



"TO CARE FOR HIM WHO HAS BORNE THE BATTLE, AND FOR HIS WIDOW AND ORPHANS."

ESTABLISHED 1877—NEW SERIES.

WASHINGTON, D. C., THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 22, 1887.

VOL. VI.—NO. 7—WHOLE NO. 319.

AVERELL'S RAID.

How the Command Eluded Many Times Its Numbers.

STORM, ICE AND FLOOD. Brave and Patient Endurance of the Devoted Soldiers.

SAFE AT LAST.

After Perils and Sufferings that Cannot Be Told.

BY J. M. RIFE, CAPTAIN, 7TH VA. CAV., WEST JEFFERSON, O.

While at Salem an incident occurred of great interest, for which I am indebted to Capt. C. T. Ewing, of the battery, whose words I quote:

"One little incident, one among a thousand, I well remember. It has always remained fixed indelibly in my memory. It occurred on the crest of the hill overlooking Salem, as we entered that place from the north. A Lieutenant had gone in advance with one section of my battery. I was riding along with the guidon at the head of the battery, and as we reached the top of the hill a lady came out and asked to look at the flag. Her face was pale and bloodless. I had no idea what she wanted. We saw the flag every day. It got to be old with us. Its stars gleamed only in a matter-of-fact way, and the unfolding of its folds only stirred us on extraordinary occasions. She had not seen it for years.

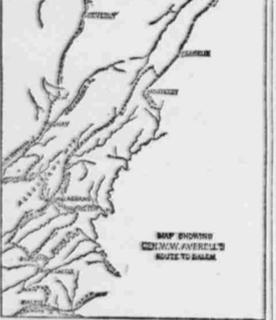
"I ordered George Martin to let her see it. He rode up to her and gave it into her hands. I was intensely anxious to know what she would do with it. Thinking of Col. Ellsworth's experience at Alexandria, Va., I would not have been surprised to have seen her tear it into ribbons. I can never forget her looks as she eagerly and passionately folded it to her bosom.

"As a mother would her long-lost child when returned to her arms. For several minutes she remained, sobbing aloud, and at last, when she gave it back, it was with bright smiles through tears of real joy and gladness."

"While this scene was going on the smoke was curling upward and hiding the clouds, while mills, depots, storehouses and other public property were being rapidly consumed. The only happy people we saw were the blacks, who were permitted to carry away food from the burning buildings, and who were exulting at the great reduction in the cost of food. It was very dear in the morning, but cheap now.

"We always felt that we did not get that locomotive and train. It would have been so nice to have gone up the road and had a chat with Longstreet, and then return toward Lynchburg and Richmond and see Jubal Early, who was laughing us with all his might. In this case, as in many others, where two persons want the same thing at the same time, one must yield. Under the circumstances we yielded.

"When our work was done and the day was nearly gone, the head of the column was directed to the rear over the road we had taken in coming. We had suffered much to get there. With little sleep and little food,



in the midst of the most fearful mountain storms of wind and sleet, a constantly-falling thermometer and swelling streams—amid all these we had moved forward and gained our purpose. The enemy had

BEEN GIVEN A BLOW which for audacity and rapidity of execution had not been equaled by any force on our side during the whole war. It far exceeded John Morgan's raid into Indiana and Ohio. He had warm weather, good roads, plenty of food. He found abundant fresh horses on his route. He had no forces specially after him for some time. There were no mountain passes. He struck no important points. He did little harm to his enemy, and was finally hunted like a deer and driven to bay, overwhelmed and routed, and he himself, committed to the Ohio penitentiary. His raid flashed out and was a miserable failure.

"We had gone through mountains with few passes, and capable of the most perfect defense. We had outmarched and outmaneuvered five different commands. We had entered the very heart of Virginia and cut the communications of the enemy. So far, good. But now for the return and for sufferings, dangers, marches and maneuvers, of which we could have no adequate idea, as we begin our journey homeward. We left Salem the same day we entered it,

December 16, and moved as rapidly as possible toward New Castle. The mountain storms had filled every stream on our way to overflowing, but all these we crossed without the least difficulty, until we reached Craig's Creek. Here a stream of magnificent size ordinarily, but now an impassable torrent, stopped our progress. Plans for crossing were at once devised, but they all proved impracticable. Night came, and the troops went into bivouac and a body of scouts was sent back to Salem over the road we had just passed to inform the people that we were returning.

