated the situation considerably. I sent the train back at once for more clothing, and on its return, just before reaching Knoxville, the quartermaster in charge, Captain Philip Smith, filled the open spaces in the wagons between the bows and load with fodder and hay, and by this clever stratagem passed it through the town safe and undisturbed as a forage train. On Smith's arrival we lost no time in issuing the clothing, and when it had passed into the hands of the individual soldiers the danger of its appropriation for general distribution, like the preceding invoice, was very remote.

General Foster had decided by this time to move his troops to Dandridge for the twofold purpose of threatening the enemy's left and of getting into a locality where we could again gather subsistence from the French Broad region. Accordingly we began an advance on the 15th of January, the cavalry having preceded us some time before. The Twenty-third Corps and Wood's division of the Fourth Corps crossed the Holstein River by a bridge that had been constructed at Strawberry Plains. My division being higher up the stream, forded it, the water very deep and bitter cold, being filled with slushy ice. Marching by way of New Market, I reached Dandridge on the 17th, and here on my arrival met General Sturgis, then commanding our cavalry. He was on the eve of setting out to, "whip the enemy's cavalry," as he said, and wanted me to go along and see him do it. I declined, however, for being now the senior officer present, Foster, Parke, and Granger having remained at Knoxville and Strawberry Plains, their absence left me in command, and it was necessary that I should make disposition of the infantry when it arrived. As there were indications of a considerable force of the enemy on the Russellville road I decided

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to place the troops in line of battle, so as to be prepared for any emergency that might arise in the absence of the senior officers, and I deemed it prudent to supervise personally the encamping of the men. This disposition necessarily required that some of the organizations should occupy very disagreeable ground, but I soon got all satisfactorily posted with the exception of General Willich, who expressed some discontent at being placed beyond the shelter of the timber, but accepted the situation cheerfully when its obvious necessity was pointed out to him.

Feeling that all was secure, I returned to my headquarters in the village with the idea that we were safely established in ease of attack, and that the men would now have a good rest if left undisturbed; and plenty to eat, but hardly had I reached my own camp when a staff-officer came post-haste from Sturgis with the information that he was being driven back to my lines, despite the confident invitation to me (in the morning) to go out and witness the whipping which was to be given to the enemy's cavalry. Riding to the front, I readily perceived that the information was correct, and I had to send a brigade of infantry out to help Sturgis, thus relieving him from a rather serious predicament. Indeed, the enemy was present in pretty strong force, both cavalry and infantry, and from his vicious attack on Sturgis it looked very much as though he intended to bring on a general engagement.

Under such circumstances I deemed it advisable that the responsible commanders of the army should be present, and so informed them. My communication brought Parke and Granger to the front without delay, but Foster could not come, since the hardships of the winter had reopened an old wound received during the Mexican War, and brought on much suffering. By the time Parke and Granger arrived, however, the enemy, who it turned out was only making a strong demonstration to learn the object of our movement on Dandridge, seemed satisfied with the results of his reconnoissance, and began falling back toward Bull's Gap. Meanwhile Parke and Granger concluded that Dandridge was an untenable point, and hence decided to withdraw a part of the army to Strawberry Plains; and the question of supplies again coming up, it was determined to send the Fourth Corps to the south side of the French Broad to obtain subsistence, provided we could bridge the river so that men could get across the deep and icy stream without suffering.

I agreed to undertake the construction of a bridge on condition that each division should send to the ford twenty-five wagons with which to make it. This being acceded to, Harker's brigade began the work next morning at a favorable point a few miles down the river. As my quota of wagons arrived, they were drawn into the stream one after another by the wheel team, six men in each wagon, and as they successively reached the other side of the channel the mules were unhitched, the pole of each wagon run

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under the hind axle of the one just in front, and the tailboards used so as to span the slight space between them. The plan worked well as long as the material lasted, but no other wagons than my twenty-five coming on the ground, the work stopped when the bridge was only half constructed. Informed of the delay and its cause, in sheer desperation I finished the bridge by taking from my own division all the wagons needed to make up the deficiency.

It was late in the afternoon when the work was finished, and I began putting over one of my brigades; but in the midst of its crossing word came that Longstreet's army was moving to attack us, which caused an abandonment of the foraging project, and orders quickly followed to retire to Strawberry Plains, the retrograde movement to begin forthwith. I sent to headquarters information of the plight I was in—baggage and supplies on the bank and wagons in the stream—begged to know what was to become of them if we were to hurry off at a moment's notice, and suggested that the movement be delayed until I could recover my transportation. Receiving in reply no assurances that I should be relieved from my dilemma—and, in fact, nothing satisfactory—I determined to take upon myself the responsibility of remaining on the ground long enough to get my wagons out of the river; so I sent out a heavy force to watch for the enemy, and with the remainder of the command went to work to break up the bridge. Before daylight next morning I had recovered everything without interference by Longstreet, who, it was afterward ascertained, was preparing to move east toward Lynchburg instead of marching to attack us; the small demonstration against Dandridge, being made simply to deceive us as to his ultimate object. I marched to Strawberry Plains unmolested, and by taking the route over Bay's Mountain, a shorter one than that followed by the main body of our troops, reached the point of rendezvous as soon as the most of the army, for the road it followed was not only longer, but badly cut up by trains that had recently passed over it.

Shortly after getting into camp, the beef contractor came in and reported that a detachment of the enemy's cavalry had captured my herd of beef cattle. This caused me much chagrin at first, but the commissary of my division soon put in an appearance, and assured me that the loss would not be very disastrous to us nor of much benefit to the enemy, since the cattle were so poor and weak that they could not be driven off. A reconnoissance in force verified the Commissary's statement. From its inability to travel, the herd, after all efforts to carry it off had proved ineffectual, had been abandoned by its captors.



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After the troops from Chattanooga arrived in the vicinity of Knoxville and General Sherman had returned to Chattanooga, the operations in East Tennessee constituted a series of blunders, lasting through the entire winter; a state of affairs doubtless due, in the main, to the fact that the command of the troops was so frequently changed. Constant shifting of responsibility from one to another ensued from the date that General Sherman, after assuring himself that Knoxville was safe, devolved the command on Burnside. It had already been intimated to Burnside that he was to be relieved, and in consequence he was inactive and apathetic, confining his operations to an aimless expedition whose advance extended only as far as Blain's crossroads, whence it was soon withdrawn. Meanwhile General Foster had superseded Burnside, but physical disabilities rendered him incapable of remaining in the field, and then the chief authority devolved on Parke. By this time the transmission of power seemed almost a disease; at any rate it was catching, so, while we were en route to Dandridge, Parke transferred the command to Granger. The latter next unloaded it on me, and there is no telling what the final outcome would have been had I not entered a protest against a further continuance of the practice, which remonstrance brought Granger to the front at Dandridge.

While the events just narrated were taking place, General Grant had made a visit to Knoxville—about the last of December—and arranged to open the railroad between there and Chattanooga, with a view to supplying the troops in East Tennessee by rail in the future, instead of through Cumberland Gap by a tedious line of wagon-trains. In pursuance of his plan the railroad had already been opened to Loudon, but here much delay occurred on account of the long time it took to rebuild the bridge over the Tennessee. Therefore supplies were still very scarce, and as our animals were now dying in numbers from starvation, and the men were still on short allowance, it became necessary that some of the troops east of Knoxville should get nearer to their depot, and also be in a position to take part in the coming Georgia campaign, or render assistance to General Thomas, should General Johnston (who had succeeded in command of the Confederate army) make any demonstration against Chattanooga. Hence my division was ordered to take station at Loudon, Tennessee, and I must confess that we took the road for that point with few regrets, for a general disgust prevailed regarding our useless marches during the winter.

At this time my faithful scout Card and his younger brother left me, with the determination, as I have heretofore related, to avenge their brother's death. No persuasion could induce Card to remain longer, for knowing that my division's next operation would be toward Atlanta, and being ignorant of the country below Dalton, he recognized and insisted that his services would then become practically valueless.

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At Loudon, where we arrived January 27, supplies were more plentiful, and as our tents and extra clothing reached us there in a few days, every one grew contented and happy. Here a number of my regiments, whose terms of service were about to expire, went through the process of “veteranizing,” and, notwithstanding the trials and hardships of the preceding nine months, they re-enlisted almost to a man.

When everything was set in motion toward recuperating and refitting my troops, I availed myself of the opportunity during a lull that then existed to take a short leave of absence—a privilege I had not indulged in since entering the service in 1853. This leave I spent in the North with much benefit to my physical condition, for I was much run down by fatiguing service, and not a little troubled by intense pain which I at times still suffered from my experience in the unfortunate hand-car incident on the Cumberland Mountains the previous July. I returned from leave the latter part of March, rejoining my division with the expectation that the campaign in that section would begin as early as April.

On the 12th of March, 1864, General Grant was assigned to the command of the armies of the United States, as general-in-chief. He was already in Washington, whither he had gone to receive his commission as lieutenant-general. Shortly after his arrival there, he commenced to rearrange the different commands in the army to suit the plans which he intended to enter upon in the spring, and out of this grew a change in my career. Many jealousies and much ill-feeling, the outgrowth of former campaigns, existed among officers of high grade in the Army of the Potomac in the winter of 1864, and several general officers were to be sent elsewhere in consequence. Among these, General Alfred Pleasonton was to be relieved from the command of the cavalry, General Grant having expressed to the President dissatisfaction that so little had hitherto been accomplished by that arm of the service, and I was selected as chief of the cavalry corps of the Army of the Potomac, receiving on the night of the 23d of March from General Thomas at Chattanooga the following telegram:

“March 23, 1864.

“Major-general Thomas, Chattanooga

“Lieutenant-General Grant directs that Major-General Sheridan immediately repair to Washington and report to the Adjutant-General of the Army.

“ H. W. Halleck, Major-General, Chief-of-Staff.”

I was not informed of the purpose for which I was to proceed to Washington, but I conjectured that it meant a severing of my relations with the Second Division, Fourth Army Corps. I at once set about obeying the order, and as but little preparation was necessary, I started for Chattanooga the next day, without taking any formal leave of the troops I had so long commanded. I could not do it; the bond existing between them and me had grown to such depth of attachment that

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I feared to trust my emotions in any formal parting from a body of soldiers who, from our mutual devotion, had long before lost their official designation, and by general consent within and without the command were called "Sheridan's Division." When I took the train at the station the whole command was collected on the hill-sides around to see me off. They had assembled spontaneously, officers and men, and as the cars moved out for Chattanooga they waved me farewell with demonstrations of affection.

A parting from such friends was indeed to be regretted. They had never given me any trouble, nor done anything that could bring aught but honor to themselves. I had confidence in them, and I believe they had in me. They were ever steady, whether in victory or in misfortune, and as I tried always to be with them, to put them into the hottest fire if good could be gained, or save them from unnecessary loss, as occasion required, they amply repaid all my care and anxiety, courageously and readily meeting all demands in every emergency that arose.

In Kentucky, nearly two years before, my lot had been cast with about half of the twenty-five regiments of infantry that I was just leaving, the rest joining me after Chickamauga. It was practically a new arm of the service to me, for although I was an infantry officer, yet the only large command which up to that time I had controlled was composed of cavalry, and most of my experience had been gained in this arm of the service. I had to study hard to be able to master all the needs of such a force, to feed and clothe it and guard all its interests. When undertaking these responsibilities I felt that if I met them faithfully, recompense would surely come through the hearty response that soldiers always make to conscientious exertion on the part of their superiors, and not only that more could be gained in that way than from the use of any species of influence, but that the reward would be quicker. Therefore I always tried to look after their comfort personally; selected their camps, and provided abundantly for their subsistence, and the road they opened for me shows that my work was not in vain. I regretted deeply to have to leave such soldiers, and felt that they were sorry I was going, and even now I could not, if I would, retain other than the warmest sentiments of esteem and the tenderest affection for the officers and men of "Sheridan's Division," Army of the Cumberland.

On reaching Chattanooga I learned from General Thomas the purpose for which I had been ordered to Washington. I was to be assigned to the command of the Cavalry Corps of the Army of the Potomac. The information staggered me at first, for I knew well the great responsibilities of such a position; moreover, I was but slightly acquainted with military operations in Virginia, and then, too, the higher officers of the Army of the Potomac were little known to me, so at the moment I felt loth to undergo the trials of the new position. Indeed, I knew not a soul in Washington except General Grant and General Halleck, and them but slightly, and no one in General Meade's army, from the

commanding general down, except a few officers in the lower grades, hardly any of whom I had seen since graduating at the Military Academy.

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Thus it is not much to be wondered at that General Thomas's communication momentarily upset me. But there was no help for it, so after reflecting on the matter a little I concluded to make the best of the situation. As in Virginia I should be operating in a field with which I was wholly unfamiliar, and among so many who were strangers, it seemed to me that it would be advisable to have, as a chief staff-officer, one who had had service in the East, if an available man could be found. In weighing all these considerations in my mind, I fixed upon Captain James W. Forsyth, of the Eighteenth Infantry, then in the regular brigade at Chattanooga—a dear friend of mine, who had served in the Army of the Potomac, in the Peninsula and Antietam campaigns. He at once expressed a desire to accept a position on my staff, and having obtained by the next day the necessary authority, he and I started for Washington, accompanied by Lieutenant T. W. C. Moore, one of my aides, leaving behind Lieutenant M. V. Sheridan, my other aide, to forward our horses as soon as they should be sent down to Chattanooga from Loudon, after which he was to join me.

CHAPTER XVIII.

At Washington—meeting Secretary Stanton—interview with President Lincoln—made commander of the cavalry corps of the army of the Potomac—its officers—general MEADE's method of using cavalry—opening of the campaign—Spottsylvania C. H.—A difference with general Meade—preparing to fight Stuart's cavalry.

Accompanied by Captain Forsyth and Lieutenant Moore, I arrived in Washington on the morning of April, 4, 1864, and stopped at Willard's Hotel, where, staying temporarily, were many officers of the Army of the Potomac en route to their commands from leave at the North. Among all these, however, I was an entire stranger, and I cannot now recall that I met a single individual whom I had ever before known.

With very little delay after reaching my hotel I made my way to General Halleck's headquarters and reported to that officer, having learned in the meantime that General Grant was absent from the city. General Halleck talked to me for a few minutes, outlining briefly the nature and duties of my new command, and the general military situation in Virginia. When he had finished all he had to say about these matters, he took me to the office of the Secretary of War, to present me to Mr. Stanton. During the ceremony of introduction, I could feel that Mr. Stanton was eyeing me closely and searchingly, endeavoring to form some estimate of one about whom he knew absolutely nothing, and whose career probably had never been called



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to his attention until General Grant decided to order me East, after my name had been suggested by General Halleck in an interview the two generals had with Mr. Lincoln. I was rather young in appearance —looking even under than over thirty-three years—but five feet five inches in height, and thin almost to emaciation, weighing only one hundred and fifteen pounds. If I had ever possessed any self-assertion in manner or speech, it certainly vanished in the presence of the imperious Secretary, whose name at the time was the synonym of all that was cold and formal. I never learned what Mr. Stanton's first impressions of me were, and his guarded and rather calculating manner gave at this time no intimation that they were either favorable or unfavorable, but his frequent commendation in after years indicated that I gained his goodwill before the close of the war, if not when I first came to his notice; and a more intimate association convinced me that the cold and cruel characteristics popularly ascribed to him were more mythical than real.

When the interview with the Secretary was over, I proceeded with General Halleck to the White House to pay my respects to the President. Mr. Lincoln received me very cordially, offering both his hands, and saying that he hoped I would fulfill the expectations of General Grant in the new command I was about to undertake, adding that thus far the cavalry of the Army of the Potomac had not done all it might have done, and wound up our short conversation by quoting that stale interrogation so prevalent during the early years of the war, "Who ever saw a dead cavalryman?" His manner did not impress me, however, that in asking the question he had meant anything beyond a jest, and I parted from the President convinced that he did not believe all that the query implied.

After taking leave I separated from General Halleck, and on returning to my hotel found there an order from the War Department assigning me to the command of the Cavalry Corps, Army of the Potomac. The next morning, April 5, as I took the cars for the headquarters of the Army of the Potomac, General Grant, who had returned to Washington the previous night from a visit to his family, came aboard the train on his way to Culpeper Court House, and on the journey down I learned among other things that he had wisely determined to continue personally in the field, associating himself with General Meade's army; where he could supervise its movements directly, and at the same time escape the annoyances which, should he remain in Washington, would surely arise from solicitude for the safety of the Capital while the campaign was in progress. When we reached Brandy Station, I left the train and reported to General Meade, who told me that the headquarters of the Cavalry Corps were some distance back from the Station, and indicated the general locations of the different divisions of the corps, also giving me, in the short time I remained with him, much information regarding their composition.

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I reached the Cavalry Corps headquarters on the evening of April 5, 1864, and the next morning issued orders assuming command. General Pleasonton had but recently been relieved, and many of his staff-officers were still on duty at the headquarters awaiting the arrival of the permanent commander. I resolved to retain the most of these officers on my staff, and although they were all unknown to me when I decided on this course, yet I never had reason to regret it, nor to question the selections made by my predecessor.

The corps consisted of three cavalry divisions and twelve batteries of horse artillery. Brigadier-General A. T. A. Torbert was in command of the First Division, which was composed of three brigades; Brigadier-General D. McM. Gregg, of the Second, consisting of two brigades; and Brigadier-General J. H. Wilson was afterward assigned to command the Third, also comprising two brigades: Captain Robinson, a veteran soldier of the Mexican war, was chief of artillery, and as such had a general supervision of that arm, though the batteries, either as units or in sections, were assigned to the different divisions in campaign.

Each one of my division commanders was a soldier by profession. Torbert graduated from the Military Academy in 1855, and was commissioned in the infantry, in which arm he saw much service on the frontier, in Florida, and on the Utah expedition. At the beginning of hostilities in April, 1861, he was made a colonel of New Jersey volunteers, and from that position was promoted in the fall of 1862 to be a brigadier-general, thereafter commanding a brigade of infantry in the Army of the Potomac till, in the redistribution of generals, after Grant came to the East, he was assigned to the First Cavalry Division.

Gregg graduated in 1855 also, and was appointed to the First Dragoons, with which regiment, up to the breaking out of the war, he saw frontier service extending from Fort Union, New Mexico, through to the Pacific coast, and up into Oregon and Washington Territories, where I knew him slightly. In the fall of 1861 he became colonel of the Eighth Pennsylvania Cavalry, and a year later was made a brigadier-general. He then succeeded to the command of a division of cavalry, and continued in that position till the close of his service, at times temporarily commanding the Cavalry Corps. He was the only division commander I had whose experience had been almost exclusively derived from the cavalry arm.

Wilson graduated in 1860 in the Topographical Engineers, and was first assigned to duty in Oregon, where he remained till July, 1861. In the fall of that year his active service in the war began, and he rose from one position to another, in the East and West, till, while on General Grant's staff, he was made a brigadier-general in the fall of 1863 in reward for services performed during the Vicksburg campaign and for engineer duty at Chattanooga preceding the battle of Missionary Ridge. At my request he was selected to command the Third Division. General Grant thought highly of him, and, expecting much from his active mental and physical ability, readily assented to assign

him in place of General Kilpatrick. The only other general officers in the corps were Brigadier-General Wesley Merritt, Brigadier-General George A. Custer, and Brigadier-General Henry E. Davies, each commanding a brigade.

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In a few days after my arrival at Brandy Station I reviewed my new command, which consisted of about twelve thousand officers and men, with the same number of horses in passable trim. Many of the general officers of the army were present at the review, among them Generals Meade, Hancock, and Sedgwick. Sedgwick being an old dragoon, came to renew his former associations with mounted troops, and to encourage me, as he jestingly said, because of the traditional prejudices the cavalymen were supposed to hold against being commanded by an infantry officer. The corps presented a fine appearance at the review, and so far as the health and equipment of the men were concerned the showing was good and satisfactory; but the horses were thin and very much worn down by excessive and, it seemed to me, unnecessary picket duty, for the cavalry picket-line almost completely encircled the infantry and artillery camps of the army, covering a distance, on a continuous line, of nearly sixty miles, with hardly a mounted Confederate confronting it at any point. From the very beginning of the war the enemy had shown more wisdom respecting his cavalry than we. Instead of wasting its strength by a policy of disintegration he, at an early day, had organized his mounted force into compact masses, and plainly made it a favorite; and, as usual, he was now husbanding the strength of his horses by keeping them to the rear, so that in the spring he could bring them out in good condition for the impending campaign.

