

GEN. AVERILL'S OPERATIONS.

Spirited Account of the Great Southern Virginia Raid.

Its Object—Destruction of Railroads, Bridges and Medical Stores—A Gallant and Obsolete Fight—Gen. Averill Wounded—Incidents, &c., &c., &c.

Special Correspondence of the New-York Times.
HEADQUARTERS CAVALRY DIVISION, DEPARTMENT WEST VIRGINIA,
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The cavalry raid of that dashing and gallant officer, Gen. AVERILL, made from Charleston, West Virginia, May 8, was undoubtedly one of the most hazardous and brilliant of the war. It was, too, successful. All and more than the usual dangers of field and flood were encountered—rivers were swam, forests penetrated, mountains scaled, unknown regions traversed, enemies met. For upward of sixty miles of the mountain travel there was nothing but precipitous bridle-paths, and for that distance did the men on foot drag themselves and their horses up and down. But seven days' rations and proportionate ammunition had been taken. For eighteen days—including four days after meeting Gen. CROOK—the command were unheard of by their friends. After the 11th their ammunition was about exhausted, and but for the fortunate capture of a rebel train on the 9th, they would have been without food; as it was they were seven days on half rations. They had ridden, walked, forded, swam, climbed and fought during the raid of three hundred and fifty miles, exhibiting an endurance and heroism challenging the admiration of the world of chivalry.

THE OBJECTS OF THE RAID.

The principal object of Gen. AVERILL'S movement was to distract the attention of the rebel Gens. JENKINS and the noted JOHN MORGAN, and by diverting it toward himself prevent a junction of their forces against Gen. CROOK, who designed moving on to Dublin, destroying the stores and the Virginia and Tennessee Railroad at that place and the bridge (the largest and the finest in the South) on New River, seven miles above. The purpose was accomplished, Gen. CROOK effecting the complete destruction he designed, and Gen. MORGAN the while, as it proved, holding himself at Wythville, southwest about thirty miles distant on the railroad, in expectation of Gen. AVERILL. Another purpose of the raid was the destruction of the road at whatever point it should be struck, and Gen. AVERILL starting from Charleston May 1, selected Wythville as his destination. His command consisted of the First, Second and Third Virginia and Fourteenth Pennsylvania Cavalry, and the Thirty-fourth Ohio Mounted Infantry—in all 2,500 men.

REBELS GOBBLED UP.

The march was without especial incident until the evening of the 7th, when the advance suddenly came upon and gobbled up some rebel pickets; rapidly advancing, they came upon an entire company of the Eighth Virginia Cavalry, part of JOHN MORGAN'S men, engaged in games of ball and quoits, capturing the whole of them, save the Captain, who escaped to the bushes. The horses were also taken. In the surprise, only some five or six shots were fired, and they without injury. The rebels were bewildered at first, chagrined afterward, and expressed surprise at the temerity of the raid. This occurred at Abb's Valley, 140 miles southeast of Charleston. The presence of a superior force in that section was suspected, and the command that night camped on the play-ground of their prisoners.

THE MARCH CONTINUED.

The next morning, two miles from camp, rebel pickets were met, who opened a fire on our advance; they were driven back and the march continued, until the enemy were found posted in the woods on the hills. Scouts were sent forward, but were driven back, some wounded, without being able to ascertain the number of the opposing force.

A FIGHT.

Gen. AVERILL concluded to fight; the nature of the ground was such that cavalry was useless, and the Thirty-fourth Ohio and Second Virginia, ordered to dismount, were thrown out as skirmishers on either flank; they gallantly went to their work; brisk firing ensued, our men pressed forward into the woods and up the hills, from one to another of which the rebels were driven for twelve miles, when they broke cover and fled to Jeffersonville, three miles beyond. This skirmishing wood and hill fighting had continued for six hours. Of Gen. AVERILL'S command two were killed and five wounded; the rebels lost seventeen killed and carried off their wounded. At the close of the fight a man well posted in the military policy of the rebels, came in and surrendering himself to Gen. AVERILL, took the oath of allegiance. He gave much valuable information, and specially valuable—the fact that MORGAN was then at Saltville, twenty miles from Jeffersonville, with a strong force on the *qui vive* for our command. It was further ascertained that all the mountain passes on the route from Jeffersonville to Wythville were strongly guarded, and that passage through would be impossible.

A REBEL TRAIN CAPTURED.