It seems, from Gen. Fitzhugh Lee's account of his share in the attempt to capture us, that this movement of our scouts led to such changes in Gen. Jubal Early's orders



to him, and also to Imboden, that our escape was made a comparatively easy matter. Gen. Lee, with his own division and Gen. Imboden's some 3,000 men in the saddle, was on his way that night to Covington, W. Va., intending to place himself in our front and await our arrival, with every assurance of our capture or destruction. Gen. Lee has kindly furnished me a few lines, giving his recollection of that affair. He says:

"I moved from Staunton via Lexington to Collierville, on the road from Lexington to Covington, reaching that point very late at night. Next morning my command was in the saddle by light, marching for Covington, and upon arriving at that place, I received an order from Gen. Lee to return to the main Valley of Virginia. I was directed to return to the main Valley of Virginia, and to move down that valley in the direction of Buchanan to intercept him in that way. It seems that after Averell left Salem, he did find Craig's Creek crossed the road a number of times very high, and stopped to make his arrangements for crossing it, sending a rear-guard for the protection of his command while making these arrangements. Citizens of Salem following his trail, saw the cavalry as it was marching back again, and rode rapidly back to Salem, where the telegraph wires had been put up again, and telegraphed all the way around to Staunton that Gen. Averell was returning to Salem; whereupon Gen. Lee sent a courier to me posthaste giving me that information. If it had not been for that, and I had continued my march to Covington, I would have reached that point with my force, increased by another brigade, under Gen. Imboden, a few hours before Gen. Averell did. Averell's command was not sent and his men very much fatigued, and I followed in pursuit as far as White Sulphur Springs, but could not overtake my force. A special opportunity was lost to me.

"By quoting Gen. Jackson I have somewhat anticipated. As we reached the river, at the mouth of Barber's Creek, we found ourselves opposed by a weak and hesitating force. Our advance, consisting of Co's A, B, D and F of the 8th Va. Cav., pushed forward rapidly and kept the enemy on the run most of the way up to the bridge. A good part of the day—19th—was consumed in making this march and reaching the bridge. The enemy in our front kept in sight and made an ineffectual resistance. A number of times I ordered a charge on them, but they would not stand—rushing away as rapidly as horses could carry them, to appear again farther on, and to annoy and impede us. When night came on the darkness became dense. We were moving on unknown roads, where the hostile force had every advantage over us, and outnumbered us

MORE THAN FIVE TO ONE. An unusual occurrence took place at this time. The enemy that had been in our front stole off the main road, took a side road, and sat there on their horses and allowed the advance to pass without noticing them. As

and dragging the artillery over by ropes, enveloping the guns and caissons completely. The ammunition for the guns was properly cared for and was kept dry. The crossing of the guns and ambulances was the most serious difficulty, but a dogged perseverance, together with ingenuity to devise ways and means, conquered everything.

"During the night we halted at New Castle. The temperature suddenly dropped to below zero, bitter winds came whistling down the valley, and the water turned rapidly into ice as the chilled men and horses came out of the stream. The ammunition of many of the men had become dampened, and was worthless. Guns, carbines and pistols were more or less splashed by the water, and were in many cases filled with ice and frozen solid. A battle at this time was utterly out of the question. The men felt the cold piercing them to the marrow. No time was given for fire to dry clothing or to thaw out guns, or do anything for the comfort of the command. This was

A CHASE FOR LIFE. We had much to fear if the enemy was vigilant. Though Lee and Imboden were, it was hoped, out of our way, we would meet with Gen. Jones, Echols and W. L. Jackson, who would, in the nature of things, occupy the passes or defend the bridges. Sometime in the night we reached Scott's Station, and found Gen. Jones on top of the mountain. That way was evidently closed to us. Lieut.-Col. Polley, of the 8th Va. Cav., was ordered to proceed up the mountain and make all the bluster and noise possible, build numerous campfires, and make the impression that we intended to force our way. This had the desired effect. Gen. Jones awaited our approach, lying on his arms all that dreadful night, and did not ascertain until nearly noon next day that no enemy was in front, but that we had escaped him at least, by taking an unfrequented road to our right toward Jackson's River and Covington. This road led down Barber's Creek, and it seems was the only road not picketed by either Gen. Jones or Gen. Jackson.

At Scott's Station a guide was forced in the person of Dr. Wiley, a practitioner in that locality. He afterward settled in

Charleston, W. Va., and after the war was arrested for the murder of a speculator named Tift. He was admitted to bail after a preliminary hearing, and absconded.