Before and at the review I took in this situation, and determined to remedy it if possible; so in due time I sought an interview with General Meade and informed him that, as the effectiveness of my command rested mainly on the strength of its horses, I thought the duty it was then performing was both burdensome and wasteful. I also gave him my idea as to what the cavalry should do, the main purport of which was that it ought to be kept concentrated to fight the enemy's cavalry. Heretofore, the commander of the Cavalry Corps had been, virtually, but an adjunct at army headquarters—a sort of chief of cavalry—and my proposition seemed to stagger General Meade not a little. I knew that it would be difficult to overcome the recognized custom of using the cavalry for the protection of trains and the establishment of cordons around the infantry corps, and so far subordinating its operations to the movements of the main army that in name only was it a corps at all, but still I thought it my duty to try.

At first General Meade would hardly listen to my proposition, for he was filled with the prejudices that, from the beginning of the war, had pervaded the army regarding the importance and usefulness of cavalry, General Scott then predicting that the contest would be settled by artillery, and thereafter refusing the services of regiment after regiment of mounted troops. General Meade deemed cavalry fit for little more than guard and picket duty, and wanted to know what

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would protect the transportation trains and artillery reserve, cover the front of moving infantry columns, and secure his flanks from intrusion, if my policy were pursued. I told him that if he would let me use the cavalry as I contemplated, he need have little solicitude in these respects, for, with a mass of ten thousand mounted men, it was my belief that I could make it so lively for the enemy's cavalry that, so far as attacks from it were concerned, the flanks and rear of the Army of the Potomac would require little or no defense, and claimed, further, that moving columns of infantry should take care of their own fronts. I also told him that it was my object to defeat the enemy's cavalry in a general combat, if possible, and by such a result establish a feeling of confidence in my own troops that would enable us after awhile to march where we pleased, for the purpose of breaking General Lee's communications and destroying the resources from which his army was supplied.

The idea as here outlined was contrary to Meade's convictions, for though at different times since he commanded the Army of the Potomac considerable bodies of the cavalry had been massed for some special occasion, yet he had never agreed to the plan as a permanency, and could not be bent to it now. He gave little encouragement, therefore, to what I proposed, yet the conversation was immediately beneficial in one way, for when I laid before him the true condition of the cavalry, he promptly relieved it from much of the arduous and harassing picket service it was performing, thus giving me about two weeks in which to nurse the horses before the campaign opened.

The interview also disclosed the fact that the cavalry commander should be, according to General Meade's views, at his headquarters practically as one of his staff, through whom he would give detailed directions as, in his judgment, occasion required. Meade's ideas and mine being so widely divergent, disagreements arose between us later during the battles of the Wilderness, which lack of concord ended in some concessions on his part after the movement toward Spottsylvania Court House began, and although I doubt that his convictions were ever wholly changed, yet from that date on, in the organization of the Army of the Potomac, the cavalry corps became more of a compact body, with the same privileges and responsibilities that attached to the other corps—conditions that never actually existed before.

On the 4th of May the Army of the Potomac moved against Lee, who was occupying a defensive position on the south bank of the Rapidan. After detailing the various detachments which I was obliged to supply for escorts and other mounted duty, I crossed the river with an effective force of about 10,000 troopers. In the interval succeeding my assignment to the command of the cavalry, I had taken the pains to study carefully the topography of the country in eastern Virginia, and felt convinced that, under the policy Meade intended I should follow, there would be little opportunity for mounted troops to acquit themselves well in a region so thickly wooded, and traversed by so many almost parallel streams; but conscious that he would be compelled sooner

or later either to change his mind or partially give way to the pressure of events, I entered on the campaign with the loyal determination to aid zealously in all its plans.

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General Lee's army was located in its winter quarters behind intrenchments that lay along the Rapidan for a distance of about twenty miles; extending from Barnett's to Morton's ford. The fords below Morton's were watched by a few small detachments of Confederate cavalry, the main body of which, however, was encamped below Hamilton's crossing, where it could draw supplies from the rich country along the Rappahannock. Only a few brigades of Lee's infantry guarded the works along the river, the bulk of it being so situated that it could be thrown to either flank toward which the Union troops approached.

General Grant adopted the plan of moving by his left flank, with the purpose of compelling Lee to come out from behind his intrenchments along Mine Run and fight on equal terms. Grant knew well the character of country through which he would have to pass, but he was confident that the difficulties of operation in the thickly wooded region of the Wilderness would be counterbalanced by the facility with which his position would enable him to secure a new base; and by the fact that as he would thus cover Washington, there would be little or no necessity for the authorities there to detach from his force at some inopportune moment for the protection of that city.

In the move forward two divisions of my cavalry took the advance, Gregg crossing the Rapidan at Ely's ford and Wilson at Germania ford. Torbert's division remained in the rear to cover the trains and reserve artillery, holding from Rapidan Station to Culpeper, and thence through Stevensburg to the Rappahannock River. Gregg crossed the Rapidan before daylight, in advance of the Second Corps, and when the latter reached Ely's ford, he pushed on to Chancellorsville; Wilson preceded the Fifth Corps to Germania ford, and when it reached the river he made the crossing and moved rapidly by Wilderness Tavern, as far as Parker's Store, from which point he sent a heavy reconnoissance toward Mine Run, the rest of his division bivouacking in a strong position. I myself proceeded to Chancellorsville and fixed my headquarters at that place, whereon the 5th I was joined by Torbert's division.

Meanwhile, General Meade had crossed the Rapidan and established his headquarters not far from Germania ford. From that point he was in direct communication with Wilson, whose original instructions from me carried him only as far as Parker's Store, but it being found, during the night of the 4th, that the enemy was apparently unacquainted with the occurrences of the day, Meade directed Wilson to advance in the direction of Craig's Meeting House; leaving one regiment to hold Parker's Store. Wilson with the second brigade encountered Rosser's brigade of cavalry just beyond the Meeting House, and drove it back rapidly a distance of about two miles, holding it there till noon, while his first brigade was halted on the north side of Robinson's Run near the junction of the Catharpen and Parker's Store roads.



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Up to this time Wilson had heard nothing of the approach of the Fifth Corps, and the situation becoming threatening, he withdrew the second brigade to the position occupied by the first, but scarcely had he done so when he learned that at an early hour in the forenoon the enemy's infantry had appeared in his rear at Parker's Store and cut off his communication with General Meade. Surprised at this, he determined to withdraw to Todd's Tavern, but before his resolution could be put into execution the Confederates attacked him with a heavy force, and at the same time began pushing troops down the Catharpen road. Wilson was now in a perplexing situation, sandwiched between the Confederates who had cut him off in the rear at Parker's store and those occupying the Catharpen road, but he extricated his command by passing it around the latter force, and reached Todd's Tavern by crossing the Po River at Corbin's bridge. General Meade discovering that the enemy had interposed at Parker's store between Wilson and the Fifth Corps, sent me word to go to Wilson's relief, and this was the first intimation I received that Wilson had been pushed out so far, but, surmising that he would retire in the direction of Todd's Tavern I immediately despatched Gregg's division there to his relief. Just beyond Todd's Tavern Gregg met Wilson, who was now being followed by the enemy's cavalry. The pursuing force was soon checked, and then driven back to Shady Grove Church, while Wilson's troops fell in behind Gregg's line, somewhat the worse for their morning's adventure.

When the Army of the Potomac commenced crossing the Rapidan on the 4th, General J. E. B. Stuart, commanding the Confederate cavalry, began concentrating his command on the right of Lee's infantry, bringing it from Hamilton's crossing and other points where it had been wintering. Stuart's force at this date was a little more than eight thousand men, organized in two divisions, commanded by Generals Wade Hampton and Fitzhugh Lee. Hampton's division was composed of three brigades, commanded by Generals Cordon, Young, and Rosser; Fitzhugh Lee's division comprised three brigades also, Generals W. H. F. Lee, Lomax, and Wickham commanding them.

Information of this concentration, and of the additional fact that the enemy's cavalry about Hamilton's crossing was all being drawn in, reached me on the 5th, which obviated all necessity for my moving on that point as I intended at the onset of the campaign. The responsibility for the safety of our trains and of the left flank of the army still continued, however, so I made such dispositions of my troops as to secure these objects by holding the line of the Brock road beyond the Furnaces, and thence around to Todd's Tavern and Piney Branch Church. On the 6th, through some false information, General Meade became alarmed about his left flank, and sent me the following note:

*"Headquarters army of the Potomac,
"May 6, 1864.—1 o'clock P. M.
"Major-general Sheridan,
"Commanding Cavalry Corps*



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“Your despatch of 11.45 a.m., received. General Hancock has been heavily pressed, and his left turned. The major-general commanding thinks that you had better draw in your cavalry, so as to secure the protection of the trains. The order requiring an escort for the wagons to-night has been rescinded.

“A. A. *Humphreys*,
“Major-General, Chief-of-Staff.”

On the morning of the 6th Custer’s and Devin’s brigades had been severely engaged at the Furnaces before I received the above note. They had been most successful in repulsing the enemy’s attacks, however, and I felt that the line taken up could be held; but the despatch from General Humphreys was alarming, so I drew all the cavalry close in toward Chancellorsville. It was found later that Hancock’s left had not been turned, and the points thus abandoned had to be regained at a heavy cost in killed and wounded, to both the cavalry and the infantry.

On the 7th of May, under directions from headquarters, Army of the Potomac, the trains were put in motion to go into park at Piney Branch Church, in anticipation of the movement that was about to be made for the possession of Spottsylvania Court House. I felt confident that the order to move the trains there had been given without a full understanding of the situation, for Piney Branch Church was now held by the enemy, a condition which had resulted from the order withdrawing the cavalry on account of the supposed disaster to Hancock’s left the day before; but I thought the best way to remedy matters was to hold the trains in the vicinity of Aldrich’s till the ground on which it was intended to park them should be regained.

This led to the battle of Todd’s Tavern, a spirited fight for the possession of the crossroads at that point, participated in by the enemy’s cavalry and Gregg’s division, and two brigades of Torbert’s division, the latter commanded by Merritt, as Torbert became very ill on the 6th, and had to be sent to the rear. To gain the objective point—the crossroads—I directed Gregg to assail the enemy on the Catharpen road with Irvin Gregg’s brigade and drive him over Corbin’s bridge, while Merritt attacked him with the Reserve brigade on the Spottsylvania road in conjunction with Davies’s brigade of Gregg’s division, which was to be put in on the Piney Branch Church road, and unite with Merritt’s left. Davies’s and Irvin Gregg’s brigades on my right and left flanks met with some resistance, yet not enough to deter them from, executing their orders. In front of Merritt the enemy held on more stubbornly, however, and there ensued an exceedingly severe and, at times, fluctuating fight. Finally the Confederates gave way, and we pursued them almost to Spottsylvania Court House; but deeming it prudent to recall the pursuers about dark, I encamped Gregg’s and Merritt’s divisions in the open fields to the east of Todd’s Tavern.



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During the preceding three days the infantry corps of the army had been engaged in the various conflicts known as the battles of the Wilderness. The success of the Union troops in those battles had not been all that was desired, and General Grant now felt that it was necessary to throw himself on Lee's communications if possible, while preserving his own intact by prolonging the movement to the left. Therefore, on the evening of the 7th he determined to shift his whole army toward Spottsylvania Court House, and initiated the movement by a night march of the infantry to Todd's Tavern. In view of what was contemplated, I gave orders to Gregg and Merritt to move at daylight on the morning of the 8th, for the purpose of gaining possession of Snell's bridge over the Po River, the former by the crossing at Corbin's bridge and the latter by the Block House. I also directed Wilson, who was at Alsop's house, to take possession of Spottsylvania as early as possible on the morning of the 8th, and then move into position at Snell's bridge conjointly with the other two divisions. Wilson's orders remained as I had issued them, so he moved accordingly and got possession of Spottsylvania, driving the enemy's cavalry a mile beyond, as will be seen by the following despatch sent me at 9 A. M. of the 8th:

*"Headquarters third division, cavalry corps,
"Army of the Potomac.
"Spottsylvania Court house, May 8, 1864 9 A. M.
" Lieutenant-colonel Forsyth, chief-of-staff, C. C.*

"Have run the enemy's cavalry a mile from Spottsylvania Court House; have charged them, and drove them through the village; am fighting now with a considerable force, supposed to be Lee's division. Everything all right.

*"J. H. Wilson,
"Brigadier-General Commanding.*

During the night of the 7th General Meade arrived at Todd's Tavern and modified the orders I had given Gregg and Merritt, directing Gregg simply to hold Corbin's bridge, and Merritt to move out in front of the infantry column marching on the Spottsylvania road. Merritt proceeded to obey, but in advancing, our cavalry and infantry became intermingled in the darkness, and much confusion and delay was the consequence. I had not been duly advised of these changes in Gregg's and Merritt's orders, and for a time I had fears for the safety of Wilson, but, while he was preparing to move on to form his junction with Gregg and Merritt at Snell's bridge, the advance of Anderson (who was now commanding Longstreet's corps) appeared on the scene and drove him from Spottsylvania.

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Had Gregg and Merritt been permitted to proceed as they were originally instructed, it is doubtful whether the battles fought at Spottsylvania would have occurred, for these two divisions would have encountered the enemy at the Pa River, and so delayed his march as to enable our infantry to reach Spottsylvania first, and thus force Lee to take up a line behind the Po. I had directed Wilson to move from the left by “the Gate” through Spottsylvania to Snell’s bridge, while Gregg and Merritt were to advance to the same point by Shady Grove and the Block House. There was nothing to prevent at least a partial success of these operations; that is to say, the concentration of the three divisions in front of Snell’s bridge, even if we could not actually have gained it. But both that important point and the bridge on the Block House road were utterly ignored, and Lee’s approach to Spottsylvania left entirely unobstructed, while three divisions of cavalry remained practically ineffective by reason of disjointed and irregular instructions.

On the morning of the 8th, when I found that such orders had been given, I made some strong remonstrances against the course that had been pursued, but it was then too late to carry out the combinations I had projected the night before, so I proceeded to join Merritt on the Spottsylvania road. On reaching Merritt I found General Warren making complaint that the cavalry were obstructing his infantry column, so I drew Merritt off the road, and the leading division of the Fifth Corps pushed up to the front. It got into line about 11 o’clock, and advanced to take the village, but it did not go very far before it struck Anderson’s corps, and was hurled back with heavy loss. This ended all endeavor to take Spottsylvania that day.

A little before noon General Meade sent for me, and when I reached his headquarters I found that his peppery temper had got the better of his good judgment, he showing a disposition to be unjust, laying blame here and there for the blunders that had been committed. He was particularly severe on the cavalry, saying, among other things, that it had impeded the march of the Fifth Corps by occupying the Spottsylvania road. I replied that if this were true, he himself had ordered it there without my knowledge. I also told him that he had broken up my combinations, exposed Wilson’s division to disaster, and kept Gregg unnecessarily idle, and further, repelled his insinuations by saying that such disjointed operations as he had been requiring of the cavalry for the last four days would render the corps inefficient and useless before long. Meade was very much irritated, and I was none the less so. One word brought on another, until, finally, I told him that I could whip Stuart if he (Meade) would only let me, but since he insisted on giving the cavalry directions without consulting or even notifying me, he could henceforth command the Cavalry Corps himself—that I would not give it another order.



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The acrimonious interview ended with this remark, and after I left him he went to General Grant's headquarters and repeated the conversation to him, mentioning that I had said that I could whip Stuart. At this General Grant remarked: "Did he say so? Then let him go out and do it." This intimation was immediately acted upon by General Meade, and a little later the following order came to me:

"Headquarters army of the Potomac

"May 8th, 1864 1 P. M.

"General Sheridan,

"Commanding Cavalry Corps.

"The major-general commanding directs you to immediately concentrate your available mounted force, and with your ammunition trains and such supply trains as are filled (exclusive of ambulances) proceed against the enemy's cavalry, and when your supplies are exhausted, proceed via New Market and Green Bay to Haxall's Landing on the James River, there communicating with General Butler, procuring supplies and return to this army. Your dismounted men will be left with the train here.

"A. A. Humphreys,

"Major-General, Chief-of-staff."

As soon as the above order was received I issued instructions for the concentration of the three divisions of cavalry at Aldrich's to prepare for the contemplated expedition. Three days' rations for the men were distributed, and half rations of grain for one day were doled out for the horses. I sent for Gregg, Merritt, and Wilson and communicated the order to them, saying at the same time, "We are going out to fight Stuart's cavalry in consequence of a suggestion from me; we will give him a fair, square fight; we are strong, and I know we can beat him, and in view of my recent representations to General Meade I shall expect nothing but success." I also indicated to my division commanders the line of march I should take—moving in one column around the right flank of Lee's army to get in its rear—and stated at the same time that it was my intention to fight Stuart wherever he presented himself, and if possible go through to Haxall's Landing; but that if Stuart should successfully interpose between us and that point we would swing back to the Army of the Potomac by passing around the enemy's left flank by way of Gordonsville. At first the proposition seemed to surprise the division commanders somewhat, for hitherto even the boldest, mounted expeditions had been confined to a hurried ride through the enemy's country, without purpose of fighting more than enough to escape in case of molestation, and here and there to destroy a bridge. Our move would be a challenge to Stuart for a cavalry duel behind Lee's lines, in his own country, but the advantages which it was reasonable to anticipate from the plan being quickly perceived, each division commander entered into its support unhesitatingly, and at once set about preparing for the march next day.

CHAPTER XIX.



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The expedition starts—destroying supplies—opening of the fight at Yellow Tavern—general Custer's Brilliant charge—death of general Stuart—removing torpedoes—excitement in Richmond—A night march—enterprising newsboys—the effects of Stuart's defeat and death—end of the first expedition—its great success and beneficial results.

The expedition which resulted in the battle of Yellow Tavern and the death of General Stuart started from the vicinity of Aldrich's toward Fredericksburg early on the morning of May 9, 1864, marching on the plank-road, Merritt's division leading. When the column reached Tabernacle Church it headed almost due east to the telegraph road, and thence down that highway to Thornburg, and from that point through Childsburg to Anderson's crossing of the North Anna River, it being my desire to put my command south of that stream if possible, where it could procure forage before it should be compelled to fight. The corps moved at a walk, three divisions on the same road, making a column nearly thirteen miles in length, and marched around the right flank of the enemy unsuspected until my rear guard had passed Massaponax Church. Although the column was very long, I preferred to move it all on one road rather than to attempt combinations for carrying the divisions to any given point by different routes. Unless the separate commands in an expedition of this nature are very prompt in movement, and each fully equal to overcoming at once any obstacle it may meet, combinations rarely work out as expected; besides, an engagement was at all times imminent, hence it was specially necessary to keep the whole force well together.

As soon as the Ny, Po, and Ta rivers were crossed, each of which streams would have afforded an excellent defensive line to the enemy, all anxiety as to our passing around Lee's army was removed, and our ability to cross the North Anna placed beyond doubt. Meanwhile General Stuart had discovered what we were about, and he set his cavalry in motion, sending General Fitzhugh Lee to follow and attack my rear on the Childsburg road, Stuart himself marching by way of Davenport's bridge, on the North Anna, toward Beaver Dam Station, near which place his whole command was directed to unite the next day.

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My column having passed the Ta River, Stuart attacked its rear with considerable vigor, in the hope that he could delay my whole force long enough to permit him to get at least a part of his command in my front; but this scheme was frustrated by Davies's brigade, which I directed to fight as a rear-guard, holding on at one position and then at another along the line of march just enough to deter the enemy from a too rapid advance. Davies performed this responsible and trying duty with tact and good judgment, following the main column steadily as it progressed to the south, and never once permitting Fitzhugh Lee's advance to encroach far enough to compel a halt of my main body. About dark Merritt's division crossed the North Anna at Anderson's ford, while Gregg and Wilson encamped on the north side, having engaged the enemy, who still hung on my rear up to a late hour at night.

After Merritt's division passed the river, Custer's brigade proceeded on to Beaver Dam Station to cut the Virginia Central railroad. Before reaching the station he met a small force of the enemy, but this he speedily drove off, recapturing from it about four hundred Union prisoners, who had been taken recently in the Wilderness and were being conducted to Richmond. Custer also destroyed the station, two locomotives, three trains of cars, ninety wagons, from eight to ten miles of railroad and telegraph lines, some two hundred thousand pounds of bacon and other supplies, amounting in all to about a million and a half of rations, and nearly all the medical stores of General Lee's army, which had been moved from Orange Court House either because Lee wished to have them directly in his rear or because he contemplated falling back to the North Anna.

On the morning of the 10th Gregg and Wilson, while crossing the North Anna, were again attacked, but were covered by the division on the south side of the stream; the passage was effected without much loss, notwithstanding the approach of Stuart on the south bank from the direction of Davenport's bridge. The possession of Beaver Dam gave us an important point, as it opened a way toward Richmond by the Negro-foot road. It also enabled us to obtain forage for our well-nigh famished animals, and to prepare for fighting the enemy, who, I felt sure, would endeavor to interpose between my column and Richmond.