That night, therefore, Gen. AVERILL marched back seven miles, branching off ten miles to Princeton, where he camped. The next morning, a mile out, a rebel train of ten wagons, loaded with provisions, was captured; what the force required, and they were sadly in need, was taken and the balance destroyed.

MEDICAL STORES DESTROYED.

A colored woman came up to the rear guard of the column and informed them that in a cave about a mile up the mountain medical stores were concealed. Twelve men were detailed to search for them, and on reaching the spot were assailed by some thirty rebels on guard. They retreated to the main column and returned reinforced. The rebels skedaddled, the cave was entered, a large quantity of medicines and of surgical instruments were discovered, all of which were destroyed. A weary march was taken across Walker Mountain to Mountain Gap, and the next day (the 10th) a forced march of twenty-five miles brought the command to Cave Mountain Gap, five miles from the expected goal—Wythville. The Gap was reached at 3 P. M., and here

THE GALLANT FIGHT OCCURRED.

Evidently information of our movements had reached MORGAN, for at the Gap was unexpectedly

discovered the redoubtable rebel chief, with full 5,000 cavalry and infantry, and four pieces of cannon. Portions of his force were strongly posted on each side of the Gap, and upon the cliffs to the front and sides, while the cannon commanded the approach. Our force, thus suddenly, and, as it would seem, overwhelmingly met, had been reduced to 2,000 men, 500 having been on the 6th day dispatched to reinforce Gen. CROOK. Scarcely had the rebels, thus impreguably ensconced, been revealed in front, ere two heavy lines of skirmishers, strongly supported, were discovered rapidly advancing, and in splendid style, over a clearing and on to our right flank. The two discoveries were almost simultaneous. Gen. AVERILL at once took in the perilous situation; to retreat was ruin, to advance certain destruction, to surrender was never thought of. Nothing was to be done but to hold his ground, make desperate, stubborn resistance, and during it to await the cover of the night. The gallant Col. SCHOONMAKER, commanding the second brigade, was, with the Fourteenth Pennsylvania and First Virginia, (mounted,) hurriedly thrown out across to the right of the road on a rise, there to meet the approaching columns, which they nobly did, receiving the fire of the enemy—presenting a front of twice their own—at close range, and returning it so rapidly and with such deadly effect, that repeated attempts to charge upon them failed. Col. SCHOONMAKER made no attempt to advance, but held his position under a constant fire for one hour, when, upon a threatened flank movement on his right by the rebel cavalry, Gen. AVERILL ordered him to fall back across the road, and on the right of the second column, which had been formed there, consisting of the Thirty-fourth Ohio and Second and Third Virginia, all dismounted, under the command of Brig.-Gen. DUFFIX. He had suffered considerably, and was compelled to leave his dead and badly wounded on the line where they had fallen. The movement was made leisurely and in excellent order. It was greeted with exultant shouts by the rebels, who pressed rapidly forward as far as the abandoned line, but the now united columns, presenting a solid and unflinching front, delivered with rapidity and withering precision a fire which prevented further advance, and temporarily staggered into confusion the opposing ranks. From the outset of the fight both columns, while holding in check the vastly superior force in front, were subjected at easy musketry range to the cross fire of the infantry and artillery at the Gap. The terrible position of Gen. AVERILL'S command no description can convey the correct idea of. They were on a cleared section, with a force double their own to the left, and another double their own to the front, with no cover of hills or woods to fall back to, and with but the one thing to do—to maintain their position under the heavy and continuous fire of shot and shell. The gallantry of Gen. AVERILL and his staff shone conspicuously during the terrific ordeal, as did that of every officer and man in his command—not one was seen to falter. The Second Virginia, on the left of the second column and in close range of the Gap, constantly under murderous fire, extorted the admiration of the enemy and won that of its own command by its splendid conduct. It was firm as a rock; every movement was executed with the ease and precision of a dress parade, and the moral effect of its splendid bearing infused the strength of another regiment. On the field, as in general orders, it received from Gen. AVERILL the warmest praise. Gen. AVERILL was constantly at the front of the first column, and on its falling back, at the front of the command, encouraging and stimulating it to the noble heroism displayed, by his own fearless exposure and dauntless courage. About midway of the fight he was struck in the middle of the forehead by a musket ball, which, glancing, passed off over the left eye, inflicting a deep wound; with the blood flowing profusely, his face undistinguishable from gore, he continued in his saddle until, by weakness, he was compelled to retire to the rear. Here the blood was staunch, the wound dressed, and after a few moments rest he was again in the saddle and to the front, there remaining until the close of the fight. His escape with life was miraculous. For five long hours did this desperate fight continue; not one inch of the second line had been yielded; MORGAN, on repeated attempts to force it, which were made with a rush and amid hellish yells, being repulsed, and when night came he seemed glad to seek repose from the obstinate and bloody contest, and to his stubborn foes that night was indeed welcome. Gen. AVERILL'S loss in killed and wounded was 135; six prisoners were taken, and from them it was ascertained that the rebel loss was far in excess of ours. The killed and badly wounded were necessarily left in the hands of the enemy, there being no conveyance for them, and at dark, having placed the latter in a farmhouse near by, and leaving a Surgeon in charge, the command hastily got away without any attempt by MORGAN being made to pursue them or even feel their position. A rapid march of thirteen miles was had for Walker's Mountain, with the design of crossing it and reaching Dublin, where Gen. CROOK was expected to be met.

Special mention, ere concluding this portion of my letter, should be made of the associate officers of Gen. AVERILL, few of whom escaped uninjured, for gallantry never had nobler exemplars than in Brig.-Gen. DUFFIX and Col. SCHOONMAKER, and in the small but devoted staff composed of Assistant Adjt.-Gen. Rumsey, Capt. George T. Castle, Capt. William H. Brown, Capt. L. A. Myers and Surgeon Fred Elliott; or, than in Col. Copehart, First Virginia, Col. Powell, Second Virginia, Maj. Conger, commanding detachment Third Virginia, Maj. Daily, Acting Colonel Fourteenth Pennsylvania and Col. Shaw, of the Thirty-fourth Ohio. During all the fight the posts of danger were persistently theirs, and their courageous examples were magnetic. It has been stated that a portion of MORGAN'S force were cavalry. They were held in reserve during the fight, under cover of the woods to the rear and left of the rebel column, awaiting the moment so vainly sought for, when our lines would be broken and they could charge upon our disordered men.

THE BALANCE OF THE RAID.

When Walker Mountain was reached, it was found that there was but a bridle-path over it, and the wearied men dismounting, dragged themselves and their jaded horses up it. The advance reached the top at midnight, and here the guide irrecoverably lost his way. To continue in the pitchy darkness was impossible. The order was given to halt, and the worn-out men and horses, stretched in single file from base to summit on the precipitous, rocky mountain's side, laid down to rest. Singularly enough, yet confirmatory of the terrible punishment the enemy had received, they were not disturbed, and at daylight were on the march again. The mountain passed, and a forced march made during the day of thirty-two miles, to Dublin. Here was a sad disappointment, for, though the good work of destruction which Gen. CROOK had done was seen, yet he was not met. Remaining over night, an early march was made of seven miles to New River; it was greatly swollen, but was crossed with the loss of two men, four horses, and destruction of all the ammunition, and, ten miles further on, the Virginia and Tennessee Railroad was struck at Christiansburgh. Some scattering rebel forces were found here, but were charged on and driven through and beyond the town, giving no after trouble. The depot here, stored with large amounts of flour, bacon and forage, was burned, the telegraph-office instrument and wires destroyed, the railroad torn up and rails rendered useless, and the bridge, two miles below, burned. Two field-pieces were captured in the village. The command occupied the town over night, moving nineteen miles to Gap Mountain the

next morning, where 1,500 rebels, under Col. (or Gen.) W. E. JACKSON, were found strongly posted in a gap, and strengthened by two pieces of artillery. Gen. AVERILL'S command was now entirely without ammunition. What little was left after the battle at Cave Mountain had been destroyed while crossing New River. A fight, therefore, was hopeless. So, by a strategic and hasty movement, he turned their left flank seeking a bridle path over the mountain and thence to Sinking Creek Valley, twelve miles distant, JACKSON making no pursuit. On the next day (the 14th) they pushed on twenty-nine miles toward Union, and within five miles thereof fell in with the rear guard of Gen. CROOK'S command. It was a gladdening sight and hailed vociferously. On the 15th Gen. AVERILL joined Gen. CROOK, and on the next day held the rear of his army while crossing Green Briar River at Alderson's ford, en route for Meadow Bluff. This duty performed, Gen. AVERILL marched for Burnt Bridge Ford, on same river, where he crossed and made direct for Lewisburgh, reaching there on the 19th. Here, for himself and his gallant command, there was but brief rest promised, for an early expedition in connection with Gen. CROOK had been planned. Its results will be of great importance. D. M. BARNES.