The night march down Barber's Creek will be remembered by the command as one of the

MOST DISAGREEABLE AND TRYING marches it ever made. The road was rough, often through the woods, the path covered in places by fallen trees and logs, over which the weary horses stumbled and sometimes fell. The awful demand of nature for sleep called loud and unrelenting. Hunger pined in vain for satisfaction. Cold—and so cold!

A fire, a warm meal and a bed were worth millions of money, but this boon could not be bought. What visions of loaded tables, laughing friends and delightful peace and rest passed over our strangely-bewildered minds. Yonder is a beautiful castle, a princely house. See the illuminated windows and the guests passing here and there. I imagine I can hear the music as it floats softly out to greet my ear. My active taste and smell seem to catch in the air the savory viands that are prepared for a King's entertainment. Shall we stop here? Is this indeed the fairyland of which I read in boyhood days? Ah! it is only

A STRANGE HALUCINATION—the outbreaths of a hungry, tired, frozen and nearly dead man. I am still on my horse, lying prone on his neck, which I embrace with my arms, and the faithful steed is carrying me on through the dark night, from shadow to shadow, and all around me are men and horses marching, suffering, hungry just as I am. O, what has become of the romance of soldiering—the beating drums, marching men, prancing horses and waving flags? That was the poetry of war; this is the bitter reality, robbed of all its charm.

Thus the night wore wearily away. Late in the dark evening of the next day found us near Jackson's River, five miles below Covington and the bridge we must cross if we escape. No enemy had been in our front all the day long. This was the only road Jackson failed to picket. He was at Clifton Forge, and had been ordered by Fitzhugh Lee to

STAY THERE AND CAPTURE STRAGGLERS who might endeavor to escape from the main force, which Lee expected to engage and destroy at Covington. Gen. Jackson says:

"I made a forced march from Warm Springs to Clifton Forge. I ordered Maj. Ledy with a squadron to proceed to the bridge near Covington and destroy it. This the destruction of the bridge. Maj. Ledy left to some extent, and it was neglected. He effected the capture of the ambulances, etc., and reported to me that the whole force of Gen. Averell had made good its escape. That night I moved from Clifton Forge to Jackson's River Depot, and hearing the report of Maj. Ledy's capture, gave up the chase. In the morning, with three of my staff, I started to investigate the bridge, and when near it we discovered the approach of your regiment [14th Pa. Cav.], which had not been reported to me. My command at Jackson's River Depot knew nothing of this, and as soon as I could safely do so I returned to my force and could not overtake my force. A special opportunity was lost to me.

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While this was going on in the rear of the column there was business in front of the most lively sort. As the advance moved on three officers were riding side by side immediately behind one or two men who were our extreme advance, when we heard a rider in the darkness coming toward us from the direction of the bridge. He was evidently an enemy who was unconscious of our approach. He was allowed to ride up and bid us good evening, when he asked, "Where are you going?"

We answered by asking, "Where are you going?"

He replied, without hesitation: "I am going to Gen. Jackson with a dispatch from Gen. Jones."

Instantly revolvers were pointed at him, and he was ordered to give up that dispatch. There was no chance to get away or to destroy the paper. It informed Gen. Jackson that Averell had escaped from Jones's front, and had gone by way of Barber's Creek toward Covington, and ordered Jackson to make sure of the bridge by destroying it, informing him that he (Gen. Jones) would move as rapidly as possible to Callahan's.

This dispatch was at once conveyed to



Gen. Averell, who sent a staff officer forward, ordering us to

TAKE THE BRIDGE at once by a charge. By this time we were in sight of the fires at the opposite end of the bridge. We could see men standing about them. We were evidently not discovered. We moved very carefully, formed the column close, and started, moving slowly at first, but as the enemy aroused himself and began to realize the situation by firing at us, the command to charge was given, and we moved with a rush.

What a clatter of hoofs on the wooden floor, and how the horses crowded on the front line! I was riding a wind-broken horse we had "borrowed" at White Sulphur Springs. He had been on the track, and when the charge began he became furious. Snorting and blowing

LIKE A STEAMBOAT, he could not be controlled, but passed everything and took the lead. My hat flew off. I looked for a plunge through the bridge into the waters of the furious stream, for I expected the floor would be found torn up at the other end. Fortunately the floor was all right, the bridge strong, and the enemy, under the command of Maj. Ledy, very kind to give way, so that we made a safe landing on solid ground and were in possession of the bridge.

