

# **The Memoirs of General Philip H. Sheridan, Volume II., Part 4 eBook**

## **The Memoirs of General Philip H. Sheridan, Volume II., Part 4 by Philip Sheridan**

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## CHAPTER I.

*Organizing scouts—Miss Rebecca Wright—important information—decide to move on Newtown—meeting general Grant—organization of the Union army—opening of the battle of the Opequon—death of general Russell—A turning movement—A successful cavalry charge—victory—three loyal girls—appointed A brigadier-general in the regular army—remarks on the battle.*

While occupying the ground between Clifton and Berryville, referred to in the last chapter of the preceding volume, I felt the need of an efficient body of scouts to collect information regarding the enemy, for the defective intelligence-establishment with which I started out from Harper's Ferry early in August had not proved satisfactory. I therefore began to organize my scouts on a system which I hoped would give better results than had the method hitherto pursued in the department, which was to employ on this service doubtful citizens and Confederate deserters. If these should turn out untrustworthy, the mischief they might do us gave me grave apprehension, and I finally concluded that those of our own soldiers who should volunteer for the delicate and hazardous duty would be the most valuable material, and decided that they should have a battalion organization and be commanded by an officer, Major H. K. Young, of the First Rhode Island Infantry. These men were disguised in Confederate uniforms whenever necessary, were paid from the Secret-Service Fund in proportion to the value of the intelligence they furnished, which often stood us in good stead in checking the forays of Gilmore, Mosby, and other irregulars. Beneficial results came from the plan in many other ways too, and particularly so when in a few days two of my scouts put me in the way of getting news conveyed from Winchester. They had learned that just outside of my lines, near Millwood, there was living an old colored man, who had a permit from the Confederate commander to go into Winchester and return three times a week, for the purpose of selling vegetables to the inhabitants. The scouts had sounded this man, and, finding him both loyal and shrewd, suggested that he might be made useful to us within the enemy's lines; and the proposal struck me as feasible, provided there could be found in Winchester some reliable person who would be willing to co-operate and correspond with me. I asked General Crook, who was acquainted with many of the Union people of Winchester, if he knew of such a person, and he recommended a Miss Rebecca Wright, a young lady whom he had met there before



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the battle of Kernstown, who, he said, was a member of the Society of Friends and the teacher of a small private school. He knew she was faithful and loyal to the Government, and thought she might be willing to render us assistance, but he could not be certain of this, for on account of her well known loyalty she was under constant surveillance. I hesitated at first, but finally deciding to try it, despatched the two scouts to the old negro's cabin, and they brought him to my headquarters late that night. I was soon convinced of the negro's fidelity, and asking him if he was acquainted with Miss Rebecca Wright, of Winchester, he replied that he knew her well. There upon I told him what I wished to do, and after a little persuasion he agreed to carry a letter to her on his next marketing trip. My message was prepared by writing it on tissue paper, which was then compressed into a small pellet, and protected by wrapping it in tin-foil so that it could be safely carried in the man's mouth. The probability, of his being searched when he came to the Confederate picketline was not remote, and in such event he was to swallow the pellet. The letter appealed to Miss Wright's loyalty and patriotism, and requested her to furnish me with information regarding the strength and condition of Early's army. The night before the negro started one of the scouts placed the odd-looking communication in his hands, with renewed injunctions as to secrecy and promptitude. Early the next morning it was delivered to Miss Wright, with an intimation that a letter of importance was enclosed in the tin-foil, the negro telling her at the same time that she might expect him to call for a message in reply before his return home. At first Miss Wright began to open the pellet nervously, but when told to be careful, and to preserve the foil as a wrapping for her answer, she proceeded slowly and carefully, and when the note appeared intact the messenger retired, remarking again that in the evening he would come for an answer.

On reading my communication Miss Wright was much startled by the perils it involved, and hesitatingly consulted her mother, but her devoted loyalty soon silenced every other consideration, and the brave girl resolved to comply with my request, notwithstanding it might jeopardize her life. The evening before a convalescent Confederate officer had visited her mother's house, and in conversation about the war had disclosed the fact that Kershaw's division of infantry and Cutshaw's battalion of artillery had started to rejoin General Lee. At the time Miss Wright heard this she attached little if any importance to it, but now she perceived the value of the intelligence, and, as her first venture, determined to send it to me at once, which she did with a promise that in the future she would with great pleasure continue to transmit information by the negro messenger.

*"September 15, 1864.*

"I learn from Major-General Crook that you are a loyal lady, and still love the old flag. Can you inform me of the position of Early's forces, the number of divisions in his army, and the strength of any or all of them, and his probable or reported intentions? Have

any more troops arrived from Richmond, or are any more coming, or reported to be coming?

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“You can trust the bearer.”

“I am, very respectfully, your most obedient servant,

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

“*September 16, 1864.*

“I have no communication whatever with the rebels, but will tell you what I know. The division of General Kershaw, and Cutshaw’s artillery, twelve guns and men, General Anderson commanding, have been sent away, and no more are expected, as they cannot be spared from Richmond. I do not know how the troops are situated, but the force is much smaller than represented. I will take pleasure hereafter in learning all I can of their strength and position, and the bearer may call again.

“Very respectfully yours,”

.....

Miss Wright’s answer proved of more value to me than she anticipated, for it not only quieted the conflicting reports concerning Anderson’s corps, but was most important in showing positively that Kershaw was gone, and this circumstance led, three days later, to the battle of the Opequon, or Winchester as it has been unofficially called. Word to the effect that some of Early’s troops were under orders to return to Petersburg, and would start back at the first favorable opportunity, had been communicated to me already from many sources, but we had not been able to ascertain the date for their departure. Now that they had actually started, I decided to wait before offering battle until Kershaw had gone so far as to preclude his return, feeling confident that my prudence would be justified by the improved chances of victory; and then, besides, Mr. Stanton kept reminding me that positive success was necessary to counteract the political dissatisfaction existing in some of the Northern States. This course was advised and approved by General Grant, but even with his powerful backing it was difficult to resist the persistent pressure of those whose judgment, warped by their interests in the Baltimore and Ohio railroad, was often confused and misled by stories of scouts (sent out from Washington), averring that Kershaw and Fitzhugh Lee had returned to Petersburg, Breckenridge to southwestern Virginia, and at one time even maintaining that Early’s whole army was east of the Blue Ridge, and its commander himself at Gordonsville.

During the inactivity prevailing in my army for the ten days preceding Miss Wright’s communication the infantry was quiet, with the exception of Getty’s division, which made a reconnoissance to the Opequon, and developed a heavy force of the enemy at Edwards’s Corners. The cavalry, however, was employed a good deal in this interval

skirmishing heavily at times to maintain a space about six miles in width between the hostile lines, for I wished to control this ground so that when I was released from the instructions of August 12, I could move my men into position for attack without the knowledge of Early. The most noteworthy of these mounted encounters was that of McIntosh's brigade, which captured the Eighth South Carolina at Abraham's Creek September 13.

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It was the evening of the 16th of September that I received from Miss Wright the positive information that Kershaw was in march toward Front Royal on his way by Chester Gap to Richmond. Concluding that this was my opportunity, I at once resolved to throw my whole force into Newtown the next day, but a despatch from General Grant directing me to meet him at Charlestown, whither he was coming to consult with me, caused me to defer action until after I should see him. In our resulting interview at Charlestown, I went over the situation very thoroughly, and pointed out with so much confidence the chances of a complete victory should I throw my army across the Valley pike near Newtown that he fell in with the plan at once, authorized me to resume the offensive, and to attack Early as soon as I deemed it most propitious to do so; and although before leaving City Point he had outlined certain operations for my army, yet he neither discussed nor disclosed his plans, my knowledge of the situation striking him as being so much more accurate than his own.

[Extract from "Grant's Memoirs," page 328.]

"...Before starting I had drawn up a plan of campaign for Sheridan, which I had brought with me; but seeing that he was so clear and so positive in his views, and so confident of success, I said nothing about this, and did not take it out of my pocket...."

The interview over, I returned to my army to arrange for its movement toward Newtown, but while busy with these preparations, a report came to me from General Averell which showed that Early was moving with two divisions of infantry toward Martinsburg. This considerably altered the state of affairs, and I now decided to change my plan and attack at once the two divisions remaining about Winchester and Stephenson's depot, and later, the two sent to Martinsburg; the disjointed state of the enemy giving me an opportunity to take him in detail, unless the Martinsburg column should be returned by forced marches.

While General Early was in the telegraph office at Martinsburg on the morning of the 18th, he learned of Grant's visit to me; and anticipating activity by reason of this circumstance, he promptly proceeded to withdraw so as to get the two divisions within supporting distance of Ramseur's, which lay across the Berryville pike about two miles east of Winchester, between Abraham's Creek and Red Bud Run, so by the night of the 18th Wharton's division, under Breckenridge, was at Stephenson's depot, Rodes near there, and Gordon's at Bunker Hill. At daylight of the 19th these positions of the Confederate infantry still obtained, with the cavalry of Lomax, Jackson, and Johnson on the right of Ramseur, while to the left and rear of the enemy's general line was Fitzhugh Lee, covering from Stephenson's depot west across the Valley pike to Applepie Ridge.



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My army moved at 3 o'clock that morning. The plan was for Torbert to advance with Merritt's division of cavalry from Summit Point, carry the crossings of the Opequon at Stevens's and Lock's fords, and form a junction near Stephenson's depot, with Averell, who was to move south from Darksville by the Valley pike. Meanwhile, Wilson was to strike up the Berryville pike, carry the Berryville crossing of the Opequon, charge through the gorge or canyon on the road west of the stream, and occupy the open ground at the head of this defile. Wilson's attack was to be supported by the Sixth and Nineteenth corps, which were ordered to the Berryville crossing, and as the cavalry gained the open ground beyond the gorge, the two infantry corps, under command of General Wright, were expected to press on after and occupy Wilson's ground, who was then to shift to the south bank of Abraham's Creek and cover my left; Crook's two divisions, having to march from Summit Point, were to follow the Sixth and Nineteenth corps to the Opcquon, and should they arrive before the action began, they were to be held in reserve till the proper moment came, and then, as a turning-column, be thrown over toward the Valley pike, south of Winchester.

McIntosh's brigade of Wilson's division drove the enemy's pickets away from the Berryville crossing at dawn, and Wilson following rapidly through the gorge with the rest of the division, debouched from its western extremity with such suddenness as to capture a small earthwork in front of General Ramseur's main line; and notwithstanding the Confederate infantry, on recovering from its astonishment, tried hard to dislodge them, Wilson's troopers obstinately held the work till the Sixth Corps came up. I followed Wilson to select the ground on which to form the infantry. The Sixth Corps began to arrive about 8 o'clock, and taking up the line Wilson had been holding, just beyond the head of the narrow ravine, the cavalry was transferred to the south side of Abraham's Creek.

The Confederate line lay along some elevated ground about two miles east of Winchester, and extended from Abraham's Creek north across the Berryville pike, the left being hidden in the heavy timber on Red Bud Run. Between this line and mine, especially on my right, clumps of woods and patches of underbrush occurred here and there, but the undulating ground consisted mainly of open fields, many of which were covered with standing corn that had already ripened.

Much time was lost in getting all of the Sixth and Nineteenth corps through the narrow defile, Grover's division being greatly delayed there by a train of ammunition wagons, and it was not until late in the forenoon that the troops intended for the attack could be got into line ready to advance. General Early was not slow to avail himself of the advantages thus offered him, and my chances of striking him in detail were growing less every moment, for Gordon and Rodes were hurrying their divisions from Stephenson's depot—across-country on a line that would place Gordon in the woods south of Red Bud Run, and bring Rodes into the interval between Gordon and Ramseur.

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When the two corps had all got through the canyon they were formed with Getty's division of the Sixth to the left of the Berryville pike, Rickett's division to the right of the pike, and Russell's division in reserve in rear of the other two. Grover's division of the Nineteenth Corps came next on the right of Rickett's, with Dwight to its rear in reserve, while Crook was to begin massing near the Opequon crossing about the time Wright and Emory were ready to attack.

Just before noon the line of Getty, Ricketts, and Grover moved forward, and as we advanced, the Confederates, covered by some heavy woods on their right, slight underbrush and corn-fields along their Centre, and a large body of timber on their left along the Red Bud, opened fire from their whole front. We gained considerable ground at first, especially on our left but the desperate resistance which the right met with demonstrated that the time we had unavoidably lost in the morning had been of incalculable value to Early, for it was evident that he had been enabled already to so far concentrate his troops as to have the different divisions of his army in a connected line of battle, in good shape to resist.

Getty and Ricketts made some progress toward Winchester in connection with Wilson's cavalry, which was beyond the Senseny road on Getty's left, and as they were pressing back Ramseur's infantry and Lomax's cavalry Grover attacked from the right with decided effect. Grover in a few minutes broke up Evans's brigade of Gordon's division, but his pursuit of Evans destroyed the continuity of my general line, and increased an interval that had already been made by the deflection of Ricketts to the left, in obedience to instructions that had been given him to guide his division on the Berryville pike. As the line pressed forward, Ricketts observed this widening interval and endeavored to fill it with the small brigade of Colonel Keifer, but at this juncture both Gordon and Rodes struck the weak spot where the right of the Sixth Corps and the left of the Nineteenth should have been in conjunction, and succeeded in checking my advance by driving back a part of Ricketts's division, and the most of Grover's. As these troops were retiring I ordered Russell's reserve division to be put into action, and just as the flank of the enemy's troops in pursuit of Grover was presented, Upton's brigade, led in person by both Russell and Upton, struck it in a charge so vigorous as to drive the Confederates back in turn to their original ground.

The success of Russell enabled me to re-establish the right of my line some little distance in advance of the position from which it started in the morning, and behind Russell's division (now commanded by Upton) the broken regiments of Ricketts's division were rallied. Dwight's division was then brought up on the right, and Grover's men formed behind it.



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The charge of Russell was most opportune, but it cost many men in killed and wounded. Among the former was the courageous Russell himself; killed by a piece of shell that passed through his heart, although he had previously been struck by a bullet in the left breast, which wound, from its nature, must have proved mortal, yet of which he had not spoken. Russell's death oppressed us all with sadness, and me particularly. In the early days of my army life he was my captain and friend, and I was deeply indebted to him, not only for sound advice and good example, but for the inestimable service he had just performed, and sealed with his life, so it may be inferred how keenly I felt his loss.

As my lines were being rearranged, it was suggested to me to put Crook into the battle, but so strongly had I set my heart on using him to take possession of the Valley pike and cut off the enemy, that I resisted this advice, hoping that the necessity for putting him in would be obviated by the attack near Stephenson's depot that Torbert's cavalry was to make, and from which I was momentarily expecting to hear. No news of Torbert's progress came, however, so, yielding at last, I directed Crook to take post on the right of the Nineteenth Corps and, when the action was renewed, to push his command forward as a turning-column in conjunction with Emory. After some delay in the annoying defile, Crook got his men up, and posting Colonel Thoburn's division on the prolongation of the Nineteenth Corps, he formed Colonel Duval's division to the right of Thoburn. Here I joined Crook, informing him that I had just got word that Torbert was driving the enemy in confusion along the Martinsburg pike toward Winchester; at the same time I directed him to attack the moment all of Duval's men were in line. Wright was instructed to advance in concert with Crook, by swinging Emory and the right of the Sixth Corps to the left together in a half-wheel. Then leaving Crook, I rode along the Sixth and Nineteenth corps, the open ground over which they were passing affording a rare opportunity to witness the precision with which the attack was taken up from right to left. Crook's success began the moment he started to turn the enemy's left; and assured by the fact that Torbert had stampeded the Confederate cavalry and thrown Breckenridge's infantry into such disorder that it could do little to prevent the envelopment of Gordon's left, Crook pressed forward without even a halt.

Both Emory and Wright took up the fight as ordered, and as they did so I sent word to Wilson, in the hope that he could partly perform the work originally laid out for Crook, to push along the Senseny road and, if possible, gain the valley pike south of Winchester. I then returned toward my right flank, and as I reached the Nineteenth Corps the enemy was contesting the ground in its front with great obstinacy; but Emory's dogged persistence was at length rewarded with success,



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just as Crook's command emerged from the morass of Red Bud Run, and swept around Gordon, toward the right of Breckenridge, who, with two of Wharton's brigades, was holding a line at right angles with the Valley pike for the protection of the Confederate rear. Early had ordered these two brigades back from Stephenson's depot in the morning, purposing to protect with them his right flank and line of retreat, but while they were en route to this end, he was obliged to recall them to his left to meet Crook's attack.

To confront Torbert, Patton's brigade of infantry and some of Fitzhugh Lee's cavalry had been left back by Breckenridge, but, with Averell on the west side of the Valley pike and Merritt on the east, Torbert began to drive this opposing force toward Winchester the moment he struck it near Stephenson's depot, keeping it on the go till it reached the position held by Breckenridge, where it endeavored to make a stand.

The ground which Breckenridge was holding was open, and offered an opportunity such as seldom had been presented during the war for a, mounted attack, and Torbert was not slow to take advantage of it. The instant Merritt's division could be formed for the charge, it went at Breckenridge's infantry and Fitzhugh Lee's cavalry with such momentum as to break the Confederate left, just as Averell was passing around it. Merritt's brigades, led by Custer, Lowell, and Devin, met from the start with pronounced success, and with sabre or pistol in hand literally rode down a battery of five guns and took about 1,200 prisoners. Almost simultaneously with this cavalry charge, Crook struck Breckenridge's right and Gordon's left, forcing these divisions to give way, and as they retired, Wright, in a vigorous attack, quickly broke Rodes up and pressed Ramseur so hard that the whole Confederate army fell back, contracting its lines within some breastworks which had been thrown up at a former period of the war, immediately in front of Winchester.

Here Early tried hard to stem the tide, but soon Torbert's cavalry began passing around his left flank, and as Crook, Emory, and Wright attacked in front, panic took possession of the enemy, his troops, now fugitives and stragglers, seeking escape into and through Winchester.

When this second break occurred, the Sixth and Nineteenth corps were moved over toward the Millwood pike to help Wilson on the left, but the day was so far spent that they could render him no assistance, and Ramseur's division, which had maintained some organization, was in such tolerable shape as to check him. Meanwhile Torbert passed around to the west of Winchester to join Wilson, but was unable to do so till after dark. Crook's command pursued the enemy through the town to Mill Creek, I going along.



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Just after entering the town, Crook and I met, in the main street, three young girls, who gave us the most hearty reception. One of these young women was a Miss Griffith, the other two Miss Jennie and Miss Susie Meredith. During the day they had been watching the battle from the roof of the Meredith residence, with tears and lamentations, they said, in the morning when misfortune appeared to have overtaken the Union troops, but with unbounded exultation when, later, the tide set in against the Confederates. Our presence was, to them, an assurance of victory, and their delight being irrepressible, they indulged in the most unguarded manifestations and expressions. When cautioned by Crook, who knew them well, and reminded that the valley had hitherto been a race-course—one day in the possession of friends, and the next of enemies—and warned of the dangers they were incurring by such demonstrations, they assured him that they had no further fears of that kind now, adding that Early's army was so demoralized by the defeat it had just sustained that it would never be in condition to enter Winchester again. As soon as we had succeeded in calming the excited girls a little I expressed a desire to find some place where I could write a telegram to General Grant informing him of the result of the battle, and General Crook conducted me to the home of Miss Wright, where I met for the first time the woman who had contributed so much to our success, and on a desk in her school-room wrote the despatch announcing that we had sent Early's army whirling up the valley.

My losses in the battle of the Opequon were heavy, amounting to about 4,500 killed, wounded, and missing. Among the killed was General Russell, commanding a division, and the wounded included Generals Upton, McIntosh and Chapman, and Colonels Duval and Sharpe. The Confederate loss in killed, wounded, and prisoners about equaled mine, General Rodes being of the killed, while Generals Fitzhugh Lee and York were severely wounded.

We captured five pieces of artillery and nine battle-flags. The restoration of the lower valley—from the Potomac to Strasburg—to the control of the Union forces caused great rejoicing in the North, and relieved the Administration from further solicitude for the safety of the Maryland and Pennsylvania borders. The President's appreciation of the victory was expressed in a despatch so like Mr. Lincoln that I give a facsimile of it to the reader:

[In the handwriting of President Lincoln] *“Executive department “Washington, Sep. 20, 1864*

*“Major-general Sherman  
“Winchester, Va.*

*“Have just heard of your great victory. God bless you all, officers and men. Strongly inclined to come up and see you.*

*“A. Lincoln.”*

This he supplemented by promoting me to the grade of brigadier-general in the regular army, and assigning me to the permanent command of the Middle Military Department, and following that came warm congratulations from Mr. Stanton and from Generals Grant, Sherman, and Meade.



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The battle was not fought out on the plan in accordance with which marching orders were issued to my troops, for I then hoped to take Early in detail, and with Crook's force cut off his retreat. I adhered to this purpose during the early part of the contest, but was obliged to abandon the idea because of unavoidable delays by which I was prevented from getting the Sixth and Nineteenth corps through the narrow defile and into position early enough to destroy Ramseur while still isolated. So much delay had not been anticipated, and this loss of time was taken advantage of by the enemy to recall the troops diverted to Bunker Hill and Martinsburg on the 17th, thus enabling him to bring them all to the support of Ramseur before I could strike with effect. My idea was to attack Ramseur and Wharton, successively, at a very early hour and before they could get succor, but I was not in condition to do it till nearly noon, by which time Gordon and Rodes had been enabled to get upon the ground at a point from which, as I advanced, they enfiladed my right flank, and gave it such a repulse that to re-form this part of my line I was obliged to recall the left from some of the ground it had gained. It was during this reorganization of my lines that I changed my plan as to Crook, and moved him from my left to my right. This I did with great reluctance, for I hoped to destroy Early's army entirely if Crook continued on his original line of march toward the Valley pike, south of Winchester; and although the ultimate results did, in a measure vindicate the change, yet I have always thought that by adhering to the original plan we might have captured the bulk of Early's army.

## CHAPTER 11.

*Pursuing early—A secret march—Fisher's hill—A great success —removal of Averell—the retreat—capturing an old comrade —the murder of lieutenant Meigs.*

The night of the 19th of September I gave orders for following Early up the valley next morning—the pursuit to begin at daybreak—and in obedience to these directions Torbert moved Averell out on the Back road leading to Cedar Creek, and Merritt up the Valley pike toward Strasburg, while Wilson was directed on Front Royal by way of Stevensburg. Merritt's division was followed by the infantry, Emory's and Wright's columns marching abreast in the open country to the right and left of the pike, and Crook's immediately behind them. The enemy having kept up his retreat at night, presented no opposition whatever until the cavalry discovered him posted at Fisher's Hill, on the first defensive line where he could hope to make any serious resistance. No effort was made to dislodge him, and later in the day, after Wright and Emory came up, Torbert shifted Merritt over toward the Back road till he rejoined



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Averell. As Merritt moved to the right, the Sixth and Nineteenth corps crossed Cedar Creek and took up the ground the cavalry was vacating, Wright posting his own corps to the west of the Valley pike overlooking Strasburg, and Emory's on his left so as to extend almost to the road leading from Strasburg to Front Royal. Crook, as he came up the same evening, went into position in some heavy timber on the north bank of Cedar Creek.

A reconnoissance made pending these movements convinced me that the enemy's position at Fisher's Hill was so strong that a direct assault would entail unnecessary destruction of life, and, besides, be of doubtful result. At the point where Early's troops were in position, between the Massanutten range and Little North Mountain, the valley is only about three and a half miles wide. All along the precipitous bluff which overhangs Tumbling Run on the south side, a heavy line of earthworks had been constructed when Early retreated to this point in August, and these were now being strengthened so as to make them almost impregnable; in fact, so secure did Early consider himself that, for convenience, his ammunition chests were taken from the caissons and placed behind the breastworks. Wharton, now in command of Breckenridge's division—its late commander having gone to southwest Virginia—held the right of this line, with Gordon next him; Pegram, commanding Ramseur's old division, joined Gordon. Ramseur with Rodes's division, was on Pegram's left, while Lomax's cavalry, now serving as foot-troops, extended the line to the Back road. Fitzhugh Lee being wounded, his cavalry, under General Wickham, was sent to Milford to prevent Fisher's Hill from being turned through the Luray Valley.

In consequence of the enemy's being so well protected from a direct assault, I resolved on the night of the 20th to use again a turning-column against his left, as had been done on the 19th at the Opequon. To this end I resolved to move Crook, unperceived if possible, over to the eastern face of Little North Mountain, whence he could strike the left and rear of the Confederate line, and as he broke it up, I could support him by a left half-wheel of my whole line of battle. The execution of this plan would require perfect secrecy, however, for the enemy from his signal-station on Three Top could plainly see every movement of our troops in daylight. Hence, to escape such observation, I marched Crook during the night of the 20th into some heavy timber north of Cedar Creek, where he lay concealed all day the 21st. This same day Wright and Emory were moved up closer to the Confederate works, and the Sixth Corps, after a severe fight, in which Ricketts's and Getty were engaged, took up some high ground on the right of the Manassas Gap railroad in plain view of the Confederate works, and confronting a commanding point where much of Early's artillery was massed. Soon after General Wright had established this line

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I rode with him along it to the westward, and finding that the enemy was still holding an elevated position further to our right, on the north side of Tumbling Run, I directed this also to be occupied. Wright soon carried the point, which gave us an unobstructed view of the enemy's works and offered good ground for our artillery. It also enabled me to move the whole of the Sixth Corps to the front till its line was within about seven hundred yards of the enemy's works; the Nineteenth Corps, on the morning of the 22d, covering the ground vacated by the Sixth by moving to the front and extending to the right, but still keeping its reserves on the railroad.

In the darkness of the night of the 21st, Crook was brought across Cedar Creek and hidden in a clump of timber behind Hupp's Hill till daylight of the 22d, when, under cover of the intervening woods and ravines, he was marched beyond the right of the Sixth Corps and again concealed not far from the Back road. After Crook had got into this last position, Ricketts's division was pushed out until it confronted the left of the enemy's infantry, the rest of the Sixth Corps extending from Ricketts's left to the Manassas Gap railroad, while the Nineteenth Corps filled in the space between the left of the Sixth and the North Fork of the Shenandoah.

When Ricketts moved out on this new line, in conjunction with Averell's cavalry on his right, the enemy surmising, from information secured from his signal-station, no doubt, that my attack was to be made from Ricketts's front, prepared for it there, but no such intention ever existed. Ricketts was pushed forward only that he might readily join Crook's turning-column as it swung into the enemy's rear. To ensure success, all that I needed now was enough daylight to complete my arrangements, the secrecy of movement imposed by the situation consuming many valuable hours.

While Ricketts was occupying the enemy's attention, Crook, again moving unobserved into the dense timber on the eastern face of Little North Mountain, conducted his command south in two parallel columns until he gained the rear of the enemy's works, when, marching his divisions by the left flank, he led them in an easterly direction down the mountain-side. As he emerged from the timber near the base of the mountain, the Confederates discovered him, of course, and opened with their batteries, but it was too late—they having few troops at hand to confront the turning-column. Loudly cheering, Crook's men quickly crossed the broken stretch in rear of the enemy's left, producing confusion and consternation at every step.



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About a mile from the mountain's base Crook's left was joined by Ricketts, who in proper time had begun to swing his division into the action, and the two commands moved along in rear of the works so rapidly that, with but slight resistance, the Confederates abandoned the guns massed near the centre. The swinging movement of Ricketts was taken up successively from right to left throughout my line, and in a few minutes the enemy was thoroughly routed, the action, though brief, being none the less decisive. Lomax's dismounted cavalry gave way first, but was shortly followed by all the Confederate infantry in an indescribable panic, precipitated doubtless by fears of being caught and captured in the pocket formed by Tumbling Run and the North Fork of the Shenandoah River. The stampede was complete, the enemy leaving the field without semblance of organization, abandoning nearly all his artillery and such other property as was in the works, and the rout extending through the fields and over the roads toward Woodstock, Wright and Emory in hot pursuit.

Midway between Fisher's Hill and Woodstock there is some high ground, where at night-fall a small squad endeavored to stay us with two pieces of artillery, but this attempt at resistance proved fruitless, and, notwithstanding the darkness, the guns were soon captured. The chase was then taken up by Devin's brigade as soon as it could be passed to the front, and continued till after daylight the next morning, but the delays incident to a night pursuit made it impossible for Devin to do more than pick up stragglers.

Our success was very great, yet I had anticipated results still more pregnant. Indeed, I had high hopes of capturing almost the whole of Early's army before it reached New Market, and with this object in view, during the manoeuvres of the 21st I had sent Torbert up the Luray Valley with Wilson's division and two of Merritt's brigades, in the expectation that he would drive Wickham out of the Luray Pass by Early's right, and by crossing the Massanutten Mountain near New Market, gain his rear. Torbert started in good season, and after some slight skirmishing at Gooney Run, got as far as Milford, but failed to dislodge Wickham. In fact, he made little or no attempt to force Wickham from his position, and with only a feeble effort withdrew. I heard nothing at all from Torbert during the 22d, and supposing that everything was progressing favorably, I was astonished and chagrined on the morning of the 23d, at Woodstock, to receive the intelligence that he had fallen back to Front Royal and Buckton ford. My disappointment was extreme, but there was now no help for the situation save to renew and emphasize Torbert's orders, and this was done at once, notwithstanding that I thought, the delay, had so much diminished the chances of his getting in the rear of Early as to make such a result a very remote possibility, unless, indeed, far greater zeal was displayed than had been in the first attempt to penetrate the Luray Valley.



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The battle of Fisher's Hill was, in a measure, a part of the battle of the Opequon; that is to say, it was an incident of the pursuit resulting from that action. In many ways, however, it was much more satisfactory, and particularly so because the plan arranged on the evening of the 20th was carried out to the very letter by Generals Wright, Crook, and Emory, not only in all their preliminary manoeuvres, but also during the fight itself. The only drawback was with the cavalry, and to this day I have been unable to account satisfactorily for Torbert's failure. No doubt, Wickham's position near Milford was a strong one, but Torbert ought to have made a fight. Had he been defeated in this, his withdrawal then to await the result at Fisher's Hill would have been justified, but it does not appear that he made any serious effort of all to dislodge the Confederate cavalry: his impotent attempt not only chagrined me very much, but occasioned much unfavorable comment throughout the army.

We reached Woodstock early on the morning of the 23d, and halted there some little time to let the troops recover their organization, which had been broken in the night march they had just made. When the commands had closed up we pushed on toward Edinburg, in the hope of making more captures at Narrow Passage Creek; but the Confederates, too fleet for us, got away; so General Wright halted the infantry not far from Edinburg, till rations could be brought the men. Meanwhile I, having remained at Woodstock, sent Devin's brigade to press the enemy under every favorable opportunity, and if possible prevent him from halting long enough to reorganize. Notwithstanding Devin's efforts the Confederates managed to assemble a considerable force to resist him, and being too weak for the rearguard, he awaited the arrival of Averell, who, I had informed him, would be hurried to the front with all possible despatch, for I thought that Averell must be close at hand. It turned out, however, that he was not near by at all, and, moreover, that without good reason he had refrained from taking any part whatever in pursuing the enemy in the flight from Fisher's Hill; and in fact had gone into camp and left to the infantry the work of pursuit.

It was nearly noon when Averell came up, and a great deal of precious time had been lost. We had some hot words, but hoping that he would retrieve the mistake of the night before, I directed him to proceed to the front at once, and in conjunction with Devin close with the enemy. He reached Devin's command about 3 o'clock in the afternoon, just as this officer was pushing the Confederates so energetically that they were abandoning Mount Jackson, yet Averell utterly failed to accomplish anything. Indeed, his indifferent attack was not at all worthy the excellent soldiers he commanded, and when I learned that it was his intention to withdraw from the enemy's front, and this, too, on the indefinite report of a signal-officer that a "brigade or division" of Confederates was turning his right flank, and that he had not seriously attempted to verify the information, I sent him this order:



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*“Headquarters middle military division,  
“Woodstock, Va., Sept. 23, 1864*

*“Brevet major-general Averell*

“Your report and report of signal-officer received. I do not want you to let the enemy bluff you or your command, and I want you to distinctly understand this note. I do not advise rashness, but I do desire resolution and actual fighting, with necessary casualties, before you retire. There must now be no backing or filling by you without a superior force of the enemy actually engaging you.

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

Some little time after this note went to Averell, word was brought me that he had already carried out the programme indicated when forwarding the report of the expected turning of his right, and that he had actually withdrawn and gone into camp near Hawkinsburg. I then decided to relieve him from the command of his division, which I did, ordering him to Wheeling, Colonel William H. Powell being assigned to succeed him.

The removal of Averell was but the culmination of a series of events extending back to the time I assumed command of the Middle Military Division. At the outset, General Grant, fearing discord on account of Averell's ranking Torbert, authorized me to relieve the former officer, but I hoped that if any trouble of this sort arose, it could be allayed, or at least repressed, during the campaign against Early, since the different commands would often have to act separately. After that, the dispersion of my army by the return of the Sixth Corps and Torbert's cavalry to the Army of the Potomac would take place, I thought, and this would restore matters to their normal condition; but Averell's dissatisfaction began to show itself immediately after his arrival at Martinsburg, on the 14th of August, and, except when he was conducting some independent expedition, had been manifested on all occasions since. I therefore thought that the interest of the service would be subserved by removing one whose growing indifference might render the best-laid plans inoperative.

*“Headquarters middle military division.  
“Harrisonburg, Va., Sept. 25, 1864 11:30 P. M.  
“Lieut-general Grant, Comd'g, City Point, Va.*

“I have relieved Averell from his command. Instead of following the enemy when he was broken at Fisher's Hill (so there was not a cavalry organization left), he went into camp and let me pursue the enemy for a distance of fifteen miles, with infantry, during the night.

“P. H. *Sheridan*, Major-General.”



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The failure of Averell to press the enemy the evening of the 23d gave Early time to collect his scattered forces and take up a position on the east side of the North Fork of the Shenandoah, his left resting on the west side of that stream at Rude's Hill, a commanding point about two miles south of Mt. Jackson. Along this line he had constructed some slight works during the night, and at daylight on the 24th, I moved the Sixth and Nineteenth corps through Mt. Jackson to attack him, sending Powell's division to pass around his left flank, toward Timberville, and Devin's brigade across the North Fork, to move along the base of Peaked Ridge and attack his right. The country was entirely open, and none of these manoeuvres could be executed without being observed, so as soon as my advance began, the enemy rapidly retreated in line of battle up the valley through New Market, closely followed by Wright and Emory, their artillery on the pike and their columns on its right and left. Both sides moved with celerity, the Confederates stimulated by the desire to escape, and our men animated by the prospect of wholly destroying Early's army. The stern-chase continued for about thirteen miles, our infantry often coming within range, yet whenever we began to deploy, the Confederates increased the distance between us by resorting to a double quick, evading battle with admirable tact. While all this was going on, the open country permitted us a rare and brilliant sight, the bright sun gleaming from the arms and trappings of the thousands of pursuers and pursued.

Near New Market, as a last effort to hold the enemy, I pushed Devin's cavalry—comprising about five hundred men—with two guns right up on Early's lines, in the hope that the tempting opportunity given him to capture the guns would stay his retreat long enough to let my infantry deploy within range, but he refused the bait, and after momentarily checking Devin he continued on with little loss and in pretty good order.

All hope of Torbert's appearing in rear of the Confederates vanished as they passed beyond New Market. Some six miles south of this place Early left the Valley Pike and took the road to Keezletown, a move due in a measure to Powell's march by way of Timberville toward Lacy's Springs, but mainly caused by the fact that the Keezletown road ran immediately along the base of Peaked Mountain—a rugged ridge affording protection to Early's right flank—and led in a direction facilitating his junction with Kershaw, who had been ordered back to him from Culpeper the day after the battle of the Opequon. The chase was kept up on the Keezletown road till darkness overtook us, when my weary troops were permitted to go into camp; and as soon as the enemy discovered by our fires that the pursuit had stopped, he also bivouacked some five miles farther south toward Port Republic.

The next morning Early was joined by Lomax's cavalry from Harrisonburg, Wickham's and Payne's brigades of cavalry also uniting with him from the Luray Valley. His whole army then fell back to the mouth of Brown's Gap to await Kershaw's division and Cutshaw's artillery, now on their return.



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By the morning of the 25th the main body of the enemy had disappeared entirely from my front, and the capture of some small, squads of Confederates in the neighboring hills furnished us the only incidents of the day. Among the prisoners was a tall and fine looking officer, much worn with hunger and fatigue. The moment I saw him I recognized him as a former comrade, George W. Carr, with whom I had served in Washington Territory. He was in those days a lieutenant in the Ninth Infantry, and was one of the officers who superintended the execution of the nine Indians at the Cascades of the Columbia in 1856. Carr was very much emaciated, and greatly discouraged by the turn events had recently taken. For old acquaintance sake I gave him plenty to eat, and kept him in comfort at my headquarters until the next batch of prisoners was sent to the rear, when he went with them. He had resigned from the regular army at the commencement of hostilities, and, full of high anticipation, cast his lot with the Confederacy, but when he fell into our hands, his bright dreams having been dispelled by the harsh realities of war, he appeared to think that for him there was no future.

Picking up prisoners here and there, my troops resumed their march directly south on the Valley pike, and when the Sixth and Nineteenth corps reached Harrisonburg, they went into camp, Powell in the meanwhile pushing on to Mt. Crawford, and Crook taking up a position in our rear at the junction of the Keezletown road and the Valley pike. Late in the afternoon Torbert's cavalry came in from New Market arriving at that place many hours later than it had been expected.

The succeeding day I sent Merritt to Port Republic to occupy the enemy's attention, while Torbert, with Wilson's division and the regular brigade, was ordered to Staunton, whence he was to proceed to Waynesboro' and blow up the railroad bridge. Having done this, Torbert, as he returned, was to drive off whatever cattle he could find, destroy all forage and breadstuffs, and burn the mills. He took possession of Waynesboro' in due time, but had succeeded in only partially demolishing the railroad bridge when, attacked by Pegram's division of infantry and Wickham's cavalry, he was compelled to fall back to Staunton. From the latter place he retired to Bridgewater, and Spring Hill, on the way, however, fully executing his instructions regarding the destruction of supplies.

While Torbert was on this expedition, Merritt had occupied Port Republic, but he happened to get there the very day that Kershaw's division was marching from Swift Run Gap to join Early. By accident Kershaw ran into Merritt shortly after the latter had gained the village. Kershaw's four infantry brigades attacked at once, and Merritt, forced out of Port Republic, fell back toward Cross Keys; and in anticipation that the Confederates could be coaxed to that point, I ordered the infantry there, but Torbert's



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attack at Wavnesboro' had alarmed Early, and in consequence he drew all his forces in toward Rock-fish Gap. This enabled me to re-establish Merritt at Port Republic, send the Sixth and Nineteenth corps to the neighborhood of Mt. Crawford to await the return of Torbert, and to post Crook at Harrisonburg; these dispositions practically obtained till the 6th of October, I holding a line across the valley from Port Republic along North River by Mt. Crawford to the Back road near the mouth of Briery Branch Gap.

It was during this period, about dusk on the evening of October 3, that between Harrisonburg and Dayton my engineer officer, Lieutenant John R. Meigs, was murdered within my lines. He had gone out with two topographical assistants to plot the country, and late in the evening, while riding along the public road on his return to camp, he overtook three men dressed in our uniform. From their dress, and also because the party was immediately behind our lines and within a mile and a half of my headquarters, Meigs and his assistants naturally thought that they were joining friends, and wholly unsuspecting of anything to the contrary, rode on with the three men some little distance; but their perfidy was abruptly discovered by their suddenly turning upon Meigs with a call for his surrender. It has been claimed that, refusing to submit, he fired on the treacherous party, but the statement is not true, for one of the topographers escaped—the other was captured—and reported a few minutes later at my headquarters that Meigs was killed without resistance of any kind whatever, and without even the chance to give himself up. This man was so cool, and related all the circumstances of the occurrence with such exactness, as to prove the truthfulness of his statement. The fact that the murder had been committed inside our lines was evidence that the perpetrators of the crime, having their homes in the vicinity, had been clandestinely visiting them, and been secretly harbored by some of the neighboring residents. Determining to teach a lesson to these abettors of the foul deed—a lesson they would never forget—I ordered all the houses within an area of five miles to be burned. General Custer, who had succeeded to the command of the Third Cavalry division (General Wilson having been detailed as chief of cavalry to Sherman's army), was charged with this duty, and the next morning proceeded to put the order into execution. The prescribed area included the little village of Dayton, but when a few houses in the immediate neighborhood of the scene of the murder had been burned, Custer was directed to cease his desolating work, but to fetch away all the able-bodied males as prisoners.

### CHAPTER III.



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*Reasons for not pursuing early through the Blue ridge—general Torbert detailed to give general Rosser A “Drubbing”—General Rosser routed—telegraphed to meet Stanton—Longstreet’s message—return to Winchester—the ride to Cedar creek—the retreating army—rallying the troops—reforming the line—commencing the attack—defeat of the confederates—appointed A major-general in the regular army—results of the battle.*

While we lay in camp at Harrisonburg it became necessary to decide whether or not I would advance to Brown’s Gap, and, after driving the enemy from there, follow him through the Blue Ridge into eastern Virginia. Indeed, this question began to cause me solicitude as soon as I knew Early had escaped me at New Market, for I felt certain that I should be urged to pursue the Confederates toward Charlottesville and Gordonsville, and be expected to operate on that line against Richmond. For many reasons I was much opposed to such a plan, but mainly because its execution would involve the opening of the Orange and Alexandria railroad. To protect this road against the raids of the numerous guerrilla bands that infested the region through which it passed, and to keep it in operation, would require a large force of infantry, and would also greatly reduce my cavalry; besides, I should be obliged to leave a force in the valley strong enough to give security to the line of the upper Potomac and the Baltimore and Ohio railroad, and this alone would probably take the whole of Crook’s command, leaving me a wholly inadequate number of fighting men to prosecute a campaign against the city of Richmond. Then, too, I was in doubt whether the besiegers could hold the entire army at Petersburg; and in case they could not, a number of troops sufficient to crush me might be detached by Lee, moved rapidly by rail, and, after overwhelming me, be quickly returned to confront General Meade. I was satisfied, moreover, that my transportation could not supply me further than Harrisonburg, and if in penetrating the Blue Ridge I met with protracted resistance, a lack of supplies might compel me to abandon the attempt at a most inopportune time.

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I therefore advised that the Valley campaign be terminated north of Staunton, and I be permitted to return, carrying out on the way my original instructions for desolating the Shenandoah country so as to make it untenable for permanent occupation by the Confederates. I proposed to detach the bulk of my army when this work of destruction was completed, and send it by way of the Baltimore and Ohio railroad through Washington to the Petersburg line, believing that I could move it more rapidly by that route than by any other. I was confident that if a movement of this character could be made with celerity it would culminate in the capture of Richmond and possibly of General Lee's army, and I was in hopes that General Grant would take the same view of the matter; but just at this time he was so pressed by the Government and by public-opinion at the North, that he advocated the wholly different conception of driving Early into eastern Virginia, and adhered to this plan with some tenacity. Considerable correspondence regarding the subject took place between us, throughout which I stoutly maintained that we should not risk, by what I held to be a false move, all that my army had gained. I being on the ground, General Grant left to me the final decision of the question, and I solved the first step by determining to withdraw down the valley at least as far as Strasburg, which movement was begun on the 6th of October.

The cavalry as it retired was stretched across the country from the Blue Ridge to the eastern slope of the Alleghanies, with orders to drive off all stock and destroy all supplies as it moved northward. The infantry preceded the cavalry, passing down the Valley pike, and as we marched along the many columns of smoke from burning stacks, and mills filled with grain, indicated that the adjacent country was fast losing the features which hitherto had made it a great magazine of stores for the Confederate armies.

During the 6th and 7th of October, the enemy's horse followed us up, though at a respectful distance. This cavalry was now under command of General T. W. Rosser, who on October 5 had joined Early with an additional brigade from Richmond. As we proceeded the Confederates gained confidence, probably on account of the reputation with which its new commander had been heralded, and on the third day's march had the temerity to annoy my rear guard considerably. Tired of these annoyances, I concluded to open the enemy's eyes in earnest, so that night I told Torbert I expected him either to give Rosser a drubbing next morning or get whipped himself, and that the infantry would be halted until the affair was over; I also informed him that I proposed to ride out to Round Top Mountain to see the fight. When I decided to have Rosser chastised, Merritt was encamped at the foot of Round Top, an elevation just north of Tom's Brook, and Custer some six miles farther north and west, near Tumbling Run. In the night Custer

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was ordered to retrace his steps before daylight by the Back road, which is parallel to and about three miles from the Valley pike, and attack the enemy at Tom's Brook crossing, while Merritt's instructions were to assail him on the Valley pike in concert with Custer. About 7 in the morning, Custer's division encountered Rosser himself with three brigades, and while the stirring sounds of the resulting artillery duel were reverberating through the valley Merritt moved briskly to the front and fell upon Generals Lomax and Johnson on the Valley pike. Merritt, by extending his right, quickly established connection with Custer, and the two divisions moved forward together under Torbert's direction, with a determination to inflict on the enemy the sharp and summary punishment his rashness had invited.

The engagement soon became general across the valley, both sides fighting mainly mounted. For about two hours the contending lines struggled with each other along Tom's Brook, the charges and counter charges at many points being plainly visible from the summit of Round Top, where I had my headquarters for the time.

The open country permitting a sabre fight, both sides seemed bent on using that arm. In the centre the Confederates maintained their position with much stubbornness, and for a time seemed to have recovered their former spirit, but at last they began to give way on both flanks, and as these receded, Merritt and Custer went at the wavering ranks in a charge along the whole front. The result was a general smash-up of the entire Confederate line, the retreat quickly degenerating into a rout the like of which was never before seen. For twenty-six miles this wild stampede kept up, with our troopers close at the enemy's heels; and the ludicrous incidents of the chase never ceased to be amusing topics around the camp-fires of Merritt and Custer. In the fight and pursuit Torbert took eleven pieces of artillery, with their caissons, all the wagons and ambulances the enemy had on the ground, and three hundred prisoners. Some of Rosser's troopers fled to the mountains by way of Columbia Furnace, and some up the Valley pike and into the Massamitten Range, apparently not discovering that the chase had been discontinued till south of Mount Jackson they rallied on Early's infantry.

After this catastrophe, Early reported to General Lee that his cavalry was so badly demoralized that it should be dismounted; and the citizens of the valley, intensely disgusted with the boasting and swaggering that had characterized the arrival of the "Laurel Brigade" in that section, baptized the action (known to us as Tom's Brook) the "Woodstock Races," and never tired of poking fun at General Rosser about his precipitate and inglorious flight. (When Rosser arrived from Richmond with his brigade he was proclaimed as the savior of the Valley, and his men came all bedecked with laurel branches.)



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On the 10th my army, resuming its retrograde movement, crossed to the north side of Cedar Creek. The work of repairing the Manassas Gap branch of the Orange and Alexandria railroad had been begun some days before, out from Washington, and, anticipating that it would be in readiness to transport troops by the time they could reach Piedmont, I directed the Sixth Corps to continue its march toward Front Royal, expecting to return to the Army of the Potomac by that line. By the 12th, however, my views regarding the reconstruction of this railroad began to prevail, and the work on it was discontinued. The Sixth Corps, therefore, abandoned that route, and moved toward Ashby's Gap with the purpose of marching direct to Washington, but on the 13th I recalled it to Cedar Creek, in consequence of the arrival of the enemy's infantry at Fisher's Hill, and the receipt, the night before, of the following despatch, which again opened the question of an advance on Gordonsville and Charlottesville:

(Cipher.)

"Washington, October 12, 1864, 12 M.

"Major-general Sheridan:

"Lieutenant-General Grant wishes a position taken far enough south to serve as a base for further operations upon Gordonsville and Charlottesville. It must be strongly fortified and provisioned. Some point in the vicinity of Manassas Gap would seem best suited for all purposes. Colonel Alexander, of the Engineers, will be sent to consult with you as soon as you connect with General Augur.

"H. W. Halleck, Major-General."

As it was well known in Washington that the views expressed in the above despatch were counter to my convictions, I was the next day required by the following telegram from Secretary Stanton to repair to that city:

"Washington, October 13, 1864.

"Major-general Sheridan  
(through General Augur)

"If you can come here, a consultation on several points is extremely desirable. I propose to visit General Grant, and would like to see you first.

"Edwin M. Stanton,  
"Secretary of War."

I got all ready to comply with the terms of Secretary Stanton's despatch, but in the meantime the enemy appeared in my front in force, with infantry and cavalry, and attacked Colonel Thoburn, who had been pushed out toward Strasburg from Crook's command, and also Custer's division of cavalry on the Back road. As afterward



appeared, this attack was made in the belief that all of my troops but Crook's had gone to Petersburg. From this demonstration there ensued near Hupp's Hill a bitter skirmish between Kershaw and Thoburn, and the latter was finally compelled to withdraw to the north bank of Cedar Creek. Custer gained better results, however, on the Back road, with his usual dash driving the enemy's cavalry away from his front, Merritt's division then joining him and remaining on the right.



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The day's events pointing to a probability that the enemy intended to resume the offensive, to anticipate such a contingency I ordered the Sixth Corps to return from its march toward Ashby's Gap. It reached me by noon of the 14th, and went into position to the right and rear of the Nineteenth Corps, which held a line along the north bank of Cedar Creek, west of the Valley pike. Crook was posted on the left of the Nineteenth Corps and east of the Valley pike, with Thoburn's division advanced to a round hill, which commanded the junction of Cedar Creek and the Shenandoah River, while Torbert retained both Merritt and Custer on the right of the Sixth Corps, and at the same time covered with Powell the roads toward Front Royal. My head-quarters were at the Belle Grove House, which was to the west of the pike and in rear of the Nineteenth Corps. It was my intention to attack the enemy as soon as the Sixth Corps reached me, but General Early having learned from his demonstration that I had not detached as largely as his previous information had led him to believe, on the night of the 13th withdrew to Fisher's Hill; so, concluding that he could not do us serious hurt from there, I changed my mind as to attacking, deciding to defer such action till I could get to Washington, and come to some definite understanding about my future operations.

To carry out this idea, on the evening of the 15th I ordered all of the cavalry under General Torbert to accompany me to Front Royal, again intending to push it thence through Chester Gap to the Virginia Central railroad at Charlottesville, to destroy the bridge over the Rivanna River, while I passed through Manassas Gap to Rectortown, and thence by rail to Washington. On my arrival with the cavalry near Front Royal on the 16th, I halted at the house of Mrs. Richards, on the north bank of the river, and there received the following despatch and inclosure from General Wright, who had been left in command at Cedar Creek:

*"Headquarters middle military Division,  
"October 16, 1864.*

*"General:*

*"I enclose you despatch which explains itself. If the enemy should be strongly reenforced in cavalry, he might, by turning our right, give us a great deal of trouble. I shall hold on here until the enemy's movements are developed, and shall only fear an attack on my right, which I shall make every preparation for guarding against and resisting.*

*"Very respectfully, your obedient servant,*

*"H. G. Wright, Major-General Commanding.  
"Major-general P. H. Sheridan,  
"Commanding Middle Military Division."*

[INCLOSURE.] *"To lieutenant-general early:*

“Be ready to move as soon as my forces join you, and we will crush Sheridan.

“*Longstreet*, Lieutenant-General.”

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The message from Longstreet had been taken down as it was being flagged from the Confederate signal-station on Three Top Mountain, and afterward translated by our signal officers, who knew the Confederate signal code. I first thought it a ruse, and hardly worth attention, but on reflection deemed it best to be on the safe side, so I abandoned the cavalry raid toward Charlottesville, in order to give General Wright the entire strength of the army, for it did not seem wise to reduce his numbers while reinforcement for the enemy might be near, and especially when such pregnant messages were reaching Early from one of the ablest of the Confederate generals. Therefore I sent the following note to General Wright:

*"Headquarters middle military division,  
"Front Royal, October 16, 1864.*

*"General: The cavalry is all ordered back to you; make your position strong. If Longstreet's despatch is true, he is under the impression that we have largely detached. I will go over to Augur, and may get additional news. Close in Colonel Powell, who will be at this point. If the enemy should make an advance, I know you will defeat him. Look well to your ground and be well prepared. Get up everything that can be spared. I will bring up all I can, and will be up on Tuesday, if not sooner.*

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

*"Major-general H. G. Wright,  
"Commanding Sixth Army Corps."*

At 5 o'clock on the evening of the 16th I telegraphed General Halleck from Rectortown, giving him the information which had come to me from Wright, asking if anything corroborative of it had been received from General Grant, and also saying that I would like to see Halleck; the telegram ending with the question: "Is it best for me to go to see you?" Next morning I sent back to Wright all the cavalry except one regiment, which escorted me through Manassas Gap to the terminus of the railroad from Washington. I had with me Lieutenant-Colonel James W. Forsyth, chief-of-staff, and three of my aides, Major George A. Forsyth, Captain Joseph O'Keefe, and Captain Michael V. Sheridan. I rode my black horse, Rienzi, and the others their own respective mounts.

Before leaving Cedar Creek I had fixed the route of my return to be by rail from Washington to Martinsburg, and thence by horseback to Winchester and Cedar Creek, and had ordered three hundred cavalry to Martinsburg to escort me from that point to the front. At Rectortown I met General Augur, who had brought a force out from Washington to reconstruct and protect the line of railroad, and through him received the following reply from General Halleck:

*"Headquarters armies of the united states, "Washington, D.C., October 16 1864*



"To *major-general Sheridan*,  
"Rectortown, Va.

General Grant says that Longstreet brought with him no troops from Richmond, but I have very little confidence in the information collected at his headquarters. If you can leave your command with safety, come to Washington, as I wish to give you the views of the authorities here.

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

In consequence of the Longstreet despatch, I felt a concern about my absence which I could hardly repress, but after duly considering what Halleck said, and believing that Longstreet could not unite with Early before I got back, and that even if he did Wright would be able to cope with them both, I and my staff, with our horses, took the cars for Washington, where we arrived on the morning of the 17th at about 8 o'clock. I proceeded at an early hour to the War Department, and as soon as I met Secretary Stanton, asked him for a special train to be ready at 12 o'clock to take me to Martinsburg, saying that in view of existing conditions I must get back to my army as quickly as possible. He at once gave the order for the train, and then the Secretary, Halleck, and I proceeded to hold a consultation in regard to my operating east of the Blue Ridge. The upshot was that my views against such a plan were practically agreed to, and two engineer officers were designated to return with me for the purpose of reporting on a defensive line in the valley that could be held while the bulk of my troops were being detached to Petersburg. Colonel Alexander and Colonel Thom both of the Engineer Corps, reported to accompany me, and at 12 o'clock we took the train.

We arrived about dark at Martinsburg, and there found the escort of three hundred men which I had ordered before leaving Cedar Creek. We spent that night at Martinsburg, and early next morning mounted and started up the Valley pike for Winchester, leaving Captain Sheridan behind to conduct to the army the Commissioners whom the State of New York had sent down to receive the vote of her troops in the coming Presidential election. Colonel Alexander was a man of enormous weight, and Colonel Thom correspondingly light, and as both were unaccustomed to riding we had to go slowly, losing so much time, in fact, that we did not reach Winchester till between 3 and 4 o'clock in the afternoon, though the distance is but twenty-eight miles. As soon as we arrived at Colonel Edwards's headquarters in the town, where I intended stopping for the night, I sent a courier to the front to bring me a report of the condition of affairs, and then took Colonel Alexander out on the heights about Winchester, in order that he might overlook the country, and make up his mind as to the utility of fortifying there. By the time we had completed our survey it was dark, and just as we reached Colonel Edwards's house on our return a courier came in from Cedar Creek bringing word that everything was all right, that the enemy was quiet at Fisher's Hill, and that a brigade of Grover's division was to make a reconnoissance in the morning, the 19th, so about 10 o'clock I went to bed greatly relieved, and expecting to rejoin my headquarters at my leisure next day.

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Toward 6 o'clock the morning of the 19th, the officer on picket duty at Winchester came to my room, I being yet in bed, and reported artillery firing from the direction of Cedar Creek. I asked him if the firing was continuous or only desultory, to which he replied that it was not a sustained fire, but rather irregular and fitful. I remarked: "It's all right; Grover has gone out this morning to make a reconnoissance, and he is merely feeling the enemy." I tried to go to sleep again, but grew so restless that I could not, and soon got up and dressed myself. A little later the picket officer came back and reported that the firing, which could be distinctly heard from his line on the heights outside of Winchester, was still going on. I asked him if it sounded like a battle, and as he again said that it did not, I still inferred that the cannonading was caused by Grover's division banging away at the enemy simply to find out what he was up to. However, I went down-stairs and requested that breakfast be hurried up, and at the same time ordered the horses to be saddled and in readiness, for I concluded to go to the front before any further examinations were made in regard to the defensive line.

We mounted our horses between half-past 8 and 9, and as we were proceeding up the street which leads directly through Winchester, from the Logan residence, where Edwards was quartered, to the Valley pike, I noticed that there were many women at the windows and doors of the houses, who kept shaking their skirts at us and who were otherwise markedly insolent in their demeanor, but supposing this conduct to be instigated by their well-known and perhaps natural prejudices, I ascribed to it no unusual significance. On reaching the edge of the town I halted a moment, and there heard quite distinctly the sound of artillery firing in an unceasing roar. Concluding from this that a battle was in progress, I now felt confident that the women along the street had received intelligence from the battle, field by the "grape-vine telegraph," and were in raptures over some good news, while I as yet was utterly ignorant of the actual situation. Moving on, I put my head down toward the pommel of my saddle and listened intently, trying to locate and interpret the sound, continuing in this position till we had crossed Mill Creek, about half a mile from Winchester. The result of my efforts in the interval was the conviction that the travel of the sound was increasing too rapidly to be accounted for by my own rate of motion, and that therefore my army must be falling back.

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At Mill Creek my escort fell in behind, and we were going ahead at a regular pace, when, just as we made the crest of the rise beyond the stream, there burst upon our view the appalling spectacle of a panic-stricken army—hundreds of slightly wounded men, throngs of others unhurt but utterly demoralized, and baggage-wagons by the score, all pressing to the rear in hopeless confusion, telling only too plainly that a disaster had occurred at the front. On accosting some of the fugitives, they assured me that the army was broken up, in full retreat, and that all was lost; all this with a manner true to that peculiar indifference that takes possession of panic-stricken men. I was greatly disturbed by the sight, but at once sent word to Colonel Edwards commanding the brigade in Winchester, to stretch his troops across the valley, near Mill Creek, and stop all fugitives, directing also that the transportation be passed through and parked on the north side of the town.

As I continued at a walk a few hundred yards farther, thinking all the time of Longstreet's telegram to Early, "Be ready when I join you, and we will crush Sheridan," I was fixing in my mind what I should do. My first thought was to stop the army in the suburbs of Winchester as it came back, form a new line, and fight there; but as the situation was more maturely considered a better conception prevailed. I was sure the troops had confidence in me, for heretofore we had been successful; and as at other times they had seen me present at the slightest sign of trouble or distress, I felt that I ought to try now to restore their broken ranks, or, failing in that, to share their fate because of what they had done hitherto.

About this time Colonel Wood, my chief commissary, arrived from the front and gave me fuller intelligence, reporting that everything was gone, my headquarters captured, and the troops dispersed. When I heard this I took two of my aides-de-camp, Major George A. Forsyth and Captain Joseph O'Keefe, and with twenty men from the escort started for the front, at the same time directing Colonel James W. Forsyth and Colonels Alexander and Thom to remain behind and do what they could to stop the runaways.

For a short distance I traveled on the road, but soon found it so blocked with wagons and wounded men that my progress was impeded, and I was forced to take to the adjoining fields to make haste. When most of the wagons and wounded were past I returned to the road, which was thickly lined with unhurt men, who, having got far enough to the rear to be out of danger, had halted, without any organization, and begun cooking coffee, but when they saw me they abandoned their coffee, threw up their hats, shouldered their muskets, and as I passed along turned to follow with enthusiasm and cheers. To acknowledge this exhibition of feeling I took off my hat, and with Forsyth and O'Keefe rode some distance in advance of my escort, while every mounted officer who saw



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me galloped out on either side of the pike to tell the men at a distance that I had come back. In this way the news was spread to the stragglers off the road, when they, too, turned their faces to the front and marched toward the enemy, changing in a moment from the depths of depression, to the extreme of enthusiasm. I already knew that even in the ordinary condition of mind enthusiasm is a potent element with soldiers, but what I saw that day convinced me that if it can be excited from a state of despondency its power is almost irresistible. I said nothing except to remark as I rode among those on the road: "If I had been, with you this morning this disaster would not have happened. We must face the other way; we will go back and recover our camp."

My first halt was made just north of Newtown, where I met a chaplain digging his heels into the sides of his jaded horse, and making for the rear with all possible speed. I drew up for an instant, and inquired of him how matters were going at the front. He replied, "Everything is lost; but all will be right when you get there"; yet notwithstanding this expression of confidence in me, the parson at once resumed his breathless pace to the rear. At Newtown I was obliged to make a circuit to the left, to get round the village. I could not pass through it, the streets were so crowded, but meeting on this detour Major McKinley, of Crook's staff, he spread the news of my return through the motley throng there.

When nearing the Valley pike, just south of Newtown I saw about three-fourths of a mile west of the pike a body of troops, which proved to be Ricketts's and Wheaton's divisions of the Sixth Corps, and then learned that the Nineteenth Corps had halted a little to the right and rear of these; but I did not stop, desiring to get to the extreme front. Continuing on parallel with the pike, about midway between Newtown and Middletown I crossed to the west of it, and a little later came up in rear of Getty's division of the Sixth Corps. When I arrived, this division and the cavalry were the only troops in the presence of and resisting the enemy; they were apparently acting as a rear-guard at a point about three miles north of the line we held at Cedar Creek when the battle began. General Torbert was the first officer to meet me, saying as he rode up, "My God! I am glad you've come." Getty's division, when I found it, was about a mile north of Middletown, posted on the reverse slope of some slightly rising ground, holding a barricade made with fence-rails, and skirmishing slightly with the enemy's pickets. Jumping my horse over the line of rails, I rode to the crest of the elevation, and there taking off my hat, the men rose up from behind their barricade with cheers of recognition. An officer of the Vermont brigade, Colonel A. S. Tracy, rode out to the front, and joining me, informed me that General Louis A. Grant was in command there, the regular division commander, General Getty, having



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taken charge of the Sixth Corps in place of Ricketts, wounded early in the action, while temporarily commanding the corps. I then turned back to the rear of Getty's division, and as I came behind it, a line of regimental flags rose up out of the ground, as it seemed, to welcome me. They were mostly the colors of Crook's troops, who had been stampeded and scattered in the surprise of the morning. The color-bearers, having withstood the panic, had formed behind the troops of Getty. The line with the colors was largely composed of officers, among whom I recognized Colonel R. B. Hayes, since president of the United States, one of the brigade commanders. At the close of this incident I crossed the little narrow valley, or depression, in rear of Getty's line, and dismounting on the opposite crest, established that point as my headquarters. In a few minutes some of my staff joined me, and the first directions I gave were to have the Nineteenth Corps and the two divisions of Wright's corps brought to the front, so they could be formed on Getty's division, prolonged to the right; for I had already decided to attack the enemy from that line as soon as I could get matters in shape to take the offensive. Crook met me at this time, and strongly favored my idea of attacking, but said, however, that most of his troops were gone. General Wright came up a little later, when I saw that he was wounded, a ball having grazed the point of his chin so as to draw the blood plentifully.

Wright gave me a hurried account of the day's events, and when told that we would fight the enemy on the line which Getty and the cavalry were holding, and that he must go himself and send all his staff to bring up the troops, he zealously fell in with the scheme; and it was then that the Nineteenth Corps and two divisions of the Sixth were ordered to the front from where they had been halted to the right and rear of Getty.

After this conversation I rode to the east of the Valley pike and to the left of Getty's division, to a point from which I could obtain a good view of the front, in the mean time sending Major Forsyth to communicate with Colonel Lowell (who occupied a position close in toward the suburbs of Middletown and directly in front of Getty's left) to learn whether he could hold on there. Lowell replied that he could. I then ordered Custer's division back to the right flank, and returning to the place where my headquarters had been established I met near them Ricketts's division under General Keifer and General Frank Wheaton's division, both marching to the front. When the men of these divisions saw me they began cheering and took up the double quick to the front, while I turned back toward Getty's line to point out where these returning troops should be placed. Having done this, I ordered General Wright to resume command of the Sixth Corps, and Getty, who was temporarily in charge of it, to take command of his own division. A little later the Nineteenth Corps came up and was posted between the right of the Sixth Corps and Middle Marsh Brook.



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All this had consumed a great deal of time, and I concluded to visit again the point to the east of the Valley pike, from where I had first observed the enemy, to see what he was doing. Arrived there, I could plainly see him getting ready for attack, and Major Forsyth now suggested that it would be well to ride along the line of battle before the enemy assailed us, for although the troops had learned of my return, but few of them had seen me. Following his suggestion I started in behind the men, but when a few paces had been taken I crossed to the front and, hat in hand, passed along the entire length of the infantry line; and it is from this circumstance that many of the officers and men who then received me with such heartiness have since supposed that that was my first appearance on the field. But at least two hours had elapsed since I reached the ground, for it was after mid-day, when this incident of riding down the front took place, and I arrived not later, certainly, than half-past 10 o'clock.

After re-arranging the line and preparing to attack I returned again to observe the Confederates, who shortly began to advance on us. The attacking columns did not cover my entire front, and it appeared that their onset would be mainly directed against the Nineteenth Corps, so, fearing that they might be too strong for Emory on account of his depleted condition (many of his men not having had time to get up from the rear), and Getty's division being free from assault I transferred a part of it from the extreme left to the support of the Nineteenth Corps. The assault was quickly repulsed by Emory, however, and as the enemy fell back Getty's troops were returned to their original place. This repulse of the Confederates made me feel pretty safe from further offensive operations on their part, and I now decided to suspend the fighting till my thin ranks were further strengthened by the men who were continually coming up from the rear, and particularly till Crook's troops could be assembled on the extreme left.

In consequence of the despatch already mentioned, "Be ready when I join you, and we will crush Sheridan," since learned to have been fictitious, I had been supposing all day that Longstreet's troops were present, but as no definite intelligence on this point had been gathered, I concluded, in the lull that now occurred, to ascertain something positive regarding Longstreet; and Merritt having been transferred to our left in the morning, I directed him to attack an exposed battery then at the edge of Middletown, and capture some prisoners. Merritt soon did this work effectually, concealing his intention till his troops got close in to the enemy, and then by a quick dash gobbling up a number of Confederates. When the prisoners were brought in, I learned from them that the only troops of Longstreet's in the fight were of Kershaw's division, which had rejoined Early at Brown's Gap in the latter part of September, and that the rest of Longstreet's



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corps was not on the field. The receipt of this information entirely cleared the way for me to take the offensive, but on the heels of it came information that Longstreet was marching by the Front Royal pike to strike my rear at Winchester, driving Powell's cavalry in as he advanced. This renewed my uneasiness, and caused me to delay the general attack till after assurances came from Powell denying utterly the reports as to Longstreet, and confirming the statements of the prisoners.

Between half-past and 4 o'clock, I was ready to assail, and decided to do so by advancing my infantry line in a swinging movement, so as to gain the Valley pike with my right between Middletown and the Belle Grove House; and when the order was passed along, the men pushed steadily forward with enthusiasm and confidence. General Early's troops extended some little distance beyond our right, and when my flank neared the overlapping enemy, he turned on it, with the effect of causing a momentary confusion, but General McMillan quickly realizing the danger, broke the Confederates at the reentering angle by a counter charge with his brigade, doing his work so well that the enemy's flanking troops were cut off from their main body and left to shift for themselves. Custer, who was just then moving in from the west side of Middle Marsh Brook, followed McMillan's timely blow with a charge of cavalry, but before starting out on it, and while his men were forming, riding at full speed himself, to throw his arms around my neck. By the time he had disengaged himself from this embrace, the troops broken by McMillan had gained some little distance to their rear, but Custer's troopers sweeping across the Middletown meadows and down toward Cedar Creek, took many of them prisoners before they could reach the stream—so I forgave his delay.

My whole line as far as the eye could see was now driving everything before it, from behind trees, stone walls, and all such sheltering obstacles, so I rode toward the left to ascertain how matters were getting on there. As I passed along behind the advancing troops, first General Grover, and then Colonel Mackenzie, rode up to welcome me. Both were severely wounded, and I told them to leave the field, but they implored permission to remain till success was certain. When I reached the Valley pike Crook had reorganized his men, and as I desired that they should take part in the fight, for they were the very same troops that had turned Early's flank at Winchester and at Fisher's Hill, I ordered them to be pushed forward; and the alacrity and celerity with which they moved on Middletown demonstrated that their ill-fortune of the morning had not sprung from lack of valor.

Meanwhile Lowell's brigade of cavalry, which, it will be remembered, had been holding on, dismounted, just north of Middletown ever since the time I arrived from Winchester, fell to the rear for the purpose of getting their led horses. A momentary panic was created in the nearest brigade of infantry by this withdrawal of Lowell, but as soon as his men were mounted they charged the enemy clear up to the stone walls in the edge of



Middletown; at sight of this the infantry brigade renewed its attack, and the enemy's right gave way. The accomplished Lowell received his death-wound in this courageous charge.



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All our troops were now moving on the retreating Confederates, and as I rode to the front Colonel Gibbs, who succeeded Lowell, made ready for another mounted charge, but I checked him from pressing the enemy's right, in the hope that the swinging attack from my right would throw most of the Confederates to the east of the Valley pike, and hence off their line of retreat through Strasburg to Fisher's Hill. The eagerness of the men soon frustrated this anticipation, however, the left insisting on keeping pace with the centre and right, and all pushing ahead till we regained our old camps at Cedar Creek. Beyond Cedar Creek, at Strasburg, the pike makes a sharp turn to the west toward Fisher's Hill, and here Merritt uniting with Custer, they together fell on the flank of the retreating columns, taking many prisoners, wagons, and guns, among the prisoners being Major-General Ramseur, who, mortally wounded, died the next day.

When the news of the victory was received, General Grant directed a salute of one hundred shotted guns to be fired into Petersburg, and the President at once thanked the army in an autograph letter. A few weeks after, he promoted me, and I received notice of this in a special letter from the Secretary of War, saying:

“—that for the personal gallantry, military skill, and just confidence in the courage and patriotism of your troops, displayed by you on the 19th day of October at Cedar Run, whereby, under the blessing of Providence, your routed army was reorganized, a great National disaster averted, and a brilliant victory achieved over the rebels for the third time in pitched battle within thirty days, Philip H. Sheridan is appointed a major-general in the United States Army.”

The direct result of the battle was the recapture of all the artillery, transportation, and camp equipage we had lost, and in addition twenty-four pieces of the enemy's artillery, twelve hundred prisoners, and a number of battle-flags. But more still flowed from this victory, succeeding as it did the disaster of the morning, for the reoccupation of our old camps at once re-established a morale which for some hours had been greatly endangered by ill-fortune.

It was not till after the battle that I learned fully what had taken place before my arrival, and then found that the enemy, having gathered all the strength he could through the return of convalescents and other absentees, had moved quietly from Fisher's Hill, in the night of the 18th and early on the morning of the 19th, to surprise my army, which, it should be remembered, was posted on the north bank of Cedar Creek, Crook holding on the left of the Valley pike, with Thoburn's division advanced toward the creek on Duval's (under Colonel Rutherford B. Hayes) and Kitching's provisional divisions to the north and rear of Thoburn. The Nineteenth Corps was on the right of Crook, extending in a semi-circular line from the pike nearly to Meadow Brook, while the Sixth Corps lay to the west of the brook in readiness to be used as a movable column. Merritt's division was to the right and rear of the Sixth Corps, and about a mile and a half west of Merritt was Custer covering the fords of Cedar Creek as far west as the Middle road.



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General Early's plan was for one column under General Gordon, consisting of three divisions of infantry (Gordon's, Ramseur's, and Pegram's), and Payne's brigade of cavalry to cross the Shenandoah River directly east of the Confederate works at Fisher's Hill, march around the northerly face of the Massanutten Mountain, and again cross the Shenandoah at Bowman's and McInturff's fords. Payne's task was to capture me at the Belle Grove House. General Early himself, with Kershaw's and Wharton's divisions, was to move through Strasburg, Kershaw, accompanied by Early, to cross Cedar Creek at Roberts's ford and connect with Gordon, while Wharton was to continue on the Valley pike to Hupp's Hill and join the left of Kershaw, when the crossing of the Valley pike over Cedar Creek became free.

Lomax's cavalry, then in the Luray Valley, was ordered to join the right of Gordon on the field of battle, while Rosser was to carry the crossing of Cedar Creek on the Back road and attack Custer. Early's conceptions were carried through in the darkness with little accident or delay, Kershaw opening the fight by a furious attack on Thoburn's division, while at dawn and in a dense fog Gordon struck Crook's extreme left, surprising his pickets, and bursting into his camp with such suddenness as to stampede Crook's men. Gordon directing his march on my headquarters (the Belle Grove House), successfully turned our position as he gained the Valley pike, and General Wright was thus forced to order the withdrawal of the Nineteenth Corps from its post at the Cedar Creek crossing, and this enabled Wharton to get over the stream there unmolested and join Kershaw early in the action.

After Crook's troops had been driven from their camps, General Wright endeavored to form a line with the Sixth Corps to hold the Valley pike to the left of the Nineteenth, but failing in this he ordered the withdrawal of the latter corps, Ricketts, temporarily commanding the Sixth Corps, checking Gordon till Emory had retired. As already stated, Wharton was thus permitted to cross Cedar Creek on the pike, and now that Early had a continuous line, he pressed his advantage so vigorously that the whole Union army was soon driven from its camps in more or less disorder; and though much disjointed resistance was displayed, it may be said that no systematic stand was made until Getty's division, aided by Torbert's cavalry, which Wright had ordered to the left early in the action, took up the ground where, on arriving from Winchester, I found them.

When I left my command on the 16th, little did I anticipate that anything like this would happen. Indeed, I felt satisfied that Early was, of himself, too weak to take the offensive, and although I doubted the Longstreet despatch, yet I was confident that, even should it prove true, I could get back before the junction could be made, and at the worst I felt certain that my army was equal to confronting the forces of Longstreet



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and Early combined. Still, the surprise of the morning might have befallen me as well as the general on whom it did descend, and though it is possible that this could have been precluded had Powell's cavalry been closed in, as suggested in my despatch from Front Royal, yet the enemy's desperation might have prompted some other clever and ingenious scheme for relieving his fallen fortunes in the Shenandoah Valley.

### CHAPTER IV.

*General early reorganizes his forces—Mosby the guerrilla—general Merritt sent to operate against Mosby—Rosser again active—general Custer surprised—Colonel Young sent to capture Gilmore the guerrilla—Colonel Young's success—capture of general Kelly and general Crook—spies—was Wilkes Booth A spy?—Driving the confederates out of the valley—the battle of Waynesboro'—marching to join the army of the Potomac.*

Early's broken army practically made no halt in its retreat after the battle of Cedar-Creek until it reached New Market, though at Fisher's Hill was left a small rear-guard of cavalry, which hastily decamped, however, when charged by Gibbs's brigade on the morning of the 20th. Between the date of his signal defeat and the 11th of November, the enemy's scattered forces had sufficiently reorganized to permit his again making a reconnoissance in the valley as far north as Cedar Creek, my army having meanwhile withdrawn to Kernstown, where it had been finally decided that a defensive line should be held to enable me to detach troops to General Grant, and where, by reconstructing the Winchester and Potomac railroad from Stephenson's depot to Harper's Ferry, my command might be more readily, supplied. Early's reconnoissance north of Cedar Creek ended in a rapid withdrawal of his infantry after feeling my front, and with the usual ill-fortune to his cavalry; Merritt and Custer driving Rosser and Lomax with ease across Cedar Creek on the Middle and Back roads, while Powell's cavalry struck McCausland near Stony Point, and after capturing two pieces of artillery and about three hundred officers and men chased him into the Luray Valley.

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Early got back to New Market on the 14th of November, and, from lack of subsistence, being unable to continue demonstrations to prevent my reinforcement of General Grant, began himself to detach to General Lee by returning Kershaw's division to Petersburg, as was definitely ascertained by Torbert in a reconnoissance to Mount Jackson. At this time General Grant wished me to send him the Sixth Corps, and it was got ready for the purpose, but when I informed him that Torbert's reconnoissance had developed the fact that Early still retained four divisions of infantry and one of cavalry, it was decided, on my suggestion, to let the Sixth Corps remain till the season should be a little further advanced, when the inclemency of the weather would preclude infantry campaigning. These conditions came about early in December, and by the middle of the month the whole of the Sixth Corps was at Petersburg; simultaneously with its transfer to that line Early sending his Second Corps to Lee.

During the entire campaign I had been annoyed by guerrilla bands under such partisan chiefs as Mosby, White, Gilmore, McNeil, and others, and this had considerably depleted my line-of-battle strength, necessitating as it did large, escorts for my supply-trains. The most redoubtable of these leaders was Mosby, whose force was made up from the country around Upperville, east of the Blue Ridge, to which section he always fled for a hiding-place when he scented danger. I had not directed any special operations against these partisans while the campaign was active, but as Mosby's men had lately killed, within my lines, my chief quartermaster, Colonel Tolles, and Medical Inspector Ohlenchlager, I concluded to devote particular attention to these "irregulars" during the lull that now occurred; so on the 28th of November, I directed General Merritt to march to the Loudoun Valley and operate against Mosby, taking care to clear the country of forage and subsistence, so as to prevent the guerrillas from being harbored there in the future their destruction or capture being well-nigh impossible, on account of their intimate knowledge of the mountain region. Merritt carried out his instructions with his usual sagacity and thoroughness, sweeping widely over each side of his general line of march with flankers, who burned the grain and brought in large herds of cattle, hogs and sheep, which were issued to the troops.

While Merritt was engaged in this service the Baltimore and Ohio railroad once more received the attention of the enemy; Rosser, with two brigades of cavalry, crossing the Great North Mountain, capturing the post of New Creek, with about five hundred prisoners and seven guns, destroying all the supplies of the garrison, and breaking up the railroad track. This slight success of the Confederates in West Virginia, and the intelligence that they were contemplating further raids in that section, led me to send, Crook there with one division, his other troops going to City Point; and, I hoped that all the threatened places would thus be sufficiently protected, but negligence at Beverly resulted in the capture of that station by Rosser on the 11th of January.



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In the meanwhile, Early established himself with Wharton's division at Staunton in winter quarters, posting his cavalry in that neighborhood also, except a detachment at New Market, and another small one at the signal-station on Three Top Mountain. The winter was a most severe one, snow falling frequently to the depth of several inches, and the mercury often sinking below zero. The rigor of the season was very much against the success of any mounted operations, but General Grant being very desirous to have the railroads broken up about Gordonsville and Charlottesville, on the 19th of December I started the cavalry out for that purpose, Torbert, with Merritt and Powell, marching through Chester Gap, while Custer moved toward Staunton to make a demonstration in Torbert's favor, hoping to hold the enemy's troops in the valley. Unfortunately, Custer did not accomplish all that was expected of him, and being surprised by Rosser and Payne near Lacy's Springs before reveille, had to abandon his bivouac and retreat down the valley, with the loss of a number of prisoners, a few horses, and a good many horse equipments, for, because of the suddenness of Rosser's attack, many of the men had no time to saddle up. As soon as Custer's retreat was assured, Wharton's division of infantry was sent to Charlottesville to check Torbert, but this had already been done by Lomax, with the assistance of infantry sent up from Richmond. Indeed, from the very beginning of the movement the Confederates had been closely observing the columns of Torbert and Custer, and in consequence of the knowledge thus derived, Early had marched Lomax to Gordonsville in anticipation of an attack there, at the same time sending Rosser down the valley to meet Custer. Torbert in the performance of his task captured two pieces of artillery from Johnson's and McCausland's brigades, at Liberty Mills on the Rapidan River, but in the main the purpose of the raid utterly failed, so by the 27th of December he returned, many of his men badly frost-bitten from the extreme cold which had prevailed.

This expedition practically closed all operations for the season, and the cavalry was put into winter cantonment near Winchester. The distribution of my infantry to Petersburg and West Virginia left with me in the beginning of the new year, as already stated, but the one small division of the Nineteenth Corps. On account of this diminution of force, it became necessary for me to keep thoroughly posted in regard to the enemy, and I now realized more than I had done hitherto how efficient my scouts had become since under the control of Colonel Young; for not only did they bring me almost every day intelligence from within Early's lines, but they also operated efficiently against the guerrillas infesting West Virginia.



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Harry Gilmore, of Maryland, was the most noted of these since the death of McNeil, and as the scouts had reported him in Harrisonburg the latter part of January, I directed two of the most trustworthy to be sent to watch his movements and ascertain his purposes. In a few days these spies returned with the intelligence that Gilmore was on his way to Moorefield, the centre of a very disloyal section in West Virginia, about ninety miles southwest of Winchester, where, under the guise of a camp-meeting, a gathering was to take place, at which he expected to enlist a number of men, be joined by a party of about twenty recruits coming from Maryland, and then begin depredations along the Baltimore and Ohio railroad. Believing that Gilmore might be captured, I directed Young to undertake the task, and as a preliminary step he sent to Moorefield two of his men who early in the war had "refugeed" from that section and enlisted in one of the Union regiments from West Virginia. In about a week these men came back and reported that Gilmore was living at a house between three and four miles from Moorefield, and gave full particulars as to his coming and going, the number of men he had about there and where they rendezvoused.

With this knowledge at hand I directed Young to take twenty of his best men and leave that night for Moorefield, dressed in Confederate uniforms, telling him that I would have about three hundred cavalry follow in his wake when he had got about fifteen miles start, and instructing him to pass his party off as a body of recruits for Gilmore coming from Maryland and pursued by the Yankee cavalry. I knew this would allay suspicion and provide him help on the road; and, indeed, as Colonel Whittaker, who alone knew the secret, followed after the fleeing "Marylanders," he found that their advent had caused so little remark that the trail would have been lost had he not already known their destination. Young met with a hearty, welcome wherever he halted on the way, and as he passed through the town of Moorefield learned with satisfaction that Gilmore still made his headquarters at the house where the report of the two scouts had located him a few days before. Reaching the designated place about 12 o'clock on the night of the 5th of February, Young, under the representation that he had come directly from Maryland and was being pursued by the Union cavalry, gained immediate access to Gilmore's room. He found the bold guerrilla snugly tucked in bed, with two pistols lying on a chair near by. He was sleeping so soundly that to arouse him Young had to give him a violent shake. As he awoke and asked who was disturbing his slumbers, Young, pointing at him a cocked six-shooter, ordered him to dress without delay, and in answer to his inquiry, informed him that he was a prisoner to one of Sheridan's staff. Meanwhile Gilmore's men had learned of his trouble, but the early appearance of Colonel Whittaker caused them to disperse; thus the last link between Maryland and the Confederacy was carried a prisoner to Winchester, whence he was sent to Fort Warren.

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The capture of Gilmore caused the disbandment of the party he had organized at the “camp-meeting,” most of the men he had recruited returning to their homes discouraged, though some few joined the bands of Woodson and young Jesse McNeil, which, led by the latter, dashed into Cumberland, Maryland, at 3 O’clock on the morning of the 21st of February and made a reprisal by carrying off General Crook and General Kelly, and doing their work so silently and quickly that they escaped without being noticed, and were some distance on their way before the colored watchman at the hotel where Crook was quartered could compose himself enough to give the alarm. A troop of cavalry gave hot chase from Cumberland, striving to intercept the party at Moorefield and other points, but all efforts were fruitless, the prisoners soon being beyond reach.

Although I had adopted the general rule of employing only soldiers as scouts, there was an occasional exception to it. I cannot say that these exceptions proved wholly that an ironclad observance of the rule would have been best, but I am sure of it in one instance. A man named Lomas, who claimed to be a Marylander, offered me his services as a spy, and coming highly recommended from Mr. Stanton, who had made use of him in that capacity, I employed him. He made many pretensions, often appearing over anxious to impart information seemingly intended to impress me with his importance, and yet was more than ordinarily intelligent, but in spite of that my confidence in him was by no means unlimited. I often found what he reported to me as taking place within the Confederate lines corroborated by Young’s men, but generally there were discrepancies in his tales, which led me to suspect that he was employed by the enemy as well as by me. I felt, however, that with good watching he could do me little harm, and if my suspicions were incorrect he might be very useful, so I held on to him.

Early in February Lomas was very solicitous for me to employ a man who, he said, had been with Mosby, but on account of some quarrel in the irregular camp had abandoned that leader. Thinking that with two of them I might destroy the railroad bridges east of Lynchburg, I concluded, after the Mosby man had been brought to my headquarters by Lomas about 12 o’clock one night, to give him employment, at the same time informing Colonel Young that I suspected their fidelity, however, and that he must test it by shadowing their every movement. When Lomas’s companion entered my room he was completely disguised, but on discarding the various contrivances by which his identity was concealed he proved to be a rather slender, dark-complexioned, handsome young man, of easy address and captivating manners. He gave his name as Renfrew, answered all my questions satisfactorily, and went into details about Mosby and his men which showed an intimacy with them at some time. I explained to the two men the work I had laid out for

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them, and stated the sum of money I would give to have it done, but stipulated that in case of failure there would be no compensation whatever beyond the few dollars necessary for their expenses. They readily assented, and it was arranged that they should start the following night. Meanwhile Young had selected his men to shadow them, and in two days reported my spies as being concealed at Strasburg, where they remained, without making the slightest effort to continue on their mission, and were busy, no doubt, communicating with the enemy, though I was not able to fasten this on them. On the 16th of February they returned to Winchester, and reported their failure, telling so many lies about their hazardous adventure as to remove all remaining doubt as to their double-dealing. Unquestionably they were spies from the enemy, and hence liable to the usual penalties of such service; but it struck me that through them, I might deceive Early as to the time of opening the spring campaign, I having already received from General Grant an intimation of what was expected of me. I therefore retained the men without even a suggestion of my knowledge of their true character, Young meanwhile keeping close watch over all their doings.

Toward the last of February General Early had at Staunton two brigades of infantry under Wharton. All the rest of the infantry except Echol's brigade, which was in southwestern Virginia, had been sent to Petersburg during the winter, and Fitz Lee's two brigades of cavalry also. Rosser's men were mostly at their homes, where, on account of a lack of subsistence and forage in the valley, they had been permitted to go, subject to call. Lomax's cavalry was at Millboro, west of Staunton, where supplies were obtainable. It was my aim to get well on the road before Early could collect these scattered forces, and as many of the officers had been in the habit of amusing themselves fox-hunting during the latter part of the winter, I decided to use the hunt as an expedient for stealing a march on the enemy, and had it given out officially that a grand fox-chase would take place on the 29th of February. Knowing that Lomas, and Renfrew would spread the announcement South, they were permitted to see several red foxes that had been secured, as well as a large pack of hounds which Colonel Young had collected for the sport, and were then started on a second expedition to burn the bridges. Of course, they were shadowed as usual, and two days later, after they had communicated with friends from their hiding-place, in Newtown, they were arrested. On the way north to Fort Warren they escaped from their guards when passing through Baltimore, and I never heard of them again, though I learned that, after the assassination of, Mr. Lincoln, Secretary Stanton strongly suspected his friend Lomas of being associated with the conspirators, and it then occurred to me that the good-looking Renfrew may have been Wilkes Booth, for he certainly bore a strong resemblance to Booth's pictures.



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On the 27th of February my cavalry entered upon the campaign which cleared the Shenandoah Valley of every remnant of organized Confederates. General Torbert being absent on leave at this time, I did not recall him, but appointed General Merritt Chief of Cavalry, for Torbert had disappointed me on two important occasions—in the Luray Valley during the battle of Fisher's Hill, and on the recent Gordonsville expedition—and I mistrusted his ability to conduct any operations requiring much self-reliance. The column was composed of Custer's and Devin's divisions of cavalry, and two sections of artillery, comprising in all about 10,000 officers and men. On wheels we had, to accompany this column, eight ambulances, sixteen ammunition wagons, a pontoon train for eight canvas boats, and a small supply-train, with fifteen days' rations of coffee, sugar, and salt, it being intended to depend on the country for the meat and bread ration, the men carrying in their haversacks nearly enough to subsist them till out of the exhausted valley.

Grant's orders were for me to destroy the Virginia Central railroad and the James River canal, capture Lynchburg if practicable, and then join General Sherman in North Carolina wherever he might be found, or return to Winchester, but as to joining Sherman I was to be governed by the state of affairs after the projected capture of Lynchburg. The weather was cold, the valley and surrounding mountains being still covered with snow; but this was fast disappearing, however, under the heavy rain that was coming down as the column moved along up the Valley pike at a steady gait that took us to Woodstock the first day. The second day we crossed the North Fork of the Shenandoah on our pontoon-bridge, and by night-fall reached Lacy's Springs, having seen nothing of the enemy as yet but a few partisans who hung on our flanks in the afternoon.

March 1 we encountered General Rosser at Mt. Crawford, he having been able to call together only some five or six hundred of his troops, our unsuspected march becoming known to Early only the day before. Rosser attempted to delay us here, trying to burn the bridges over the Middle Fork of the Shenandoah, but two regiments from Colonel Capehart's brigade swam the stream and drove Rosser to Kline's Mills, taking thirty prisoners and twenty ambulances and wagons.

Meanwhile General Early was busy at Staunton, but not knowing my objective point, he had ordered the return of Echol's brigade from southwestern Virginia for the protection of Lynchburg, directed Lomax's cavalry to concentrate at Pond Gap for the purpose of harassing me if I moved toward Lynchburg, and at the same time marched Wharton's two brigades of infantry, Nelson's artillery, and Rosser's cavalry to Waynesboro', whither he went also to remain till the object of my movement was ascertained.

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I entered Staunton the morning of March 2, and finding that Early had gone to Waynesboro' with his infantry and Rosser, the question at once arose whether I should continue my march to Lynchburg direct, leaving my adversary in my rear, or turn east and open the way through Rockfish Gap to the Virginia Central railroad and James River canal. I felt confident of the success of the latter plan, for I knew that Early numbered there not more than two thousand men; so, influenced by this, and somewhat also by the fact that Early had left word in Staunton that he would fight at Waynesboro', I directed Merritt to move toward that place with Custer, to be closely followed by Devin, who was to detach one brigade to destroy supplies at Swoope's depot. The by-roads were miry beyond description, rain having fallen almost incessantly since we left Winchester, but notwithstanding the down-pour the column pushed on, men and horses growing almost unrecognizable from the mud covering them from head to foot.

General Early was true to the promise made his friends in Staunton, for when Custer neared Waynesboro' he found, occupying a line of breastworks on a ridge west of the town, two brigades of infantry, with eleven pieces of artillery and Rosser's cavalry. Custer, when developing the position of the Confederates, discovered that their left was somewhat exposed instead of resting on South River; he therefore made his dispositions for attack, sending around that flank the dismounted regiments from Pennington's brigade, while he himself, with two brigades, partly mounted and partly dismounted, assaulted along the whole line of breastworks. Pennington's flanking movement stampeded the enemy in short order, thus enabling Custer to carry the front with little resistance, and as he did so the Eighth New York and First Connecticut, in a charge in column, broke through the opening made by Custer, and continued on through the town of Waynesboro', never stopping till they crossed South River. There, finding themselves immediately in the enemy's rear, they promptly formed as foragers and held the east bank of the stream till all the Confederates surrendered except Rosser, who succeeded in making his way back to the valley, and Generals Early, Wharton, Long, and Lilley, who, with fifteen or twenty men, escaped across the Blue Ridge. I followed up the victory immediately by despatching Capehart through Rockfish Gap, with orders to encamp on the east side of the Blue Ridge. By reason of this move all the enemy's stores and transportation fell into our hands, while we captured on the field seventeen battle flags, sixteen hundred officers and men, and eleven pieces of artillery. This decisive victory closed hostilities in the Shenandoah Valley. The prisoners and artillery were sent back to Winchester next morning, under a guard of 1,500 men, commanded by Colonel J. H. Thompson, of the First New Hampshire.



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The night of March 2 Custer camped at Brookfield, Devin remaining at Waynesboro'. The former started for Charlottesville the next morning early, followed by Devin with but two brigades, Gibbs having been left behind to blow up the iron railroad bridge across South River. Because of the incessant rains and spring thaws the roads were very soft, and the columns cut them up terribly, the mud being thrown by the sets of fours across the road in ridges as much as two feet high, making it most difficult to get our wagons along, and distressingly wearing on the animals toward the middle and rear of the columns. Consequently I concluded to rest at Charlottesville for a couple of days and recuperate a little, intending at the same time to destroy, with small parties, the railroad from that point toward Lynchburg. Custer reached Charlottesville the 3d, in the afternoon, and was met at the outskirts by a deputation of its citizens, headed by the mayor, who surrendered the town with medieval ceremony, formally handing over the keys of the public buildings and of the University of Virginia. But this little scene did not delay Custer long enough to prevent his capturing, just beyond the village, a small body of cavalry and three pieces of artillery. Gibbs's brigade, which was bringing up my mud-impeded train, did not arrive until the 5th of March. In the mean time Young's scouts had brought word that the garrison of Lynchburg was being increased and the fortifications strengthened, so that its capture would be improbable. I decided, however, to move toward the place as far as Amherst Court House, which is sixteen miles short of the town, so Devin, under Merritt's supervision, marched along the James River, destroying the canal, while Custer pushed ahead on the railroad and broke it up. The two columns were to join at New Market, whence I intended to cross the James River at some point east of Lynchburg, if practicable, so as to make my way to Appomattox Court House, and destroy the Southside railroad as far east as Farmville. Owing to its swollen condition the river was unfordable but knowing that there was a covered bridge at Duguidsville, I hoped to secure it by a dash, and cross there, but the enemy, anticipating this, had filled the bridge with inflammable material, and just as our troops got within striking distance it burst into flames. The bridge at Hardwicksville also having been burned by the enemy, there was now no means of crossing except by pontoons. But, unfortunately, I had only eight of these, and they could not be made to span the swollen river.

Being thus unable to cross until the river should fall, and knowing that it was impracticable to join General Sherman, and useless to adhere to my alternative instructions to return to Winchester, I now decided to destroy still more thoroughly the James River canal and the Virginia Central railroad and then join General Grant in front of Petersburg. I was master of the whole country north of the James as far down as Goochland; hence the destruction of these arteries of supply could be easily compassed, and feeling that the war was nearing its end, I desired my cavalry to be in at the death.



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On March 9 the main column started eastward down the James River, destroying locks, dams, and boats, having been preceded by Colonel Fitzhugh's brigade of Devin's division in a forced march to Goochland and Beaver Dam Creek, with orders to destroy everything below Columbia. I made Columbia on the 10th, and from there sent a communication to General Grant reporting what had occurred, informing him of my condition and intention, asking him to send forage and rations to meet me at the White House, and also a pontoon-bridge to carry me over the Pamunkey, for in view of the fact that hitherto it had been impracticable to hold Lee in the trenches around Petersburg, I regarded as too hazardous a march down the south bank of the Pamunkey, where the enemy, by sending troops out from Richmond, might fall upon my flank and rear. It was of the utmost importance that General Grant should receive these despatches without chance of failure, in order that I might, depend absolutely on securing supplies at the White House; therefore I sent the message in duplicate, one copy overland direct to City Point by two scouts, Campbell and Rowan, and the other by Fannin and Moore, who were to go down the James River in a small boat to Richmond, join the troops in the trenches in front of Petersburg, and, deserting to the Union lines, deliver their tidings into General Grant's hands. Each set of messengers got through, but the copy confided to Campbell and Rowan was first at Grant's headquarters.

I halted for one day at Columbia to let my trains catch up, for it was still raining and the mud greatly delayed the teams, fatiguing and wearying the mules so much that I believe we should have been forced to abandon most of the wagons except for the invaluable help given by some two thousand negroes who had attached themselves to the column: they literally lifted the wagons out of the mud. From Columbia Merritt, with Devin's division, marched to Louisa Court House and destroyed the Virginia Central to Frederick's Hall. Meanwhile Custer was performing similar work from Frederick's Hall to Beaver Dam Station, and also pursued for a time General Early, who, it was learned from despatches captured in the telegraph office at Frederick's Hall, was in the neighborhood with a couple of hundred men. Custer captured some of these men and two of Early's staff-officers, but the commander of the Valley District, accompanied by a single orderly, escaped across the South Anna and next day made his way to Richmond, the last man of the Confederate army that had so long contended with us in the Shenandoah Valley.

At Frederick's Hall, Young's scouts brought me word from Richmond that General Longstreet was assembling a force there to prevent my junction with Grant, and that Pickett's division, which had been sent toward Lynchburg to oppose my march, and Fitzhugh Lee's cavalry, were moving east on the Southside railroad, with the object of circumventing me. Reasoning that Longstreet could interpose



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effectually only by getting to the White House ahead of me, I pushed one column under Custer across the South Anna, by way of Ground Squirrel bridge, to Ashland, where it united with Merritt, who had meanwhile marched through Hanover Junction. Our appearance at Ashland drew the Confederates out in that direction, as was hoped, so, leaving Colonel Pennington's brigade there to amuse them, the united command retraced its route to Mount Carmel church to cross the North Anna. After dark Pennington came away, and all the troops reached the church by midnight of the 15th.

Resuming the march at an early hour next morning, we took the road by way of King William Court House to the White House, where, arriving on the 18th, we found, greatly to our relief, the supplies which I had requested to be sent there. In the meanwhile the enemy had marched to Hanover Court House, but being unable either to cross the Pamunkey there or forestall me at the White House on the south side of the river, he withdrew to Richmond without further effort to impede my column.

The hardships of this march far exceeded those of any previous campaigns by the cavalry. Almost incessant rains had drenched us for sixteen days and nights, and the swollen streams and well-nigh bottomless roads east of Staunton presented grave difficulties on every hand, but surmounting them all, we destroyed the enemy's means of subsistence, in quantities beyond computation, and permanently crippled the Virginia Central railroad, as well as the James River canal, and as each day brought us nearer the Army of the Potomac, all were filled with the comforting reflection that our work in the Shenandoah Valley had been thoroughly done, and every one was buoyed up by the cheering thought that we should soon take part in the final struggle of the war.

## CHAPTER V.

*Transferred to Petersburg—general Rawlins Cordial welcome—general GRANT's orders and plans—A trip with Mr. Lincoln and general Grant—meeting general Sherman—opposed to joining the army of the Tennessee—opening of the Appomattox campaign—general Grant and general Rawlins.*

The transfer of my command from the Shenandoah Valley to the field of operations in front of Petersburg was not anticipated by General Grant; indeed, the despatch brought from Columbia by my scouts, asking that supplies be sent me at the White House, was the first word that reached him concerning the move. In view of my message the general-in-chief decided to wait my arrival before beginning spring operations with the investing troops south of the James River, for he felt the importance of having my cavalry at

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hand in a campaign which he was convinced would wind up the war. We remained a few days at the White House resting and refitting the cavalry, a large amount of shoeing being necessary; but nothing like enough horses were at hand to replace those that had died or been disabled on the mud march from Staunton to the Pamunkey River, so a good many of the men were still without mounts, and all such were sent by boat to the dismounted camp near City Point. When all was ready the column set out for Hancock Station, a point on the military railroad in front of Petersburg, and arriving there on the 27th of March, was in orders reunited with its comrades of the Second Division, who had been serving with the Army of the Potomac since we parted from them the previous August. General Crook, who had been exchanged within a few days, was now in command of this Second Division. The reunited corps was to enter upon the campaign as a separate army, I reporting directly to General Grant; the intention being thus to reward me for foregoing, of my own choice, my position as a department commander by joining the armies at Petersburg.

Taking the road across the Peninsula, I started from the White House with Merritt's column on the 25th of March and encamped that night at Harrison's Landing. Very early next morning, in conformity with a request from General Grant, I left by boat for City Point, Merritt meanwhile conducting the column across the James River to the point of rendezvous, The trip to City Point did not take long, and on arrival at army headquarters the first person I met was General John A. Rawlins, General Grant's chief-of-staff. Rawlins was a man of strong likes and dislikes, and positive always both in speech and action, exhibiting marked feelings when greeting any one, and on this occasion met me with much warmth. His demonstrations of welcome over, we held a few minutes' conversation about the coming campaign, he taking strong ground against a part of the plan of operations adopted, namely, that which contemplated my joining General Sherman's army. His language was unequivocal and vehement, and when he was through talking, he conducted me to General Grant's quarters, but he himself did not enter.

General Grant was never impulsive, and always met his officers in an unceremonious way, with a quiet "How are you" soon putting one at his ease, since the pleasant tone in which he spoke gave assurance of welcome, although his manner was otherwise impassive. When the ordinary greeting was over, he usually waited for his visitor to open the conversation, so on this occasion I began by giving him the details of my march from Winchester, my reasons for not joining Sherman, as contemplated in my instructions, and the motives which had influenced me to march to the White House. The other provision of my orders on setting out from Winchester—the alternative return to that place—was not touched upon, for the wisdom of having ignored that was fully apparent.



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Commenting on this recital of my doings, the General referred only to the tortuous course of my march from Waynesboro' down, our sore trials, and the valuable services of the scouts who had brought him tidings of me, closing with the remark that it was rare a department commander voluntarily deprived himself of independence, and added that I should not suffer for it. Then turning to the business for which he had called me to City Point, he outlined what he expected me to do; saying that I was to cut loose from the Army of the Potomac by passing its left flank to the southward along the line of the Danville railroad, and after crossing the Roanoke River, join General Sherman. While speaking, he handed me a copy of a general letter of instructions that had been drawn up for the army on the 24th. The letter contained these words concerning the movements of my command:

“The cavalry under General Sheridan, joined by the division now under General Davies, will move at the same time (29th inst.) by the Weldon road and the Jerusalem plank-road, turning west from the latter before crossing the Nottoway, and west with the whole column before reaching Stony Creek. General Sheridan will then move independently under other instructions which will be given him. All dismounted cavalry belonging to the Army of the Potomac, and the dismounted cavalry from the Middle Military Division not required for guarding property belonging to their arm of the service, will report to Brigadier-General Benham to be added to the defenses of City Point.”

When I had gone over the entire letter I showed plainly that I was dissatisfied with it, for, coupled with what the General had outlined orally, which I supposed was the “other instructions,” I believed it foreshadowed my junction with General Sherman. Rawlins thought so too, as his vigorous language had left no room to doubt, so I immediately began to offer my objections to the programme. These were, that it would be bad policy to send me down to the Carolinas with a part of the Army of the Potomac, to come back to crush Lee after the destruction of General Johnston's army; such a course would give rise to the charge that his own forces around Petersburg were not equal to the task, and would seriously affect public opinion in the North; that in fact my cavalry belonged to the Army of the Potomac, which army was able unaided to destroy Lee, and I could not but oppose any dispersion of its strength.

All this was said in a somewhat emphatic manner, and when I had finished he quietly told me that the portion of my instructions from which I so strongly dissented was intended as a “blind” to cover any check the army in its general move, to the left might meet with, and prevent that element in the North which held that the war could be ended only through negotiation, from charging defeat. The fact that my cavalry was not to ultimately join Sherman was a great relief to me, and after expressing the utmost confidence



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in the plans unfolded for closing the war by directing every effort to the annihilation of Lee's army, I left him to go to General Ingalls's quarters. On the way I again met Rawlins, who, when I told him that General Grant had intimated his intention to modify the written plan of operations so far as regarded the cavalry, manifested the greatest satisfaction, and I judged from this that the new view of the matter had not previously been communicated to the chief-of-staff, though he must have been acquainted of course with the programme made out on the 24th of March.

Toward noon General Grant sent for me to accompany him up the river. When I joined the General he informed me that the President was on board the boat—the steamer Mary Martin. For some days Mr. Lincoln had been at City Point, established on the steamer River Queen, having come down from Washington to be nearer his generals, no doubt, and also to be conveniently situated for the reception of tidings from the front when operations began, for he could not endure the delays in getting news to Washington. This trip up the James had been projected by General Meade, but on account of demands at the front he could not go, so the President, General Grant, and I composed the party. We steamed up to where my cavalry was crossing on the pontoon-bridge below the mouth of the Dutch Gap canal, and for a little while watched the column as it was passing over the river, the bright sunshine presaging good weather, but only to delude, as was proved by the torrents of rain brought by the succeeding days of March. On the trip the President was not very cheerful. In fact, he was dejected, giving no indication of his usual means of diversion, by which (his quaint stories) I had often heard he could find relief from his cares. He spoke to me of the impending operations and asked many questions, laying stress upon the one, “What would be the result when the army moved out to the left, if the enemy should come down and capture City Point?” the question being prompted, doubtless, by the bold assault on our lines and capture of Fort Steadman two days before by General Gordon. I answered that I did not think it at all probable that General Lee would undertake such a desperate measure to relieve the strait he was in; that General Hartranft's successful check to Gordon had ended, I thought, attacks of such a character; and in any event General Grant would give Lee all he could attend to on the left. Mr. Lincoln said nothing about my proposed route of march, and I doubt if he knew of my instructions, or was in possession at most of more than a very general outline of the plan of campaign. It was late when the Mary Martin returned to City Point, and I spent the night there with General Ingalls.



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The morning of the 27th I went out to Hancock Station to look after my troops and prepare for moving two days later. In the afternoon I received a telegram from General Grant, saying: "General Sherman will be here this evening to spend a few hours. I should like to have you come down." Sherman's coming was a surprise—at least to me it was—this despatch being my first intimation of his expected arrival. Well knowing the zeal and emphasis with which General Sherman would present his views, there again came into my mind many misgivings with reference to the movement of the cavalry, and I made haste to start for Grant's headquarters. I got off a little after 7 o'clock, taking the rickety military railroad, the rails of which were laid on the natural surface of the ground, with grading only here and there at points of absolute necessity, and had not gone far when the locomotive jumped the track. This delayed my arrival at City Point till near midnight, but on repairing to the little cabin that sheltered the general-in-chief, I found him and Sherman still up talking over the problem whose solution was near at hand. As already stated, thoughts as to the tenor of my instructions became uppermost the moment I received the telegram in the afternoon, and they continued to engross and disturb me all the way down the railroad, for I feared that the telegram foreshadowed, under the propositions Sherman would present, a more specific compliance with the written instructions than General Grant had orally assured me would be exacted.

My entrance into the shanty suspended the conversation for a moment only, and then General Sherman, without prelude, rehearsed his plans for moving his army, pointing out with every detail how he would come up through the Carolinas to join the troops besieging Petersburg and Richmond, and intimating that my cavalry, after striking the Southside and Danville railroads, could join him with ease. I made no comments on the projects for moving, his own troops, but as soon as opportunity offered, dissented emphatically from the proposition to have me join the Army of the Tennessee, repeating in substance what I had previously expressed to General Grant.

My uneasiness made me somewhat too earnest, I fear, but General Grant soon mollified me, and smoothed matters over by practically repeating what he had told me in regard to this point at the close of our interview the day before, so I pursued the subject no further. In a little while the conference ended, and I again sought lodging at the hospitable quarters of Ingalls.

Very early the next morning, while I was still in bed, General Sherman came to me and renewed the subject of my joining him, but when he saw that I was unalterably opposed to it the conversation turned into other channels, and after we had chatted awhile he withdrew, and later in the day went up the river with the President, General Grant, and Admiral Porter, I returning to my command at Hancock Station, where my presence was needed to put my troops in march next day.



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During the entire winter General Grant's lines fronting Petersburg had extended south of the Appomattox River, practically from that stream around to where the Vaughn road crosses Hatcher's Run, and this was nearly the situation when the cavalry concentrated at Hancock Station, General Weitzel holding the line north of the Appomattox, fronting Richmond and Bermuda Hundred.

The instructions of the 24th of March contemplated that the campaign should begin with the movement of Warren's corps (the Fifth) at 3 o'clock on the morning of the 29th, and Humphreys's (the Second) at 6; the rest of the infantry holding on in the trenches. The cavalry was to move in conjunction with Warren and Humphreys, and make its way out beyond our left as these corps opened the road.

The night of the 28th I received the following additional instructions, the general tenor of which again disturbed me, for although I had been assured that I was not to join General Sherman, it will be seen that the supplemental directions distinctly present that alternative, and I therefore feared that during the trip up the James River on the morning of the 28th General Grant had returned to his original views:

*"Headquarters armies of the united states, "City Point, Va., March 28, 1865.*

*"Major-general P. H. Sheridan:*

*"The Fifth Army Corps will move by the Vaughn road at 3 A.M. tomorrow morning. The Second moves at about 9 A.M., having but about three miles to march to reach the point designated for it to take on the right of the Fifth Corps, after the latter reaches Dinwiddie Court House.*

*"Move your cavalry at as early an hour as you can, and without being confined to any particular road or roads. You may go out by the nearest roads in rear of the Fifth Corps, pass by its left, and passing near to or through Dinwiddie, reach the right and rear of the enemy as soon as you can. It is not the intention to attack the enemy in his intrenched position, but to force him out if possible. Should he come out and attack us, or get himself where he can be attacked, move in with your entire force in your own way, and with the full reliance that the army will engage or follow the enemy, as circumstances will dictate. I shall be on the field, and will probably be able to communicate with you; should I not do so, and you find that the enemy keeps within his main intrenched line, you may cut loose and push for the Danville road. If you find it practicable I would like you to cross the Southside road, between Petersburg and Burkeville, and destroy it to some extent. I would not advise much detention, however, until you reach the Danville road, which I would like you to strike as near to the Appomattox as possible; make your destruction of that road as complete as possible; you can then pass on to the Southside road, west of Burkeville, and destroy that in like manner.*



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“After having accomplished the destruction of the two railroads, which are now the only avenues of supply to Lee’s army, you may return to this army, selecting your road farther south, or you may go on into North Carolina and join General Sherman. Should you select the latter course, get the information to me as early as possible, so that I may send orders to meet you at Goldsboro’.

“U. S. *Grant*, Lieut.-General.”

These instructions did not alter my line of march for the morrow, and I trusted matters would so come about as not to require compliance with those portions relative to the railroads and to joining Sherman; so early on the 29th I moved my cavalry out toward Ream’s Station on the Weldon road, Devin commanding the First Division, with Colonels Gibbs, Stagg, and Fitzhugh in charge of the brigades; the Third Division under Custer, Colonels Wells, Capehart and Pennington being the brigade commanders. These two divisions united were commanded by Merritt, as they had been since leaving Winchester. Crook headed the Second Division, his brigades being under General Davies and Colonels John I. Gregg and Smith.

Our general direction was westward, over such routes as could be found, provided they did not embarrass the march of the infantry. The roads, from the winter’s frosts and rains, were in a frightful state, and when it was sought to avoid a spot which the head of the column had proved almost bottomless, the bogs and quicksands of the adjoining fields demonstrated that to make a detour was to go from bad to worse. In the face of these discouragements we floundered on, however, crossing on the way a series of small streams swollen to their banks. Crook and Devin reached the county-seat of Dinwiddie about 5 o’clock in the evening, having encountered only a small picket, that at once gave way to our advance. Merritt left Custer at Malon’s crossing of Rowanty Creek to care for the trains containing our subsistence and the reserve ammunition, these being stuck in the mire at, intervals all the way back to the Jerusalem plank-road; and to make any headway at all with the trains, Custer’s men often had to unload the wagons and lift them out of the boggy places.

Crook and Devin camped near Dinwiddie Court House in such manner as to cover the Vaughn, Flatfoot, Boydton, and Five Forks roads; for, as these all intersected at Dinwiddie, they offered a chance for the enemy’s approach toward the rear of the Fifth Corps, as Warren extended to the left across the Boydton road. Any of these routes leading to the south or west might also be the one on which, in conformity with one part of my instructions, I was expected to get out toward the Danville and Southside railroads, and the Five Forks road would lead directly to General Lee’s right flank, in case opportunity was found to comply with the other part. The place was, therefore, of great strategic value, and getting it without cost repaid us for floundering through the mud.



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Dinwiddie Court House, though a most important point in the campaign, was far from attractive in feature, being made up of a half-dozen unsightly houses, a ramshackle tavern propped up on two sides with pine poles, and the weatherbeaten building that gave official name to the cross-roads. We had no tents—there were none in the command—so I took possession of the tavern for shelter for myself and staff, and just as we had finished looking over its primitive interior a rain storm set in.

The wagon containing my mess equipment was back somewhere on the road, hopelessly stuck in the mud, and hence we had nothing to eat except some coffee which two young women living at the tavern kindly made for us; a small quantity of the berry being furnished from the haversacks of my escort. By the time we got the coffee, rain was falling in sheets, and the evening bade fair to be a most dismal one; but songs and choruses set up by some of my staff—the two young women playing accompaniments on a battered piano—relieved the situation and enlivened us a little. However, the dreary night brought me one great comfort; for General Grant, who that day had moved out to Gravelly Run, sent me instructions to abandon all idea of the contemplated raid, and directed me to act in concert with the infantry under his immediate command, to turn, if possible, the right flank of Lee's army. The despatch made my mind easy with respect to the objectionable feature of my original instructions, and of course relieved me also from the anxiety growing out of the letter received at Hancock Station the night of the 28th; so, notwithstanding the suspicions excited by some of my staff concerning the Virginia feather-bed that had been assigned me, I turned in at a late hour and slept most soundly.

The night of the 29th the left of General Grant's infantry—Warren's corps—rested on the Boydton road, not far from its intersection with the Quaker road. Humphreys's corps was next to Warren; then came Ord, next Wright, and then Parke, with his right resting on the Appomattox. The moving of Warren and Humphreys to the left during the day was early discovered by General Lee. He met it by extending the right of his infantry on the White Oak road, while drawing in the cavalry of W. H. F. Lee and Rosser along the south bank of Stony Creek to cover a crossroads called Five Forks, to anticipate me there; for assuming that my command was moving in conjunction with the infantry, with the ultimate purpose of striking the Southside railroad, Lee made no effort to hold Dinwiddie, which he might have done with his cavalry, and in this he made a fatal mistake. The cavalry of Fitz. Lee was ordered at this same time from Sunderland depot to Five Forks, and its chief placed in command of all the mounted troops of General Lee's army.

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At daylight on the 30th I proceeded to make dispositions under the new conditions imposed by my modified instructions, and directed Merritt to push Devin out as far as the White Oak road to make a reconnoissance to Five Forks, Crook being instructed to send Davies's brigade to support Devin. Crook was to hold, with Gregg's brigade, the Stony Creek crossing of the Boydton plank road, retaining Smith's near Dinwiddie, for use in any direction required. On the 29th W. H. F. Lee conformed the march of his cavalry with that of ours, but my holding Stony Creek in this way forced him to make a detour west of Chamberlin's Run, in order to get in communication with his friends at Five Forks.

The rain that had been falling all night gave no sign of stopping, but kept pouring down all day long, and the swamps and quicksands mired the horses, whether they marched in the roads or across the adjacent fields. Undismayed, nevertheless, each column set out for its appointed duty, but shortly after the troops began to move I received from General Grant this despatch, which put a new phase on matters:

*"Headquarters armies of the united states, "Gravelly Run, March 30, 1865.*

*"Major-general Sheridan:*

*"The heavy rain of to-day will make it impossible for us to do much until it dries up a little, or we get roads around our rear repaired. You may, therefore, leave what cavalry you deem necessary to protect the left, and hold such positions as you deem necessary for that purpose, and send the remainder back to Humphrey's Station where they can get hay and grain. Fifty wagons loaded with forage will be sent to you in the morning. Send an officer back to direct the wagons back to where you want them. Report to me the cavalry you will leave back, and the position you will occupy. Could not your cavalry go back by the way of Stony Creek depot and destroy or capture the store of supplies there?"*

*"U. S. Grant, Lieut.-General."*

When I had read and pondered this, I determined to ride over to General Grant's headquarters on Gravelly Run, and get a clear idea of what it was proposed to do, for it seemed to me that a suspension of operations would be a serious mistake. Mounting a powerful gray pacing horse called Breckenridge (from its capture from one of Breckenridge's staff-officers at Missionary Ridge), and that I knew would carry me through the mud, I set out accompanied by my Assistant Adjutant-General, Colonel Frederick C. Newhall, and an escort of about ten or fifteen men. At first we rode north up the Boydton plank-road, and coming upon our infantry pickets from a direction where the enemy was expected to appear, they began to fire upon us, but seeing from our actions that we were friends, they ceased, and permitted us to pass the outposts. We then struggled on in a northeasterly direction across-country, till we struck the Vaughn road.

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This carried us to army headquarters, which were established south of Gravelly Run in an old cornfield. I rode to within a few yards of the front of General Grant's tent, my horse plunging at every step almost to his knees in the mud, and dismounted near a camp-fire, apparently a general one, for all the staff-officers were standing around it on boards and rails placed here and there to keep them from sinking into the mire.

Going directly to General Grant's tent, I found him and Rawlins talking over the question of suspending operations till the weather should improve. No orders about the matter had been issued yet, except the despatch to me, and Rawlins, being strongly opposed to the proposition, was frankly expostulating with General Grant, who, after greeting me, remarked, in his quiet way: "Well, Rawlins, I think you had better take command." Seeing that there was a difference up between Rawlins and his chief, I made the excuse of being wet and cold, and went outside to the fire. Here General Ingalls met me and took me to his tent, where I was much more comfortable than when standing outside, and where a few minutes later we were joined by General Grant. Ingalls then retired, and General Grant began talking of our fearful plight, resulting from the rains and mud, and saying that because of this it seemed necessary to suspend operations. I at once begged him not to do so, telling him that my cavalry was already on the move in spite of the difficulties, and that although a suspension of operations would not be fatal, yet it would give rise to the very charge of disaster to which he had referred at City Point, and, moreover, that we would surely be ridiculed, just as General Burnside's army was after the mud march of 1863. His better judgment was against suspending operations, but the proposition had been suggested by all sorts of complaints as to the impossibility of moving the trains and the like, so it needed little argument to convince him, and without further discussion he said, in that manner which with him meant a firmness of purpose that could not be changed by further complainings, "We will go on." I then told him that I believed I could break in the enemy's right if he would let me have the Sixth Corps; but saying that the condition of the roads would prevent the movement of infantry, he replied that I would have to seize Five Forks with the cavalry alone.

On my way back to Dinwiddie I stopped at the headquarters of General Warren, but the General being asleep, I went to the tent of one of his staff-officers. Colonel William T. Gentry, an old personal friend with whom I had served in Oregon. In a few minutes Warren came in and we had a short conversation, he speaking rather despondently of the outlook, being influenced no doubt by the depressing weather.



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From Warren's headquarters I returned, by the Boydton road to Dinwiddie Court House, fording Gravelly Run with ease. When I got as far as the Dabney road I sent Colonel Newhall out on it toward Five Forks, with orders for Merritt to develop the enemy's position and strength, and then rode on to Dinwiddie to endeavor to get all my other troops up. Merritt was halted at the intersection of the Five Forks and Gravelly Church roads when Newhall delivered the orders, and in compliance moving out Gibbs's brigade promptly, sharp skirmishing was brought on, Gibbs driving the Confederates to Five Forks, where he found them behind a line of breastworks running along the White Oak road. The reconnoissance demonstrating the intention of the enemy to hold this point, Gibbs was withdrawn.

That evening, at 7 o'clock, I reported the position of the Confederate cavalry, and stated that it had been reinforced by Pickett's division of infantry. On receipt of this despatch, General Grant offered me the Fifth Corps, but I declined to take it, and again asked for the Sixth, saying that with it I believed I could turn the enemy (Pickett's) left, or break through his lines. The morning of the 31st General Grant replied the the Sixth Corps could not be taken from its position in the line, and offered me the Second; but in the mean time circumstances had changed, and no corps was ordered.