Stuart had hardly united his troops near Beaver Dam when he realized that concentrating there was a mistake, so he began making dispositions for remedying his error, and while we leisurely took the Negro-foot road toward Richmond, he changed his tactics and hauled off from my rear, urging his horses to the death in order to get in between Richmond and my column. This he effected about 10 o'clock on the morning of the 11th, concentrating at Yellow Tavern, six miles from the city, on the Brook turnpike. His change of tactics left my march on the 10th practically unmolested, and we quietly encamped that night on the south bank of the South Anna, near Ground Squirrel Bridge. Here we procured an abundance of forage, and as the distance traveled that day had been only fifteen to eighteen miles, men and horses were able to obtain a good rest during the night.



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At 2 o'clock in the morning, May 11, Davies's brigade of Gregg's division marched for Ashland to cut the Fredericksburg railroad. Arriving there before the head of the enemy's column, which had to pass through this same place to reach Yellow Tavern, Davies drove out a small force occupying the town, burnt a train of cars and a locomotive, destroyed the railroad for some distance, and rejoined the main column at Allen's Station on the Fredericksburg and Richmond railroad. From Allen's Station the whole command moved on Yellow Tavern, Merritt in the lead, Wilson following, and Gregg in the rear.

The appearance of Davies's brigade at Ashland in the morning had had the effect of further mystifying the enemy as to my intentions; and while he held it incumbent to place himself between me and Richmond, yet he was still so uncertain of my movements that he committed the same fault that he did the first day, when he divided his force and sent a part to follow me on the Childsburg road. He now divided his command again, sending a portion to hang upon my rear, while he proceeded with the rest to Yellow Tavern. This separation not only materially weakened the force which might have been thrown across my line of march, but it also enabled me to attack with almost my entire corps, while occupying the pursuers with a small rearguard.

By forced marches General Stuart succeeded in reaching Yellow Tavern ahead of me on May 11; and the presence of, his troops, on the Ashland and Richmond road becoming known to Merritt as he was approaching the Brook turnpike, this general pressed forward at once to the attack. Pushing his division to the front, he soon got possession of the turnpike and drove the enemy back several hundred yards to the east of it. This success had the effect of throwing the head of my column to the east of the pike, and I quickly brought up Wilson and one of Gregg's brigades to take advantage of the situation by forming a line of battle on that side of the road. Meanwhile the enemy, desperate but still confident, poured in a heavy fire from his line and from a battery which enfiladed the Brook road, and made Yellow Tavern an uncomfortably hot place. Gibbs's and Devin's brigades, however, held fast there, while Custer, supported by Chapman's brigade, attacked the enemy's left and battery in a mounted charge.

Custer's charge, with Chapman on his flank and the rest of Wilson's division sustaining him, was brilliantly executed. Beginning at a walk, he increased his gait to a trot, and then at full speed rushed at the enemy. At the same moment the dismounted troops along my whole front moved forward, and as Custer went through the battery, capturing two of the guns with their cannoneers and breaking up the enemy's left, Gibbs and Devin drove his centre and right from the field. Gregg meanwhile, with equal success, charged the force in his rear-Gordon's brigade and the engagement ended by giving us complete control of the road to Richmond. We captured a number of prisoners, and the casualties on both sides were quite severe, General Stuart himself falling mortally wounded, and General James B. Gordon, one of his brigade commanders, being killed.



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After Custer's charge, the Confederate cavalry was badly broken up, the main portion of it being driven in a rout toward Ashland and a small part in the direction of Richmond, which latter force finally rejoined Fitzhugh Lee near Mechanicsville. A reconnoitring party being now sent up the Brook turnpike toward the city, dashed across the South Fork of the Chickahominy, drove a small force from the enemy's exterior intrenchments and went within them. I followed this party, and after a little exploration found between the two lines of works a country road that led across to the pike which runs from Mechanicsville to Richmond. I thought we could go around within the outer line of works by this country road across to the Mechanicsville pike on the south side of the Chickahominy, and encamp the next night at Fair Oaks; so I determined to make the movement after dark, being influenced in this to some extent by reports received during the afternoon from colored people, to the effect that General B. F. Butler's army had reached a small stream on the south side of the James, about four miles south of Richmond. If I could succeed in getting through by this road, not only would I have a shorter line of march to Haxall's landing, but there was also a possibility that I could help Butler somewhat by joining him so near Richmond. Therefore, after making the wounded as comfortable as possible, we commenced the march about 11 o'clock on the night of the 11th, and massed the command on the plateau south of the Meadow bridge near daylight on the 12th.

The enemy, anticipating that I would march by this route, had planted torpedoes along it, and many of these exploded as the column passed over them, killing several horses and wounding a few men, but beyond this we met with no molestation. The torpedoes were loaded shells planted on each side of the road, and so connected by wires attached to friction-tubes in the shells, that when a horse's hoof struck a wire the shell was exploded by the jerk on the improvised lanyard. After the loss of several horses and the wounding of some of the men by these torpedoes, I gave directions to have them removed, if practicable, so about twenty-five of the prisoners were brought up and made to get down on their knees, feel for the wires in the darkness, follow them up and unearth the shells. The prisoners reported the owner of one of the neighboring houses to be the principal person who had engaged in planting these shells, and I therefore directed that some of them be carried and placed in the cellar of his house, arranged to explode if the enemy's column came that way, while he and his family were brought off as prisoners and held till after daylight.

Meanwhile the most intense excitement prevailed in Richmond. The Confederates, supposing that their capital was my objective point, were straining every effort to put it in a state of defense, and had collected between four and five thousand irregular troops, under General Bragg, besides bringing up three brigades of infantry from the force confronting General Butler south of the James River, the alarm being intensified by the retreat, after the defeat at Yellow Tavern, of Stuart's cavalry, now under General Fitzhugh Lee, by way of Ashland to Mechanicsville, on the north side of the Chickahominy, for falling back in that direction, left me between them and Richmond.



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Our march during the night of the 11th was very tedious, on account of the extreme darkness and frequent showers of rain; but at daylight on the 12th the head of my column, under Wilson, reached the Mechanicsville pike. Here Wilson, encountering the enemy's works and batteries manned by General Bragg's troops, endeavored to pass. In this he failed, and as soon as I was notified that it was impracticable to reach Fair Oaks by passing between the works and the Chickahominy, Custer's brigade was directed to make the crossing to the north side of the Chickahominy, at the Meadow bridge. Custer moved rapidly for the bridge, but found it destroyed, and that the enemy's cavalry was posted on the north side, in front of Mechanicsville. When this information came back, I ordered Merritt to take his whole division and repair the bridge, instructing him that the crossing must be made at all hazards; for, in view of an impending attack by the enemy's infantry in Richmond, it was necessary that I should have the bridge as a means of egress in case of serious disaster.

All the time that Merritt was occupied in this important duty, the enemy gave great annoyance to the working party by sweeping the bridge with a section of artillery and a fire from the supporting troops, so a small force was thrown across to drive them away. When Merritt had passed two regiments over, they attacked, but were repulsed. The work on the bridge continued, however, notwithstanding this discomfiture; and when it was finished, Merritt crossed nearly all his division, dismounted, and again attacked the enemy, this time carrying the line, of temporary breastworks, built with logs and rails, and pursuing his broken troops toward Gaines's Mills.

While Merritt was engaged in this affair, the Confederates advanced from behind their works at Richmond, and attacked Wilson and Gregg. Wilson's troops were driven back in some confusion at first; but Gregg, in anticipation of attack, had hidden a heavy line of dismounted men in a bushy ravine on his front, and when the enemy marched upon it, with much display and under the eye of the President of the Confederacy, this concealed line opened a destructive fire with repeating carbines; and at the same time the batteries of horse-artillery, under Captain Robinson, joining in the contest, belched forth shot and shell with fatal effect. The galling fire caused the enemy to falter, and while still wavering Wilson rallied his men, and turning some of them against the right flank of the Confederates, broke their line, and compelled them to withdraw for security behind the heavy works thrown up for the defense of the city in 1862.

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By destroying the Meadow bridge and impeding my column on the Mechanicsville, pike, the enemy thought to corner us completely, for he still maintained the force in Gregg's rear that had pressed it the day before; but the repulse of his infantry ended all his hopes of doing us any serious damage on the limited ground between the defenses of Richmond and the Chickahominy. He felt certain that on account of the recent heavy rains we could not cross the Chickahominy except by the Meadow bridge, and it also seemed clear to him that we could not pass between the river and his intrenchments; therefore he hoped to ruin us, or at least compel us to return by the same route we had taken in coming, in which case we would run into Gordon's brigade, but the signal repulse of Bragg's infantry dispelled these illusions.

Even had it not been our good fortune to defeat him, we could have crossed the Chickahominy if necessary at several points that were discovered by scouting parties which, while the engagement was going on, I had sent out to look up fords. This means of getting out from the circumscribed plateau I did not wish to use, however, unless there was no alternative, for I wished to demonstrate to the Cavalry Corps the impossibility of the enemy's destroying or capturing so large a body of mounted troops.

The chances of seriously injuring, us were more favorable to the enemy this time than ever they were afterward, for with the troops from Richmond, comprising three brigades of veterans and about five thousand irregulars on my front and right flank, with Gordon's cavalry in the rear, and Fitzhugh Lee's cavalry on my left flank, holding the Chickahominy and Meadow bridge, I was apparently hemmed in on every side, but relying on the celerity with which mounted troops could be moved, I felt perfectly confident that the seemingly perilous situation could be relieved under circumstances even worse than those then surrounding us. Therefore, instead of endeavoring to get away without a fight, I concluded that there would be little difficulty in withdrawing, even should I be beaten, and none whatever if I defeated the enemy.

In accordance with this view I accepted battle; and the complete repulse of the enemy's infantry, which assailed us from his intrenchments, and of Gordon's cavalry, which pressed Gregg on the Brook road, ended the contest in our favor. The rest of the day we remained on the battle-field undisturbed, and our time was spent in collecting the wounded, burying the dead, grazing the horses, and reading the Richmond journals, two small newsboys with commendable enterprise having come within our lines from the Confederate capital to sell their papers. They were sharp youngsters, and having come well supplied, they did a thrifty business. When their stock in trade was all disposed of they wished to return, but they were so intelligent and observant that I thought their mission involved other purposes than the mere sale of newspapers, so they were held till we crossed the Chickahominy and then turned loose.

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After Merritt had crossed the Chickahominy and reached Mechanicsville, I sent him orders to push on to Gaines's Mills. Near the latter place he fell in with the enemy's cavalry again, and sending me word, about 4 o'clock in the afternoon I crossed the Chickahominy with Wilson and Gregg, but when we overtook Merritt he had already brushed the Confederates away, and my whole command went into camp between Walnut Grove and Gaines's Mills.

The main purposes of the expedition had now been executed. They were "to break up General Lee's railroad communications, destroy such depots of supplies as could be found in his rear, and to defeat General Stuart's cavalry." Many miles of the Virginia Central and of the, Richmond and Fredericksburg railroads were broken up, and several of the bridges on each burnt. At Beaver Dam, Ashland, and other places, about two millions of rations had been captured and destroyed. The most important of all, however, was the defeat of Stuart. Since the beginning of the war this general had distinguished himself by his management of the Confederate mounted force. Under him the cavalry of Lee's army had been nurtured, and had acquired such prestige that it thought itself well-nigh invincible; indeed, in the early years of the war it had proved to be so. This was now dispelled by the successful march we had made in Lee's rear; and the discomfiture of Stuart at Yellow Tavern had inflicted a blow from which entire recovery was impossible.

In its effect on the Confederate cause the defeat of Stuart was most disheartening, but his death was even a greater calamity, as is evidenced by the words of a Confederate writer (Cooke), who says: "Stuart could be ill spared at this critical moment, and General Lee was plunged into the deepest melancholy at the intelligence of his death. When it reached him he retired from those around him, and remained for some time communing with his own heart and memory. When one of his staff entered and spoke of Stuart, General Lee said: 'I can scarcely think of him without weeping.'"

From the camp near Gaines's Mills I resumed the march to Haxall's Landing, the point on the James River contemplated in my instructions where I was to obtain supplies from General Butler. We got to the James on the 14th with all our wounded and a large number of prisoners, and camped between Haxall's and Shirley. The prisoners, as well as the captured guns, were turned over to General Butler's provost-marshal, and our wounded were quickly and kindly cared for by his surgeons. Ample supplies, also, in the way of forage and rations, were furnished us by General Butler, and the work of refitting for our return to the Army of the Potomac was vigorously pushed. By the 17th all was ready, and having learned by scouting parties sent in the direction of Richmond and as far as Newmarket that the enemy's cavalry was returning to Lee's army I started that evening on my return march, crossing the Chickahominy at Jones's bridge, and bivouacking on the 19th near Baltimore crossroads.

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My uncertainty of what had happened to the Army of the Potomac in our absence, and as to where I should find it, made our getting back a problem somewhat difficult of solution, particularly as I knew that reinforcements for Lee had come up from the south to Richmond, and that most likely some of these troops were being held at different points on the route to intercept my column. Therefore I determined to pass the Pamunkey River at the White House, and sent to Fort Monroe for a pontoon-bridge on which to make the crossing. While waiting for the pontoons I ordered Custer to proceed with his brigade to Hanover Station, to destroy the railroad bridge over the South Anna, a little beyond that place; at the same time I sent Gregg and Wilson to Cold Harbor, to demonstrate in the direction of Richmond as far as Mechanicsville, so as to cover Custer's movements. Merritt, with the remaining brigades of his division, holding fast at Baltimore crossroads to await events.

After Gregg and Custer had gone, it was discovered that the railroad bridge over the Pamunkey, near the White House, had been destroyed but partially—the cross-ties and stringers being burned in places only—and that it was practicable to repair it sufficiently to carry us over. In view of this information General Merritt's two brigades were at once put on the duty of reconstructing the bridge. By sending mounted parties through the surrounding country, each man of which would bring in a board or a plank, Merritt soon accumulated enough lumber for the flooring, and in one day the bridge was made practicable. On the 22d Gregg, Wilson, and Custer returned. The latter had gone on his expedition as far as Hanover Station, destroyed some commissary stores there, and burned two trestle bridges over Hanover Creek. This done, he deemed it prudent to retire to Hanover town. The next morning he again marched to Hanover Station, and there ascertained that a strong force of the enemy, consisting of infantry, cavalry, and artillery, was posted at the South Anna bridges. These troops had gone there from Richmond en route to reinforce Lee. In the face of this impediment Custer's mission could not be executed fully, so he returned to Baltimore crossroads.

The whole command was drawn in by noon of the 22d, and that day it crossed the Pamunkey by Merritt's reconstructed bridge, marching to Ayletts, on the Mattaponi River, the same night. Here I learned from citizens, and from prisoners taken during the day by scouting parties sent toward Hanover Court House, that Lee had been, forced from his position near Spottsylvania Court House and compelled to retire to the line of the North Anna. I then determined to rejoin the Army of the Potomac at the earliest moment, which I did by making for Chesterfield Station, where I reported to General Meade on the 24th of May.



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Our return to Chesterfield ended the first independent expedition the Cavalry Corps had undertaken since coming under my command, and our success was commended highly by Generals Grant and Meade, both realizing that our operations in the rear of Lee had disconcerted and alarmed that general so much as to aid materially in forcing his retrograde march, and both acknowledged that, by drawing off the enemy's cavalry during the past fortnight, we had enabled them to move the Army of the Potomac and its enormous trains without molestation in the manoeuvres that had carried it to the North Anna. Then, too, great quantities of provisions and munitions of war had been destroyed—stores that the enemy had accumulated at sub-depots from strained resources and by difficult means; the railroads that connected Lee with Richmond broken, the most successful cavalry leader of the South killed, and in addition to all this there had been inflicted on the Confederate mounted troops the most thorough defeat that had yet befallen them in Virginia.

When the expedition set out the Confederate authorities in Richmond were impressed, and indeed convinced, that my designs contemplated the capture of that city, and notwithstanding the loss they sustained in the defeat and death of Stuart, and their repulse the succeeding day, they drew much comfort from the fact that I had not entered their capital. Some Confederate writers have continued to hold this theory and conviction since the war. In this view they were and are in error. When Stuart was defeated the main purpose of my instructions had been carried out, and my thoughts then turned to joining General Butler to get supplies. I believed that I could do this by cutting across to the Mechanicsville pike and Fair Oaks on the south side of the Chickahominy, but the failure of Wilson's column to get possession of the outwork which commanded the pike necessitated my crossing at Meadow bridge, and then moving by Mechanicsville and Gaines's Mills instead of by the shorter route. Moreover, my information regarding General Butler's position was incorrect, so that even had I been successful in getting to Fair Oaks by the direct road I should still have gained nothing thereby, for I should still have been obliged to continue down the James River to Haxall's.

CHAPTER XX.

General Wilson's advance toward Hanover Court house—crossing the Pamunkey—engagement of Howe's shop—fight at Matadequin creek—capture of Cold Harbor—the fight to retain the place—movements of general Wilson.

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When I rejoined the Army of the Potomac, near Chesterfield Station, the heavy battles around Spottsylvania had been fought, and the complicated manoeuvres by which the whole Union force was swung across the North Anna were in process of execution. In conjunction with these manoeuvres Wilson's division was sent to the right flank of the army, where he made a reconnoissance south of the North Anna as far as Little River, crossing the former stream near Jericho Mills. Wilson was to operate from day to day on that flank as it swung to the south, covering to New Castle ferry each advance of the infantry and the fords left behind on the march. From the 26th to the 30th these duties kept Wilson constantly occupied, and also necessitated a considerable dispersion of his force, but by the 31st he was enabled to get all his division together again, and crossing to the south side of the Pamunkey at New Castle ferry, he advanced toward Hanover Court House. Near Dr Pride's house he encountered a division of the enemy's cavalry under General W. H. F. Lee, and drove it back across Mechamp's Creek, thus opening communication with the right of our infantry resting near Phillips's Mills. Just as this had been done, a little before dark, Wilson received an order from General Meade directing him to push on toward Richmond until he encountered the Confederates in such strength that he could no longer successfully contend against them, and in compliance with this order occupied Hanover Court House that same day. Resuming his march at daylight on June 1, he went ahead on the Ashland road while sending Chapman's brigade up the south bank of the South Anna to destroy the bridges on that stream. Chapman having succeeded in this work, Wilson re-united his whole command and endeavored to hold Ashland, but finding the Confederate cavalry and infantry there in strong force, he was obliged to withdraw to Dr. Price's house. Here he learned that the army had gone to the left toward Cold Harbor, so on the 2d of June he moved to Hawe's Shop.

While Wilson was operating thus on the right, I had to cover with Gregg's and Torbert's divisions the crossing of the army over the Pamunkey River at and near Hanover town. Torbert having recovered from the illness which overtook him in the Wilderness, had now returned to duty. The march to turn the enemy's right began on the 26th. Torbert and Gregg in advance, to secure the crossings of the Pamunkey and demonstrate in such manner as to deceive the enemy as much as possible in the movement, the two cavalry divisions being supported by General D. A. Russell's division of the Sixth Corps.



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To attain this end in the presence of an ever-watchful foe who had just recently been reinforced in considerable numbers from Richmond and further south—almost enough to make up the losses he had sustained in the Wilderness and at Spottsylvania—required the most vigorous and zealous work on the part of those to whom had been allotted the task of carrying out the initial manoeuvres. Torbert started for Taylor's ford on the Pamunkey with directions to demonstrate heavily at that point till after dark, as if the crossing was to be made there, and having thus impressed the enemy, he was to leave a small guard, withdraw quietly, and march to Hanover town ford, where the real crossing was to be effected. Meanwhile Gregg marched to Littlepage's crossing of the Pamunkey, with instructions to make feints in the same manner as Torbert until after dark, when he was to retire discreetly, leaving a small force to keep up the demonstration, and then march rapidly to Hanover town crossing, taking with him the pontoon-bridge.

At the proper hour Russell took up the march and followed the cavalry. The troops were in motion all night, undergoing the usual delays incident to night marches, and, early on the morning of the 27th the crossing was made, Custer's brigade of Torbert's division driving from the ford about one hundred of the enemy's cavalry, and capturing between thirty and forty prisoners. The remainder of Torbert's division followed this brigade and advanced to Hanover town, where General Gordon's brigade of Confederate cavalry was met. Torbert attacked this force with Devin's brigade, while he sent Custer to Hawe's Shop, from which point a road leading to the right was taken that brought him in rear of the enemy's cavalry; when the Confederates discovered this manoeuvre, they retired in the direction of Hanover Court House. Pursuit continued as far as a little stream called Crump's Creek, and here Torbert was halted, Gregg moving up on his line meanwhile, and Russell encamping near the crossing of the river. This completed our task of gaining a foothold south of the Pamunkey, and on the 28th the main army crossed unharassed and took up a position behind my line, extending south from the river, with the Sixth Corps on the right across the Hanover Court House road at Crump's Creek, the Second Corps on the left of the Sixth, and the Fifth Corps about two miles in front of Hanover town, its left extending to the Tolopotomy.

There was now much uncertainty in General Grant's mind as to the enemy's whereabouts, and there were received daily the most conflicting statements as to the nature of Lee's movements. It became necessary, therefore, to find out by an actual demonstration what Lee was doing, and I was required to reconnoitre in the direction of Mechanicsville. For this purpose I moved Gregg's division out toward this town by way of Hawe's Shop, and when it had gone about three-fourths of a mile beyond the Shop the enemy's cavalry was discovered dismounted and disposed behind a temporary breastwork of rails and logs.



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This was the first occasion on which, since the battle of Yellow Tavern, the Confederate troopers had confronted us in large numbers, their mounted operations, like ours, having been dependent more or less on the conditions that grew out of the movements in which Lee's infantry had been engaged since the 14th of May.

On that date General Lee had foreshadowed his intention of using his cavalry in connection with the manoeuvres of his infantry by issuing an order himself, now that Stuart was dead, directing that the "three divisions of cavalry serving with the army [Lee's] will constitute separate commands, and will report directly to and receive orders from the headquarters of the army." The order indicates that since Stuart's death the Confederate cavalry had been re-organized into three divisions, that were commanded respectively by General Wade Hampton, General Fitzhugh Lee, and General W. H. F. Lee, the additional division organization undoubtedly growing out of the fact, that General M. C. Butler's brigade of about four thousand men had joined recently from South Carolina.

When this force developed in Gregg's front, he attacked the moment his troops could be dismounted; and the contest became one of exceeding stubbornness, for he found confronting him Hampton's and Fitzhugh Lee's divisions, supported by what we then supposed to be a brigade of infantry, but which, it has since been ascertained, was Butler's brigade of mounted troops; part of them armed with long-range rifles. The contest between the opposing forces was of the severest character and continued till late in the evening. The varying phases of the fight prompted me to reinforce Gregg as much as possible, so I directed Custer's brigade to report to him, sending, meanwhile, for the other two brigades of Torbert, but these were not available at the time—on account of delays which occurred in relieving them from the line at Crump's Creek—and did not get up till the fight was over. As soon as Custer joined him, Gregg vigorously assaulted the Confederate position along his whole front; and notwithstanding the long-range rifles of the South Carolinians, who were engaging in their first severe combat it appears, and fought most desperately, he penetrated their barricades at several points.

The most determined and obstinate efforts for success were now made on both sides, as the position at Hawe's Shop had become of very great importance on account of the designs of both Lee and Grant. Lee wished to hold this ground while he manoeuvred his army to the line of the Tolopotomy, where he could cover the roads to Richmond, while Grant, though first sending me out merely to discover by a strong reconnoissance the movements of the enemy, saw the value of the place to cover his new base at the White House, and also to give us possession of a direct road to Cold Harbor. Hawe's Shop remained in our possession finally, for late in the evening Custer's brigade was dismounted and formed in close column in rear of Gregg, and while it assaulted through an opening near the centre of his line, the other two brigades advanced and carried the temporary works. The enemy's dead and many of his wounded fell into our hands; also a considerable number of prisoners, from whom we learned that Longstreet's and Ewell's corps were but four miles to the rear.



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The battle was a decidedly severe one, the loss on each side being heavy in proportion to the number of troops engaged. This fight took place almost immediately in front of our infantry, which, during the latter part of the contest, was busily occupied in throwing up intrenchments. Late in the afternoon I reported to General Meade the presence of the enemy's infantry, and likewise that Hampton's and Fitzhugh Lee's divisions were in my front also, and asked, at the same time; that some of our infantry, which was near at hand, be sent to my assistance. I could not convince Meade that anything but the enemy's horse was fighting us, however, and he declined to push out the foot-troops, who were much wearied by night marches. It has been ascertained since that Meade's conclusions were correct in so far as they related to the enemy's infantry; but the five cavalry brigades far outnumbered my three, and it is to be regretted that so much was risked in holding a point that commanded the roads to Cold Harbor and Meadow bridge, when there was at hand a preponderating number of Union troops which might have been put into action. However, Gregg's division and Custer's brigade were equal to the situation, all unaided as they were till dark, when Torbert and Merritt came on the ground. The contest not only gave us the crossroads, but also removed our uncertainty regarding Lee's movements, clearly demonstrating that his army was retiring by its right flank, so that it might continue to interpose between Grant and the James River; as well as cover the direct route to Richmond.

General Lee reported this battle to his Government as a Confederate victory, but his despatch was sent early in the day, long before the fight ended, and evidently he could not have known the final result when he made the announcement, for the fight lasted until dark. After dark, our own and the Confederate dead having been buried, I withdrew, and moving to the rear of our infantry, marched all night and till I reached the vicinity of Old Church, where I had been instructed to keep a vigilant watch on the enemy with Gregg's and Torbert's divisions. As soon as I had taken position at Old Church my pickets were pushed out in the direction of Cold Harbor, and the fact that the enemy was holding that point in some force was clearly ascertained. But our occupation of Cold Harbor was of the utmost importance; indeed, it was absolutely necessary that we should possess it, to secure our communications with the White House, as well as to cover the extension of our line to the left toward the James River. Roads from Bethesda Church, Old Church, and the White House centred at Cold Harbor, and from there many roads diverged also toward different crossings of the Chickahominy, which were indispensable to us.

The enemy too realized the importance of the place, for as soon as he found himself compelled to take up the line of the Toloatomy he threw a body of troops into Cold Harbor by forced marches, and followed it up by pushing a part of this force out on the Old Church road as far as Matadequin Creek, where he established a line of battle, arranging the front of it parallel to the road along the south bank of the Pamunkey; this for the purpose of endangering our trains as they moved back and forth between the army and the White House.



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Meanwhile I had occupied Old Church and pushed pickets down toward Cold Harbor. The outposts struck each other just north of Matadequin Creek, and a spirited fight immediately took place. At first our pickets were sorely pressed, but Torbert, who was already preparing to make a reconnoissance, lost no time in reinforcing them on the north side of the creek with Devin's brigade. The fight then became general, both sides, dismounted, stubbornly contesting the ground. Of the Confederates, General Butler's South Carolinians bore the brunt of the fight, and, strongly posted as they were on the south bank of the creek, held their ground with the same obstinacy they had previously shown at Hawe's Shop. Finally, however, Torbert threw Merritt's and Custer's brigades into the action, and the enemy retired, we pursuing to within a mile and a half of Cold Harbor and capturing a number of prisoners. Gregg's division took no part in the actual fighting, but remained near Old Church observing the roads on Torbert's flanks, one leading toward Bethesda Church on his right, the other to his left in the direction of the White House. This latter road Gregg was particularly instructed to keep open, so as to communicate with General W. F. Smith, who was then debarking his corps at the White House, and on the morning of the 31st this general's advance was covered by a brigade which Gregg had sent him for the purpose.

Torbert having pursued toward Cold Harbor the troops he fought at Matadequin Creek, had taken up a position about a mile and a half from that place, on the Old Church road. The morning of the 31st I visited him to arrange for his further advance, intending thus to anticipate an expected attack from Fitzhugh Lee, who was being reinforced by infantry. I met Torbert at Custer's headquarters, and found that the two had already been talking over a scheme to capture Cold Harbor, and when their plan was laid before me it appeared so plainly feasible that I fully endorsed it, at once giving directions for its immediate execution, and ordering Gregg to come forward to Torbert's support with such troops as he could spare from the duty with which he had been charged.

Torbert moved out promptly, Merritt's brigade first, followed by Custer's, on the direct road to Cold Harbor, while Devin's brigade was detached, and marched by a left-hand road that would bring him in on the right and rear of the enemy's line, which was posted in front of the crossroads. Devin was unable to carry his part of the programme farther than to reach the front of the Confederate right, and as Merritt came into position to the right of the Old Church road Torbert was obliged to place a part of Custer's brigade on Merritt's left so as to connect with Devin. The whole division was now in line, confronted by Fitzhugh Lee's cavalry, supported by Clingman's brigade from Hoke's division of infantry; and from the Confederate breastworks, hastily constructed out of logs, rails,

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and earth, a heavy fire was already being poured upon us that it seemed impossible to withstand. None of Gregg's division had yet arrived, and so stubborn was the enemy's resistance that I began to doubt our ability to carry the place before reinforcements came up, but just then Merritt reported that he could turn the enemy's left, and being directed to execute his proposition, he carried it to a most successful issue with the First and Second regular cavalry. Just as these two regiments passed around the enemy's left and attacked his rear, the remainder of the division assailed him in front. This manoeuvre of Merritt's stampeded the Confederates, and the defenses falling into our hands easily, we pushed ahead on the Bottom's bridge road three-fourths of a mile beyond Cold Harbor.

Cold Harbor was now mine, but I was about nine miles away from our nearest infantry, and had been able to bring up only Davies's brigade of cavalry, which arrived after the fight. My isolated position therefore made me a little uneasy. I felt convinced that the enemy would attempt to regain the place, for it was of as much importance to him as to us, and the presence of his infantry disclosed that he fully appreciated this. My uneasiness increased as the day grew late, for I had learned from prisoners that the balance of Hoke's division was en route to Cold Harbor, and Kershaw near at hand, interposing between the Union left near Bethesda Church and my position. In view of this state of affairs, I notified General Meade that I had taken Cold Harbor, but could not with safety to my command hold it, and forthwith gave directions to withdraw during the night. The last of my troops had scarcely pulled out, however, when I received a despatch from Meade directing me to hold Cold Harbor at every hazard. General Grant had expected that a severe battle would have to be fought before we could obtain possession of the place; and its capture by our cavalry not being anticipated, no preparation had been made for its permanent occupancy. No time was to be lost, therefore, if the advantages which possession of Cold Harbor gave us were to be improved, so at the same hour that Meade ordered me to hold the place at all hazards the Sixth Corps was started on a forced march, by Grant's directions, to aid in that object, and on arrival to relieve my cavalry.

The moment Meade's order was received, I directed a reoccupation of Cold Harbor, and although a large portion of Torbert's command was already well on its way back to the line we held on the morning of the 31st, this force speedily retraced its steps, and re-entered the place before daylight; both our departure and return having been effected without the enemy being aware of our movements. We now found that the temporary breastworks of rails and logs which the Confederates had built were of incalculable benefit to us in furnishing material with which to establish a line of defense, they being made available



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by simply reversing them at some points, or at others wholly reconstructing them to suit the circumstances of the ground: The troops, without reserves, were then placed behind our cover dismounted, boxes of ammunition distributed along the line, and the order passed along that the place must be held. All this was done in the darkness, and while we were working away at our cover the enemy could be distinctly heard from our skirmish-line giving commands and making preparations to attack.

Just after daylight on the 1st of June the Confederate infantry under General Kershaw endeavored to drive us out, advancing against my right from the Bethesda Church road. In his assault he was permitted to come close up to our works, and when within short range such a fire was opened on him from our horse-artillery and repeating carbines that he recoiled in confusion after the first onset; still, he seemed determined to get the place, and after reorganizing, again attacked; but the lesson of the first repulse was not without effect, and his feeble effort proved wholly fruitless. After his second failure we were left undisturbed, and at 9 A.M. I sent the following despatch to army headquarters:

*“Headquarters cavalry corps,
“Army of the Potomac.
“Cold Harbor, Va., June 1, 1864—9 A.M.*

*“Major-general Humphreys,
“Chief-of-Staff.*

“General: In obedience to your instructions I am holding Cold Harbor. I have captured this morning more prisoners; they belong to three different infantry brigades. The enemy assaulted the right of my lines this morning, but were handsomely repulsed. I have been very apprehensive, but General Wright is now coming up. I built slight works for my men; the enemy came up to them, and were driven back. General Wright has just arrived.

*“P. H. Sheridan,
“Major-General Commanding.”*

About 10 o'clock in the morning the Sixth Corps relieved Torbert and Davies, having marched all night, and these two generals moving out toward the Chickahominy covered the left of the infantry line till Hancock's corps took their place in the afternoon. By this time Gregg had joined me with his two brigades, and both Torbert and Gregg were now marched to Prospect Church, from which point I moved them to a position on the north side of the Chickahominy at Bottom's bridge. Here the enemy's cavalry confronted us, occupying the south bank of the stream, with artillery in position at the fords prepared to dispute our passage; but it was not intended that we should cross; so

Gregg and Torbert lay quiet in camp at Bottom's bridge and at Old Church without noteworthy event until the 6th of June.



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As before related, Wilson's division struck the enemy's infantry as well as W. H. F. Lee's cavalry near Ashland on the 1st of June, and although Chapman destroyed the bridges over the South Anna, which was his part of the programme, Wilson found it necessary to return to Price's Store. From this point he continued to cover the right of the Army of the Potomac, on the 2d of June driving the rear-guard of the enemy from Hawe's Shop, the scene of the battle of May 28. The same day he crossed Tolopotomy Creek, and passed around the enemy's left flank so far that Lee thought his left was turned by a strong force, and under cover of darkness withdrew from a menacing position which he was holding in front of the Ninth Corps. This successful manoeuvre completed, Wilson returned to Hawe's Shop, and on the 4th went into camp at New Castle ferry, in anticipation of certain operations of the Cavalry Corps, which were to take place while the Army of the Potomac was crossing to the south side of the James.

CHAPTER XXI.

The movement to the James—the second expedition—battle of Trevillian station—defeat of general Wade Hampton—Mallory's crossroads—suffering of the wounded—securing the trains—general Gregg's stubborn fight.

By the 6th of June General Grant again determined to continue the movement of the army by its left flank to the south bank of the James River, his unsuccessful attack on the enemy's works near Cold Harbor having demonstrated that Lee's position north of the Chickahominy could not be carried by assault with results that would compensate for the enormous loss of life which must follow; therefore a further attempt to fight a decisive battle north of Richmond was abandoned. In carrying the army to the James River the hazardous manoeuvres would be hampered by many obstacles, such as the thick timber, underbrush, and troublesome swamps to be met in crossing the Chickahominy. Besides, Lee held an interior line, from which all the direct roads to Richmond could be covered with his infantry, leaving his cavalry free to confront our advance on the south bank of the Chickahominy as far down as Jones's bridge, and thence around to Charles City Court House. In view of these difficulties it became necessary to draw off the bulk of the enemy's cavalry while the movement to the James was in process of execution, and General Meade determined to do this by requiring me to proceed with two divisions as far as Charlottesville to destroy the railroad bridge over the Rivanna River near that town, the railroad itself from the Rivanna to Gordonsville, and, if practicable, from Gordonsville back toward Hanover Junction also.

*"Headquarters army of the Potomac,
"June 5, 1864. 3.30 P. M.*



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“Major-general Sheridan, Commanding Cavalry Corps.

“I am directed by the major-general commanding to furnish the following instructions for your guidance in the execution of the duty referred to in the order for movements and changes of position to-night, a copy of which order accompanies this communication.

“With two divisions of your corps you will move on the morning of the 7th instant to Charlottesville and destroy the railroad bridge over the Rivanna near that town; you will then thoroughly destroy the railroad from that point to Gordonsville, and from Gordonsville toward Hanover Junction, and to the latter point, if practicable. The chief engineer, Major Duane, will furnish you a canvas pontoon-train of eight boats. The chief quartermaster will supply you with such tools, implements, and materials as you may require for the destruction of the road. Upon the completion of this duty you will rejoin this army.

*“A. Humphreys,
“Major-General, Chief-of-Staff.”*

After Meade’s instructions reached me they were somewhat modified by General Grant, who on the same evening had received information that General Hunter, commanding the troops in West Virginia, had reached Staunton and engaged with advantage the Confederate commander, General Jones, near that place. General Grant informed me orally that he had directed Hunter to advance as far as Charlottesville, that he expected me to unite with him there, and that the two commands, after destroying the James River canal and the Virginia Central road, were to join the Army of the Potomac in the manner contemplated in my instructions from General Meade; and that in view of what was anticipated, it would be well to break up as much of the railroad as possible on my way westward. A copy of his letter to Hunter comprised my written instructions. A junction with this general was not contemplated when the expedition was first conceived, but became an important though not the paramount object after the reception of the later information. The diversion of the enemy’s cavalry from the south side of the Chickahominy was its main purpose, for in the presence of such a force as Lee’s contracted lines would now permit him to concentrate behind the Chickahominy, the difficulties of crossing that stream would be largely increased if he also had at hand a strong body of horse, to gain the time necessary for him to oppose the movement at the different crossings with masses of his infantry.

The order calling for two divisions for the expedition, I decided to take Gregg’s and Torbert’s, leaving Wilson’s behind to continue with the infantry in its march to the James and to receive instructions directly from, the headquarters of the army. All my dismounted men had been sent to the White House some days before, and they were directed to report to Wilson as they could be provided with mounts.

“Cold Harbor, Va., June 6, 1864.



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“Major-general D. Hunter, Commanding Dept West Virginia.

“General Sheridan leaves here to-morrow morning with instructions to proceed to Charlottesville, Va., and to commence there the destruction of the Virginia Central railroad, destroying this way as much as possible. The complete destruction of this road and of the canal on James River is of great importance to us. According to the instructions I sent to General Halleck for your guidance, you will proceed to Lynchburg and commence there. It would be of great value to us to get possession of Lynchburg for a single day. But that point is of so much importance to the enemy, that in attempting to get it such resistance may be met as to defeat your getting into the road or canal at all. I see, in looking over the letter to General Halleck on the subject of your instructions, that it rather indicates that your route should be from Staunton via Charlottesville. If you have so understood it, you will be doing just what I want. The direction I would now give is, that if this letter reaches you in the valley between Staunton and Lynchburg, you immediately turn east by the most practicable road until you strike the Lynchburg branch of the Virginia Central road. From there move eastward along the line of the road, destroying it completely and thoroughly, until you join General Sheridan. After the work laid out for General Sheridan and yourself is thoroughly done, proceed to join the Army of the Potomac by the route laid out in General Sheridan’s instructions. If any portion of your force, especially your cavalry, is needed back in your department, you are authorized to send it back. If on receipt of this you should be near to Lynchburg and deem it practicable to reach that point, you will exercise your judgment about going there. If you should be on the railroad between Charlottesville and Lynchburg, it may be practicable to detach a cavalry force to destroy the canal. Lose no opportunity to destroy the canal.

“U. S. Grant, Lieutenant-General.”

Owing to the hard service of the preceding month we had lost many horses, so the number of dismounted men was large; and my strength had also been much reduced by killed and wounded during the same period of activity. The effective mounted force of my two divisions was therefore much diminished, they mustering only about six thousand officers and men when concentrated on June 6 at New Castle ferry. Here they were provided with three days’ rations, intended to last five days, and with two days’ grain for the horses. The rations and forty rounds of ammunition per man were to be carried on the persons of the troopers, the grain on the pommel of the saddle, and the reserve ammunition in wagons. One medical wagon and eight ambulances were also furnished, and one wagon was authorized for each division and brigade headquarters; enough canvas-covered boats for a small pontoon-bridge were also provided.



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My instructions permitting latitude in the route I should take, I decided to march along the north bank of the North Anna River, cross that stream at Carpenter's ford, strike the Virginia Central railroad at Trevillian Station, destroy it toward Louisa Court House, march past Gordonsville, strike the railroad again at Cobham's Station, and destroy it thence to Charlottesville as we proceeded west. The success of the last part of this programme would of course depend on the location of General Hunter when I should arrive in the region where it would be practicable for us to communicate with each other.

From my camp at New Castle ferry we crossed the Pamunkey, marched between Aylett's and Dunkirk on the Mattaponi River, and on the 8th of June encamped at Polecat Station. The next day we resumed the march along the North Anna—our advance guard skirmishing with a few mounted men of the enemy, who proved to be irregulars—and bivouacked on Northeast Creek, near Young's Mills. This day I learned from some of these irregulars whom we made prisoners that Breckenridge's division of infantry, en route to the Shenandoah Valley by way of Gordonsville, was passing slowly up the railroad parallel to me, and that the enemy's cavalry had left its position on the south side of the Chickahominy, and was marching on the old Richmond and Gordonsville road toward Gordonsville, under command of General Wade Hampton, the information being confirmed by a scouting party sent out to cut the telegraph wires along the railroad in the night. Breckenridge had been ordered back to the valley by General Lee as soon as he heard of Hunter's victory near Staunton, but now that my expedition had been discovered, the movement of Breckenridge's troops on the railroad was being timed to correspond with the marches of my command till Hampton could get more nearly parallel with me.

On the 10th we resumed the march, passing by Twyman's store, crossing the North Anna at Carpenter's ford and encamping on the road leading along the south fork of the North Anna to Trevillian Station. During the evening and night of the 10th the boldness of the enemy's scouting parties, with which we had been coming into collision more or less every day, perceptibly increased, thus indicating the presence of a large force, and evidencing that his shorter line of march had enabled him to bring to my front a strong body of cavalry, although it started from Lee's army nearly two days later than I did from Grant's. The arrival of this body also permitted Breckenridge to pass on to Gordonsville, and from there to interpose between General Hunter and me at either Charlottesville or Waynesboro' as circumstances might determine.

On the night of the 10th General Hampton's division camped about three miles northwest of Trevillian, at a place called Green Spring Valley and Fitzhugh Lee's division not far from Louisa Court House, some six miles east of Trevillian. Learning that I was at Carpenter's ford, Hampton marched his division by way of Trevillian Station toward Clayton's store, on the road from Trevillian to Carpenter's ford, intending to attack me at Clayton's. Fitzhugh Lee's division was to join Hampton at Clayton's store from Louisa Court House; but on the morning of the 11th the two generals were separated by several miles.

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At daylight of the 11th my march, to Trevillian Station was resumed on the direct road to that point, and engaging the enemy's pickets and advanced parties soon after setting out, we began to drive them in. Torbert had the lead with Merritt's and Devin's brigades, and as he pressed back the pickets he came upon the enemy posted behind a line of barricades in dense timber about three miles from Trevillian. Meanwhile Custer's brigade had been sent from where we bivouacked, by a wood road found on our left, to destroy Trevillian Station. In following this road Custer got to the rear of Hampton's division, having passed between its right flank and Fitzhugh Lee's division, which was at the time marching on the road leading from Louisa Court House to Clayton's store to unite with Hampton.

Custer, the moment he found himself in Hampton's rear, charged the led horses, wagons, and caissons found there, getting hold of a vast number of each, and also of the station itself. The stampede and havoc wrought by Custer in Hampton's rear compelled him to turn Rosser's brigade in that direction, and while it attacked Custer on one side, Fitzhugh Lee's division, which had followed Custer toward Trevillian, attacked him on the other. There then ensued a desperate struggle for the possession of the captured property, resulting finally in its being retaken by the enemy. Indeed, the great number of horses and vehicles could not be kept on the limited space within Custer's line, which now formed almost a complete circle; and while he was endeavoring to remove them to a secure place they, together with Custer's headquarters wagon and four of his caissons, fell into the hands of their original owners.

As soon as the firing told that Custer had struck the enemy's rear, I directed Torbert to press the line in front of Merritt and Devin, aided by one brigade of Gregg's division on their left, Gregg's other brigade in the meantime attacking Fitzhugh Lee on the Louisa Court House road. The effect of this was to force Hampton back, and his division was so hard pushed that a portion of it was driven pell-mell into Custer's lines, leaving there about five hundred prisoners. The rest of Hampton's men did not rally till they got some distance west of Trevillian, while, in the meantime, Gregg had driven Fitzhugh Lee toward Louisa Court House so far that many miles now intervened between the two Confederate divisions, precluding their union until about noon the next day, when Fitzhugh Lee effected the junction after a circuitous march in the night. The defeat of Hampton at the point where he had determined to resist my further advance, and his retreat westward, gave me undisturbed possession of the station; and after destroying the railroad to some extent toward Gordonsville, I went into camp.

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From prisoners taken during the day, I gathered that General Hunter, instead of coming toward Charlottesville, as I had reason to expect, both from the instructions given me and the directions sent him by General Grant, was in the neighborhood of Lexington—apparently moving on Lynchburg—and that Breckenridge was at Gordonsville and Charlottesville. I also heard, from the same source, that Ewell's corps was on its way to Lynchburg, but this intelligence proved afterward to be incorrect, for these troops, commanded by General Early, did not leave Richmond till two days later.

There was no doubt as to the information about Hunter's general location, however. He was marching toward Lynchburg, away from instead of toward me, thus making the junction of our commands beyond all reasonable probability. So in view of this, I made up my mind to abandon that part of the scheme, and to return by leisurely marches, which would keep Hampton's cavalry away from Lee while Grant was crossing the James River. I was still further influenced to this course by the burden which was thrown on me in the large number of wounded—there being about five hundred cases of my own—and the five hundred prisoners that I would probably be forced to abandon, should I proceed farther. Besides, the recent battle had reduced my supply of ammunition to a very small amount—not more than enough for one more respectable engagement; and as the chances were that I would have to fight a great deal before I could reach Hunter, now that the enemy's cavalry and Breckenridge's infantry were between us, the risks of the undertaking seemed too great to warrant it.

The morning of June 12 Gregg's division commenced destroying the railroad to Louisa Court House, and continued the work during the day, breaking it pretty effectually. While Gregg was thus occupied, I directed Torbert to make a reconnoissance up the Gordonsville road, to secure a by-road leading over Mallory's ford, on the North Anna, to the Catharpen road, as I purposed following that route to Spottsylvania Court House on my return, and thence via Bowling Green and Dunkirk to the White House. About a mile beyond Trevillian the Gordonsville road fork—the left fork leading to Charlottesville—and about a mile beyond the fork Hampton had taken up and strongly intrenched a line across both roads, being reinforced by Fitzhugh Lee, who, as before related, had joined him about noon by a roundabout march. Torbert soon hotly engaged this line, and by the impetuosity of his first attack, gained some advantage; but the appearance of Fitzhugh Lee's troops on the right, and Hampton's strong resistance in front, rendered futile all efforts to carry the position; and, although I brought up one of Gregg's brigades to Torbert's assistance, yet the by-road I coveted was still held by the enemy when night closed in.



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This engagement, like that of the day before around Trevillian, was mostly fought dismounted by both sides, as had also been the earlier fights of the cavalry during the summer in the Wilderness, at Todd's Tavern, Hawe's Shop, and Matadequin Creek. Indeed, they could hardly have been fought otherwise than on foot, as there was little chance for mounted fighting in eastern Virginia, the dense woods, the armament of both parties, and the practice of barricading making it impracticable to use the sabre with anything like a large force; and so with the exception of Yellow Tavern the dismounted method prevailed in almost every engagement.

The losses at Mallory's Crossroads were very heavy on both sides. The character of the fighting, together with the day's results, demonstrated that it was impossible to make the passage of the North Anna at Mallory's ford without venturing another battle the next day. This would consume the little ammunition left, and though we might gain the road, yet the possibility of having no ammunition whatever to get back with was too great a hazard, so I gave orders to withdraw during the night of the 12th. We retired along the same road by which we had come, taking with us the prisoners, and all of our wounded who could be moved. Those who could not be transported, some ninety in number, and all the Confederate wounded in my hands, were left at Trevillian in hospitals, under charge of one of our surgeons, with plenty of medical and other stores.

We recrossed the North Anna at Carpenter's ford the following morning, and halting there, unsaddled and turned the horses out to graze, for they were nearly famished, having had neither food nor water during the preceding forty-eight hours. Late in the afternoon we saddled up and proceeded to Twyman's Store, while General Hampton's main body moved down the south bank of the North Anna, with the purpose of intervening between me and the Army of the Potomac, in the hope of preventing my return to it; but his movements took no definite shape beyond watching me, however, till several days later, near St. Mary's Church, when I was crossing the peninsula to the James River.

On the 14th the march was continued, and we reached the Catharpen road, upon which it was originally intended to move if we had been able to cross at Mallory's ford, and this conducted me to Shady Grove Church. The next day we passed over the battle-field of Spottsylvania Court House. The marks of the recent conflicts about there were visible on every hand, and in the neighboring houses were found many Union and Confederate wounded, who had been too severely hurt to be removed from the field-hospitals at the time of the battles. Such of our wounded as were able to travel were brought away.

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On the 16th I marched from Edge Hill on the Ta River through Bowling Green to Dr. Butler's, on the north side of the Mattapony. When I arrived here I was unable to ascertain the position of the Army of the Potomac, and was uncertain whether or not the base at the White House had been discontinued. I had heard nothing from the army for nine days except rumors through Southern sources, and under these circumstances did not like to venture between the Mattapony and Pamunkey rivers, embarrassed as I was with some four hundred wounded, five hundred prisoners, and about two thousand negroes that had joined my column in the hope of obtaining their freedom. I therefore determined to push down the north bank of the Mattapony far enough to enable me to send these impediments directly to West Point, where I anticipated finding some of our gunboats and transports, that could carry all to the North. Following this plan, we proceeded through Walkerton to King and Queen Court House, and bivouacked in its vicinity the night of the 18th. Next day I learned that the depot at the White House had not yet been broken up entirely, and that supplies were in store for me there; so after sending the wounded, prisoners, and negroes to West Point under an escort of two regiments, I turned back to Dunkirk, on the Mattapony, and crossed to the south side at a place where the stream was narrow enough to bridge with my pontoon-boats.

In returning from Trevillian, as the most of our wounded were hauled in old buggies, carts, and such other vehicles as could be made available in the absence of a sufficient number of ambulances, the suffering was intense, the heat of the season and dusty roads adding much to the discomfort. Each day we halted many times to dress the wounds of the injured and to refresh them as much as possible, but our means for mitigating their distress were limited. The fortitude and cheerfulness of the poor fellows under such conditions were remarkable, for no word of complaint was heard. The Confederate prisoners and colored people being on foot, our marches were necessarily made short, and with frequent halts also, but they too suffered considerably from the heat and dust, though at times the prisoners were relieved by being mounted on the horses of some of our regiments, the owners meantime marching on foot. Where all the colored people came from and what started them was inexplicable, but they began joining us just before we reached Trevillian—men, women, and children with bundles of all sorts containing their few worldly goods, and the number increased from day to day until they arrived at West Point. Probably not one of the poor things had the remotest idea, when he set out, as to where he would finally land, but to a man they followed the Yankees in full faith that they would lead to freedom, no matter what road they took.

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On the morning of the 20th, at an early hour, we resumed our march, and as the column proceeded sounds of artillery were heard in the direction of the White House, which fact caused us to quicken the pace. We had not gone far when despatches from General Abercrombie, commanding some fragmentary organizations at the White House, notified me that the place was about to be attacked. I had previously sent an advance party with orders to move swiftly toward the cannonading and report to me by couriers the actual condition of affairs. From this party I soon learned that there was no occasion to push our jaded animals, since the crisis, if there had been one, was over and the enemy repulsed, so the increased gait was reduced to a leisurely march that took us late in the afternoon to the north bank of the Pamunkey, opposite Abercrombie's camp. When I got to the river the enemy was holding the bluffs surrounding the White House farm, having made no effort to penetrate General Abercrombie's line or do him other hurt than to throw a few shells among the teamsters there congregated.

Next day Gregg's division crossed the Pamunkey dismounted, and Torbert's crossed mounted. As soon as the troops were over, Gregg, supported by Merritt's brigade, moved out on the road to Tunstall's Station to attack Hampton, posted on the west side of Black Creek, Custer's brigade meanwhile moving, mounted, on the road to Cumberland, and Devin's in like manner on the one to Baltimore crossroads. This offer of battle was not accepted, however, and Hampton withdrew from my front, retiring behind the Chickahominy, where his communications with Lee would be more secure.

While at the White House I received orders to break up that depot wholly, and also instructions to move the trains which the Army of the Potomac had left there across the peninsula to the pontoon-bridge at Deep Bottom on the James River. These trains amounted to hundreds of wagons and other vehicles, and knowing full well the dangers which would attend the difficult problem of getting them over to Petersburg, I decided to start them with as little delay as circumstances would permit, and the morning of the 22d sent Torbert's division ahead to secure Jones's bridge on the Chickahominy, so that the wagons could be crossed at that point. The trains followed Torbert, while Gregg's division marched by a road parallel to the one on which the wagons were moving, and on their right flank, as they needed to be covered and protected in that direction only.

The enemy made no effort to attack us while we were moving the trains that day, and the wagons were all safely parked for the night on the south side of the Chickahominy, guarded by General Getty, who had relieved Abercrombie from command of the infantry fragments before we started off from the White House.

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To secure the crossing at Jones's bridge, Torbert had pushed Devin's brigade out on the Long Bridge road, on the side of the Chickahominy where, on the morning of the 23d, he was attacked by Chambliss's brigade of W. H. F. Lee's division. Devin was driven in some little distance, but being reinforced by Getty with six companies of colored troops, he quickly turned the tables on Chambliss and re-established his picket-posts. From this affair I learned that Chambliss's brigade was the advance of the Confederate cavalry corps, while Hampton discovered from it that we were already in possession of the Jones's bridge crossing of the Chickahominy; and as he was too late to challenge our passage of the stream at this point he contented himself with taking up a position that night so as to cover the roads leading from Long Bridge to Westover, with the purpose of preventing the trains from following the river road to the pontoon-bridge at Deep Bottom.

My instructions required me to cross the trains over the James River on this pontoon-bridge if practicable, and to reach it I should be obliged to march through Charles City Court House, and then by Harrison's Landing and Malvern Hill, the latter point being held by the enemy. In fact, he held all the ground between Long Bridge on the Chickahominy and the pontoon-bridge except the Tete de pont at the crossing. Notwithstanding this I concluded to make the attempt, for all the delays of ferrying the command and trains would be avoided if we got through to the bridge; and with this object in view I moved Torbert's division out on the Charles City road to conduct the wagons. Just beyond Charles City Court House Torbert encountered Lomax's brigade, which he drove across Herring Creek on the road to Westover Church; and reporting the affair to me, I surmised, from the presence of this force in my front, that Hampton would endeavor to penetrate to the long column of wagons, so I ordered them to go into park near Wilcox's landing, and instructed Gregg, whose division had been marching in the morning along the road leading from Jones's bridge to St. Mary's Church for the purpose of covering the exposed flank of the train, to hold fast near the church without fail till all the transportation had passed Charles City Court House.

Meanwhile, General Hampton, who had conjectured that I would try to get the train across the James by the pontoon-bridge at Deep Bottom, began concentrating all his troops except Lomax's brigade, which was to confront the head of my column on the river road, in the vicinity of Nance's Shop. This was discovered by Gregg at an early hour, and divining this purpose he had prepared to meet it by constructing hasty cover for his men before receiving my instructions. About 4 o'clock in the afternoon Hampton got his force in hand, and with Fitzhugh Lee's division assailed the whole front of Gregg's line, and his left flank with Chambliss's and Geary's brigades. For two hours he



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continued to attack, but made little impression on Gregg—gain at one point being counterbalanced by failure at another. Because of the evident strength of Hampton, Gregg had placed all his troops in line of battle from the first, and on discovery of the enemy's superior numbers sent message after message to me concerning the situation, but the messengers never arrived, being either killed or captured, and I remained in total ignorance till dark of the strait his division was in.

Toward night it became clear to Gregg that he could maintain the unequal contest no longer, and he then decided to retreat, but not until convinced that the time won had enabled all the trains to pass Charles City Court House in safety. When he had got all his led horses fairly on the way, and such of the wounded as could be transported, he retired by his right flank—in some confusion, it is true, but stubbornly resisting to Hopewell Church, where Hampton ceased to press him.

Gregg's losses were heavy, and he was forced to abandon his dead and most seriously wounded, but the creditable stand made ensured the safety of the train, the last wagon of which was now parked at Wilcox's Landing. His steady, unflinching determination to gain time for the wagons to get beyond the point of danger was characteristic of the man, and this was the third occasion on which he had exhibited a high order of capacity and sound judgment since coming under my command. The firmness and coolness with which he always met the responsibilities of a dangerous place were particularly strong points in Gregg's make-up, and he possessed so much professional though unpretentious ability, that it is to be regretted he felt obliged a few months later to quit the service before the close of the war.

Gregg's fight fully satisfied me that we could not get the trains up to the pontoon-bridge, for of course Hampton would now throw all his cavalry in my front, on the river road, where it could be backed up by Lee's infantry. Meanwhile, General Meade had become assured of the same thing, and as he was now growing anxious about the fate of Wilson's division—which, during my absence, had been sent out to break the enemy's communications south of Petersburg, by destroying the Southside and Danville railroads—he sent ferryboats to cross me over the James. During the night of the 24th, and next morning, the immense train—which ought never to have been left for the cavalry to escort, after a fatiguing expedition of three weeks—was moved back through Charles City Court House to Douthard's landing, and there ferried over the river, followed by my troops in like manner. When General Hampton discovered this, he moved to Drury's Bluff, and there, on the morning of the 27th, crossed the James by the Confederate pontoon-bridge.



CHAPTER XXII.

*General Wilson's raid—destroying railroads—his discomfiture
—results of his raid—REMOUNTS—movement to the north side of the
James—deceiving Lee—my isolated position—estimate of Hancock
—success of the cavalry—their constant duties.*



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While I was absent on the expedition to Trevillian, the movement of the Army of the Potomac across the James River was effected, and Wilson, whom I had left behind for the purpose, was engaged in the duty of covering its front and rear. Late on the night of June 12 he, with Chapman's brigade, crossed the Chickahominy at Long Bridge, in advance of the Fifth Corps, and by 7 o'clock next morning had driven the enemy's pickets up to White Oak bridge, where he waited for our infantry. When that came up, he pushed on as far as Riddle's Shop, but late that evening the Confederate infantry forced him to withdraw to St. Mary's Church; for early in the morning General Lee had discovered the movement of our army, and promptly threw this column of infantry south of the Chickahominy to White Oak Swamp, with the design of covering Richmond. From St. Mary's Church Wilson guarded all the roads toward White Oak Swamp and Riddle's Shop, McIntosh's brigade joining him on the 14th, by way of Long Bridge, as the rear of the Army of the Potomac passed the Chickahominy. In the performance of this duty Wilson did not have to fight any engagement of magnitude, for the bulk of the enemy's cavalry had followed me to Trevillian. During the 15th and 16th Wilson drew his troops in toward the James River, and next day crossed it on the pontoon-bridge and camped on the Blackwater, near Mt. Sinai Church. Here he remained till the 22d of June—the same day I reached the White House with Gregg and Torbert—when, under orders from General Meade, he set out to cut the enemy's communications to the south and southwest of Petersburg.

His instructions implied that the breaking up of the Petersburg and Lynchburg, and Richmond and Danville railroads at Burkeville was the most important part of his mission, and that when the work of destruction began, it should be continued till he was driven off by the enemy. Wilson's force consisted of about 5,500 men, General A. V. Kautz, with the cavalry of the Army of the James, having joined him for the expedition. In moving out Wilson crossed the Weldon road near Ream's Station, first destroying it effectually at that point. About fourteen miles west of Petersburg he struck the Southside railroad, and broke it up clear to Burkeville, a distance of thirty miles. Having destroyed everything at Burkeville Junction, he moved along the Danville road to Staunton River, completely wrecking about thirty miles of that line also. At Staunton River he found the railroad bridge strongly guarded, and seeing that he could not burn it, he began his return march that night, and reached Nottoway River, some thirty miles south of Petersburg, at noon of the next day—the 28th.

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In this expedition Wilson was closely followed from the start by Barringer's brigade of W. H. F. Lee's cavalry, but the operations were not interfered with materially, his success being signal till he reached the vicinity of Stony Creek depot on his return. At this point General Hampton, with his own and Fitzhugh Lee's cavalry, got between Wilson and the Army of the Potomac, there being behind them at Ream's Station, at the same time, two brigades of infantry under General Mahone. A severe battle ensued, resulting in Wilson's defeat, with the loss of twelve guns and all his wagons. In consequence of this discomfiture he was obliged to fall back across the Nottoway River with his own division, and rejoined the army by way of Peter's bridge on that stream, while Kautz's division, unable to unite with Wilson after the two commands had become separated in the fight, made a circuit of the enemy's left, and reached the lines of our army in the night of the 28th.

Neither the presence of Hampton's cavalry at Stony Creek depot, nor the possession of Ream's Station by the Confederate infantry, seems to have been anticipated by Wilson, for in the report of the expedition he states:

"Foreseeing the probability of having to return northward, I wrote to General Meade the evening before starting that I anticipated no serious difficulty in executing his orders; but unless General Sheridan was required to keep Hampton's cavalry engaged, and our infantry to prevent Lee from making detachments, we should probably experience great difficulty in rejoining the army. In reply to this note, General Humphreys, chief-of-staff, informed me it was intended the Army of the Potomac should cover the Weldon road the next day, the Southside road the day after, and that Hampton having followed Sheridan toward Gordonsville, I need not fear any trouble from him."

I doubt that General Meade's letter of instructions and Wilson's note of the same evening, warrant what General Wilson here says. It is true that the Weldon railroad near Ream's Station was not covered by our infantry, as General Humphreys informed him it would be, but Wilson is in error when he intimates that he was assured that I would look after Hampton. I do not think General Meade's instructions are susceptible of this interpretation. I received no orders requiring me to detain Hampton. On the contrary, when I arrived at the White House my instructions required me to break up the depot there, and then bring the train across the Peninsula as soon as practicable, nor were these instructions ever modified. I began the duty imposed on me on the morning of the 23d, totally in the dark as to what was expected of Wilson, though it seems, from some correspondence between Generals Grant and Meade, which I never saw till after the war, that Grant thought Wilson could rely on Hampton's absence from his field of operations throughout the expedition.

"Headquarters army of the Potomac,
"June 21, 1864. 9:20 A. M.



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*“Brigadier-general Wilson,
“Commanding Third Division Cavalry Corps.*

“The major-general commanding directs that you move your command at 2 A. M. to-morrow, the 22d instant, in execution of the duty assigned you of destroying certain railroads. Despatches received from the White House state that Hampton’s cavalry was before that place yesterday evening, and that General Sheridan had also reached there, hence it is desirable that you should march at the earliest moment. In passing Petersburg you will endeavor to avoid the observation of the enemy, and then move by the shortest routes to the intersection of the Petersburg and Lynchburg, and the Richmond and Danville railroads, and destroy both these roads to the greatest extent possible, continuing their destruction until driven from it by such attacks of the enemy as you can no longer resist. The destruction of those roads to such an extent that they cannot be used by the enemy in connection with Richmond during the remainder of the campaign is an important part of the plan of campaign. The latest information from Major-General Hunter represents him to be a few miles west of Lynchburg. He may endeavor to form a junction with this army; you will communicate with him if practicable, and have delivered to him verbally the contents of the following copy of a communication from Lieutenant-General Grant to the major-general commanding this army. Lieutenant Brooks, who will accompany your expedition part of the way, should be informed where General Hunter will probably be found.

“The success of your expedition will depend upon the secrecy with which it is commenced, and the celerity with which its movements are conducted; your command will, therefore, have with it the lightest supplies and smallest number of wheels consistent with the thorough execution of the duty, the supplies of the section of country you will operate in being taken into account. Upon the completion of the work assigned you, you will rejoin this army.

“The chief quartermaster was directed yesterday to supply you with the implements and material for the destruction of railroads obtained for General Sheridan.

“[Signed] “A. A. *Humphreys*, “Major-General, Chief-of-Staff.”

*“Headquarters cavalry forces,
Mount Sinai Church, June 21, 1864—6 P.M.*

*“Major-general Humphreys,”
“Chief-of-Staff.*

“The instructions of the major-general commanding, of this date, are received. I shall march in obedience thereto at 2 A. M. to-morrow. Before starting I would like to know if our infantry forces cover the Weldon road.



“I propose striking the Southside road first at Sutherland Station, or some point in that vicinity, tearing up the track sufficiently to delay railroad communication ten or twelve hours. At this place I shall detach a force to strike the Richmond and Danville road, by a rapid march, at the nearest point, tearing up the track at every practicable point between there and Burkeville.



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“From Sutherlands I shall move the main body of my command by the Great road (breaking the railroad at every convenient point) directly to Burkeville, which, if we succeed in capturing, will afford us the opportunity of prosecuting our work with great advantage. As soon as I have made dispositions for communicating with Hunter and done all the damage possible, I shall move with all possible rapidity for Danville and Grenboro’.

“Circumstances must, however, is a great degree control our movements after leaving Burkeville.

“If Sheridan will look after Hampton, I apprehend no difficulty, and hope to be able to do the enemy great damage. The ammunition issued to my command is very defective. The implements for destroying roads have not yet arrived, but I learn from General Ingalls that they will certainly be here early to-morrow.

“[Signed] J. H. *Wilson*, “Brigadier-General Commanding.”

The moment I received orders from General Meade to go to the relief of Wilson, I hastened with Torbert and Gregg by way of Prince George Court House and Lee’s Mills to Ream’s Station. Here I found the Sixth Corps, which Meade had pushed out on his left flank immediately on hearing of Wilson’s mishap, but I was too late to render any material assistance, Wilson having already disappeared, followed by the enemy. However, I at once sent out parties to gather information, and soon learned that Wilson had got safe across the Nottoway at Peter’s bridge and was making for the army by way of Blunt’s bridge, on the Blackwater.

The benefits derived from this expedition, in the destruction of the Southside and Danville railroads, were considered by General Grant as equivalent for the losses sustained in Wilson’s defeat, for the wrecking of the railroads and cars was most complete, occasioning at this, time serious embarrassment to the Confederate Government; but I doubt if all this compensated for the artillery and prisoners that fell into the hands of the enemy in the swamps of Hatcher’s Run and Rowanty Creek. Wilson’s retreat from the perilous situation at Ream’s station was a most creditable performance—in the face of two brigades of infantry and three divisions of cavalry—and in the conduct of the whole expedition the only criticism that can hold against him is that he placed too much reliance on meeting our infantry at Ream’s station, seeing that uncontrollable circumstances might, and did, prevent its being there. He ought to have marched on the 28th by Jarrett’s Station to Peter’s bridge, on the Nottoway, and Blunts bridge on the Blackwater, to the rear of the Army of the Potomac.



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When the safety of Wilson's command was assured, I was ordered back to Light House Point, where I had gone into camp after crossing the James River to rest and recruit my command, now very much reduced in numbers by reason of casualties to both horses and men. It had been marching and fighting for fifty consecutive days, and the fatiguing service had told so fearfully on my animals that the number of dismounted men in the corps was very large. With the exception of about four hundred horses that I received at the White House, no animals were furnished to supply the deficiencies which had arisen from the wearing marches of the past two months until I got to this camp at Light House Point; here my needs were so obvious that they could no longer be neglected.

I remained at Light House Point from the 2d to the 26th of July, recuperating the cavalry, the intensely warm weather necessitating almost an entire suspension of hostilities on the part of the Army of the Potomac. Meanwhile fifteen hundred horses were sent me here, and these, with the four hundred already mentioned, were all that my troops received while I held the personal command of the Cavalry Corps, from April 6 to August 1, 1864. This was not near enough to mount the whole command, so I disposed the men who could not be supplied in a dismounted camp.

By the 26th of July our strength was pretty well restored, and as General Grant was now contemplating offensive operations for the purpose of keeping Lee's army occupied around Richmond, and also of carrying Petersburg by assault if possible, I was directed to move to the north side of the James River in conjunction with General Hancock's corps, and, if opportunity offered, to make a second expedition against the Virginia Central railroad, and again destroy the bridges on the North Anna, the Little and the South Anna rivers.

I started out on the afternoon of the 26th and crossed the Appomattox at Broadway landing. At Deep Bottom I was joined by Kautz's small division from the Army of the James, and here massed the whole command, to allow Hancock's corps to take the lead, it crossing to the north bank of the James River by the bridge below the mouth of Bailey's Creek. I moved late in the afternoon, so as not to come within the enemy's view before dark, and after night-fall Hancock's corps passed me and began crossing the pontoon-bridge about 2 o'clock in the morning.

By daylight Hancock was across, the cavalry following. Soon a portion of his corps attacked the enemy's works on the east side of Bailey's Creek, and, aided by the cavalry moving on its right, captured four pieces of artillery. This opened the way for Hancock to push out his whole corps, and as he advanced by a wheel, with his left as a pivot, the cavalry joined in the movement, pressing forward on the New Market and Central or Charles City roads.

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We did not go far before we found the enemy's infantry posted across these two roads behind a strong line of intrenchments on the west bank of Bailey's Creek. His videttes in front of Ruffin's house on the New Market road were soon driven in on their main line, and the high ground before the house was immediately occupied by Torbert and Gregg, supported by Kautz's division. By the time the cavalry line was formed the Confederate General Kershaw, with his own division of infantry and those of Wilcox and Heath, advanced to attack us. Directing the most of his troops against the cavalry, which was still mounted, Kershaw drove it back some distance over the high ground. When it reached the eastern face of the ridge, however, it was quickly dismounted, and the men directed to lie down in line of battle about fifteen yards from the crest, and here the onset of the enemy was awaited. When Kershaw's men reached the crest such a severe fire was opened on them, and at such close quarters, that they could not withstand it, and gave way in disorder. They were followed across the plain by the cavalry, and lost about two hundred and fifty prisoners and two battle-flags. The counter attack against the infantry by Torbert and Gregg re-established our line and gave us the victory of Darbytown, but it also demonstrated the fact that General Lee had anticipated the movement around his left flank by transferring to the north side of the James a large portion of his infantry and W. H. F. Lee's division of cavalry.

This development rendered useless any further effort on Hancock's part or mine to carry out the plan of the expedition, for General Grant did not intend Hancock to assault the enemy's works unless there should be found in them but a very thin line of infantry which could be surprised. In such event, Hancock was to operate so that the cavalry might turn the Confederates on the Central or Charles City road, but the continually increasing force of the enemy showed this to be impracticable. The long front presented by Hancock's corps and the cavalry deceived General Lee, and he undoubtedly thought that nearly all of Grant's army had been moved to the north side of the James River; and to meet the danger he transferred the most of his own strength to the same side to confront his adversary, thinning the lines around Petersburg to reinforce those opposing us on the Central and New Market roads. This was what Grant hoped Lee would do in case the operations of Hancock and myself became impracticable, for Grant had an alternative plan for carrying Petersburg by assault in conjunction with the explosion of a mine that had been driven under the enemy's works from the front of Burnside's corps.

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Now that there was no longer a chance for the cavalry to turn the enemy's left, our attention was directed to keeping up the deception of Lee, and on the afternoon of the 28th Hancock's corps withdrew to a line nearer the head of the bridge, the cavalry drawing back to a position on his right. From now on, all sorts of devices and stratagems were practiced—anything that would tend to make the Confederates believe we were being reinforced, while Hancock was preparing for a rapid return to Petersburg at the proper time. In order to delude the enemy still more after night-fall of the 28th I sent one of my divisions to the south side of the James, first covering the bridgeway with refuse hay to keep the tramp of the horses from being heard. After daylight the next morning, I marched this division back again on foot, in full view of the enemy, to create the impression of a continuous movement large bodies of infantry to the north side, while the same time Kautz was made to skirmish with the enemy on our extreme right. These various artifices had the effect intended, for by the evening of the 29th Lee had transferred all his infantry to the north bank of the James, except three divisions, and all his cavalry save one.

The morning of the 30th had been fixed upon to explode the mine and assault the enemy's works, so after dark on the evening of the 29th Hancock hastily but quietly withdrew his corps to the south side to take part in the engagement which was to succeed the explosion, and I was directed to follow Hancock. This left me on the north side of the river confronting two-thirds of Lee's army in a perilous position, where I could easily be driven into Curl's Neck and my whole command annihilated. The situation, therefore, was not a pleasant one to contemplate, but it could not be avoided. Luckily the enemy did not see fit to attack, and my anxiety was greatly relieved by getting the whole command safely across the bridge shortly after daylight, having drawn in the different brigades successively from my right. By 10 o'clock on the morning of the 30th my leading division was well over toward the left of our army in front of Petersburg, marching with the purpose to get around the enemy's right flank during the operations that were to succeed the mine explosion, but when I reached General Meade's headquarters I found that lamentable failure had attended the assault made when the enemy's works were blown up in the morning. Blunder after blunder had rendered the assault abortive, and all the opportunities opened by our expedition to the north side were irretrievably lost, so General Meade at once arrested the movement of the cavalry.



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In the expedition to Deep Bottom I was under the command of Major-General Hancock, who, by seniority, was to control my corps as well as his own until the way was opened for me to get out on the Virginia Central railroad. If this opportunity was gained, I was to cut loose and damage Lee's communications with the Shenandoah Valley in such manner as best suited the conditions, but my return was not to be jeopardized nor long delayed. This necessitated that Hancock's line should extend to Bottom's bridge on the Chickahominy. The enemy's early discovery of the movement and his concentration of troops on the north side prevented Hancock from accomplishing the programme laid out for him. Its impracticability was demonstrated early on the 27th, and Hancock's soldierly instincts told him this the moment he unexpectedly discovered Kershaw blocking the New Market and Charles City roads. To Hancock the temptation to assault Kershaw's position was strong indeed, but if he carried it there would still remain the dubious problem of holding the line necessary for my safe return, so with rare judgment he desisted zealously turning to the alternative proposition—the assault on Petersburg—for more significant results. This was the only occasion during the war in which I was associated with Hancock in campaign. Up till then we had seldom met, and that was the first opportunity I had to observe his quick apprehension, his physical courage, and the soldierly personality which had long before established his high reputation.

On the 1st of August, two days after the mine explosion, I was relieved from the personal command of the Cavalry Corps, and ordered to the Shenandoah Valley, where at a later date Torbert's and Wilson's divisions joined me. Practically, after I went to the valley, my command of the Cavalry Corps became supervisory merely. During the period of my immediate control of the corps, I tried to carry into effect, as far as possible, the views I had advanced before and during the opening of the Wilderness campaign, *i.e.*, "that our cavalry ought to fight the enemy's cavalry, and our infantry the enemy's infantry"; for there was great danger of breaking the spirit of the corps if it was to be pitted against the enemy's compact masses of foot-troops posted behind intrenchments, and unless there was some adequate tactical or strategical advantage to be gained, such a use of it would not be justified. Immediately succeeding the battles of the Wilderness, opportunity offered to put this plan into execution to some extent, and from that time forward—from the battle of Yellow Tavern—our success was almost continuous, resulting finally, before the close of the war, in the nearly total annihilation of the enemy's cavalry.



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The constant activity of the corps from May 5 till August 1 gave little opportunity for the various division and brigade commanders to record its work in detail; so there exists but meagre accounts of the numerous skirmishes and graver conflicts in which, in addition to the fights mentioned in this narrative, it engaged. A detailed history of its performances is not within the province of a work of this nature; but in review, it can be said, without trespassing on the reader's time, that the Cavalry Corps led the advance of the Army of the Potomac into the Wilderness in the memorable campaign of 1864; that on the expedition by way of Richmond to Haxall's it marked out the army's line of march to the North Anna; that it again led the advance to the Toloatomy, and also to Cold Harbor, holding that important strategic point at great hazard; and that by the Trevillian expedition it drew away the enemy's cavalry from the south side of the Chickahominy, and thereby assisted General Grant materially in successfully marching to the James River and Petersburg. Subsequently, Wilson made his march to Staunton bridge, destroying railroads and supplies of inestimable value, and though this was neutralized by his disaster near Ream's Station, the temporary set-back there to one division was soon redeemed by victory over the Confederate infantry at the battle of Darbytown.

In the campaign we were almost always on the march, night and day, often unable to care properly for our wounded, and obliged to bury our dead where they fell; and innumerable combats attest the part the cavalry played in Grant's march from the Rapidan to Petersburg. In nearly all of these our casualties were heavy, particularly so when, as was often the case, we had to engage the Confederate infantry; but the enemy returned such a full equivalent in dead and wounded in every instance, that finally his mounted power, which from the beginning of the war had been nurtured with a wise appreciation of its value, was utterly broken.

CHAPTER XXIII.

General Hunter's successful march and subsequent retreat—general Jubal A. Early threatens Washington—Chambersburg, Pa., Burned—selected to operate against general early—the Shenandoah valley—the Confederate army.

When the attempt to take Petersburg in conjunction with the mine explosion resulted in such a dismal failure, all the operations contemplated in connection with that project came to a standstill, and there was every prospect that the intensely hot and sultry weather would prevent further activity in the Army of the Potomac till a more propitious season. Just now, however, the conditions existing in the Shenandoah Valley and along the upper Potomac demanded



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the special attention of General Grant, for, notwithstanding the successful march that Major-General David Hunter had made toward Lynchburg early in the summer, what he had first gained was subsequently lost by strategical mistakes, that culminated in disaster during the retreat he was obliged to make from the vicinity of Lynchburg to the Kanawha Valley. This route of march uncovered the lower portion of the Valley of the Shenandoah, and with the exception of a small force of Union troops under General Franz Sigel posted aft Martinsburg for the purpose of covering the Baltimore and Ohio railroad, there was nothing at hand to defend the lower valley.

The different bodies of Confederates which compelled Hunter's retreat were under command of General Jubal A. Early, who had been sent to Lynchburg with Ewell's corps after the defeat of the Confederate General W. C. Jones near Staunton on the 5th of June, to take command of the Valley District. When Early had forced Hunter into the Kanawha region far enough to feel assured that Lynchburg could not again be threatened from that direction, he united to his own corps General John C. Breckenridge's infantry division and the cavalry of Generals J. H. Vaughn, John McCausland. B. T. Johnson, and J. D. Imboden, which heretofore had been operating in southwest and western Virginia under General Robert Ransom, Jr., and with the column thus formed, was ready to turn his attention to the lower Shenandoah Valley. At Early's suggestion General Lee authorized him to move north at an opportune moment, cross the upper Potomac into Maryland and threaten Washington. Indeed, General Lee had foreshadowed such a course when Early started toward Lynchburg for the purpose of relieving the pressure in front of Petersburg, but was in some doubt as to the practicability of the movement later, till persuaded to it by the representations of Early after that general had driven Hunter beyond the mountains and found little or nothing opposing except the small force of Sigel, which he thought he could readily overcome by celerity of movement.

By rapid marching Early reached Winchester on the 2d of July, and on the 4th occupied Martinsburg, driving General Sigel out of that place the same day that Hunter's troops, after their fatiguing retreat through the mountains, reached Charlestown, West Virginia. Early was thus enabled to cross the Potomac without difficulty, when, moving around Harper's Ferry, through the gaps of the South Mountain, he found his path unobstructed till he reached the Monocacy, where Ricketts's division of the Sixth Corps, and some raw troops that had been collected by General Lew Wallace, met and held the Confederates till the other reinforcements that had been ordered to the capital from Petersburg could be brought up. Wallace contested the line of the Monocacy with obstinacy, but had to retire finally toward Baltimore. The road was then open to Washington, and Early marched to the outskirts and began against the capital the demonstrations which were designed to divert the Army of the Potomac from its main purpose in front of Petersburg.

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Early's audacity in thus threatening Washington had caused some concern to the officials in the city, but as the movement was looked upon by General Grant as a mere foray which could have no decisive issue, the Administration was not much disturbed till the Confederates came in close proximity. Then was repeated the alarm and consternation of two years before, fears for the safety of the capital being magnified by the confusion and discord existing among the different generals in Washington and Baltimore; and the imaginary dangers vanished only with the appearance of General Wright, who, with the Sixth Corps and one division of the Nineteenth Corps, pushed out to attack Early as soon as he could get his arriving troops in hand, but under circumstances that precluded celerity of movement; and as a consequence the Confederates escaped with little injury, retiring across the Potomac to Leesburg, unharassed save by some Union cavalry that had been sent out into Loudoun County by Hunter, who in the meantime had arrived at Harper's Ferry by the Baltimore and Ohio railroad. From Leesburg Early retired through Winchester toward Strasburg, but when the head of his column reached this place he found that he was being followed by General Crook with the combined troops of Hunter and Sigel only, Wright having returned to Washington under orders to rejoin Meade at Petersburg. This reduction of the pursuing force tempting Early to resume the offensive, he attacked Crook at Kernstown, and succeeded in administering such a check as to necessitate this general's retreat to Martinsburg, and finally to Harper's Ferry. Crook's withdrawal restored to Early the line of the upper Potomac, so, recrossing this stream, he advanced again into Maryland, and sending McCausland on to Chambersburg, Pennsylvania, laid that town in ashes, leaving three thousand non-combatants without shelter or food.

When Early fell back from the vicinity of Washington toward Strasburg, General Grant believed that he would rejoin Lee, but later manoeuvres of the enemy indicated that Early had given up this idea, if he ever, entertained it, and intended to remain in the valley, since it would furnish Lee and himself with subsistence, and also afford renewed opportunities for threatening Washington. Indeed, the possession of the Valley of the Shenandoah at this time was of vast importance to Lee's army, and on every hand there were indications that the Confederate Government wished to hold it at least until after the crops could be gathered in to their depots at Lynchburg and Richmond. Its retention, besides being of great advantage in the matter of supplies, would also be a menace to the North difficult for General Grant to explain, and thereby add an element of considerable benefit to the Confederate cause; so when Early's troops again appeared at Martinsburg it was necessary for General Grant to confront them with a force strong enough to put an end to incursions north of the Potomac, which hitherto had always led to National discomfiture at some critical juncture, by turning our army in eastern Virginia from its chief purpose—the destruction of Lee and the capture of the Confederate capital.



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This second irruption of Early, and his ruthless destruction of Chambersburg led to many recommendations on the part of General Grant looking to a speedy elimination of the confusion then existing among the Union forces along the upper Potomac, but for a time the authorities at Washington would approve none of his propositions. The President and Secretary Stanton seemed unwilling to adopt his suggestions, and one measure which he deemed very important—the consolidation into a single command of the four geographical districts into which, to relieve political pressure no doubt, the territory had been divided—met with serious opposition. Despite Grant's representations, he could not prevail on the Administration to approve this measure, but finally the manoeuvres of Early and the raid to Chambersburg compelled a partial compliance, though Grant had somewhat circumvented the difficulty already by deciding to appoint a commander for the forces in the field that were to operate against Early.

On the 31st of July General Grant selected me as this commander, and in obedience to his telegraphic summons I repaired to his headquarters at City Point. In the interview that followed, he detailed to me the situation of affairs on the upper Potomac, telling me that I was to command in the field the troops that were to operate against Early, but that General Hunter, who was at the head of the geographical department, would be continued in his position for the reason that the Administration was reluctant to reconstruct or consolidate the different districts. After informing me that one division of the Cavalry Corps would be sent to my new command, he went on to say that he wanted me to push the enemy as soon as this division arrived, and if Early retired up the Shenandoah Valley I was to pursue, but if he crossed the Potomac I was to put myself south of him and try to compass his destruction. The interview having ended, I returned to Hancock Station to prepare for my departure, and on the evening of August 1 I was relieved from immediate duty with the Army of the Potomac, but not from command of the cavalry as a corps organization.

I arrived at Washington on the 4th of August, and the next day received instructions from General Halleck to report to General Grant at Monocacy Junction, whither he had gone direct from City Point, in consequence of a characteristic despatch from the President indicating his disgust with the confusion, disorder, and helplessness prevailing along the upper Potomac, and intimating that Grant's presence there was necessary.

In company with the Secretary of War I called on the President before leaving Washington, and during a short conversation Mr. Lincoln candidly told me that Mr. Stanton had objected to my assignment to General Hunter's command, because he thought me too young, and that he himself had concurred with the Secretary; but now, since General Grant had "ploughed round" the difficulties of the situation by picking me out

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to command the “boys in the field,” he felt satisfied with what had been done, and “hoped for the best.” Mr. Stanton remained silent during these remarks, never once indicating whether he, too, had become reconciled to my selection or not; and although, after we left the White House, he conversed with me freely in regard to the campaign I was expected to make, seeking to impress on me the necessity for success from the political as well as from the military point of view, yet he utterly ignored the fact that he had taken any part in disapproving the recommendation of the general-in-chief.

August 6, I reported to General Grant at the Monocacy, and he there turned over to me the following instructions, which he had previously prepared for General Hunter in the expectation that general would continue to command the department:

“Headquarters in the field,
“Monocacy Bridge, Md., Aug. 5, 1864.

“General: Concentrate all your available force without delay in the vicinity of Harper’s Ferry, leaving only such railroad guards and garrisons for public property as may be necessary.

“Use in this concentration the railroad, if by so doing time can be saved. From Harper’s Ferry, if it is found that the enemy has moved north of the Potomac in large force, push north, following and attacking him wherever found; following him, if driven south of the Potomac, as long as it is safe to do so. If it is ascertained that the enemy has but a small force north of the Potomac, then push south the main force, detaching, under a competent commander, a sufficient force to look after the raiders and drive them to their homes. In detaching such a force, the brigade of cavalry now en route from Washington via Rockville may be taken into account.

“There are now on the way to join you three other brigades of the best of cavalry, numbering at least five thousand men and horses. These will be instructed, in the absence of further orders, to join you by the south side of the Potomac. One brigade will probably start to-morrow.

“In pushing up the Shenandoah Valley, as it is expected you will have to go first or last, it is desirable that nothing should be left to invite the enemy to return. Take all provisions, forage, and stock wanted for the use of your command. Such as cannot be consumed, destroy. It is not desirable that the buildings should be destroyed—they should, rather, be protected; but the people should be informed that so long as an army can subsist among them recurrences of these raids must be expected, and we are determined to stop them at all hazards.



“Bear in mind, the object is to drive the enemy south; and to do this you want to keep him always in sight. Be guided in your course by the course he takes.

“Make your own arrangements for supplies of all kinds, giving regular vouchers for such as may be taken from loyal citizens in the country through which you march.



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“Very respectfully,
“U. S. *Grant*, Lieut.-General.”

“Major-General D. *Hunter*,
“Commanding Department of West Virginia.”

When I had read the letter addressed to Hunter, General Grant said I would be expected to report directly to him, as Hunter had asked that day to be wholly relieved, not from any chagrin at my assignment to the control of the active forces of his command, but because he thought that his fitness for the position he was filling was distrusted by General Halleck, and he had no wish to cause embarrassment by remaining where he could but remove me one degree from the headquarters of the army. The next day Hunter’s unselfish request was complied with, and an order was issued by the President, consolidating the Middle Department, the Department of Washington, the Department of the Susquehanna, and the Department of West Virginia.

Under this order these four geographical districts constituted the Middle Military Division, and I was temporarily assigned to command it. Hunter’s men had been bivouacking for some days past in the vicinity of Monocacy Junction and Frederick, but before General Grant’s instructions were written out, Hunter had conformed to them by directing the concentration at Halltown, about four miles in front of Harper’s Ferry, of all his force available for field service. Therefore the different bodies of troops, with the exception of Averell’s cavalry, which had followed McCausland toward Moorefield after the burning of Chambersburg, were all in motion toward Halltown on August 6.

Affairs at Monocacy kept me but an hour or two, and these disposed of, I continued on to Harper’s Ferry by the special train which had brought me from Washington, that point being intended as my headquarters while making preparations to advance. The enemy was occupying Martinsburg, Williamsport, and Shepherdstown at the time; sending occasional raiding parties into Maryland as far as Hagerstown. The concentration of my troops at Halltown being an indication to Early that we intended to renew the offensive, however, he immediately began counter preparations by drawing in all his detached columns from the north side of the Potomac, abandoning a contemplated raid into Maryland, which his success against Crook at Kernstown had prompted him to project, and otherwise disposing himself for defense.

At Harper’s Ferry I made my headquarters in the second story of a small and very dilapidated hotel, and as soon as settled sent for Lieutenant John R. Meigs, the chief engineer officer of the command, to study with him the maps of my geographical division. It always came rather easy to me to learn the geography of a new section, and its important topographical features as well; therefore I found that, with the aid of Meigs, who was most intelligent in his profession, the region in which I was to operate would soon be well fixed in my mind. Meigs was familiar with



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every important road and stream, and with all points worthy of note west of the Blue Ridge, and was particularly well equipped with knowledge regarding the Shenandoah Valley, even down to the farmhouses. He imparted with great readiness what he knew of this, clearly pointing out its configuration and indicating the strongest points for Confederate defense, at the same time illustrating scientifically and forcibly the peculiar disadvantages under which the Union army had hitherto labored.

The section that received my closest attention has its northern limit along the Potomac between McCoy's ferry at the eastern base of the North Mountain, and Harper's Ferry at the western base of the Blue Ridge. The southern limit is south of Staunton, on the divide which separates the waters flowing into the Potomac from those that run to the James. The western boundary is the eastern slope of the Alleghany Mountains, the eastern, the Blue Ridge; these two distinct mountain ranges trending about southwest inclose a stretch of quite open, undulating country varying in width from the northern to the southern extremity, and dotted at frequent intervals with patches of heavy woods: At Martinsburg the valley is about sixty miles broad, and on an east and west line drawn through Winchester about forty-five, while at Strasburg it narrows down to about twenty-five. Just southeast of Strasburg, which is nearly midway between the eastern and western walls of the valley, rises an abrupt range of mountains called Massanutten, consisting of several ridges which extend southward between the North and South Forks of the Shenandoah River until, losing their identity, they merge into lower but broken ground between New Market and Harrisonburg. The Massanutten ranges, with their spurs and hills, divide the Shenandoah Valley into two valleys, the one next the Blue Ridge being called the Luray, while that next the North Mountain retains the name of Shenandoah.

A broad macadamized road, leading south from Williamsport, Maryland, to Lexington, Virginia, was built at an early day to connect the interior of the latter State with the Chesapeake and Ohio canal, and along this road are situated the principal towns and villages of the Shenandoah Valley, with lateral lines of communication extending to the mountain ranges on the east and west. The roads running toward the Blue Ridge are nearly all macadamized, and the principal ones lead to the railroad system of eastern Virginia through Snicker's, Ashby's Manassas, Chester, Thornton's Swift Run, Brown's and Rock-fish gaps, tending to an ultimate centre at Richmond. These gaps are low and easy, offering little obstruction to the march of an army coming from eastern Virginia, and thus the Union troops operating west of the Blue Ridge were always subjected to the perils of a flank attack; for the Confederates could readily be brought by rail to Gordonsville and Charlottesville, from which points they could move with such celerity through the Blue Ridge that, on more than one occasion, the Shenandoah Valley had been the theatre of Confederate success, due greatly to the advantage of possessing these interior lines.



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Nature had been very kind to the valley, making it rich and productive to an exceptional degree, and though for three years contending armies had been marching up and down it, the fertile soil still yielded ample subsistence for Early's men, with a large surplus for the army of Lee. The ground had long been well cleared of timber, and the rolling surface presented so few obstacles to the movement of armies that they could march over the country in any direction almost as well as on the roads, the creeks and rivers being everywhere fordable, with little or no difficulty beyond that of leveling the approaches.

I had opposing me an army largely composed of troops that had operated in this region hitherto under "Stonewall" Jackson with marked success, inflicting defeat on the Union forces almost every time the two armies had come in contact. These men were now commanded by a veteran officer of the Confederacy-General Jubal A. Early—whose past services had so signalized his ability that General Lee specially selected him to take charge of the Valley District, and, notwithstanding the misfortunes that befell him later, clung to him till the end, of the war. The Confederate army at this date was about twenty thousand strong, and consisted of Early's own corps, with Generals Rodes, Ramseur, and Gordon commanding its divisions; the infantry of Breckenridge from southwestern Virginia; three battalions of artillery; and the cavalry brigades of Vaughn, Johnson, McCausland, and Imboden. This cavalry was a short time afterward organized into a division under the command of General Lomax.

After discovering that my troops were massing in front of Harper's Ferry, Early lost not a moment in concentrating his in the vicinity of Martinsburg, in positions from which he could continue to obstruct the Baltimore and Ohio railroad, and yet be enabled to retire up the valley under conditions of safety when I should begin an offensive campaign.

When I took command of the Army of the Shenandoah its infantry force comprised the Sixth Corps, one division of the Nineteenth Corps, and two divisions from West Virginia. The Sixth Corps was commanded by Major-General Horatio G. Wright; its three divisions by Brigadier-Generals David A. Russell, Geo. W. Getty, and James B. Ricketts. The single division of the Nineteenth Corps had for its immediate chief Brigadier-General William Dwight, the corps being commanded by Brigadier-General Wm. H. Emory. The troops from West Virginia were under Brigadier-General George Crook, with Colonels Joseph Thoburn and Isaac H. Duval as division commanders, and though in all not more than one fair-sized division, they had been designated, on account of the department they belonged to, the Army of West Virginia. General Torbert's division, then arriving from the Cavalry Corps of the Army of the Potomac, represented the mounted arm of the service, and in the expectation that Averell would soon join me with his troopers, I assigned General Torbert as chief of cavalry, and General Wesley Merritt succeeded to the command of Torbert's division.

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General Wright, the commander of the Sixth Corps, was an officer of high standing in the Corps of Engineers, and had seen much active service during the preceding three years. He commanded the Department of the Ohio throughout the very trying period of the summer and fall of 1862, and while in that position he, with other prominent officers, recommended my appointment as a brigadier-general. In 1863 he rendered valuable service at the battle of Gettysburg, following which he was assigned to the Sixth Corps, and commanded it at the capture of the Confederate works at Rappahannock Station and in the operations at Mine Run. He ranked me as a major-general of volunteers by nearly a year in date of commission, but my assignment by the President to the command of the army in the valley met with Wright's approbation, and, so far as I have ever known, he never questioned the propriety of the President's action. The Sixth Corps division commanders, Getty, Russell, and Ricketts, were all educated soldiers, whose records, beginning with the Mexican War, had already been illustrated in the war of the rebellion by distinguished service in the Army of the Potomac.

General Emory was a veteran, having graduated at the Military Academy in 1831, the year I was born. In early life he had seen much service in the Artillery, the Topographical Engineers, and the Cavalry, and in the war of the rebellion had exhibited the most soldierly characteristics at Port Hudson and on the Red River campaign. At this time he had but one division of the Nineteenth Corps present, which division was well commanded by General Dwight, a volunteer officer who had risen to the grade of brigadier-general through constant hard work. Crook was a classmate of mine—at least, we entered the Military Academy the same year, though he graduated a year ahead of me. We had known each other as boys before we entered the army, and later as men, and I placed implicit faith in his experience and qualifications as a general.

The transfer of Torbert to the position of chief of cavalry left Merritt, as I have already said, in command of the First Cavalry Division. He had been tried in the place before, and from the day he was selected as one of a number of young men to be appointed general officers, with the object of giving life to the Cavalry Corps, he filled the measure of expectation. Custer was one of these young men too, and though as yet commanding a brigade under Merritt, his gallant fight at Trevillian Station, as well as a dozen others during the summer, indicated that he would be equal to the work that was to fall to him when in a few weeks he should succeed Wilson. But to go on down the scale of rank, describing the officers who commanded in the Army of the Shenandoah, would carry me beyond all limit, so I refrain from the digression with regret that I cannot pay to each his well-earned tribute.



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The force that I could take with me into the field at this time numbered about 26,000 men. Within the limits of the geographical division there was a much greater number of troops than this. Baltimore, Washington, Harper's Ferry, Hagerstown, Frederick, Cumberland, and a score of other points; besides the strong detachments that it took to keep the Baltimore and Ohio railroad open through the mountains of West Virginia, and escorts for my trains, absorbed so many men that the column which could be made available for field operations was small when compared with the showing on paper. Indeed, it was much less than it ought to have been, but for me, in the face of the opposition made by different interests involved, to detach troops from any of the points to which they had been distributed before I took charge was next to impossible.

In a few days after my arrival preparations were completed, and I was ready to make the first move for the possession of the Shenandoah Valley. For the next five weeks the operations on my part consisted almost wholly of offensive and defensive manoeuvring for certain advantages, the enemy confining himself meanwhile to measures intended to counteract my designs. Upon the advent of Torbert, Early immediately grew suspicious, and fell back twelve miles south of Martinsburg, to Bunker Hill and vicinity, where his right flank would be less exposed, but from which position he could continue to maintain the break in the Baltimore and Ohio railroad, and push reconnoitring parties through Smithfield to Charlestown. These reconnoitring parties exhibited considerable boldness at times, but since they had no purpose in view save to discover whether or not we were moving, I did not contest any ground with them except about our outposts. Indeed, I desired that Early might remain at some point well to the north till I was fully prepared to throw my army on his right and rear and force a battle, and hence I abstained from disturbing him by premature activity, for I thought that if I could beat him at Winchester, or north of it, there would be far greater chances of weighty results. I therefore determined to bring my troops, if it were at all possible to do so, into such a position near that town as to oblige Early to fight. The sequel proved, however, that he was accurately informed of all my movements. To anticipate them, therefore, he began his retreat up the valley the day that I moved out from Halltown, and consequently was able to place himself south of Winchester before I could get there.

CHAPTER XXIV.

*Moving on general early—general grant's letter of instructions
—destroying the resources of the valley—reason for the destruction
—withdrawal to Halltown—alarm in the north over the retrograde
movement—renewing the advance up the valley—general Anderson's
attempt to return to Petersburg—strength of the armies.*

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For a clear understanding of the operations which preceded the victories that resulted in almost annihilating General Early's army in the Shenandoah Valley, it is necessary to describe in considerable detail the events that took place prior to the 19th of September. My army marched from Harper's Ferry on the 10th of August, 1864, General Torbert with Merritt's division of cavalry moving in advance through Berryville, going into position near White Post. The Sixth Corps, under General Wright, moved by way of Charlestown and Summit Point to Clifton; General Emory, with Dwight's division of the Nineteenth Corps, marched along the Berryville pike through Berryville to the left of the position of the Sixth Corps at Clifton; General Crook's command, moving on the Kabletown road, passed through Kabletown to the vicinity of Berryville, and went into position on the left of Dwight's division, while Colonel Lowell, with a detached force of two small regiments of cavalry, marched to Summit Point; so that on the night of August 10 my infantry occupied a line stretching from Clifton to Berryville, with Merritt's cavalry at White Post and Lowell's at Summit Point. The enemy, as stated before, moved at the same time from Bunker Hill and vicinity, and stretched his line from where the Winchester and Potomac railroad crosses Opequon Creek to the point at which the Berryville and Winchester pike crosses the same stream, thus occupying the west bank to cover Winchester.

On the morning of the 11th the Sixth Corps was ordered to move across the country toward the junction of the Berryville-Winchester pike and the Opequon, and to take the crossing and hold it, Dwight's division being directed to move through Berryville on the White Post road for a mile, then file to the right by heads of regiments at deploying distances, and carry the crossing of Opequon Creek at a ford about three-fourths of a mile from the left of the Sixth Corps, while Crook was instructed to move out on the White Post road, a mile and a half beyond Berryville, then head to the right and secure the ford about a mile to the left of Dwight; Torbert's orders were to push Merritt's division up the Millwood pike toward Winchester, attack any force he might run against, and ascertain the movements of the Confederate army; and lastly, Lowell received instructions to close in from Summit Point on the right of the Sixth Corps.

My object in securing the fords was to further my march on Winchester from the southeast, since, from all the information gathered during the 10th, I still thought Early could be brought to a stand at that point; but in this I was mistaken, as Torbert's reconnoissance proved, for on the morning of the 11th, when Merritt had driven the Confederate cavalry, then covering the Millwood pike west of the Opequon, off toward Kernstown, he found that their infantry and artillery were retreating south, up the Valley pike.



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As soon as this information was obtained Torbert moved quickly through the toll-gate on the Front Royal and Winchester road to Newtown, to strike the enemy's flank and harass him in his retreat, Lowell following up through Winchester, on the Valley pike; Crook was turned to the left and ordered to Stony Point, while Emory and Wright, marching to the left also, were directed to take post on the night of the 11th between the Millwood and Front Royal roads, within supporting distance of Crook. Merritt meeting some of the enemy's cavalry at the tollgate, drove it in the direction of Newtown till it got inside the line of Gordon's division of infantry, which had been thrown out and posted behind barricades to cover the flank of the main force in its retreat. A portion of Merritt's cavalry attacked this infantry and drove in its skirmish-line, and though not able to dislodge Gordon, Merritt held the ground gained till night-fall, when the Confederate infantry moved off under cover of darkness to Hupp's Hill, between Strasburg and Cedar Creek.

The next morning Crook marched from Stony Point to Cedar Creek, Emory followed with Dwight, and the cavalry moved to the same point by way of Newtown and the Valley pike, the Sixth Corps following the cavalry. That night Crook was in position at Cedar Creek, on the left of the Valley pike, Emory on the right of the pike, the Sixth Corps on the right of Emory, and the cavalry on the flanks. In the afternoon a heavy skirmish-line had been thrown forward to the heights on the south side of Cedar Creek, and a brisk affair with the enemy's pickets took place, the Confederates occupying with their main force the heights north of Strasburg. On the morning of the 13th my cavalry went out to reconnoitre toward Strasburg, on the middle road, about two and a half miles west of the Valley pike, and discovered that Early's infantry was at Fisher's Hill, where he had thrown up behind Tumbling Run earthworks extending clear across the narrow valley between the Massanutten and North mountains. On the left of these works he had Vaughan's, McCausland's, and Johnson's brigades of cavalry under General Lomax, who at this time relieved General Ramseur from the command of the Confederate mounted forces.

Within the past day or two I had received information that a column of the enemy was moving up from Culpeper Court House and approaching Front Royal through Chester Gap, and although the intelligence was unconfirmed, it caused me much solicitude; for there was strong probability that such a movement would be made, and any considerable force advancing through Front Royal toward Winchester could fall upon my rear and destroy my communication with Harper's Ferry, or, moving along the base of Massanutten Mountain, could attack my flank in conjunction with the force at Fisher's Hill without a possibility of my preventing it.



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Neither Wilson's cavalry nor Grower's infantry had yet joined me, and the necessities, already explained, which obliged me to hold with string garrisons Winchester and other points heretofore mentioned. had so depleted my line of battle strength that I knew the enemy would outnumber me when Anderson's corps should arrive in the valley. I deemed it advisable, therefore, to act with extreme caution, so, with the exception of a cavalry reconnoissance on the 13th, I remained on the defensive, quietly awaiting developments. In the evening of that day the enemy's skirmishers withdrew to Tumbling Run, his main force remaining inactive behind the intrenchments at Fisher's Hill waiting for the arrival of Anderson.

The rumors in regard to the force advancing from Culpeper kept increasing every hour, so on the morning of the 14th I concluded to send a brigade of cavalry to Front Royal to ascertain definitely what was up. At the same time I crossed the Sixth Corps to the south side of Cedar Creek, and occupied the heights near Strasburg. That day I received from the hands of Colonel Chipman, of the Adjutant-General's Department, the following despatch, to deliver which he had ridden in great haste from Washington through Snicker's Gap, escorted by a regiment of cavalry:

"City point, August 12, 1864—9 A. M.

"Major-general Halleck

"Inform General Sheridan that it is now certain two (2) divisions of infantry have gone to Early, and some cavalry and twenty (20) pieces of artillery. This movement commenced last Saturday night. He must be cautious, and act now on the defensive until movements here force them to detach to send this way. Early's force, with this increase, cannot exceed forty thousand men, but this is too much for General Sheridan to attack. Send General Sheridan the remaining brigade of the Nineteenth Corps.

"I have ordered to Washington all the one-hundred-day men. Their time will soon be out, but for the present they will do to serve in the defenses.

"U. S. Grant, Lieutenant-General."

The despatch explained the movement from Culpeper, and on the morning of the 15th Merritt's two remaining brigades were sent to Front Royal to oppose Anderson, and the Sixth Corps withdrawn to the north side of Cedar Creek, where it would be in a position enabling me either to confront Anderson or to act defensively, as desired by General Grant.

To meet the requirements of his instructions I examined the map of the valley for a defensive line—a position where a smaller number of troops could hold a larger number—for this information led me to suppose that Early's force would greatly exceed mine when Anderson's two divisions of infantry and Fitzhugh Lee's cavalry had joined him. I

could see but one such position, and that was at Halltown, in front of Harper's Ferry. Subsequent experience convinced me that there was no other really defensive line in the Shenandoah Valley, for at almost any other point the open country and its peculiar topography invites rather than forbids flanking operations.

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This retrograde movement would also enable me to strengthen my command by Grower's division of the Nineteenth Corps and Wilson's cavalry, both of which divisions were marching from Washington by way of Snicker's Gap.

After fully considering the matter, I determined to move back to Halltown, carrying out, as I retired, my instructions to destroy all the forage and subsistence the country afforded. So Emory was ordered to retire to Winchester on the night of the 15th, and Wright and Crook to follow through Winchester to Clifton the next night.

For the cavalry, in this move to the rear, I gave the following instructions:

"...In pushing up the Shenandoah Valley, as it is expected you will have to go first or last, it is desirable that nothing should be left to invite the enemy to return. Take all provisions, forage, and stock wanted for the use of your command. Such as cannot be consumed, destroy. It is not desirable that buildings should be destroyed—they should, rather, be protected; but the people should be informed that so long as an army can subsist among them, recurrences of these raids must be expected, and we are determined to stop them at all hazards...." [Grant's letter of instructions.]

*"Headquarters middle military division,
"Cedar Creek, Va., August 16, 1864.*

"General: In compliance with instructions of the Lieutenant-General commanding, you will make the necessary arrangements and give the necessary orders for the destruction of the wheat and hay south of a line from Millwood to Winchester and Petticoat Gap. You will seize all mules, horses, and cattle that may be useful to our army. Loyal citizens can bring in their claims against the Government for this necessary destruction. No houses will be burned, and officers in charge of this delicate but necessary duty must inform the people that the object is to make this valley untenable for the raiding parties of the rebel army.

"Very respectfully,

"P. H. *Sheridan*,
"Major-General Commanding.

"Brigadier-general A. T. A. Torbert,
"Chief of Cavalry, Middle Military Division."

During his visit to General Hunter at the Monocacy, General Grant had not only decided to retain in the Shenandoah Valley a large force sufficient to defeat Early's army or drive it back to Lee, but he had furthermore determined to make that sections by the destruction of its supplies, untenable for continued occupancy by the Confederates. This would cut off one of Lee's main-stays in the way of subsistence, and at the same



time diminish the number of recruits and conscripts he received; the valley district while under his control not only supplying Lee with an abundance of food, but also furnishing him many men for his regular and irregular forces. Grant's instructions to destroy the valley began with the letter of August 5 to Hunter, which was turned over to me, and this was followed at intervals by more specific directions, all showing the earnestness of his purpose.



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“*City point, Va., Aug. 16—3:30 P. M., 1864.*

“*Major-general Sheridan, Winchester, Va.:*

“If you can possibly spare a division of cavalry, send them through Loudoun County to destroy and carry off the crops, animals, negroes, and all men under fifty years of age capable of bearing arms. In this way you will get many of Mosby’s men. All male citizens under fifty can fairly be held as prisoners of war, not as citizen prisoners. If not already soldiers, they will be made so the moment the rebel army gets hold of them.

“U. S. *Grant*, Lieutenant-General.”

“*Headquarters armies of the united states,*

“*City point, Aug. 21, 1864.*

“*Major-general Sheridan, Charlestown, Va.:*

“In stripping Loudoun County of supplies, *etc.*, impress from all loyal persons so that they may receive pay for what is taken from them. I am informed by the Assistant Secretary of War that Loudoun County has a large population of Quakers, who are all favorably disposed to the Union. These people may be exempted from arrest.

“U. S. *Grant*, Lieutenant-General.”

“*Headquarters armies of the united states*

“*City point, Va., Aug. 26, 2:30 P. M. 1864.*

“*Major-general Sheridan, Halltown, Va.:*

“Telegraphed you that I had good reason for believing that Fitz Lee had been ordered back here. I now think it likely that all troops will be ordered back from the valley except what they believe to be the minimum number to detain you. My reason for supposing this is based upon the fact that yielding up the Weldon road seems to be a blow to the enemy he cannot stand. I think I do not overstate the loss of the enemy in the last two weeks at 10,000 killed and wounded. We have lost heavily, mostly in captured when the enemy gained temporary advantages. Watch closely, and if you find this theory correct, push with all vigor. Give the enemy no rest, and if it is possible to follow to the Virginia Central road, follow that far. Do all the damage to railroads and crops you can. Carry off stock of all descriptions and negroes, so as to prevent further planting. If the war is to last another year we want the Shenandoah Valley to remain a barren waste.

“U. S. *Grant*, Lieutenant-General.

“*Headquarters armies of the united states,*

“*City point, Va., Sept. 4,—10 A. M.—1864.*



“Major-general Sheridan, Charlestown, Va.:

“In cleaning out the arms-bearing community of Loudoun County and the subsistence for armies, exercise your own judgment as to who should be exempt from arrest, and as to who should receive pay for their stock, grain, etc. It is our interest that that county should not be capable of subsisting a hostile army, and at the same time we want to inflict as little hardship upon Union men as possible.



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“U. S. *Grant*, Lieutenant-General.”

“*City point, Va.*, Nov. 9, 1864.

“*Major-general Sheridan, Cedar Creek, Va.*:

“Do you not think it advisable to notify all citizens living east of the Blue Ridge to move out north of the Potomac all their stock, grain, and provisions of every description? There is no doubt about the necessity of clearing out that country so that it will not support Mosby’s gang. And the question is whether it is not better that the people should save what they can. So long as the war lasts they must be prevented from raising another crop, both there and as high up the valley as we can control.

“U. S. *Grant*, Lieutenant-General.”

He had rightly concluded that it was time to bring the war home to a people engaged in raising crops from a prolific soil to feed the country’s enemies, and devoting to the Confederacy its best youth. I endorsed the programme in all its parts, for the stores of meat and grain that the valley provided, and the men it furnished for Lee’s depleted regiments, were the strongest auxiliaries he possessed in the whole insurgent section. In war a territory like this is a factor of great importance, and whichever adversary controls it permanently reaps all the advantages of its prosperity. Hence, as I have said, I endorsed Grant’s programme, for I do not hold war to mean simply that lines of men shall engage each other in battle, and material interests be ignored. This is but a duel, in which one combatant seeks the other’s life; war means much more, and is far worse than this. Those who rest at home in peace and plenty see but little of the horrors attending such a duel, and even grow indifferent to them as the struggle goes on, contenting themselves with encouraging all who are able-bodied to enlist in the cause, to fill up the shattered ranks as death thins them. It is another matter, however, when deprivation and suffering are brought to their own doors. Then the case appears much graver, for the loss of property weighs heavy with the most of mankind; heavier often, than the sacrifices made on the field of battle. Death is popularly considered the maximum of punishment in war, but it is not; reduction to poverty brings prayers for peace more surely and more quickly than does the destruction of human life, as the selfishness of man has demonstrated in more than one great conflict.

In the afternoon of the 16th I started back to Winchester, whence I could better supervise our regressive march. As I was passing through Newtown, I heard cannonading from the direction of Front Royal, and on reaching Winchester, Merritt’s couriers brought me word that he had been attacked at the crossing of the Shenandoah by Kershaw’s division of Anderson’s corps and two brigades of Fitzhugh Lee’s cavalry, but that the attack had been handsomely repulsed, with a capture of two battle-flags and three hundred prisoners. This was an absolute confirmation of the despatch from Grant; and I was now more than satisfied with the wisdom of my withdrawal.



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At daylight of the 17th Emory moved from Winchester to Berryville, and the same morning Crook and Wright reached Winchester, having started from Cedar Creek the day before. From Winchester, Crook and Wright resumed their march toward Clifton, Wright, who had the rear guard, getting that day as far as the Berryville crossing of the Opequon, where he was ordered to remain, while Crook went ahead till he reached the vicinity of Berryville. On the afternoon of the 17th Lowell with his two regiments of troopers came into Winchester, where he was joined by Wilson's mounted division, which had come by a rapid march from Snicker's ferry. In the mean time Merritt, after his handsome engagement with Kershaw near Front Royal, had been ordered back to the neighborhood of White Post, so that my cavalry outposts now extended from this last point around to the west of Winchester.

During all these operations the enemy had a signal-station on Three Top Mountain, almost overhanging Strasburg, from which every movement made by our troops could be plainly seen; therefore, early on the morning of the 17th he became aware of the fact that we were retiring down the valley, and at once made after us, and about sundown drove Torbert out of Winchester, he having been left there-with Wilson and Lowell, and the Jersey brigade of the Sixth Corps, to develop the character of the enemy's pursuit. After a severe skirmish Wilson and Lowell fell back to Summit Point, and the Jersey brigade joined its corps at the crossing of the Opequon. This affair demonstrated that Early's whole army had followed us from Fisher's Hill, in concert with Anderson and Fitzhugh Lee from Front Royal, and the two columns joined near Winchester the morning of the 18th.

That day I moved the Sixth Corps by way of Clifton to Flowing Spring, two and a half miles west of Charlestown, on the Smithfield pike; and Emory, with Dwight's and Grower's divisions (Grower's having joined that morning from Washington), to a position about the same distance south of Charlestown, on the Berryville pike. Following these movements, Merritt fell back to Berryville, covering the Berryville pike crossing of the Opequon, and Wilson was stationed at Summit Point, whence he held a line along the Opequon as far north as the bridge at Smithfield. Crook continued to hold on near Clifton until the next day, and was then moved into place on the left of Emory.

This line was practically maintained till the 21st, when the enemy, throwing a heavy force across the Opequon by the bridge at Smithfield, drove in my cavalry pickets to Summit Point, and followed up with a rapid advance against the position of the Sixth Corps near Flowing Spring. A sharp and obstinate skirmish with a heavy picket-line of the Sixth Corps grew out of this manoeuvre, and resulted very much in our favor, but the quick withdrawal of the Confederates left no opportunity for a general engagement. It seems that General Early thought I had taken position near Summit Point, and that by moving rapidly around through Smithfield he could fall upon my rear in concert with an attack in front by Anderson, but the warm reception given him disclosed his error, for he soon discovered that my line lay in front of Charlestown instead of where he supposed.



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In the manoeuvre Merritt had been attacked in front of Berryville and Wilson at Summit Point, the former by cavalry and the latter by Anderson's infantry. The exposed positions of Merritt and Wilson necessitated their withdrawal if I was to continue to act on the defensive; so, after the army had moved back to Halltown the preceding night, without loss or inconvenience, I called them in and posted them on the right of the infantry.

My retrograde move from Strasburg to Halltown caused considerable alarm in the North, as the public was ignorant of the reasons for it; and in the excited state of mind then prevailing, it was generally expected that the reinforced Confederate army would again cross the Potomac, ravage Maryland and Pennsylvania, and possibly capture Washington. Mutterings of dissatisfaction reached me from many sources, and loud calls were made for my removal, but I felt confident that my course would be justified when the true situation was understood, for I knew that I was complying with my instructions. Therefore I paid small heed to the adverse criticisms pouring down from the North almost every day, being fully convinced that the best course was to bide my time, and wait till I could get the enemy into a position from which he could not escape without such serious misfortune as to have some bearing on the general result of the war. Indeed, at this time I was hoping that my adversary would renew the boldness he had exhibited the early part of the month, and strike for the north side of the Potomac, and wrote to General Grant on the 20th of August that I had purposely left everything in that direction open to the enemy.

On the 22d the Confederates moved to Charlestown and pushed well up to my position at Halltown. Here for the next three days they skirmished with my videttes and infantry pickets, Emory and Cook receiving the main attention; but finding that they could make no impression, and judging it to be an auspicious time to intensify the scare in the North, on the 25th of August Early despatched Fitzhugh Lee's cavalry to Williamsport, and moved all the rest of his army but Anderson's infantry and McCausland's cavalry to Kerneysville. This same day there was sharp picket firing along the whole front of my infantry line, arising, as afterward ascertained, from a heavy demonstration by Anderson. During this firing I sent Torbert, with Merritt's and Wilson's divisions, to Kerneysville, whence he was to proceed toward Leetown and learn what had become of Fitz. Lee.

About a mile from Leetown Torbert met a small force of Confederate cavalry, and soon after encountering it, stumbled on Breckenridge's corps of infantry on the march, apparently heading for Shepherdstown. The surprise was mutual, for Torbert expected to meet only the enemy's cavalry, while the Confederate infantry column was anticipating an unobstructed march to the Potomac. Torbert attacked with such vigor as at first to double up the head of Breckenridge's corps and throw it into confusion, but when the Confederates realized that they were confronted only by cavalry, Early brought up the whole of the four infantry divisions engaged in his manoeuvre, and in a sharp attack pushed Torbert rapidly back.

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All the advantages which Torbert had gained by surprising the enemy were nullified by this counter-attack, and he was obliged to withdraw Wilson's division toward my right, to the neighborhood of Duffield's Station, Merritt drawing back to the same point by way of the Shepherdstown ford. Custer's brigade becoming isolated after the fight while assisting the rear guard, was also obliged to retire, which it did to Shepherdstown and there halted, picketing the river to Antietam ford.

When Torbert reported to me the nature of his encounter, and that a part of Early's infantry was marching to the north, while Fitzhugh Lee's cavalry had gone toward Martinsburg, I thought that the Confederate general meditated crossing his cavalry into Maryland, so I sent Wilson by way of Harper's Ferry to watch his movements from Boonesboro', and at the same time directed Averell, who had reported from West Virginia some days before, to take post at Williamsport and hold the crossing there until he was driven away. I also thought it possible that Early might cross the Potomac with his whole army, but the doubts of a movement like this outweighed the probabilities favoring it. Nevertheless, to meet such a contingency I arranged to throw my army on his rear should the occasion arise, and deeming my position at Halltown the most advantageous in which to await developments, my infantry was retained there.

If General Early had ever intended to cross the Potomac, Torbert's discovery of his manoeuvre put an end to his scheme of invasion, for he well knew that and success he might derive from such a course would depend on his moving with celerity, and keeping me in ignorance of his march till it should be well under way; so he settled all the present uncertainties by retiring with all his troops about Kerneysville to his old position at Bunker Hill behind the Opequon, and on the night of the 26th silently withdrew Anderson and McCausland from my front at Halltown to Stephenson's depot.

By the 27th all of Early's infantry was in position at Brucetown and Bunker Hill, his cavalry holding the outposts of Leetown and Smithfield, and on that day Merritt's division attacked the enemy's horse at Leetown, and pressed it back through Smithfield to the west side of the Opequon. This reconnoissance determined definitely that Early had abandoned the projected movement into Maryland, if he ever seriously contemplated it; and I marched my infantry out from Halltown to the front of Charlestown, with the intention of occupying a line between Clifton and Berryville the moment matters should so shape themselves that I could do so with advantage. The night of the 28th Wilson joined me near Charlestown from his points of observation in Maryland, and the next day Averell crossed the Potomac at Williamsport and advanced to Martinsburg.



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Merritt's possession of Smithfield bridge made Early somewhat uneasy, since it afforded opportunity for interposing a column between his right and left flanks, so he concluded to retake the crossing, and, to this end, on the 29th advanced two divisions of infantry. A severe fight followed, and Merritt was forced to retire, being driven through the village toward Charlestown with considerable loss. As Merritt was nearing my infantry line, I ordered Ricketts's division of the Sixth Corps to his relief, and this in a few minutes turned the tide, the Smithfield crossing of the Opequon being regained, and afterward held by Lowell's brigade, supported by Ricketts. The next morning I moved Torbert, with Wilson and Merritt, to Berryville, and succeeding their occupation of that point there occurred along my whole line a lull, which lasted until the 3d of September, being undisturbed except by a combat near Bunker Hill between Averell's cavalry and a part of McCausland's, supported by Rodes's division of infantry, in which affair the Confederates were defeated with the loss of about fifty prisoners and considerable property in the shape of wagons and beef-cattle.

Meanwhile Torbert's movement to Berryville had alarmed Early, and as a counter move on the 2d of September he marched with the bulk of his army to Summit Point, but while reconnoitring in that region on the 3d he learned of the havoc that Averell was creating in his rear, and this compelled him to recross to the west side of the Opequon and mass his troops in the vicinity of Stephenson's depot, whence he could extend down to Bunker Hill, continue to threaten the Baltimore and Ohio railroad, and at the same time cover Winchester.

The same day I was moving my infantry to take up the Clifton-Berryville line, and that afternoon Wright went into position at Clifton, Crook occupied Berryville, and Emory's corps came in between them, forming almost a continuous line. Torbert had moved to White Post meanwhile, with directions to reconnoitre as far south as the Front Royal Pike.

My infantry had just got fairly into this position about an hour before sunset, when along Crook's front a combat took place that at the time caused me to believe it was Early's purpose to throw a column between Crook and Torbert, with the intention of isolating the latter; but the fight really arose from the attempt of General Anderson to return to Petersburg with Kershaw's division in response to loud calls from General Lee. Anderson started south on the 3d of September, and possibly this explains Early's reconnoissance that day to Summit Point as a covering movement, but his rapid withdrawal left him in ignorance of my advance, and Anderson marched on heedlessly toward Berryville, expecting to cross the Blue Ridge through Ashby's Gap. At Berryville however, he blundered into Crook's lines about sunset, and a bitter little fight ensued, in which the Confederates got so much the worst of it that they withdrew toward Winchester. When General Early received word of this encounter he hurried to Anderson's assistance with three divisions, but soon perceiving what was hitherto unknown to him, that my whole army was on a new line, he decided, after some slight

skirmishing, that Anderson must remain at Winchester until a favorable opportunity offered for him to rejoin Lee by another route.



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Succeeding the discomfiture of Anderson, some minor operations took place on the part of Averell on the right and McIntosh's brigade of Wilson's division on the left, but from that time until the 19th of September no engagement of much importance occurred. The line from Clifton to Berryville was occupied by the Sixth Corps and Grower's and Dwight's divisions of the Nineteenth, Crook being transferred to Summit Point, whence I could use him to protect my right flank and my communication with Harper's Ferry, while the cavalry threatened the enemy's right flank and line of retreat up the valley.

The difference of strength between the two armies at this date was considerably in my favor, but the conditions attending my situation in a hostile region necessitated so much detached service to protect trains, and to secure Maryland and Pennsylvania from raids, that my excess in numbers was almost canceled by these incidental demands that could not be avoided, and although I knew that I was strong, yet, in consequence of the injunctions of General Grant, I deemed it necessary to be very cautious; and the fact that the Presidential election was impending made me doubly so, the authorities at Washington having impressed upon me that the defeat of my army might be followed by the overthrow of the party in power, which event, it was believed, would at least retard the progress of the war, if, indeed, it did not lead to the complete abandonment of all coercive measures. Under circumstances such as these I could not afford to risk a disaster, to say nothing of the intense disinclination every soldier has for such results; so, notwithstanding my superior strength, I determined to take all the time necessary to equip myself with the fullest information, and then seize an opportunity under such conditions that I could not well fail of success.