But our trouble was not ended with this success. A company was left to hold the bridge for the main body, while the rest of us rushed on to Covington to seize another bridge over the same stream on the opposite side of the town. Scarcely had we left the first bridge until the enemy had rallied and retaken it, but only for a minute, for before the torch could be applied they were driven off, and the bridge was then firmly held until we destroyed it the next morning.

Moving to Covington, we took the town from the rear. It was midnight and past when our advance entered the sleeping village. Our noise and clatter soon aroused the people. Stables were searched for horses, now so sadly necessary for artillery, until quite a number were gathered. A number of rebel soldiers and one officer were captured. The bridge was easily taken. Lieut. Wingfield with a small squad rode through it to the reserve post and quietly

TOOK THE BOYS ALL IN,

much to their disgust and surprise. Now we had the way open for our escape. Jones could not get down from Sweet Spring Mountain in time to get to Callahan's before we got there. Then to our sorrow we found two roads out—one to Lewisburg and the Big Kanawha, the other by way of Pocahontas County across the Greenbrier River to Beverly, in Randolph County.

While we were getting along nicely in the front and were opening the way for a safe retreat, the rear was not moving along so smoothly. The enemy was thoroughly aroused, as he saw his game almost escaped from his hands.

Gen. Averell seemed to be slowly coming forward with the main body. When he had finally crossed the bridge day was dawning, and the rear-guard—the 14th Pa. Cav.—was still far behind and could not be communicated with. A number of messengers sent to hasten them forward came back because the enemy was on the road between us. After a while the enemy appeared on the other side. That seemed to indicate

OUR FRIENDS WERE CAPTURED, or were seeking some other way out. The enemy strongly covering the bridge. Gen. Averell ordered fire set to it, and when the blaze was at its height the lost command appeared in sight, on its way to a ford above which was undefended.

A rebel officer demanded the surrender of the regiment. The commander was disposed to listen to terms, but a number of the officers protested, and the regiment fought its way to the ford. Gen. Averell called over

to the commanding officer, Lieut.-Col. Blakely, to do the best he could, and to rejoin the main body if possible by the ford. The river had fallen some; the weather was still very cold, but this did not deter the brave riders.

A ford was found above the bridge, which was passable at low water, but deep and dangerous now. Into this the rear-guard plunged, and almost every man crossed over safely. A citizen saw the crossing, who writes me that

IT WAS A SPLENDID SIGHT.

Now we were all together again, moving forward to gain Callahan's as soon as possible. The enemy was feeble in our front, and the destruction of the bridges in our rear held him off for a short time from that direction. But he was making every effort to prevent our escape, and it was clear we could not pass out by either of the two regular roads open to us. Gen. Echols and McCausland were somewhere on our left or front.

At this time we did not know where Fitzhugh Lee and Imboden were, and if they were in the vicinity of Warm Springs they might easily get in our front if we moved by Marr's Hill toward Huntersville, in Pocahontas County. This was one of the critical times of the campaign. We were not out of the woods by any means, though so far away from Salem and fully half way back.

Gen. Averell went into bivouac here for a little needed rest and to give himself time to decide

WHAT TO DO NEXT.

It is said that the negroes were called to headquarters, and one, a boy perhaps 12 years old, said he knew a way across Greenbrier River by a ford far above Lewisburg. He had been there to mill with his master. Hearing this, Gen. Averell put the boy on a horse, ordered "boots and saddles" to be sounded, and then "forward." The boy led us up Ogle's Creek and down Anthony's Creek, over the Allegheny Mountains—high, rough, wild and icy. The horses were taken from the artillery and long ropes attached; men were dismounted, and drew the six pieces up and down that fearful mountain path.

How we reached the summit and got safely down was a wonder of wonders to us all. Only the fact that we had done it could not be denied. It would seem that now we were safe from pursuit, but the rear-guard saw the enemy in sight much of the time, though keeping at a safe distance. This was evidently simply an escort to see us safely across the river and on our way home.

Our advance reached the Greenbrier River at daylight of Dec. 20. We found the stream swollen and

FULL OF FLOATING ICE. It seemed impossible to cross. Gen. Averell in person directed the crossing, and tested the ford. Cakes of ice from 10 to 15 feet square, and heavy enough to submerge a horse, were constantly passing. The order came to plunge in and across. This was done without loss. The command was in no mood to hesitate. Hunger, cold, exhaustion had done their utmost. Men had lost the ordinary feelings of their kind, but had only on taking care of self; and thus each man pressed over.

