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CONTENTS

Colonel Streight Drives for the Western and Atlantic Railroad, by Edwin C. Bearss	133
The War Comes to Central Alabama: Ebenezer Church, by John Kent Folmar	187
Brigadier-General James Deshler, Professional Soldier, by Richard B. Sheridan	203
Alabamians in the Forts Henry and Donelson Campaign, by Benjamin F. Cooling III	217
"Betsy Hamilton": Alabama Local Colorist, by Benjamin B. Williams	235
Amnesty and Pardon and Republicanism in Alabama, by Sarah Van V. Woolfolk	240
The Senatorial Career of Gabriel Moore, by John M. Martin	249

EDITORIAL

The contents of this number of the *Quarterly* are purposely selected to include material pertinently concerned with the centennial years of the Civil War.

The *Quarterly* is printed as are other State Documents and is frequently late of issue, but it is hoped that this number will be a contribution to the Centennial's work.

P. A. B.

COLONEL STREIGHT DRIVES FOR THE WESTERN AND ATLANTIC RAILROAD

By Edwin C. Bearss

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Most Civil War historians when writing of Grierson's and Streight's raids fail to establish their relationship. Historians with Confederate sympathies exalt over Brigadier General Nathan B. Forrest's success in bagging Colonel Abel D. Streight's Federal raiders; writers with a Union ax to grind praise the daring of Colonel Benjamin H. Grierson and his men. It is difficult to understand why military historians have consistently divorced these two raids. One would think that these actions had taken place on different continents. In reality these raids, given a large assist by the columns led by Brigadier Generals W. Sooy Smith and Grenville M. Dodge, and Colonel George E. Bryant, were part of a giant operation.

The object of this undertaking was to sever General Braxton Bragg's chief line of supply, the Western and Atlantic Railroad, and Lieutenant General John C. Pemberton's principal communication line, the Southern Railroad of Mississippi. Strategic planning and co-operation goes much farther in explaining the success of Grierson's men, rather than the bewildered Pemberton's complaint that he lacked cavalry to cope with the Yankee raiders. Before May 1, 1863, arrived every major Confederate cavalry command between the Appalachian Mountains and the Mississippi River was engaged in trying to contain the hydra-headed thrusts launched by the Federals.

* * *

Early spring 1863 found Major General Stephen A. Hurlbut (the commander of the Army of the Tennessee's XVI Corps which had its headquarters in Memphis) maturing a plan to send a "flying column" of cavalry deep into Mississippi. This fast-moving force was to cut the Southern Railroad of Mississippi, thereby severing the route over which munitions

and reinforcements reached "Fortress" Vicksburg from the east.¹

At this time, Brigadier General Grenville M. Dodge, who led the left wing of the XVI Corps from his headquarters at Corinth, warned Hurlbut of a Confederate build-up in northwest Alabama and northeast Mississippi. Dodge interpreted this concentration to mean that the Rebels were preparing to raid the Union communications and posts in that area. The Corinth commander notified Hurlbut that if given permission, he would capture Pontotoc. Holding that strategic town on the Pontotoc Ridge with his infantry and artillery, Dodge would employ his cavalry to cut the Southern Railroad of Mississippi, east of Jackson, and the Mississippi Central Railroad south of Grenada. Dodge believed the Federals had much to gain and little to lose by beating the Southerners to the punch.²

This timely information from Dodge helped fortify Hurlbut in his resolve to launch a devastating raid on the Confederate supply line in Mississippi.

Meanwhile, unknown to General Hurlbut, the commander of the Department of the Cumberland, Major William S. Rosecrans, had outlined a daring proposal to his staff. Rosecrans wished to dispatch 1,500 men, under an able officer, to Eastport, Mississippi. There, the raiders would rendezvous with two of Dodge's infantry brigades from Corinth. The joint-expeditionary force would advance and capture Tuscumbia, Alabama. Covered by Dodge's infantrymen, the raiders would sweep across northern Alabama into Georgia, where they would cut the Western and Atlantic Railroad.³

Rosecrans communicated the gist of this plan to Dodge, who telegraphed Hurlbut on April 3:

¹ **The War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies** (128 Vols., Washington, 1880-1900), Series I, Vol XXIV, pt. I, 520. (Cited hereinafter as **O. R.**).

² **O. R.**, Series I, Vol. XXIV, pt. III, 155, 156.

³ **O.R.**, Series I, Vol. XXIII, pt. II, 207.

General Rosecrans desires me to move on Tuscumbia He asks this in mentioning [a] raid he is about to make; says it is necessary for his success. It will be a terrible blow to the enemy near our lines, and I will carry out my part of it by again taking Tuscumbia, if it meets your views.⁴

Hurlbut replied, "Move as requested by General Rosecrans, with force enough to do it thoroughly."⁵

Thus, General Dodge had played an important part in establishing contact between Hurlbut and Rosecrans. Through the intervention of Dodge, the two senior officers would be able to coordinate their impending strikes deep into the heart of the Confederacy, and take maximum advantage of the confusion engendered at Bragg's and Pemberton's headquarters.

Dutiful subordinates such as Dodge were not too common in the Civil War. Hurlbut didn't receive Rosecrans' dispatch outlining his projected thrust against the Western and Atlantic Railroad until April 6, three days after receipt of Dodge's message. In fact, Rosecrans' communication to Hurlbut was dated the 5th, an indication that he might have been attempting to pull a fast one on the commander of the XVI Corps.⁶

Dodge, upon receipt of Hurlbut's go ahead, notified Rosecrans that he was prepared to capture Tuscumbia, whenever the commander of the Army of the Cumberland gave the word. Since there was no telegraph line between West Tennessee and Rosecrans' Nashville headquarters, Dodge warned Rosecrans to be sure to let him know well in advance when the raiders would arrive at Eastport. Such action on Rosecrans' part would enable Dodge to provide for full co-operation between the commands.⁷

⁴ *Ibid.*, 205.

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ *Ibid.*, 215.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 206.

Hurlbut on April 6 wrote his superior, Major General Ulysses S. Grant, informing him of Dodge's and Rosecrans' forthcoming operations in northern Alabama and Georgia. Rosecrans' raid against the Western and Atlantic, Hurlbut assured Grant, would enhance the chances for success of the projected dash on the Southern Railroad of Mississippi, because it would draw most of the Confederate horsemen into Alabama. In closing, Hurlbut expressed a desire to coordinate the raid on the Southern Railroad of Mississippi with Grant's impending amphibious assault on the Mississippi shore, near Grand Gulf. Cutting the railroad between Meridian and Jackson, Hurlbut predicted, would be of tremendous assistance to Grant in his efforts to gain the bluffs south of Vicksburg.⁸

Two days before (on the 4th) to bolster Dodge in his attempt to smash the Confederate build-up along the Tennessee River, Grant had asked Rear Admiral David D. Porter to rush the Mississippi Marine Brigade commanded by Brigadier General Alfred W. Ellet to the Tennessee River.⁹ At Greenville, Mississippi, the next day, Ellet received orders from Porter directing him to proceed upstream to Cairo, Illinois. Casting off immediately, the seven boats carrying the Marine Brigade headed up river. Confederate scouts posted along the Mississippi reported the departure of Ellet's brigade.

Taken in conjunction with other events transpiring in the area, the movement of the Marine Brigade helped reinforce Pemberton in the delusion that the Army of the Tennessee was withdrawing from the western approaches to Vicksburg.

Stopping briefly at Memphis on the morning of April 8, General Ellet neglected to report to Hurlbut. The Memphis commander was understandably miffed when he learned of Ellet's actions. When Hurlbut wired Dodge informing him of the Marine Brigade's scheduled early arrival at Eastport, he asked Dodge to reprimand Ellet for his discourtesy.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 214.

⁹ *O. R.*, Series I, Vol. XXIV, pt. III, 172.

At Cairo, Ellet's estimated time of arrival in the Tennessee Valley was knocked in the head by the inability of his boats to obtain enough coal to fill their bunkers. It was the 14th before the vessels were coaled and the voyage resumed.¹⁰

Several weeks before, Colonel Streight had applied to General Rosecrans "for an independent mounted brigade, with which to engage the guerrilla bands of Forrest and Wheeler and other rebel organizations that infested the banks of the Cumberland and Tennessee rivers, and caused a great deal of annoyance" to Union steamboats. This proposition was "favorably received" by Brigadier General James A. Garfield, Rosecrans' chief of staff, who presented it to his general "in such a manner as to gain his consent to its organization."¹¹

Rosecrans on April 7 placed Colonel Streight in charge of a "Provisional Brigade" composed of the 80th Illinois, the 51st and 73rd Indiana, and the 3rd Ohio Infantry Regiments, and two companies of the 5th Tennessee (Union) Cavalry, about 1,700 effectives. With this force, Streight was charged with carrying out the projected raid on the Western and Atlantic Railroad. Streight was to assemble his newly constituted brigade in Nashville, and equip his men for the impending strike deep into the heart of Dixie. With the exception of the troopers in the two Tennessee cavalry companies, all of Streight's men were infantry.

To expedite the march of his column across the mountains of north Alabama, Streight proposed to Rosecrans that his bluecoats be mounted on mules. Rosecrans liked Streight's idea. Orders were drafted authorizing Streight to draw half the mules needed to mount his command at Nashville; the remainder would be seized from civilians along the line of march.¹²

¹⁰ **Official Records of the Union and Confederate Navies in the War of the Rebellion** (30 Vols. and index, Washington, 1894-1927), Series I, Vol. 24, p. 529. (Cited hereinafter as **O. R. N.**); **O. R.**, Series I, Vol. XXIV, pt. III, 181.

¹¹ William R. Hartpence, **History of the Fifty-First Indiana Veteran Volunteer Infantry** (Cincinnati, 1894), 115.

¹² **O. R.**, Series I, Vol. XXIII, pt. I, 281, 282, 283; Hartpence, **History of the 51st Indiana**, 116-118.

Streight's orders read:

Colonel—By Special Field Orders No. 94, Paragraph VIII, you have been assigned to the command of an independent provisional brigade for temporary purposes. After filling out your command with equipments and supplies, as you have already been directed, in the verbal instructions of the general commanding this department, you will proceed by a route, of which you will be advised by telegraph, to some good steamboat landing on the Tennessee River, not far above Ft. Henry, where you will embark your command, and proceed up the river. At Hamburg you will confer with Brig. Gen. Dodge, who will probably have a messenger farther up the river, you will debark at Hamburg, and without delay, join the force of Gen. Dodge, which will be en route for Iuka, Miss. If, however, it should be deemed safe, you will land at Eastport, and form a junction with Gen. Dodge.

From that point you will then march, in conjunction with him, to menace Tuscumbia, but you will not wait to join in an attack, unless it should be necessary for the safety of Gen. Dodge's command, or your own, or unless some considerable advantage can be gained over the enemy without interfering with the general object of the expedition.

After having marched long enough with Gen. Dodge to create a general impression that you are part of his expedition, you will push to the southward, and reach Russellville or Moulton. Thence your route will be governed by circumstances, but you will, with all reasonable despatch, push on to Western Georgia, and cut the railroads which supply the rebel army by way of Chattanooga. To accomplish this, is the chief object of your expedition; and you must not allow collateral nor incidental schemes, even though promising great results, to delay you so as to endanger your return. Your quartermaster has been furnished with funds sufficient for the necessary expenses of your command. You will draw your supplies, and keep your command well mounted, from the country through which you pass. For all property taken for the legitimate use of your command, you will make cash payment in full to men of undoubted loyalty; give the usual conditional receipts to men whose loyalty is doubtful, but to rebels nothing.

You are particularly commanded to restrain your command from pillage and marauding. You will destroy all depots of supplies of the rebel army, all manufactories of guns, ammunition, equipments and clothing for their use, which you can without delaying you so as to endanger your return.

That you may not be trammelled with minute instructions, nothing further will be ordered than this general outline of policy and operation. You are authorized to enlist all able-bodied men who desire to join the Army of the Union. Hartpence, **History of the 51st Indiana**, 117-118.

“We can start within three hours from the time of receiving orders,” Streight on April 9 assured Rosecrans.

In his correspondence with headquarters, Streight desired to know if it would “be violating the rules of war, should . . . [he] see fit to dress any number of men—say two companies, after the promiscuous Southern style?”¹³

Rosecrans’ reply does not appear in the records, but as Streight’s troopers went on the raid wearing their “blue blouses,” there can be no doubt that Rosecrans said no to the suggestion. Rosecrans had not forgotten the unfortunate Andrews raiders, who had dressed themselves after the “promiscuous Southern style.” Being in citizen’s attire when captured, the Andrews raiders had practically tied the noose around their necks; a number of the men paid the penalty of their folly with their lives.¹⁴

At the same time, Rosecrans sent a message to Dodge informing him of Streight’s imminent departure from Nashville. Rosecrans indicated that Streight could be expected to reach Pittsburg Landing or Eastport on April 16.¹⁵

Hurlbut as he studied his campaign maps, on which were plotted the Confederate dispositions in North Mississippi and Alabama, observed a Confederate force which would be left undisturbed by the Union thrusts. This was Brigadier General James R. Chalmers’ 1,800 troops based on the Coldwater River in Northwest Mississippi. To keep the Coldwater Confederates occupied and prevent them from dashing off in pursuit of the Union troopers striking for the Southern Railroad of Mississippi, Hurlbut planned a two pronged offensive. An infantry column with artillery support commanded by Brigadier General W. Sooy Smith would march southwestward from La Grange, Tennessee. Striking the Mississippi and Tennessee Railroad

¹³ O. R., Series I, Vol. XXIII, pt. II, 224; Hartpence, *History of the 51st Indiana*, 118.

¹⁴ John A. Wyeth, *Life of General Nathan Bedford Forrest* (New York, 1899), 187, 188.

¹⁵ O. R., Series I, Vol. XXIII, pt. II, 218.

near Sardis, Smith's column would turn northward. A second task force led by Colonel George B. Bryant was to drive southward from Memphis. Bryant's blueclads were to attack Chalmers' troops from the front, while Smith's infantry took them in the flank and rear.¹⁶

Despite the disadvantages of slow and inadequate lines of communication, without an effective General-in-Chief to coordinate the movement of the forces from different departments, Hurlbut and Rosecrans had drawn up plans for a series of blows on a scale to stagger the imagination. With their plans hammered into shape, the two generals sat back and waited for their troops, many of whom had to be moved considerable distances, to get into their assigned jumping off positions. Naturally, as in all operations when troops from two departments were to co-operate, it proved impossible to assemble all the units in forward staging areas at the desired time. Delays ensued; the day that the raiders were to move out had to be postponed several times.

As drawn up, the generals' plans provided: Dodge's column (5,700 strong) would drive eastward from Corinth and capture Tuscumbia. Next, Dodge was to try to push on to Decatur, destroying the Memphis and Charleston Railroad as he advanced. The Mississippi Marine Brigade was to ascend the Tennessee River as far as Muscle Shoals. Ellet's marines were to cover Dodge's left flank in case the Confederate cavalry based at Columbia, Tennessee, under Major General Earl Van Dorn tried to cross the Tennessee River and intercept the Union raiding columns as they drove deep into the Confederacy. Screened by Dodge's capture of Tuscumbia, Colonel Streight's mule-mounted infantry would race across north Alabama and sever the Western and Atlantic Railroad, east of Rome, Georgia.

Hurlbut's raiders led by Colonel Grierson would ride southward from La Grange, cut the Southern Railroad of Mississippi,

¹⁶ O. R., Series I, Vol. XXIV, pt. III, 196, 197; O. R., Series I, Vol. XXIV, pt. I, 520.

east of Jackson. In northwestern Mississippi, Sooy Smith and Bryant were to hammer Chalmers' Rebels.

The Union raids were comprehensive. If successful, they would seriously embarrass Confederate efforts to funnel supplies and reinforcements to Bragg's and Pemberton's armies.

* * *

Among the Confederate commands that would be called upon to oppose these powerful and dangerous thrusts were the troops in General Chalmers' Fifth Military District of Mississippi. Chalmers' district consisted of the upper two tiers of counties in Mississippi, bounded on the east by a line running north and south through New Albany, and on the west by the Mississippi River. Chalmers commanded 1,800 Confederates, mostly State Troops, all mounted.¹⁷ Chalmers, having heard rumors of the impending Union attack, notified Pemberton, "This news has come to me from various sources and may be true, but the very publicity that has been given to it would make me doubtful about it."¹⁸

Evidently, Pemberton placed no credence in the report passed on by Chalmers, because he made no effort to alert the Confederate forces in north Alabama and Mississippi to the dangers inherent in the forthcoming Union raids. Chalmers, while the Federals made their plans and massed their troops, spent a good deal of his time and energy in a futile battle of words with a ranking officer in the Mississippi State Troops—Major General Samuel J. Gholson. The two officers battled over who was to control the State Troops.¹⁹

The First Mississippi Military District commanded by Brigadier General Daniel Ruggles was bounded on the west by Chalmers' district and on the east by the Alabama line. Ruggles' district was garrisoned by 2,600 troops — cavalry, artillery, and infantry.²⁰

¹⁷ O. R., Series I, Vol. XXIV, pt. III, 702, 713.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 740.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 737, 738, 740, 741.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 702, 706, 733.

On April 6 an interesting telegram reached Ruggles' Columbus headquarters from Brigadier General (Sterling A. M. Wood, the officer in charge of the District of North Alabama. Wood observed, "The enemy intend to make a raid from Corinth in the Tennessee Valley. Please instruct your cavalry to harass them in rear."²¹

Ruggles reacted to this warning by placing Lieutenant Colonel Clark R. Barteau in command of all the mounted troops in the district.²² The next day, Ruggles ordered his junior officers to hold their men ready to move into the Big Bear country. There, they would be on the flank of any Federal force which advanced toward Tusculumbia. Later information satisfied Ruggles that the Yankees, instead of planning an offensive into north Alabama, were pulling troops out of their forward base at Corinth. Ruggles canceled the orders for the march of a strong column into the (Big Bear Creek) area. Instead, he would send a combat patrol.

Plans were now worked out by Ruggles for a raid on Union communication lines in West Tennessee and north Mississippi. The 2d Alabama Cavalry, supported by four guns of Owens' Arkansas Battery, was sent to Town Creek, supported by four guns of Owens' Arkansas Battery, nine miles east of Okolona, and Ruggles left his Columbus headquarters on the 13th for a tour of inspection of the northern section of his district.

At Verona, Mississippi, Ruggles ascertained that the reports he had received of a reduction in Federal strength at Corinth were without foundation. In addition, news was received indicating that the Yanks were concentrating a formidable force at La Grange. Ruggles now made a fatal mistake. Believing it was his primary duty to protect the Mobile and Ohio Railroad and the adjacent countryside, the general decided it would be unwise to send combat patrols to harass the Corinth Federals. Apparently, the only action Ruggles took to embarrass the bluecoats was to request that General Gholson send 100 of

²¹ *Ibid.*, 707.

²² *Ibid.*, 716.

his Mississippi State Troops to tear up the Memphis and Charleston Railroad between Grand Junction and Corinth. Nothing came of these orders to Gholson; no mention of any raid on the railroad at this time is contained in the *Official Records*.

Having visited all the troops in the district, relocated his lines of communication, and alerted his subordinates to the impending dangers, Ruggles returned to Columbus.²³

Colonel Philip D. Roddey had only recently relieved General Wood as commander of the District of Northern Alabama.²⁴ Roddey established his headquarters at Tuscumbia, and received the distressing news from his aides that the district contained less than 2,100 Confederate troops—hardly enough to conduct a holding action in case the Corinth Federals launched an offensive into the Muscle Shoals area.²⁵ Evidently, Roddey made good use of the few soldiers available, because the reports of Dodge's scouts led the Yankee officers to estimate the Rebel strength as in excess of 6,500.²⁶

The Confederate position in the Muscle Shoals sector wasn't as critical as a comparison of the "Orders of Battle" might indicate. The reason: The presence of the Confederate Cavalry Corps commanded by hard-hitting Major General Earl Van Dorn in the neighborhood of Columbia, Tennessee, 70 miles north of Tuscumbia. Here, Van Dorn's troopers screened the left flank of Bragg's Army of Tennessee. Part of this mobile

* * *

While Streight's soldiers were drawing the prerequisite clothing, ordnance, and equipment from the big Nashville supply depot on April 10, the colonel received orders from Chief of

²³ O. R., Series I, Vol. XXIV, pt. I, 560.

²⁴ O. R., Series I, Vol. XXIII, pt. II, 728. Upon being relieved by Roddey, Wood had returned to Wartrace, Tennessee, where he had resumed command of his infantry brigade in the Army of Tennessee.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 873; Thomas Jordan and J. P. Pryor, *The Campaigns of Lieut. Gen. N. B. Forrest, and of Forrest's Cavalry*, (New Orleans, 1868), 251.

²⁶ O. R., Series I, Vol. XXIII, pt. II, 245, 246.

force, mustering about 7,300 rugged, combat-tested troopers, could be sent to Roddey's assistance, if needed.²⁷ Staff Garfield to embark his men at once on steamers. The "provisional brigade" would then proceed down the Cumberland River to Palmyra. Landing at Palmyra, the column would march to Fort Henry, seizing all the horses and mules found along the route.

The troops were formed, mustered, and marched to the steamboat landing. Streight and his subordinates turned the men to loading their gear aboard eight transports. It was after dark, before the last of the stubborn mules was embarked, and the boats were able to cast off.

The next evening the boats tied up at Palmyra. Here, the soldiers disembarked and prepared to march cross-country to Fort Henry on the Tennessee River. With the troops and their mounts ashore, the steamboats resumed their run down the Cumberland River, and on to Fort Henry, where they were to rendezvous with Streight's column.²⁸

Streight mustered his command at Palmyra early on the 12th. Instructions were issued to catch and saddle the mules. It was now that the Yankee infantrymen discovered, much to their discomfort, that most of the mules were poor, wild, unbroken colts. Many of the beasts were only two years old, and to make matters worse, a large number had distemper. Between 40 and 50 of the animals were too near death to travel and would have to be left at the landing. A wild, riotous scene ensued as the soldiers became cowboys. The baffled midwesterners were hard put to catch and break the mules. A day and one-half passed before a sufficient number of mules had been broken to the saddle and bridle to allow the column to depart from Palmyra. Meanwhile, Streight had sent out patrols, which had seized about 150 "excellent" horses and mules from the protesting Montgomery and Stewart county farmers.²⁹

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 749.

²⁸ *O. R.*, Series I, Vol. XXIII, pt. I, 285; Hartpence, *History of the 51st Indiana*, 118-119.

²⁹ *O. R.*, Series I, Vol. XXIII, pt. I, 286.

Leaving Palmyra at noon on the 13th, Streight's column marched 15 miles before nightfall; the blueclads halted for the night on Yellow Creek. Parties again scoured the countryside to appropriate additional animals for the men's use during the forthcoming raid. Alerted to the Federals' approach, the farmers had hidden most of their horses and mules.

Early the next morning the march was resumed. By noon on the 15th, the soldiers reached Fort Henry. It had required two days for the novice cavalymen to march 30 miles on their unbroken mounts. As on the previous day, patrols visited the Stewart county farms in an effort to find additional horses and mules for Streight's men. The proximity of the Rebel 2d Kentucky Cavalry undoubtedly curbed the ardor of the Union scouts; only a limited number of horses and mules were seized. By the time his raiders had reached Fort Henry, Colonel Streight found he had only enough animals to mount 1,250 men.³⁰

Streight had been disappointed to discover that the vessels anchored at the fort weren't the transports he had sent around to the Tennessee from Palmyra. It was ascertained by the colonel that the vessels riding at anchor were the boats carrying the Mississippi Marine Brigade, which had just arrived from Cairo. It was the next evening (the 16th) before Streight's anxiously awaited transports arrived. Colonel Orris A. Lawson of the 3rd Ohio, the officer in charge, explained to his superior the reason for the convoy's delay—the vessels had stopped at Smithland to take on "a quantity of rations and forage" destined for General Dodge's command at Corinth.³¹

Streight's men were immediately embarked. General Ellet assumed charge of the convoy, and the crews squared away the boats, preparatory to casting off. Despite the hurried preparations, the transports were unable to get underway on the night of the 16th; the pilots had declared that it would be unsafe to

³⁰ *Ibid.*; Hartpence, *History of the 51st Indiana*, 119-120.

³¹ *O. R.*, Series I, Vol. XXIII, pt. I, 286; *O. R. N.*, Series I, Vol. 24, p. 529. The guard aboard the transports consisted of four companies of the 51st Indiana.

navigate the river after dark, because of the low stage of the water.

Early the next morning, escorted by two gunboats, the convoy started up the Tennessee River. In spite of Streight's exhortations, the run upstream was very slow.³²

The convoy stopped at Savannah, Tennessee, on the evening of the 18th. From Savannah, Streight addressed a message to General Dodge:

I will move up the river at daylight tomorrow morning. We have 130,000 rations on board for you. Will halt at Hamburg, for message from you, and if I do not hear from you there, I will proceed to Eastport, where I shall endeavor to open communications with you.³³

Streight at the same time mailed a letter to his wife, informing her that he was "entering into a most difficult and dangerous service. My command is curious to know where we are going. The general [Rosecrans] has trusted to my hands a very important command. I hope I will not disappoint him."³⁴

On the morning of April 19, the convoy resumed its tedious run up the Tennessee River. A brief stop to see if Dodge had sent a courier with a reply to Streight's communication was made at Hamburg. Not hearing anything from Dodge, Streight gave the order to cast off.

It was mid-afternoon when the expedition reached Eastport. As soon as the boats had tied up, Streight went ashore. He left Colonel Lawson in charge, with orders to supervise the debarkation of the men. From Eastport, Streight rode inland to confer with General Dodge, who had established his headquarters on Big Bear Creek, 12 miles away.³⁵

³² *Ibid.*

³³ Hartpence, *History of the 51st Indiana*, 120.

³⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁵ *O. R.*, Series I, Vol. XXIII, pt. I, 286.

General Dodge's cavalry brigade led by Colonel Florence M. Cornyn had ridden out of its Glendale encampment on the morning of April 14. The Union troopers encountered scouts from Colonel Roddey's Confederate command near Burnsville. After a brief clash, the Yankees drove the Rebels from the village, and pushed on to within four miles of Iuka, where they bivouacked for the night. The advance of the Union horsemen had been hindered more by the muddy roads than Southern resistance.

"Boots and Saddles" was sounded at daybreak. The troopers mounted their horses and again started in pursuit of the retiring Confederates. An advance of eight miles brought Cornyn's blueclads to Cook's farm, on the Memphis and Charleston Railroad, two and one-half miles west of Big Bear Creek.³⁶

Three of the four infantry brigades constituting Dodge's division, supported by two batteries of artillery, marched from Corinth on the 15th. The footsoldiers took the road pioneered by Cornyn's horsemen. One of the soldiers noted in his diary, "We travel slowly all day, save at times when we are compelled to make brisk stops owing to the tardiness of the teams. We go into camp to-night at Burnsville, fifteen miles from Corinth. The boys are in fine spirits, eager to push forward."

The infantry resumed its tramp eastward, as soon as the first streaks of dawn appeared. A soldier reported that the sun was "intensely hot," and a number of men were felled by the heat. The column halted at Iuka for the noon meal. By mid-afternoon, Dodge's infantry reached Cook's farm, three miles from Big Bear Creek, where they rendezvoused with Cornyn's cavalry.³⁷

During the night of April 16-17, Dodge briefed his subordinates as to what was expected of them in the morning. If

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 251.

³⁷ D. Leib Ambrose, *History of the Seventh Regiment Illinois Volunteer Infantry, From its First Muster into the Service, April 25, 1861, to its Final Muster Out, July 9, 1865* (Springfield, 1868), 146-147; *O. R.*, Series I, Vol. XXIII, pt. I, 246, 247.

all went well, nightfall on the 17th would find Dodge's command east of Big Bear Creek. Shortly after daybreak, the brigade commanders moved to carry out Dodge's instructions. Cornyn's mounted brigade, covered by a fierce bombardment, charged across Big Bear Creek at Steminine's Ford. On doing so, they found that Roddey's men had already withdrawn.³⁸ After a bridgehead had been established, Colonel Cornyn detached two companies of the 10th Missouri Cavalry and one company of the 9th Illinois Mounted Infantry. This combat patrol was to follow a little used byway north of the Corinth-Tuscumbia road, and screen the left flank of the main column as it drove eastward.

A mile and one-half east of Big Bear Creek, Cornyn's vanguard encountered a small Confederate patrol. The Southerners' retreat was so precipitant that it was unnecessary for the Yanks to deploy. Roddey's greyclads were next encountered at Dickson Station, four miles beyond. The Rebels' resistance now stiffened. Cornyn was compelled to deploy his men to the right and to the left of the road, and bring forward a section of artillery manned by Battery I, 1st Missouri Light Artillery.

A few shells from the Missourian's guns caused the Confederate line of battle to dissolve. The advance was resumed; it continued until the Yankee cavalrymen reached Buzzard Roost. There, they found Roddey's men deployed in line of battle across the road. The Missourians' two cannons came thundering forward. Unlimbering, the cannoneers opened fire on the greyclads. Lieutenant Colonel Jesse J. Phillips of the 9th Illinois Mounted Infantry shouted for his troopers to dismount. As soon as horseholders had been detailed, Phillips' troopers charged the Confederate right flank. A few minutes of brisk skirmishing ended in another withdrawal by the greybacks, who fell back to within a short distance of Caney Creek. The victorious Yanks pursued the Rebs as far as Barton Station. Halting his command in a large clover field, Cornyn ordered his men to dismount and rest.³⁹

³⁸ O. R., Series I, Vol. XXIII, pt. I, 247, 251.

³⁹ Ibid., 251, 252.

Meanwhile, the three companies covering the left flank of Cornyn's advance had flushed a strong force of Southerners from an encampment north of the railroad. The Rebels, to escape from being encircled, sought to make their getaway to the south. They struck the Corinth-Tuscumbia road near Newsom's farm at an opportune moment.

Following the skirmish at Buzzard Roost, Captain Benjamin Tannrath of Battery I had reported his ammunition exhausted. Cornyn directed him to halt his guns, and send to the rear for his reserve supply. Upon the arrival of the ammunition, Tannrath was to press forward and rejoin the cavalry brigade. Having refilled their limbers, the cannoners resumed the march eastward. Unfortunately for the artillerists, they encountered the Confederates who were escaping from Dodge's trap. The guns, limbers, and 45 cannoners were gobbled up by the Rebs.⁴⁰

Cornyn, upon receipt of news regarding the capture of the cannons, left the 9th Illinois Mounted Infantry and the 10th Missouri Cavalry to hold his advanced position at Barton Station. Accompanied by the remainder of his brigade, Cornyn returned to Newsom's farm hoping to retake the guns.

Coming up with the Rebels, Cornyn called for Captain James Cameron of the 1st Alabama Cavalry (Union) to take his unit, charge the greyclads, and recover the cannons. The Alabama Unionists put their spurs to their horses and swept forward. But, they were easily repulsed by a hail of lead which killed their captain. Roddey's men, observing that they were confronted by overwhelming odds, abandoned one of the guns. Taking cover in the woods south of the road, they opened fire on the Yanks. Cornyn feared the Southerners might establish a roadblock. By doing so, they could interrupt communications between his advanced guard at Barton Station, and the remainder of his brigade at Newsom's farm. Cornyn accordingly recalled his troops from Barton Station.⁴¹

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 252. Captain Tannrath accompanied Cornyn's advance, leaving Lieutenant John F. Brunner in charge of the section.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 253.