Once across, the head of the column halted to await the main body, and the exhausted men literally fell to the ground and slept. When the order to move forward came it was almost impossible to get the men up and on their horses. I rode up to one after another, and by punching them with my sword aroused them and induced them to mount. Ordinary calling was useless.

But scarcely had we gotten under way again when we were met by a familiar flash and heard reports that told us in some way the enemy had

PLACED HIMSELF IN OUR FRONT.

Halting to form an attacking force, Co. C of the 8th Va. Cav., Capt. Charles Smith, was ordered to charge and with a yell they plunged into the darkness and pushed the enemy entirely beyond, where a junction was formed of our road with the pike between Lewisburg and Beverly. Here we turned to the right, and for the first time in 10 days and nights went into camp at Hillsboro.

The enemy was now entirely in our rear, barring the danger from Early at Warm Springs. His strongest columns were too far

away to strike us, and the force following us too contemptible to notice. The next day we moved leisurely to Etroy, where supplies were sent for Beverly and our furnished men and horses stopped until we met them 12 miles from that place. On Christmas Day, 1863, our column moved into Beverly, where supplies were sent for Beverly and our furnished men and horses stopped until we met them 12 miles from that place. On Christmas Day, 1863, our column moved into Beverly, where supplies were sent for Beverly and our furnished men and horses stopped until we met them 12 miles from that place.

My march was retarded occasionally by the temper in the mountains and the icy roads.

I was obliged to swim my command and drag my artillery with ropes across Craig's Creek seven times in 24 hours. On my return I found six separate commands under Gen. Early, Jones, Fitz Lee, Imboden, Jackson, Echols and McCausland arranged in a line extending from Staunton to Newports, upon the available roads, to prevent my return. I captured a dispatch from Gen. Jones to Gen. Early, giving me the position and that of

Jackson at Clifton Forge, and Covington was selected to carry.

I mentioned the fact that the two bridges across Jackson's River were saved, although I had been miles ready to ignite.

My column, about four miles long, hastened across, and a strong effort was made to retake the first bridge, in which I was successful. The ambulances and some sick men were lost, and the enemy immediately changed his position. When it was ascertained that the enemy's force determined to maintain his position up the cliffs which overlooked the bridge, I caused the bridge, which were long and high, to be destroyed, and the enemy immediately changed his position. My loss is six men drowned, one officer and four men wounded, and four officers and 50 men on account of their inability to walk have remained at 40 camps and 80 men. We took about 150 horses. My horses have subsisted entirely upon a poor country, and the officers and men have suffered from hunger and cold with remarkable fortitude. My command has marched, climbed, slid and swam 325 miles since the 1st inst.

W. W. AVERELL, Brigadier-General.

An officer of this expedition, on hearing I was writing an account of it, said to me: "You cannot do it justice." I realize how true this remark is. No pen can describe the terrible march, the storms, snow, ice, cold, floods, sufferings and escapes of the men of that expedition. I have mentioned a few persons in this paper, because if praise is given at all, it should be to every one, and not to a few.

Some will read this account and will be disappointed because incidentally to them are not noticed, but every soldier knows there are as many phases to a battle or campaign as there are faces among men. No two see the same thing, and each man has his own opinion, or have the same way of telling it. It is sufficient for me to say that this account is fair and impartial from my standpoint.

I close by copying Gen. R. E. Lee's information on the reports sent to him of the efforts made for our capture:

HEADQUARTERS, Dec. 26, 1863. Respectfully forwarded for information of the Department. High waters and cross-currents, with untoward events, prevented the success of the arrangements that I hoped would have resulted in Averell's capture.

R. E. LEE, General.

[At the request of Capt. Rife, the author, a "proof" of the first part of this article, published two weeks ago, was sent to Gen. Averell, both N. Y. that any errors of fact might be corrected. Owing to the General's temporary absence from home the proof was not received until after the paper had gone to press. Gen. Averell says that the copy of fact might be corrected. Owing to the General's temporary absence from home the proof was not received until after the paper had gone to press.

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GEN. BLACK'S REPORT.

The Commissioner Reviews the Work of the Pension Bureau.

A SPLENDID SHOWING.

An Interesting Resume of Foreign Pension Systems.

SERVICE AND DISABILITY.

Some Pertinent Recommendations as to Needed Legislation.

The Commissioner of Pensions, Gen. John C. Black, has submitted his annual report to the Secretary of the Interior. It is so interesting a document to the veterans that we reproduce it below in full. Gen. Black's review of the pension system of other Nations will be found especially interesting, and embodies new matter not before published in the United States. The text of the report is as follows: