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FIERY DAWN

The Civil War Battle at Monroe's Crossroads, North Carolina



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1 - The War Before Monroe's Crossroads

The Battle of Monroe's Crossroads began at dawn on March 10, 1865 with the sounds of thundering horse hooves and yelling Confederate soldiers storming onto the grounds surrounding a farm house near Fayetteville, North Carolina. The surprise Confederate charge on a camped Union cavalry brigade began what appeared at first to be a bloody rout. Union soldiers, many of them startled awake by the attack, scrambled for their weapons and cover while Confederates on horseback bore down on them.

But the battle that in the beginning seemed to be a likely Confederate victory became less assured as Union forces rallied a defense. All together, 4,000 to 5,000 men exchanged gunfire that morning around the abandoned farm house where stout pine trees provided cover for some men and swamps proved to be the undoing of others. There was a fierce firefight, duels on horseback, hand-to-hand combat, and the perilous retaking of two artillery pieces that may well have been the most decisive move of the day.

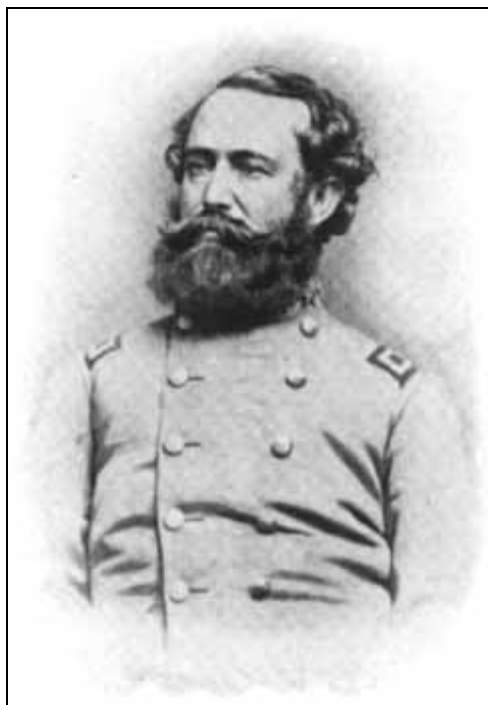
The fight came near the end of four long years of war. To understand how the combatants happened to meet on this North Carolina farm, this volume traces back the footsteps of the leading officers involved. They include Brevet Major General Hugh Judson Kilpatrick for the United States and Lieutenant General Wade Hampton, Lieutenant General Joseph Wheeler, and Major General Matthew C. Butler for the Confederate States. Tracking their actions leading up to the Battle of Monroe's Crossroads, as well as the movements of others whose names are better known - General William Tecumseh Sherman, General Robert E. Lee - reveals the role that chance played in this engagement, and perhaps the entire war.

* * * *

As a wealthy planter with no military background, Wade Hampton was an unlikely candidate to become one of the most esteemed officers in Confederate General Robert E. Lee's army. High command posts were generally reserved for graduates of the United States Military Academy or other military schools such as South Carolina's Citadel or the Virginia Military Institute.

But Hampton, far from being the only Civil War officer without formal military training, was one of many. Most began uncertainly, their decisions reflecting their inexperience. Some couldn't handle the strains of combat and failed miserably, while others ultimately acquitted themselves admirably. Hampton was among the few who acted from the war's start as if he had been preparing all his life for military service, as evidenced by his quickly soaring prestige and eventual position as head of Confederate cavalry under Lee.

Hampton's great, great-grandfather, Anthony Hampton, arrived in South Carolina with his wife



in the mid-1700s when much of the colony was still considered frontier.

The couple raised a brood of sons who helped carve out a home in the wilderness. Then the family's dreams turned to ashes in 1776 during the Revolutionary War. Cherokee Indians, incensed by repeated treaty violations and by colonists invading their land, launched raids against white settlers, encouraged by the British to coincide with their naval assault on Charleston, South Carolina. These Indian attacks fanned anti-British feelings among many in the back country of South Carolina who before leaned toward supporting the Crown.

Five Hampton sons were away, and consequently spared, when Indian warriors invaded the homestead and killed Anthony Hampton, his wife, a son, and grandson. The surviving sons, including the first Wade Hampton, soon joined the rebel fight for independence from the British. Wade Hampton later also fought in the War of 1812 against the British. Between stints in the military, he established thriving plantations in Louisiana and Mississippi, as well as South Carolina, becoming, by his death in 1835, one of the richest planters in the nation.

His namesake, Wade Hampton II, also prospered at his plantation, Millwood, near Columbia, South Carolina, where he indulged a passion for collecting horses and books, developing one of the finest private libraries in the country. He also became a force to be reckoned with politically, though he remained primarily behind-the-scenes, with many of the state's powerful figures paying homage to him at his estate.

His son, Wade Hampton III, was perhaps as proficient at business as his grandfather, although, like many other prosperous Southerners, much of his wealth was built on human bondage. While some slave holders were more humane than others, denying a slave's basic rights and dignities was inherent in the system. Slave families were routinely torn apart, often never to see each other again. A slave child began a life full of work as soon as he or she was big enough to move stones out of the plow's way. Many planters or their hired hands whipped and beat slaves to enforce control or increase productivity, and their victims had little hope of escape. Laws banned teaching slaves to read and write or own property. Nor were they allowed free movement, a restriction enforced by white patrols who roamed the countryside, stopping any black they met and demanding written proof that the individual had permission to be away from a slave holder's property.

At some point, Wade Hampton III developed misgivings about slavery, apparently not because of moral scruples, but because he concluded the system was uneconomical. As a state legislator, he argued the point with his peers. In 1860, when secession fever hit South Carolina after Abraham Lincoln was elected President, Hampton opposed leaving the Union. Nevertheless, when South Carolina opted to break away, Hampton resolved to abide by the decision. Using his own money, he recruited and supplied a legion of troops - infantry, cavalry, and artillery - and, at the rank of colonel, led the force to Virginia where fighting was expected to begin.

In the first major clash of the war on July 21, 1861 at Manassas, Virginia (also known as the Battle of Bull Run), Hampton led 600 infantry soldiers into ferocious fighting. His second-in-command, and the only officer with military experience accompanying Hampton, was killed soon after fighting began. Attacked on three sides by Union troops, Hampton's soldiers stubbornly held their position amidst a hailstorm of bullets until his superiors urged Hampton to retreat. The men, resting briefly in a ravine, prepared for further battle. Soon they were back in action, capturing a Federal artillery piece and joining the pursuit of retreating Union soldiers in the first major Confederate victory of the war. Hampton, who suffered a superficial wound, lost 20 percent of his force, 121 men.

He garnered more attention in 1862 during a bungled Confederate advance on the outskirts of Richmond where he was shot in the foot on May 31 in the Battle of Seven Pines. Despite his wound, Hampton refused to leave the fray, insisting that he be treated while remaining astride his horse. With bullets whizzing through the air, he continued to direct his troops while a surgeon extracted the bullet.

In the heady days that followed, while Hampton recuperated, Lee took command of the Army of Northern Virginia. He and Major General Thomas Jonathan "Stonewall" Jackson built an army that for a time seemed almost invincible. Jackson moved his infantry at such lightning speed in the Shenandoah Valley that more than once the soldiers almost seemed to be in two places simultaneously. Trapped between two converging armies, Jackson boldly attacked one, then wheeled around to face the other, within two days sending both armies into retreat. With such feats, he kept Washington, D.C. cowering in fear that he would attack the capital, and when Jackson joined Lee near Richmond, together they held a massive Union Army at bay.

Hampton, convalescing, was apparently less than thrilled by Southern women admirers seeking his attention. Mary Chesnut, who vividly wrote about the Civil War, quotes an observer saying that Hampton "looked as if he wished they [the ladies] would leave him alone." His bravery and coolness under fire were also noted by his superiors, who promoted him to brigadier general. In the summer of 1862, Hampton was given a command post in Major General J.E.B. Stuart's cavalry.

Smart and daring, Stuart had a knack for deciphering enemy intentions, making him invaluable to Lee. A United States Military Academy graduate, he was also an able teacher for those in his command. He hungered for praise and found defeat nearly impossible to admit. Many civilians, however, knew Stuart more for his flamboyant ways than his military astuteness. His plumed hat, gray cape, yellow sash, gold spurs, and high boots suggested a character drawn from the pages of popular fiction. And unlike Hampton, Stuart enjoyed female attention and went out of his way to court it, although he rarely had to search far.

The red-haired Stuart, with full beard and mustache, had already gained considerable fame in mid-June by leading his cavalry in a ride around the Union Army commanded by Major General George B. McClellan. Stuart was ready for an even more audacious raid into Union territory by the fall of 1862. Hampton would play a key role.

The Confederates had recently suffered their first big setback. Brimming with confidence, troops had advanced into Maryland in the first major invasion of Union territory. Then, disastrously, a copy of Lee's orders somehow fell into Union hands, and McClellan,



notoriously cautious, became suddenly aggressive. He nearly overwhelmed Confederates at Antietam, Maryland, in a clash known to Southerners as the Battle of Sharpsburg. The Confederates managed to retreat to Virginia, where discouraged, they looked to Stuart's cavalry to lift their spirits. Lee ordered a raid into Union territory, primarily to gather intelligence on the disposition of Federal troops, but also to disrupt communications and supply.

In early October 1862, few guessed that Stuart was preparing for this critical maneuver. He camped with his staff at The Bower, the Virginia plantation of Stephen Dandridge, and apart from army tents dotting the grounds beneath massive old oaks, the place appeared to

be the setting for a nearly non-stop, grand party. Dandridge and his wife maintained a stately home filled with their eligible daughters and female cousins. The ladies took advantage of the presence of the soldiers by accompanying them on daily strolls, horseback rides, and boat outings on Opequan Creek flowing through the plantation. Formal teas in the afternoon were followed by music and dancing at night. The soldiers also joined in friendly parlor games. There was much flirting, with Stuart, who was married, joining in, apparently kissing some young women clamoring for his attention. Some even tore the buttons from his uniform for souvenirs; others begged for locks of his red hair. Stuart soaked up the adulation like a sponge, but his close aides insisted that he never strayed farther from Flora, his wife, than kissing.

On the evenings of October 7 and 8, as word spread that the soldiers were about to invade the North, there were two more balls at the Dandridge plantation. Two of Stuart's subordinates provided entertainment for one, costumed as a farm couple from Pennsylvania, which is where the cavalry was ultimately headed. The officer dressed as a woman stood more than six feet tall and weighed some 250 pounds. Big cavalry boots peeking out beneath his white skirt added to the ridiculousness, prompting Stuart to laugh so heartily that tears came to his eyes.

On Wednesday night, October 8, Stuart retired from the dance about 11:00 p.m. to toil at paper work until 1:00 a.m., when he ordered a torch-lit concert with banjos and violins. Charmed women and other residents leaned out the windows to hear this farewell performance, punctuating every song with applause. Stuart, never one to shy from the limelight, played the banjo and sang four solos.

The next day, Stuart rode toward the Potomac River where he joined Hampton and a cavalry unit of 600 men. Hampton's soldiers would spearhead the raid into Maryland and then Pennsylvania. Two other cavalry commands would follow, raising Stuart's force to 1,800 men. They were to shadow a Union Army numbering some 100,000. The dangers were obvious. Besides being vastly outnumbered, they faced a hyper-vigilant Union force determined not to be surprised again.

The Confederates slept in fields near the Potomac, awakening around 4:00 a.m., October 10. They burned no campfires, did nothing to alert an outpost of Union soldiers across the water of their presence.

In early morning, about 30 of Hampton's soldiers from South Carolina and Virginia moved upstream to wade stealthily across the river, their movements shrouded by thick fog. The remainder of Hampton's troops waited at McCoy's Ford, a shallow crossing. For about an hour, there were few sounds apart from the rushing of the river and call of birds, then gunshots. This signaled that the main body of Confederate troops should advance into Union territory. Troopers rode their horses into the river, led by Colonel Matthew C. Butler, Hampton's top subordinate who had resigned from the South Carolina Legislature to join Hampton's Legion. Butler, son-in-law of a South Carolina governor, was born in Greenville and attended South Carolina College.

By first light, the raid was underway. After Hampton's soldiers cleared the path, the entire Confederate force rode north, forming a line that



stretched about five miles. At first, they encountered little resistance. Most of the Union Army was just to the east, off to the Confederates' right, as the Confederates moved steadily across Maryland and into Pennsylvania.

At 10:00 a.m., Stuart called a brief halt and issued these orders to be read throughout the ranks: "We are now in enemy country. Hold yourselves ready for attack or defense, and behave with no other thought than victory. If any man cannot abide cheerfully by the order and the spirit of these instructions, he will be returned to Virginia with a guard of honor." Nobody took him up on the offer. Instead, cheering broke out as the ride continued.

The force was divided into three divisions. Hampton's 600 soldiers in the lead were always on guard, ready to deploy for battle, if Union troops appeared. They were also ready to snare prisoners without firing a shot, if possible, and captured a small contingent of Union soldiers they surprised at a signaling station.

Hampton's lead soldiers, with Butler in command, rode into Mercersburg, Pennsylvania about noon. Soft-spoken soldiers from South Carolina soon crowded into a store and selected dozens of pairs of boots and shoes to buy. The merchant didn't realize they were enemy soldiers until, to pay for their purchases, they handed him scrip signed by the Confederate Army quartermaster. When he balked, they told him not to worry. They felt sure the U.S. government in Washington would reimburse him.

As the column pressed forward, Stuart ordered the 600 soldiers in the middle to fan out into the countryside to gather horses from local farmers. He strictly forbade stealing other items, an admonition many ignored. Most pillaging apparently involved food, with soldiers eating as they returned to the main column; some had roasted turkeys and hams strapped to their saddles. The haversacks of others were stuffed with bread and crocks of cream and butter, provisions not always easily surrendered by farmers. A private from Virginia, entering a house occupied by a woman and young children, requested food. When she insisted she had nothing to give him, he threatened, "I've never eaten human flesh. But I think I'm hungry enough to try one of them babies." The frightened mother found food for him after all.

As ordered, the cavalrymen collected some 1,200 horses, strong work animals that proved invaluable in the long ride ahead. Soldiers rode with as many as three horses in tow. As one mount tired, they switched to another.

Rain fell, sometimes heavily, as darkness enveloped the cavalry. Many troopers wore

oilcloth coveralls to repel the wet. After traveling some 40 miles, the first soldiers reached the outskirts of Chambersburg, Pennsylvania where Hampton called a halt to assess whether the place was occupied by Union troops, and, if so, by how many. Lights from the town lit up the night sky as the Confederates heard the roll of drums, an ominous sound suggesting a military presence. They could see people darting from building to building, but were too far away to identify them.

Seeking to avoid an uncertain fight against foes who possibly outnumbered his own men, Hampton decided to bluff. He sent 10 soldiers into the town under a truce flag, a dirty white cloth tied to a stick. The men carried Hampton's terse demand for surrender, prompting three of Chambersburg's leading citizens to ride out to meet the commander. Their community was undefended by Union troops, they told Hampton, and on behalf of the citizenry, they surrendered the town. As Confederates poured into Chambersburg, Stuart arrived and ordered Butler to break into the bank, where Butler and his men found nothing of value. Money and other deposits had been spirited away and hidden at the first sign of Confederates.

Other soldiers attempting to destroy a key railroad bridge north of town failed because it was made of iron and couldn't be burned or axed. Soldiers did succeed in cutting the local telegraph line, but not before someone sent a message of alarm detailing the Confederate presence. Still, in a moment of playfulness indicative of his optimism, Stuart solemnly appointed Hampton military governor of Chambersburg, as if the Confederates planned to stay for months, not mere hours.

Rain continued to pour. The cavalry spread out through the town and tried to settle down for the night, but neither Stuart nor many of his soldiers slept much. Stuart worried that the continuing heavy downpour would flood the Potomac, making their return to Confederate territory impossible.

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2 - The High Price of Vanity

Confederate Brigadier General Wade Hampton was a grim warrior who favored using maximum force to resolve conflicts as quickly as possible. He was painfully aware of the high price in human life and misery at stake in the Civil War. Confederate Major General J.E.B. Stuart, a gregarious man who reveled in military pomp and pageantry, nonetheless showed increasing faith in Hampton. He dispatched him in late 1862 and early 1863 to lead several cavalry raids into Union-occupied territory. With troops from the Carolinas, Mississippi, Georgia, and Alabama, Hampton acquired horses and supplies and disrupted Federal communications. These forays, and others led by Stuart, helped confirm the dominance of Confederate cavalry early in the war.

But Union forces slowly gained ground as the Federal government opened schools to train cavalry and obtained more horses. Gradually, a new, tougher breed of cavalry officer took charge, including Colonel Hugh Judson Kilpatrick. Still, improvements in the Union Army weren't immediately apparent, and Confederates continued to enjoy major successes.

In December 1862, Union forces launched a series of disastrous infantry attacks on entrenched Confederate positions at Fredericksburg, Virginia. Wave after wave of Federal soldiers, 13,000 men in all, marched forward to be killed, wounded or captured, while some 5,400 Confederates became casualties. The much higher toll on Union forces confirmed for Confederate Lieutenant General James Longstreet and others that fighting from defensive positions was often far preferable to taking the offensive. This led to a significant change in battle tactics. Before the Civil War, massed infantry attacks such as those orchestrated by France's Napoleon Bonaparte were commonly preferred. Now rifled-muskets could fire much farther, making it easier to fell attacking infantrymen before they could reach defensive barriers.

Cavalry tactics were also changing. Horsemen still gathered intelligence about enemy troop movements and raided and disrupted communications and supplies. Cavalry also continued to ride along the edges of massed infantry, slowing momentum of enemy attacks and serving as a screen to prevent opposing forces from penetrating close enough to detect the infantry's direction. What changed as the war unfolded was that often cavalry dismounted to fight like infantry. Because of the greater range of weapons in this era, dismounted soldiers, in protected positions, could more easily shoot enemy cavalymen. Hampton for the Confederates and Kilpatrick for the Union both used this ploy of directing dismounted cavalry, and when they eventually met in battle at Monroe's Crossroads, dismounted cavalry affected the outcome.

In late April and the first days of May 1863, a huge Union Army, 130,000 strong, commanded by Major General Joe Hooker, advanced toward General Robert E. Lee's army, which was about half as big. Both sides split their forces, leaving Lee in the Wilderness of northern Virginia, near the village of Chancellorsville, still facing formidable odds. Lee further divided his army in the face of Hooker's massive advance. With some 10,000 men, Lee held off Hooker, while Lieutenant General Thomas Jonathan "Stonewall" Jackson marched his corps of some 28,000 down hot wooded roads to the Union right and attacked about 5:30 p.m., May 2.

The surprised Federal forces were hurled back and almost destroyed in this flank attack. Only the lateness of the day, a stout defense by some Federal units, and the wounding of Jackson likely saved the Union Army. The crushing defeat sent Hooker scrambling back across the Rappahannock River to safety.

The battle involved some of the bloodiest fighting to date in the war. Confederates suffered 14,000 killed, wounded, and captured; the Union about 17,000. The wounding of Jackson, who later died, was devastating to Confederate fortunes in the remainder of the war. Jackson proved to be irreplaceable. He and Lee had been ideal collaborators, almost machinelike in precision. Nothing similar developed between Lee and any of his subordinates.

The Confederates rested a few weeks and prepared for another invasion of the North. Stuart used the lull to parade his cavalry, grown to nearly 10,000 men, before an adoring public, an exercise in pride he soon regretted. The cavalry camped in Virginia near the small railroad community of Brandy Station, several miles from the Rappahannock River. On the evening of June 4, Stuart hosted a glittering, candle-lit ball in the county courthouse. The next day, he and his staff, resplendent in new uniforms, paraded through Brandy Station on their way to a field set up for a grand review. The cavalry, divided into five brigades (one commanded by Hampton), formed a line some two miles long.

Stuart rode onto the field with a great flourish. Civilians from miles around watched from train cars on nearby tracks and carriages and wagons. A fellow soldier described Stuart: "He was superbly mounted and his side arms gleamed in the morning sun like burnished silver. A long black ostrich plume waved gracefully from a black slouch hat cocked up on one side, held with a golden clasp... .He is the prettiest and most graceful rider I ever saw."

Stuart and his staff walked their horses past the assembled brigades, inspecting the troops who sat on their mounts at attention. Stuart then rode to a steep knoll serving as a natural reviewing stand where, to the crowd's delight, he wheeled his horse around and sat ramrod straight as the cavalry paraded past. Later, each brigade demonstrated mock cavalry charges while artillery boomed in the background.

That night there was another dance, outside this time, lit by bonfires. The crackling flames and the women's long twirling skirts provided a fitting close to a day so filled with pageantry. The only shadow on the festivities was that Lee had been unable to attend, but when the general arrived June 8 many of the ceremonies were repeated and another ball was held. The Union Army and thoughts of war seemed distant indeed.

But Union soldiers were not far away after all, only just across the Rappahannock. They kept quiet and burned no fires, waiting patiently for dawn, June 9. That morning, Stuart awoke to the sound of gunfire and explosions of artillery. He had camped the night before on Fleetwood Hill, the highest ground available in the area, and the spot with the loveliest view of Brandy Station, the undulating countryside, and the sparkling river several miles away.

While Stuart slept, Federal cavalrymen had stormed across the Rappahannock at several places and were fighting their way toward Fleetwood Hill. Stuart quickly rode northeast toward the Union horsemen and began coordinating intense fighting already in progress across a three-mile front. Hampton and other Confederates had, for the moment, stalled part of the Union advance. Kilpatrick was among the young Union cavalry officers in the battle.



The stand-off continued for several hours. Then came word, about noon, that other Union troops had crossed the river at another location and were now riding hard to positions behind Stuart and his embattled troops. Soon these Federals streamed up Fleetwood Hill. Not only

had Stuart once again been taken by surprise, his entire force risked being severely punished if the Union soldiers held the high ground and managed to position artillery there.

Confederate cavalymen charged, trying to retake the hill, and were repulsed. Their second try succeeded. But unlike many previous battles of the war, this time the Federal cavalry didn't buckle and scatter. They regrouped and attacked, taking back part of the hill. So fiercely and stubbornly did the Union soldiers fight that the situation became desperate for the Confederates. The Federals now threatened to recover the summit and the initiative. They were hauling a cannon toward the top of Fleetwood Hill when Hampton pivoted his soldiers around and sent them quickly toward the hill to stop them. Although the Confederates moved fast, they advanced in perfect order, almost as if still on parade. As he galloped forward, Hampton shouted orders, splitting his force, sending Cobb's Legion from Georgia head on toward the Union troops. Cavalry from North and South Carolina rode in support. Hampton swung around the base of the hill with other troopers, hoping to slam into the Union soldiers from the side.

With sabers raised, the Cobb Legion thundered up the hill at the same time that the Union forces charged. "The lines met on the hill," a witness remembered. "It was like what we read of in the days of chivalry, acres and acres of horsemen sparkling with sabers... flags above them, hurled against each other at full speed and meeting with a shock that made the earth tremble."

The Confederates swept to the top of the hill, while Union troops turned and rode in the opposite direction, running directly into the oncoming cavalry led by Hampton. A terrible fight ensued. "The whole plateau east of the hill and beyond the railroad was covered with Federal cavalry," described an artillery officer. "Hampton, diverging toward his left, passed the eastern terminus of the ridge, and crossing the railroad, struck the enemy. This charge was as gallantly made and gallantly met as any.... ever witnessed."

A thick cloud of dust and smoke obscured the combat for a time. Observers held their breaths and strained, trying to see what was happening. Minutes passed like hours. Finally, the haze partially lifted. Hampton's forces were still driving forward. The Union cavalry was in full retreat, heading for the cover of nearby trees. Hampton was about to surround the Union force, but as he raced forward a Confederate cannon atop Fleetwood Hill began firing by mistake at Hampton and his men. Hampton later wrote, "The capture of the whole force which had been driven from the hill would have been almost certain but that our own artillery...opened a heavy and well-directed fire at the head of my column. The delay rendered necessary to make this fire cease enabled the enemy to reach the woods."

Sporadic fighting continued for some time, but in the end Hampton's forces had helped save the day and prevented Stuart from suffering ignominious defeat. Still, their stunning surprise attack at Brandy Station showed that the Federal cavalry, commanded by Brigadier General Alfred Pleasanton, was indisputably equal in skill to the Confederates. The days of automatic victories for Stuart's cavalry were gone.

Confederates suffered 523 killed and wounded, while the Union lost 936 soldiers, almost half taken as prisoners. Among mortally wounded Confederates was Lieutenant Colonel Frank Hampton, Wade Hampton's brother.

Confederate Colonel Matthew C. Butler was also severely wounded while he directed soldiers holding off yet another Union cavalry advance several miles from Fleetwood Hill. Butler was sitting on horseback beside chief cavalry scout Captain Will Farley, also mounted, when a Union artillery piece fired, flinging a spinning cannon ball straight at the two officers. The projectile hit Butler first, tearing off his foot, then passed through his

horse and Farley's before severing much of Farley's leg.

Officers rushed to attend Butler, who was gently placed on a blanket to be carried to the rear, out of the fighting. Butler, in great pain, protested. "I wish that you two gentlemen, as you have placed me in the hands of my own men, would go and take charge of Captain Farley."

The officers located Parley and helped him onto a makeshift stretcher where he calmly asked them to bring him his missing leg. Farley, clutching the limb to his chest as tenderly as a baby, said, "It is an old friend, gentlemen, and I do not wish to part from it." As medics started to carry Parley away, the officers shook hands with him and told him they hoped to see him soon. But Farley, realizing the end was near, responded candidly, "Goodbye, gentlemen, and forever. I know my condition, and we will not meet again. I thank you for your kindness. It is a pleasure to me that I have fallen into the hands of good Carolinians at my last moment."

Farley smiled and nodded to the officers as he was taken to the rear where he died a few hours later.

Stuart, who must have been shaken by the attack, was determined not to reveal any misgivings about his role in the near disaster. To demonstrate that he had held his ground, he resolved to reestablish his camp of the night before on Fleetwood Hill. But his bravado fell away atop the summit where dead horses and the bodies of slain soldiers lay everywhere. Blue bottle flies swarmed in thick clouds over pools of blood seeping into the soil. Stuart camped elsewhere.



[Chapter 3: "Kill-Cavalry" Makes His Reputation](#)

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3 - "Kill-Cavalry" Makes His Reputation

After the surprise attack at Brandy Station, Virginia, criticism of Confederate Major General J.E.B. Stuart escalated, with *The Richmond Examiner* calling his men the "puffed up cavalry." "The more the circumstances of the late affair at Brandy Station are considered, the less pleasant do they appear... If the war was a tournament, invented and supported for the pleasure of a few vain and weak-headed officers, these disasters might be dismissed with compassion... The surprise on this occasion was the most complete that has occurred," the paper said. "The Confederate cavalry was carelessly strewn over the country...."

The criticism must have stung a man so eager for and accustomed to adulation. And disapproval of the cavalry chief wasn't confined to the press. The Confederate Army was awash with rumors about how Stuart had failed his soldiers. One officer wrote, "The fight at Brandy Station can hardly be called a victory. Stuart was certainly surprised, and but for the supreme gallantry of his subordinate officers and men...it would have been a day of disaster and disgrace...Stuart is blamed very much, but whether or not fairly I am not sufficiently well informed to say."

Various officials in Richmond, the Confederate capital, were also highly critical. "Stuart is so conceited that he got careless - his officers were having a frolic [the night before]," wrote one.

Unquestioning exuberance and approval for the cavalry commander's exploits were clearly over. Stuart soon launched a dramatic enterprise that he must have hoped would quash the criticism and restore his reputation. But for the time being, in late June 1863, the immediate task required the cavalry to shield General Robert E. Lee's infantry on a march north for another invasion.

Lee's infantry moved through the Shenandoah Valley, west of the rugged Blue Ridge and Bull Run Mountains which formed long, high barriers separating the Confederates from the Union Army on the other side. As the Confederates traveled north, Union cavalry tried to penetrate mountain passes to edge close enough to assess Lee's direction and intent. Stuart's cavalry, operating not as a single unit but as separate brigades, deliberately obstructed the way.

Confederate Brigadier General Wade Hampton, commanding one of Stuart's brigades, distinguished himself again near Upperville, Virginia, on June 21, 1863. Union forces were routing a Confederate cavalry unit when Hampton arrived and charged, halting further damage. But then the Union cavalry fought back, mounting another attack, and Hampton, his forces widely scattered after his initial charge, had only a small contingent of North Carolina troops to command. Turning to them, he raised his saber, stood in his stirrups, and yelled, "First North Carolina, follow me!" The soldiers, vastly outnumbered, nonetheless obeyed, confronting oncoming Federal troops. After fighting for a time, they disengaged to regroup for another charge and were joined by other Confederates, evening the odds. Their next assault forced Union soldiers to retreat, pushing them back more than a half mile. Finally, both sides retired.

The skirmish illustrated Hampton's powerful magnetism. As a member of Stuart's staff wrote, "This success was mainly due to the personal influence which...has marked Hampton as a leader of men." For his part, Stuart called Hampton's actions "brilliant."

Nevertheless, the sharpened skills of Union cavalry, evident in their surprise attack at Brandy Station, were again apparent. Improved leadership was especially obvious. Newly



appointed Brigadier General Hugh Judson Kilpatrick was among Union officers gaining renown. His soldiers, including units from New York, Massachusetts, Ohio, and Maine, fought like demons, according to Civil War historian Burke Davis.

Kilpatrick was born to a farm family in Deckertown, New Jersey, in January 1836, and like many rural children of the era quit school after the primary grades. Yet in 1856, he managed to gain admittance to the United States Military Academy where he dropped his first name. Graduating in 1861, the year the nation plunged into civil war, Kilpatrick volunteered for the United States infantry at the rank of captain. Early on, at Big Bethel, Virginia, he gained notice as the first regular Union officer wounded in the war. Recovering quickly, he joined the 2nd New York Cavalry in September 1861 and quickly rose in rank amid frequent displays of valor.

In June 1863, as Lee moved north to invade Federal territory, he authorized Stuart to conduct raids, mainly to gain intelligence on the Union Army's movements. Because he was leaving Virginia, Lee needed to know exactly how close the Federals, still on the other side of the Blue Ridge Mountains, were following.

Stuart's cavalry was free to create havoc if opportunity arose, and the troops were authorized to capitalize on any chance to slow a Union advance. But Stuart's primary objective was to collect information, then hurry back to the Confederate infantry to protect them.

What followed differed disastrously from Lee's expectations. The misunderstandings began when Lee and Lieutenant General James Longstreet sent somewhat ambiguous instructions to Stuart outlining various tactical options.

Stuart gathered three cavalry brigades for the raid, about 4,000 men, with Hampton commanding one brigade. Other cavalry stayed to protect Lee's army, but because of mismanagement and flawed communications played virtually no role in the climactic events that unfolded.

Stuart's cavalymen were told to take rations for only three days because they would live off the land whenever possible. They set out around midnight June 25, 1863, using cover of darkness to evade nearby Union troops. Stuart's brigades traveled east of the Blue Ridge Mountains in northern Virginia, while most of Lee's force, west of the mountains, crossed into Maryland and Pennsylvania. Stuart also planned to head toward Maryland, but the Union Second Corps almost immediately blocked the way. Thinking he had Lee's permission to improvise and to operate behind the Union Army, Stuart changed course, swinging in a wide arc east toward Washington, D.C.

Trouble plagued Stuart's mission from the outset. Men and horses, worn from recent skirmishing, moved slowly, and the Confederates found living off the land difficult because

armies from both sides had repeatedly trampled through the region, leaving little that was edible or useful. The cavalry halted frequently to let the horses graze and men rest. They encountered few Union troops, although Hampton's brigade did charge and scatter a small cavalry force and capture prisoners. These captives proved to be yokes around the cavalry's neck, slowing them even more. Finally, they reached Fairfax Court House, Virginia, on June 27, where the hungry soldiers looted stores, searching for food. The cavalry had covered only 34 miles in a little more than two days, keeping a pace more typical of the infantry than mounted soldiers.

Hampton's troopers led the column as they neared the Potomac River. It was night time and because Union units held most fords across the river Hampton rode in the dark toward a little known and treacherous crossing, Rowser's Ford.

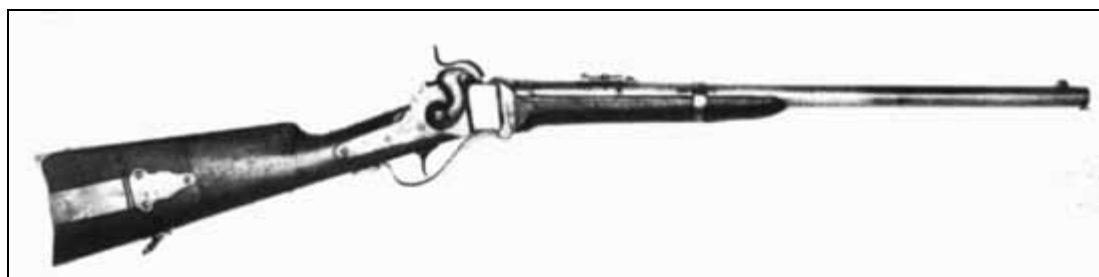
By now, Stuart realized that much of the Union Army was marching north, rapidly pursuing Lee. Stuart sent a dispatch to Lee to alert him, but the courier failed to reach him. The massive Union Army was now squarely between Lee's infantry and Stuart's cavalry. Lee groped forward, unaware of the location of the Union forces and wondering what had happened to Stuart's cavalry. Stuart was also in a quandary. He was unsure of Lee's whereabouts, but under orders to return to him quickly.

The Confederate cavalry seemed to inch forward. Hampton and his soldiers plunged into the mile-wide Potomac about midnight on Sunday, June 28. The water was deep and swift, hazardous for fresh horses, but particularly treacherous for the weary beasts the soldiers rode. Hampton and his troopers took nearly an hour to cross. The rest of the column followed, but difficulties mounted. Especially troublesome were the four cannons and ambulances. The cannons slipped beneath the water several times as the horses strained to pull them across. Water damaged shells and powder, forcing soldiers to carry remaining dry bags of gunpowder on horseback.

Finally, by 3:00 a.m., the last of the force reached the other side. Exhausted horses and men rested until late morning before the caravan continued.

They stopped about 15 miles from Washington, D.C., at Rockville, Maryland, where the Confederates, riding into town around noon on Sunday, found townspeople strolling about in their church finery. There was an air of celebration in the town as the cavalry appeared. Sympathizers cheered from their windows and waved Confederate flags, while school girls crowded into the street to throng around the soldiers and snip off their uniform buttons as souvenirs.

Some distance away to the northwest, Lee learned on the night of June 28 that the Union Army, now commanded by Major General George Meade, had crossed the Potomac and was closing in on him. Lee began consolidating his forces at Cashtown Gap, seven miles west of the small town of Gettysburg, Pennsylvania, still with no idea what had happened to his cavalry, which he now desperately needed.



In fact, the Confederate cavalry was enjoying what seemed to be a bonanza of good luck,

encountering a long wagon train loaded with supplies lumbering toward Rockville, Maryland, and bound for Union forces trailing Lee's army. When Federal guards riding some distance ahead of the wagons spotted the Confederates, they spun their horses around, shouting alarm. Wagon drivers cursed, lashed their mule teams, and turned the wagons, furiously trying to escape. For the Confederates, this was too good an opportunity to miss. Hampton and his men led the chase. In the wild pursuit, at least one wagon flipped over, spilling its contents onto the road. Other wagons smashed into the toppled wagon. Mules lay on the ground, hooves flailing the air.

The Confederates rounded up or plundered every wagon. Returning to Rockville, they proudly displayed their trophies - 125 wagons brimming with sacks of grain, an important find for the hungry horses. There was also a bounty of other staples, including bread, bacon, hams, sugar, and many liquor bottles, which soon vanished. The cavalry lost precious time organizing the wagons for travel, collecting Confederates dispersed during the chase, and writing paroles for many of the 400 prisoners recently captured. The freed parolees weren't supposed to fight for the Union Army again, a requirement many soon ignored.

After losing much of the day in Rockville, the cavalry headed north, markedly slowed by the heavy wagons, which Hampton's brigade guarded, riding at the rear of the column. The cavalry traveled about 20 miles that night. The next day, June 29, part of the column stopped to destroy Baltimore and Ohio Railroad tracks running west from Baltimore. The railroad provided a vital supply route for the Union Army converging on Gettysburg.

Ripping up the tracks proved arduous and time-consuming. The tired Confederates didn't have many tools, and the heat was oppressive. When they heard a train approaching, the cavalrymen ran for their horses, hoping to capture the engine and wreck it, but the engineer spotted the mangled tracks and hit the brakes. The train squealed to a stop, then reversed direction and disappeared. Several other trains followed, but their alert engineers spotted danger and escaped. In the end, the Confederates had little to show for their efforts. They did manage to pull up the tracks, but the rails were soon repaired by Union crews.

Later in the day, Stuart's force fought several skirmishes, capturing more prisoners, then at nightfall reached the small town of Westminster, Maryland, 25 miles from Gettysburg. Stuart never realized that Lee's army was so close. For his part, Lee continued to grope forward, asking repeatedly for news about the cavalry.

Stuart had other concerns. A large Union cavalry force, commanded by Kilpatrick, was at Littletown, ten miles away, he learned, midway between Stuart's soldiers and Gettysburg. Even though speed and mobility would now be essential if he and his men were to survive, Stuart apparently didn't consider destroying the wagons that had become such a hindrance. As an aide wrote, "It was not in Stuart's nature to abandon an attempt until it had been proven to be beyond his powers...."

Some of the Confederate cavalrymen spent the night in Westminster, while others stopped in Union Mills. While some soldiers slept, others stayed awake much of the night tending the horses. The next day, they rode a short distance north into Pennsylvania. The rear guard, commanded by Hampton, lagged dangerously behind because of the wagon train.

Chapter 3 (continued)

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4 - Hampton Takes Charge

Driving rain pelted the Confederates as they retreated from Gettysburg the night of July 4, 1863. The wagon train of wounded stretched some 17 miles as the army trudged back toward the Potomac River. A soldier guarding the wounded recalled, "From every wagon issued wails of agony. For four hours I galloped. I was never out of the hearing of the groans and cries of the wounded and dying. Many of them had been without food for 36 hours. Their torn and bloody clothing, matted and hardened, was rasping the tender wounds. The road was rough and rocky. The jolting was enough to have killed sound, strong men. From nearly every wagon came cries: 'Oh, God! Why can't I die?'"

Confederate Brigadier General Wade Hampton was among the patients in the wagon train. His chief, Major General J.E.B. Stuart, had to fend off the Union cavalry as the infantry retreated. Obstacles facing him were many, primarily exhaustion of both men and horses. A Union soldier, seeing the Confederate cavalry that night, wrote, "A large number of his men were mounted on shoeless horses whose leanness showed that they had made many a long march through and from Virginia. Or... they had fat horses stolen from the fields and stalls of the invaded states, but, being entirely unused to such hard and cruel treatment, were well nigh unserviceable."

Throughout the night Stuart's cavalry battled various mounted Union units, including those commanded by Brigadier General Judson Kilpatrick. Fighting was particularly intense at Monterey Pass, where, because of darkness and rain, Kilpatrick's troops battled an enemy they rarely saw in the mountain gap, except when their foes were illuminated by flashing cannons or lightning. Said one Union soldier, "The darkness was so intense that the guns could be of little use, except to make the night terribly hideous with their bellowings, the echoes of which reverberated in the mountain gorges in a most frightful manner. To add to the horrors, the rain fell in floods, accompanied with groaning thunders, while lightning flashed from cloud to cloud, only to leave friend and foe enveloped in greater darkness."

Kilpatrick's force eventually dislodged the Confederates and rushed through the pass. Dashing out into the open, they came upon a moving Confederate wagon train laden with supplies. Union soldiers immediately began capturing wagons and prisoners, storming through the long line of wagons, collecting their bounty until dawn. Later that day, Stuart mounted another defense, pushing the Union cavalry back and forcing the release of many prisoners. The cavalry skirmishing continued for more than a week as Confederate General Robert E. Lee's troops dug fortified positions. The Confederates were stuck precariously north of the Potomac River, forced to delay crossing because of flooding and difficulties in securing a pontoon bridge. Kilpatrick and other Union cavalry leaders repeatedly attacked like angry hornets at the shield posed by Stuart's horsemen, who stubbornly resisted. Cavalrymen from both sides fought almost constantly until they were nearly numb.

While Lee's army was vulnerable near the river, the Union commander, Major General George Meade, hesitated to throw the full weight of his infantry against the Confederates as urged by President Abraham Lincoln. Finally, on the night of July 13, Lee's infantry and wagons began crossing the Potomac. Heavy rains drenched the troops. As the infantry pulled out of the muddy earthworks, Stuart's cavalry, fighting dismounted, filled the void to hold off the Union forces. Kilpatrick's cavalry hit these Confederates hard, opening a hole and bearing down on the infantry crossing the river. Some Confederates, mistaking Kilpatrick's cavalry for their own, allowed the Union soldiers to pass, although they eventually realized their mistake and rebuffed the Federals, who suffered heavy casualties. By July 14, Lee's army at last crossed back into Virginia.

The awful toll from the Battle of Gettysburg continued to become apparent. The Union had lost some 23,000 killed or wounded, the Confederates about 28,000. Beyond the heavy casualties for both sides, the Confederacy had suffered a severe drain in leadership. Before Gettysburg, Lee's army fielded 52 officers above the rank of colonel. Almost one third of these officers were killed, wounded, or captured in the Pennsylvania battle. The less seriously wounded returned to duty almost immediately. Others, including Hampton, faced long recuperations. Many never returned to fight. By the most optimistic projections, Lee had to replace some 20 percent of his officers. The Confederate spirit of invincibility was also wounded, though not destroyed. For the most part, the army still maintained faith in its leaders, especially in Lee.

There was other news disturbing to the Confederates. Union General Ulysses S. Grant, maneuvering through Mississippi, had forced the surrender of the Confederate fortress at Vicksburg. Then, following the July 9 surrender of Port Hudson, Louisiana, the United States again controlled the vital Mississippi River. Clearly, President Lincoln was finding more generals who could win.

Soon after Gettysburg, Stuart reorganized the Confederate cavalry. Hampton and Colonel Matthew C. Butler, recuperating from their wounds, were expected to return, and Stuart



recommended both for promotion. Hampton was named a major general, while Butler was promoted to brigadier general. Stuart divided the cavalry into two divisions with Major General Fitzhugh "Fitz" Lee, nephew of the Confederate general, commanding one division and Hampton leading the other.

The Confederate and Union cavalries continued skirmishing, with some of the fiercest fighting involving Kilpatrick's troops. During two battles in the fall of 1863, the Confederates appeared to have Kilpatrick's troops penned in from several different directions, but each time they escaped. Kilpatrick was surrounded during a battle on October 11 in Virginia by Confederate cavalry near the village of Brandy Station, the railroad community so severely contested just months before. A Union soldier recalled that Kilpatrick never seemed in the slightest perturbed by his predicament as he calmly formed his forces into three lines and ordered an attack. The Union band struck up marshal music during the advance. They charged and Confederates countercharged.

"For at least two long hours of slaughter these opposing squadrons dashed upon one another... and at times the blue and gray were so confusedly commingled together that it was difficult to conjecture how they could regain their appropriate places...It was a scene of wild commotion and blood," a Union soldier recalled.

Eventually, Kilpatrick extracted his men from the chaos and retreated, aided by Confederate gunners who misdirected artillery fire at their own soldiers. Also in the Union's favor was the panic among some Confederates, surprised by the attack. Their pell-mell retreat halted only when Confederate officers blocked their way, threatening them with pistols.

Kilpatrick again encountered Stuart near Buckland Mills on October 19. A Union soldier explained, "Dripping wet and somewhat stiffened with cold, we were ordered in battle array early in the morning, and the command, about 2,000 strong, advanced."

But Stuart was not yet ready to fight. He slowly withdrew his cavalry, never offering

battle, enticing Kilpatrick into a trap. The Union soldiers warily pursued the Confederates until Stuart, secure in a position protected by hills, halted his cavalry and waited. Kilpatrick led his troops directly into the snare. When they were within 200 yards of Stuart's men, other Confederate cavalry tore into the Union rear guard. It was then that Stuart seized the moment to attack them from the front. The ambushed Union forces turned around to escape, fighting through the Confederates behind them. Stuart's cavalry dogged them in a firefight spanning some five miles. Some Union soldiers drowned in a frantic creek crossing, but most survived. Several hundred were captured in the fight that came to be known as the Buckland Races.

Stuart crowed over his victory in his official report, claiming that Kilpatrick was so damaged he would have to cease operations for more than a month, "that time being necessary, no doubt, to collect the panic-stricken fugitives." In fact, Kilpatrick's soldiers almost immediately returned to action.

Also in the fall of 1863, the armies controlled by Lee and Meade maneuvered against each other and sometimes grappled, but the battles didn't significantly weaken either. As fall turned to winter, with both armies huddled in camp, Stuart several times visited Richmond, Virginia, where he was a predictable hit on the social scene. Yet, as young socialite Constance Cary observed, the lightheartedness masked uneasiness. "In all our parties and pleasuring, there seemed to lurk a foreshadowing of tragedy, as in the Greek plays where the gloomy end is ever kept in sight," she wrote.

Indeed, Lee steadily pleaded to the Confederate government in Richmond for more food, shoes, clothes, and other supplies for his army. Disease rampaged through the hut cities serving as the Confederate winter encampments where desertions were increasing. Cavalrymen also faced another problem, horses so hungry that they ate bark from trees. Indeed, most trees near Confederate camps were stripped bare of bark to the height a horse could reach. Because Confederates had to supply their own horses, many cavalrymen took leaves from duty to search for mounts to replace their ruined or dead horses. Some reluctantly gave up the cavalry altogether and joined the infantry.

In late February 1864, the Union cavalry duplicated a Confederate cavalry tactic and raided deep into Confederate territory, with Kilpatrick leading the main thrust. Union Brigadier General George Custer also participated, riding into central Virginia, leading about 1,500 troopers. Custer's men threatened the picturesque town of Charlottesville on February 29. They were pursued by Stuart, whose force rode through a sleet storm and camped, shivering, in the freezing rain. The next day, Custer's troops, riding fresh horses, managed to rush by them and escape. But Custer's demonstration was only a sideshow. The main event involved Kilpatrick's troops.

Leading a force of about 4,000 soldiers, Kilpatrick rode through the sleet toward Richmond. That night the Union troops built large campfires and tried to stay warm. The next day, Kilpatrick neared the Confederate capital after splitting his force. He sent 500 men, commanded by Colonel Ulric Dahlgren, to circle Richmond to attack the city from the south. Dahlgren was supposed to storm a Confederate prison and free Union soldiers, then rejoin Kilpatrick north of the city.

The rest of the force, led by Kilpatrick, rode within five miles of Richmond to wait for Dahlgren. When he failed to appear, they fired artillery toward the Confederate capital for a time, then retreated. Kilpatrick's troops camped that night in more cold, blustery weather, trailed by Hampton who was recovered from his injuries and led a small contingent of Confederates. After dark, the Confederates sneaked near the Federal camp, sounds of their approach muffled by falling snow, and fired artillery shells. Loud booming and flashing

lights awakened the Union soldiers, creating chaos as tents blew apart and terrified horses reared. Kilpatrick's men grabbed their guns and darted for cover. Most got away, including Kilpatrick. Still, Hampton's men rounded up almost 100 prisoners, many fresh mounts, and sorely needed supplies and equipment.

Dahlgren, who wore a wooden lower right leg because of injuries received in a clash at Hagerstown, Maryland, had a bumpy ride almost from the moment he left Kilpatrick. A black guide hired to show him the best route into Richmond led the force to a river crossing that proved impassable. Dahlgren was so livid that he hanged the man.

His soldiers did eventually approach Richmond where they met heavy fire from Confederates. Dahlgren escaped temporarily, but soon he and part of his force stumbled into an ambush. As he yelled, "Disperse, you damned rebels!" Dahlgren was shot and killed. Confederate soldiers took his wooden leg for a trophy, as well as documents from the body detailing plans not only to free prisoners, but to torch Richmond and assassinate Confederate President Jefferson Davis and his cabinet. The papers stirred outrage in the South, with Lee writing to Meade, protesting Dahlgren's purpose. Meade and U.S. government officials denied condoning the scheme.

The ruckus over the Union's failed Richmond raid helped cement Kilpatrick's controversial image. Apparently, no one doubted his valor, but some questioned his judgment and intelligence. One Union officer described Kilpatrick as "a frothy braggart without brains."

Spring 1864 brought new troubles to the Confederacy. Grant assumed command of the Union Armies in Virginia, promising to pursue Lee vigorously. In the Union general, Lee faced a tougher opponent than any before. In May, Grant moved his army, 116,000 strong, into the impenetrable Virginia thicket called the Wilderness north of Richmond. Lee, with 65,000 men, continued to maneuver effectively, inflicting heavy casualties on these Union forces. The horrific bloodshed continued at Spotsylvania Court House in Virginia. Stymied by his opponent, Grant unleashed his cavalry to wreak havoc behind the Confederate Army.

Grant chose Lieutenant General Philip Sheridan to reorganize the Union cavalry in Virginia and sent Kilpatrick to join Major General William Tecumseh Sherman who was planning the destruction of Confederate forces in Georgia and the capture of Atlanta.

Sheridan, like Stuart, had a clear vision of what cavalry could do. He concentrated disparate units into a single corps of 10,000 to 12,000 soldiers for a raid toward Richmond. In contrast, Stuart had never used more than 2,000 troops on a raid.

Sheridan also took steps to ensure cavalry horses were fit. While most Confederate mounts were skeletal from hunger and over use, Sheridan saw that Union horses were used sparingly in guard duty and on patrols. And unlike the Confederates, Union troops also had ample food for their horses, even in winter.

On May 9, 1864, Sheridan began his raid at dawn toward Richmond. His troops, crossing into Confederate territory, seemed virtually unstoppable. They formed a column 13 miles long, pulling 36 artillery pieces.

Stuart, through his extensive network of lookouts and spies, knew almost immediately of Sheridan's presence. He rounded up available men and began pursuit, with most of Hampton's cavalry staying behind to protect the infantry. The Confederates rode all night and into the next day, trying to catch Sheridan, but in the midst of the pursuit Stuart lost precious moments visiting his wife. He was concerned because she was staying with friends in an area where Sheridan's force had just traveled. Stuart, finding her well, stayed

only long enough to confirm that she was safe. The cavalry leader seemed uncharacteristically subdued as they resumed the chase after Union forces, recalled a fellow officer. When Stuart broke his silence, he revealed that he never expected to outlive the war, and if the Union conquered the Confederacy, he didn't wish to live anyway.

Their weakened horses slowed the Confederate cavalry hunting Sheridan. The soldiers were also weary, but kept pushing forward, spurred on by Stuart's iron will and encouraging words. Finally, about 9:00 p.m. on May 10, an officer persuaded Stuart that the troops could go no farther. Everyone needed rest, if only for a while. They stopped briefly, but were on the move again by 1:00 a.m.

Stuart split his force of about 4,000 troopers in two, sending brigades from North Carolina to hit Sheridan's cavalry from the rear. He led the rest toward the head of the Union column, now closing in on Richmond. By hard riding into the next morning, Stuart managed to beat the Union force to an intersection six miles from the Confederate capital. He telegraphed Confederate General Braxton Bragg, commanding Confederate defenses around Richmond, to prepare for an assault. Describing their foe Sheridan, Stuart wrote, "His force is large, and if attack is made on Richmond it will be principally as dismounted cavalry, which fight better than enemy's infantry."

By midmorning on May 11, Stuart's cavalry was waiting behind defensive positions near an old roadside building, Yellow Tavern, when Union scouts and other lead troops appeared and were quickly followed by many more Federal troops. The Union juggernaut of more than 10,000 men bore down on Stuart's few thousand men. The Confederate attack at the rear of Union forces had been too small to deter Sheridan's advance, although casualties were heavy. Now Stuart faced the full fury of the Union cavalry.

Stuart and his men were accustomed to being outnumbered, but never so drastically. Yet, as he deployed his troops, Stuart seemed typically unconcerned and confident, an attitude reflected among his soldiers. Many prepared to fight dismounted, while their horses were held for them in the rear.

Union horse soldiers from New York, Pennsylvania, and elsewhere made several thrusts at the Confederates, who held their positions. Then, about 2:00 p.m., masses of Michigan cavalry attacked, led by Custer, dressed in a black velvet uniform, his long, blonde hair waving in the wind. Face to face, the Confederates and Union troops fought for a time. Then Union forces withdrew. A lull settled over the battlefield.

Union troops slowly began advancing again about 4:00 p.m., firing carbines and Colt's pistols. Stuart rode his horse along the Confederate line, whistling nonchalantly as bullets flew by, until he reached an artillery post particularly hard hit. Dead horses and men lay everywhere. To the beleaguered soldiers still standing, Stuart said he was proud of their bravery and knew they could continue to hold their ground. At least two Confederates implored Stuart to seek cover, requests the general ignored as he rode on. One officer begged him to see that Confederates nearby who were hiding behind stumps and fences were being shot, while Stuart was riding in the open, an easy

target.

Stuart responded, laughing. "I don't reckon there is any danger."



As the attack intensified, Stuart rode to a fence defended by Maryland soldiers from the 1st Virginia Cavalry who stood behind the barrier, firing their carbines. Stuart guided his mount between some of the soldiers until his horse's head stuck out over the fence. Union bugles sounded for a charge, and the Michigan cavalry rushed forward, storming by within 10 feet of Stuart. He and the soldiers near him held their position, while other nearby Confederates grudgingly gave ground, retreating some 400 yards.

The retreating Confederates found cover in a ravine, while other Confederates on horseback mounted their own charge, forcing Union troops to turn and withdraw. As the Union men rode back toward Stuart, he yelled to his soldiers, "Steady, men, steady." Then, "Give it to them!" He emptied his pistol as the Union soldiers neared.

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5 - Sherman Burns Confederate Hopes

In April 1864, Confederate General Joseph Johnston met with President Jefferson Davis's personal envoy, Brigadier General William Pendleton. The meeting at Johnston's headquarters in north Georgia lasted most of the day, with a discussion all too familiar to participants. President Davis wanted Johnston to attack Union General William Tecumseh Sherman's forces then controlling Tennessee, but Johnston was resisting unless he could get more troops.

Johnston turned for support to his cavalry commander, Major General Joseph Wheeler, who, at only five feet, five inches tall, nonetheless spoke with the authority of a hardened veteran who had proved his courage time and again. Although he had missed the Confederate Army's celebrated Virginia campaigns, Wheeler had distinguished himself in Tennessee, Kentucky, and Georgia, earning a reputation for astuteness and for gathering reliable intelligence about Union forces.

Wheeler, at Johnston's request, recited a thorough account of all units available to Sherman in Tennessee, Alabama, and Georgia, with detailed estimates of the fighting capabilities and strengths of each one. Sherman was assembling an awesome force, he concluded. The Union general would have more than 100,000 soldiers, not counting an additional 15,000 African-American troops.

Wheeler's estimates, forwarded to Richmond, Virginia, were dismissed as inflated by President Davis and his top military advisor, General Braxton Bragg. Sherman could count on only 60,000 soldiers at most, in their view. Attack, they insisted. But Johnston, trusting Wheeler's count instead, delayed and consequently likely saved his army from certain disaster because Wheeler's numbers were uncannily accurate. Johnston, with an army of fewer than 50,000 soldiers, proved to be up against a Union force of more than 100,000.



While Johnston's army was eventually reinforced to total more than 60,000, Sherman outclassed him in almost every facet of military might - infantry, artillery, wagons, support personnel, and supply. Cavalry was the only category where Confederates fared better than the Union, which no one knew better than Sherman. Confederate cavalry consisted of "young bloods of the South," wrote Sherman, and the troopers were "splendid riders, first-rate shots, and utterly reckless."

Union cavalry, even at this late date in the war, lacked the Confederates' cockiness, and Sherman had little confidence in the horsemen and was inexperienced and uncomfortable directing them. His great skill was commanding infantry.

The Union cavalry was divided into four divisions, all with separate commanders who reported directly to Sherman, while the Confederates consolidated most of their

horsemen under Wheeler, a proven cavalry leader. Brigadier General Judson Kilpatrick, 28 years old, was one of the four Union cavalry commanders, and although controversial, was

probably the best Sherman had.

Wheeler, 27, was born in Augusta, Georgia, and nicknamed "Little Joe" and "War Child" by his troops because of his short stature, a trait shared with Kilpatrick. Graduating from the United States Military Academy in 1859, he joined the U.S. Army, then resigned after the shelling of Fort Sumter to support the Confederacy. He began in artillery, then switched to commanding Alabama infantry, participating with distinction at the Battle of Shiloh in west Tennessee. Soon, he transferred to the cavalry, and by July 1862 Bragg appointed him commander of cavalry for the Army of the Mississippi, which in November became the Army of Tennessee.

Wheeler fast became known for fearlessness, earning another name, "Fighting Joe." He oversaw the destruction of an important Union wagon train in Tennessee and was with Bragg's troops when they fought alongside Lieutenant General James Longstreet's forces at Chickamauga, Georgia, where the Confederates overpowered Union soldiers. After the battle, Wheeler rampaged behind Union lines, inflicting much damage until he overextended his command and lost effectiveness.

Cool in the face of danger, Wheeler preferred to be in the thick of action, inspiring loyalty and confidence in his troops, but often placing his life in jeopardy. He was wounded three times in the war, with 16 horses killed beneath him and 36 staff officers shot down around him. Wheeler's one apparent weakness was overestimating what he could accomplish and exaggerating what he achieved.

Still, he proved invaluable in the fight against Sherman. In late April 1864, Wheeler's cavalry drove back advanced Union forces in north Georgia in a preliminary skirmish foreshadowing that the Confederates would not easily submit. Wheeler's cavalry fought Union troops in flare-ups for almost a week before the Union and Confederate infantries engaged.

As Sherman ordered his massive force forward, he commanded that soldiers should leave unnecessary baggage, supplies, and equipment, including some 300 cannons. They jettisoned anything that would slow their advance or hinder maneuverability, but even so, the Federals still had 254 artillery pieces compared to the Confederates' 144. The Union troops also held on to their fiddles, with nearly every company claiming at least one. Just before the first major clash, dances spontaneously occurred through the ranks.

By May 6, much of Sherman's infantry had pushed into north Georgia. That night, a Union soldier from Indiana cut up candles from his pack, lit the separate pieces, and placed them inside and around his tent. Other soldiers quickly imitated him, lighting their own candles. Soon, someone climbed a tree and used wax to stick burning candles to the limbs, and before long, others copied him as well, until thousands of tiny flames flickered in the trees, creating a spectacular display as if the stars had dropped from the sky to roost just above the soldiers.

The next day brought the first major Union advance. Sherman's forces rumbled into place near Confederate headquarters at the small northwest Georgia town of Dalton. Expecting them for a long time, Confederate soldiers, under Johnston's orders, had spent months preparing nearly impregnable defenses, including creating a deep pond by damming Mill Creek. Johnston hoped, but didn't really expect, that Sherman would foolishly waste his troops with assaults on these

fortifications. More likely, Johnston expected the Union general to attempt a wide sweep around the Confederates.

Sherman ordered almost three fourths of his army to push cautiously against the Confederate positions near Dalton, then fulfilled Johnston's expectations, sending the rest of his army around them. What Johnston did not anticipate was the Union route. Unexpectedly, Sherman directed troops toward an unguarded mountain pass, Snake Creek Gap, to gain access to Resaca behind Confederate lines.



Before Confederates realized what was happening, Union Major General James Birdseye McPherson led his Army of Tennessee through the four-mile long pass between steep mountains. The force stopped near the small community of Resaca, some 10 miles to the rear of Confederates in Dalton. McPherson was now within striking distance of the railroad line that passed through Resaca and supplied the Confederate Army. The Confederates were almost trapped. All McPherson had to do was overpower a small garrison and destroy a railroad bridge, then the Confederates would be forced to escape or be caught without resupply in a certain Union siege. If they fled, Sherman intended to catch them in motion and destroy them. There seemed to be no way out of the dilemma for the Confederates. Hearing that McPherson was in Resaca, Sherman exclaimed, "I've got Joe Johnston dead!"

Victory within his grasp on May 9, McPherson hesitated. He couldn't tell how many Confederates hid in earthworks protecting the railroad, and he had another concern. Some recently captured Confederate prisoners claimed that Wheeler's cavalry was close by, ready to advance through Snake Creek Gap and pounce on the Federals. With few Union cavalrymen to scout for reliable information, McPherson panicked. He ordered a hasty retreat, sending a message to Sherman claiming, inaccurately, that the Confederate position was too strong to overpower. Union soldiers, only yards away from the vital railroad, couldn't comprehend why they were withdrawing and grumbled as they pulled back.

Sherman, no doubt disappointed, immediately formulated an alternative strategy. He began moving most of his forces to join McPherson, leaving enough soldiers in place perhaps to bluff the Confederates into thinking that the Union Army was still seriously challenging their defenses at Rocky Face, shielding Dalton. If everything went as Sherman hoped, the huge Federal force would soon be between the Confederates and Atlanta, the vital transportation and industrial center 90 miles to the south.

Then Sherman underestimated Johnston. He assumed the Confederates wouldn't quickly abandon their Dalton fortifications, but Johnston considered doing just that as he gathered cavalry reports. Wheeler's horsemen first detected the movement of Federal troops near the unguarded Snake Creek Gap, then confirmed that much of Sherman's army was withdrawing from the Dalton area. In response, on the night of May 12, Johnston ordered the infantry to abandon the bulwarks where they had spent the past six months and march

south. Wheeler's cavalry remained, preparing to delay oncoming Union troops sure to pursue the Confederate infantry.

Moving through the night, many Confederate soldiers arrived by early morning in Resaca, a small village of some dozen wooden buildings and the train depot. By now, Sherman knew the Confederates were retreating, but was unaware that many were already in Resaca. He still thought he could get most of the army to the town before the Confederates.

By midmorning on May 13, Sherman still thought his plan to take Resaca was working, but as Kilpatrick led the first Union troops toward the town, gunfire erupted from a nest of Confederate soldiers hidden in a thicket. Kilpatrick responded with a cavalry charge. Union horses galloped toward the brush, riders shooting, but the Confederates' return gunfire was intense and the hidden soldiers were hard to see. The Union troops yanked back on their reins and turned away. Kilpatrick immediately ordered another charge, this time by dismounted cavalry, and led these soldiers himself. While the men walked warily forward, Kilpatrick rode just ahead, shouting encouragement and waving his saber. He was an irresistible target. A Confederate soldier rose from the bushes some 10 feet away and fired, shooting Kilpatrick in the thigh. The bullet barely missed bone, sparing Kilpatrick from amputation, but still forcing him out of the battle.

Union troops, perhaps inspired by Kilpatrick's valor, pushed the Confederates back and broke out of the woods, firing at the Confederates who retreated to a cluster of hills. On their next charge, the Union troops took the hills, but their triumph was short lived. Below them, across a valley, lay the town of Resaca where a Confederate supply train chugged along the tracks, smoke billowing from the engine. All around, in every direction, the ground bristled with Confederate defenses. Soldiers clad in gray seemed to be everywhere. The Union troops realized they were too late. Much of the Confederate infantry was already in place.

The rest of the Confederates were rushing to join them, pursued by Union forces who were repeatedly delayed by Wheeler's cavalry, who dismounted at intervals to erect hasty roadblocks. The cavalymen cut trees and dragged them across the road, along with anything else to strengthen the barricades, then, when Union troops approached, shielded themselves behind the barriers and blasted away with their guns. When the pressure from the Federals became too great, the Confederates would ride back about a quarter mile to another roadblock already being built by their comrades. Soon, shooting would begin again. Wheeler and his men stalled the Union forces this way for hours until, by afternoon, the entire Confederate Army was snug behind Resaca defenses. Sherman had lost this leg of the deadly race.

For the next two months, Johnston and Sherman repeated similar strategies, each occasionally surprising the other, neither making many serious missteps. Johnston continued finding ideal spots for defenses, then held on until the last possible moment against the oncoming Union Army. This was military chess, and Johnston was as skilled at withdrawal as any general in either army. The smart officers knew there was no one more dangerous than Johnston in retreat, who waited like a viper, poised to attack when his foe made a mistake.

Born in Virginia, Johnston was in the same 1829 United States Military Academy class with General Robert E. Lee. He made his reputation during fights with the Seminole Indians and in the Mexican-American War and quickly rose in rank. Appointed quartermaster general on the eve of the Civil War, he resigned to join the Confederacy. Early in the conflict, he commanded Confederate forces in Virginia where he was severely wounded and replaced by his former classmate Lee.

Johnston's Achilles heel was a stormy relationship with President Davis. The two had the first of many arguments early in the war and rarely saw eye-to-eye. Their mutual distrust ill served both men and their cause. In the campaign against Sherman, several Confederate officers, perhaps emboldened by Johnston's well-known troubles with the Confederate president, groused about Johnston's strategies. At least two, including Wheeler, fed disparaging information to President Davis through his military advisor, Bragg. Wheeler sent a complaining letter to Bragg, stating that he had urged Johnston to order a large cavalry raid on Union supplies and that Johnston balked. The damaging letter came just when the Confederate president was considering removing Johnston from command.

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6 - The General's Close Call

(Click here to open [Map 2 -Legend for Battle Maps](#), which will be used to interpret Map 1 and Maps 3-8 of this chapter)

Widely scattered events conspired to bring remarkable cavalry leaders together at Monroe's Crossroads, North Carolina. Union Brevet Major General Judson Kilpatrick would face



three Confederate counterparts -Lieutenant General Wade Hampton, Major General Matthew C. Butler, and Lieutenant General Joseph Wheeler. Kilpatrick had battled each man before, but never the trio simultaneously. The combatants all had fought nearly nonstop since the war began, leaving only to recover from serious wounds. They were tough, determined, and bold beyond most people's comprehension.

Kilpatrick and Wheeler skirmished against each other often as 1864 neared an end. During most of Union General William Tecumseh Sherman's march from Atlanta to the Atlantic Ocean, Wheeler and his small band were the only effective fighting force standing in his way. The Confederates had no hope of halting the powerful Union forces, but repeatedly harassed them, especially stragglers and foraging parties.

Most of the Confederate Army of Tennessee, commanded by General John Bell Hood, that had fought Sherman until Atlanta fell eventually ended up in middle Tennessee. Hood's troops were crippled by Union forces in November and December 1864. The Confederates suffered some 7,000 casualties in vain assaults against Union troops at Franklin on November 30. Then, near Nashville, Union Major General George Thomas's army swooped down on the Confederates in one of the Federals' most decisive victories, taking almost 5,000 prisoners. The Army of Tennessee seemed finished.

But in Washington, D.C., advisors warned President Abraham Lincoln that the Army of Tennessee was still a threat. The President characteristically answered their concerns with a tale. Farmer Slocum, he said, had a mean yellow dog, Rover, the neighborhood terror. One day, some boys cornered the dog, tied firecrackers onto him, and set them afire, killing the animal. Farmer Slocum, looking sadly at his dead dog, said, "Rover was a good dog. There wasn't any better dog than Rover. But I reckon that Rover's usefulness, as a dog, is about over." In short, President Lincoln wasn't worried about the Army of Tennessee, although he should have been.

In Virginia, General Robert E. Lee's once proud army suffered in the cold. Stuck in a labyrinth of trenches protecting the city of Petersburg, south of Richmond, the Confederates were in tatters, shivering and hungry. Some were barefoot. Hardtack, made with flour and water, was often their sole nourishment. Days passed when there was no meat or any other protein, leading to malnutrition, sapping the men's strength. And there was little hope of help. The Union naval blockade was strangling the Confederacy, while Union troops methodically destroyed Southern industries. Confederate enlistments were few as male manufacturing workers, the elderly, the young, and the infirm remained close

to home throughout the South. Those civilians who were able drilled in preparation for more Union invasions.

For the Confederate Army, life in the Virginia trenches was a numbing mix of tedium and danger. Union sharpshooters trained powerful rifled-muskets with telescopic sights on the earthworks, ready to shoot anyone who raised his head for even an instant. An army that so often had been the aggressor crouched trapped in the cold dirt.

Lee's officers could hope only that warmer weather, when it finally arrived, would dissipate the despair slowly overtaking the troops who were deserting in unprecedented numbers. Some risked the short dash to surrender behind Union lines against the chance of being shot; others simply headed home. Officers spent much of their time trying to rally spirits, a task made harder by painful letters full of privation and destruction from wives and families. Many in Lee's army hailed from North and South Carolina, and as Sherman, after stopping in Savannah, Georgia, marched into the Carolinas, soldier apprehension about loved ones grew. Privately, some whispered what would have been unthinkable just months earlier - the cause was doomed. Depressed realists, including Lieutenant General James Longstreet, had lost hope of victory.

Even so, many in Lee's command refused to quit. Despite the cold, the hunger, and their own shrinking numbers, they clung to the belief that the general would somehow pull off another amazing feat. For his part, Lee knew that Sherman's army had to be prevented from joining Lieutenant General Ulysses S. Grant's force, if there was to be any hope. He made a fateful decision. To slow Sherman's momentum, he sent one fourth of his prized cavalry into the Carolinas. The overall cavalry commander, Hampton, and his subordinate, Butler, would also go.

Dispatching so much cavalry, considering the weakened condition of the army, was risky. Losing Hampton alone from the dreary trenches in Virginia was a blow to morale because he had become a bigger-than-life hero. When Confederates had little to cheer about, Hampton grabbed victories, despite facing a foe usually equipped with more men, guns, and horses. Indeed, his renown was partly responsible for Lee's decision to send Hampton to South Carolina. Perhaps his presence in his native state would energize residents, encourage them to enlist, and induce them to supply the army with badly needed horses.

Lee didn't address the departing men or in any way publicly acknowledge them. As few people as possible knew they were going because Union spies, the newspapers, and ultimately Grant, had to be kept in the dark as long as possible.

Even so, word spread fast once the cavalry reached South Carolina and began battling elements of Sherman's army.

Sherman entered Columbia, the South Carolina capital, on February 17, 1865, prompting retreating Confederates, led by Hampton, to torch cotton bales to keep them from Union hands. Brisk winds spread the flames, as well as other fires set by Union sympathizers, until entire sections of Columbia were ablaze. Sherman ordered his troops to fight the inferno, but winds kept roaring and the fires spread, blackening about a third of the city. Businesses, churches, and mansions were destroyed.

The fires provided many Confederates with one more reason to hate Sherman. Indeed, four brutal years of war had stirred a deep animosity on both sides. Union forces especially despised Confederate cavalry, feelings returned in kind. From the earliest days of Sherman's campaign in north Georgia, there were charges that Union and Confederate soldiers alike were executing prisoners. There was also the account that Union cavalry in a dash behind Confederate lines allegedly tried to kill wounded soldiers in a field hospital.

Tensions mounted further after Sherman left Atlanta. His troops, taking whatever they could find, deliberately punished civilians whom Sherman thought bore heavy responsibility for the war and must be dissuaded from continuing it. There were apparently few incidents of bodily harm to civilians, and soldiers torched only a small percentage of residences, but soldiers frequently confiscated food and supplies. Called bummers, these men stripped farms and plantations of everything edible or useful. What the army missed, mobs of Confederate and Union deserters, trailing Sherman, took, only to be followed by more hungry hordes, hundreds of former slaves who shadowed the army, seeking safety from previous masters. Wheeler's Confederate cavalry also scavenged. The result of all this was a path of devastation some 60 miles wide.

The Union Army had plenty of its own reasons to inflict as much damage as possible on their foes. Nearing Savannah, the force stumbled onto Confederate land mines called torpedoes. Sherman was outraged. "This was no war, but murder and it made me very angry," he wrote. He forced Confederate prisoners to walk in front of his army to remove the torpedoes and suffer the risk of being maimed or wounded by the mines.

Moving through South Carolina, Sherman exchanged angry letters with Hampton after 18 dead Union soldiers were found with their throats slit or heads bashed. Some of the corpses wore signs saying, "Death to all foragers." Sherman, concluding the Confederate cavalry had killed them, wrote to Hampton promising that the Union Army would retaliate. Foraging, he insisted, was "a right as old as history."

Hampton replied that he would order two Union soldiers shot for every Confederate killed because of the incident, about which he and Wheeler both denied any knowledge. Furthermore, the Confederate general wrote, he had commanded shooting anyone trying to burn a house. "This order shall remain in force so long as you disgrace the profession of arms by allowing your men to destroy private dwellings."

Sherman didn't respond, but told Kilpatrick, his cavalry commander, to ignore Hampton's complaints about "...warring against women and children. If they claim to be men, they should defend their women and children and prevent us reaching their homes."

Consequently, it was no surprise that as the Union Army approached North Carolina fear spread among residents for their safety and property. Newspapers ran upbeat articles to quell concern, and rallies challenged citizens to pledge undying support to beat back the invaders, but local leaders quietly sent urgent messages to the Confederate government demanding Sherman be stopped. In response, Lee, recently named Confederate General-in-Chief, appointed General Joseph Johnston commander of the Departments of Tennessee, Georgia, and South Carolina. Soon, he also gained leadership of the Department of North Carolina. In effect, by February 25, 1865, Johnston was the general in charge of halting Sherman. He established headquarters in Charlotte, in southwestern North Carolina.

Charlotte was exactly where Sherman's force seemed to be headed, with Kilpatrick's cavalry in front of the army, which Sherman divided into two wings. The two sections moved on parallel routes, at times straying precariously far apart.

Confederate troops numbering 6,000 to 8,000, led by Lieutenant General William Hardee, were also moving toward Johnston after evacuating Charleston in mid-February. Hardee's troops weren't far in front of Sherman's almost 60,000 soldiers as they trudged north. Joining the moving sea of soldiers were remnants of Johnston's old command, the Army of Tennessee, which President Lincoln had prematurely dismissed as a threat. The only other Confederate forces nearby were two cavalry units, one commanded by Hampton and

Butler, the other by Wheeler. They operated separately, each striking hard at Sherman's troops whenever possible. Other Confederate forces were bogged down near the North Carolina coast near two Union armies.



Johnston's chances for success were slim, but if he could assemble the disparate forces available to him he would have about 30,000 soldiers. Perhaps then he could crush one wing of Sherman's army before reinforcements arrived. If Johnston could somehow slow the Union advance, perhaps his army could join Lee's forces and continue the war.

Sherman's objective was to speed through North Carolina, combine with the two Union armies on the coast, then proceed toward Grant's forces in Virginia. Together, the two generals would then crush any remaining resistance.

All the principal actors whose actions would lead to the cavalry clash at Monroe's Crossroads were heading toward the battlefield.

On March 3, Kilpatrick's Union cavalry, the 3rd Division, crossed into North Carolina and camped in Anson County about four miles from the state line. Confederate cavalry led by Hampton and Butler attacked them in early evening, withdrawing after several skirmishes. Kilpatrick's Division was divided into four brigades, with the 1st, 2nd, and 3rd each having some 1,200 to 1,500 mounted soldiers. The 4th Brigade consisted of 400 men, all on foot. This dismounted brigade included soldiers taken from the three other brigades. Kilpatrick also had six cannons, operated by the 100 men of the 10th Battery, Wisconsin Light Artillery.



Because the brigades often separated widely as they advanced, the lead brigade stopped periodically to allow the others to close the gaps. Sometimes the brigades traveled along parallel roads so that the rear brigade could avoid negotiating roads ruined by traffic from the rest of the division. The brigades also often camped separately.

The weather was miserable, with cool heavy rain that turned the dirt roads into slippery mud. Kilpatrick's 4th Brigade struggled to move artillery and wagons through the mud and dark, advancing only five miles after seven hours of effort. In pouring rain, soldiers pulled and pushed the cannons, cursing, slipping, and falling. They finally stopped to rest late at night on March 3.

The 1st Brigade encamped nearby. Officers posted pickets, armed guards, around the perimeter some distance from the main bivouac so that if attacked, they could shoot and

fall back, giving soldiers in camp time to ready a defense. But the pickets were useless in this instance. Early in the morning of March 4, some Confederates managed to sneak in between the 1st Brigade's camp and the pickets and fire at the guards from the rear, no doubt causing pandemonium among the startled troops. The Union soldiers quickly recovered and drove the invaders away, but the battle was just beginning as Wheeler's cavalry furiously attacked the 1st Brigade.

Kilpatrick's response was quick and clever. He withdrew his Union forces to a more secure position, ordering the 1st Brigade to retreat through the 2nd Brigade, which then took the brunt of the Confederate attack. The 1st Brigade withdrew about two miles to build fortifications. Then Kilpatrick withdrew the 2nd Brigade through the 1st Brigade's barricades and summoned the rest of his other brigades and artillery. Now the Confederates, initially battling only one brigade, faced an entire division. They futilely charged the Union barricades several times before pulling back. Wheeler dispatched a plea to nearby Confederate infantry for more soldiers, but waited throughout the day and none came. After sunset, he ordered one final assault.

"About dark," described a Union artillery officer, "the enemy came charging upon our front, mounted, when I was ordered by Colonel [Thomas Jefferson] Jordan to open fire on them; after firing a few rounds the enemy drew off, and did not molest us again during the night."

The Confederates defiantly camped several hundred yards from the Union force, putting the Federals on alert, expecting a dawn attack that never came. At daybreak, they discovered that the Confederates had slipped away in the night.



The Union cavalry turned toward Fayetteville on March 5. Sherman feinted as if heading to Charlotte, then marched northeast instead. Kilpatrick's cavalry, which had been in front of the army, now had to rush to catch up to protect the infantrymen on the march when they were in most peril from attack. Although he was responsible for shielding the infantry, Kilpatrick was also under Sherman's orders to avoid pitched battles with Confederate cavalry so that Union cavalrymen and their horses were preserved for major battles expected ahead.

Confederate patrols, combing central North Carolina for signs of the Federals, reported their findings to headquarters in Charlotte, so Confederate commanders soon realized Sherman's new direction and ordered their forces converging on Charlotte to alter their plans.

Hardee, commanding Confederate infantry, sent troops on a wide arc toward Fayetteville. The men force marched, pushing hard, beginning early each day and going late, with few breaks. If they could reach Fayetteville before Sherman's troops, they might be able to cross the Cape Fear River without a fight. Then they would burn bridges behind them and hurry to meet other Confederates preparing for battle.

Chapter 6 (continued)

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7 - Under Cover of Darkness

(Click here to open [Map 2 -Legend for Battle Maps](#), which will be used to interpret Maps 9-13 of this chapter)

Since the earliest days of the war, Confederate cavalry proved adept at capturing Union supplies and horses, and as the war dragged on and Confederate access to food, supplies, and animals diminished, plundering became less a strategy for weakening an opponent and more a necessity for survival.



The meager conditions of the Confederate cavalry nearing Monroe's Crossroads were evident. The soldiers were a tattered lot, especially those assigned to Lieutenant General Joseph Wheeler. Some were in rags, embarrassed to ride into towns because of their appearance. Disapproving Southern newspapers and Confederate officials criticized Wheeler's Corps as undisciplined, probably largely because of their unruly appearance, speculates author Ken Belew. Because of various factors, including

weeks spent off on their own targeting Union General William Tecumseh Sherman's force, Wheeler's troops had not been resupplied in two years; many wore a slapdash collection of odds and ends barely resembling uniforms, often including pieces of Union garb.

Archeologists studying the Monroe's Crossroads battlefield identified one suspected Confederate grave because of buttons found from both Union and Confederate uniforms. Union troops had no reason to borrow clothes from Confederates because, as in everything else, they were much better supplied by 1865. For instance, many Confederates had no overcoats, despite living outdoors nearly full-time, often in bitter cold. Those who did have coats likely took them from Federal soldiers.

The Confederate cavalry also carried a motley variety of weapons for which the bullet supply could dwindle dangerously low. The status of Wheeler's cavalry's weapons was described in an 1865 inspection report by Colonel Charles C. Jones. "As a general rule, there is a great want of uniformity in the armament of this command.... Many, if not all, of the breech-loading rifles and pistols are captured arms; for some of them...there is great difficulty in procuring the requisite amount of ammunition, the supply now in the cartridge boxes of the men, and in the ordnance train, having been obtained exclusively by capture."

Besides bullets, nourishing meals were often scarce for the Confederates. Stealing food from Union troops whenever possible had become a habit. Indeed, plundering sometimes diverted Confederate attention from warfare and played a role at Monroe's Crossroads.

Adding to these disadvantages was a new Union weapon, the Spencer repeating carbine. The Union 5th Ohio Cavalry Regiment carried the carbines in the fighting at Monroe's Crossroads. The Spencer fired 21 rounds per minute, far more bullets than the best other carbines and rifles in either army. For example, muzzle loading rifled-carbines used in the battle by some soldiers on both sides fired only three shots a minute.



But the Spencer's speed was not without drawbacks. The weapon discharged bullets so fast that soldiers aimed carelessly, wasting ammunition. Although some rifled-muskets Confederates used had a longer range, this advantage was useless when combatants confronted each other at fewer than 200 yards, as they often did at Monroe's Crossroads. Research by National Park Service archeologists Douglas Scott and William Hunt revealed just how crucial the Spencers were. They found more cartridge cases for the weapons at the battlefield than any other type.

The first skirmish leading to the Battle of Monroe's Crossroads began about 9:00 p.m. (shown as 2100 hours on [Map 8](#)) March 9. Confederate Major General Matthew C. Butler and troops from South Carolina nearly captured the Union cavalry commander, Brevet Major General Judson Kilpatrick, at the intersection of Yadkin and Morganton Roads. When this happened, the Union's 2nd Brigade was some miles back on Morganton Road, unaware that the Confederate column was just ahead, cutting them off from the Union 3rd and 4th Brigades which were moving into Monroe's Crossroads. Confederates held a decisive upper hand, for the moment, by splitting the Union cavalry.

The 2nd Brigade, riding toward Monroe's Crossroads, was traveling parallel with the rear sections of the Confederate column, Wheeler's troops, who were riding on Yadkin Road. The two roads were sometimes less than a mile apart, leading to Union and Confederate patrols repeatedly spilling into each other, igniting running gun battles. The popping of gunshots sometimes reverberated miles away. A Georgia soldier, E.W. Watkins, riding with Wheeler, explained how closely the foes rode that night. "During the march after nightfall, while riding leisurely along, it being rather dark, to my surprise, I discovered a Yankee riding in our column by my side." Watkins reported what he saw to an officer who sent him with several others to the rear to check Union prisoners. They discovered that Union cavalry had "captured our guard and prisoners. Returning and reporting this, we were halted. The Yankees were marching on a parallel road and soon mixed up with us."

The skirmishes between the 2nd Brigade and Wheeler's Corps were mere preludes of what would soon happen at Monroe's Crossroads where Morganton Road and Blue's Rosin Road intersected. Blue's Rosin Road trailed off to the south after the intersection, while Morganton Road continued toward the east and Fayetteville. A farm owned by Charles Monroe and perhaps his sisters was adjacent to Blue's Rosin Road. The family likely grew a few crops, raised livestock, and tapped trees for turpentine production.

The farm was deserted when the 400 dismounted men of the Union 4th Brigade arrived. The brigade, escorting supply and ammunition wagons, as well as Kilpatrick's headquarters wagon, turned south and marched a short distance past the two-story Monroe farmhouse. The men set up camp by the residence, while wagon drivers parked on or near the open area that soldiers called the lawn close to the house.

At some point, the two women who had earlier accompanied Kilpatrick arrived in their buggy and were escorted inside the house where soldiers likely built a fire in the brick fireplace to ease the chill.

The 3rd Brigade was next on the scene, camping behind and beside the 4th Brigade in a large field. The field was square and about 200 yards long, the length of two football fields, and equally wide. Nicholson Creek and adjacent swamps wrapped in a rough semicircle behind the southern and western sides of the field.

The 3rd Brigade of about 1,500 troops was divided into three regiments. The 1st Alabama (U.S.) Regiment camped on the far west of the field near Nicholson Creek and the swamps. Units from Alabama fought on both Union and Confederate sides during the Battle of Monroe's Crossroads. Northern Alabama was a hotbed for Union loyalists, many of whom hid in hilly wilderness near their homes to avoid retaliation from Confederate authorities. Most soldiers in the 1st Alabama (U.S.) Regiment came from this hill region.

The 5th Kentucky (U.S.) Regiment camped in the southern part of the field, near Green Springs, the popular campsite for farmers and other visitors. Kentucky was another state sending soldiers to fight for both the Union and the Confederacy. The last group in the 3rd Brigade was the 5th Ohio Cavalry Regiment, armed with the Spencer repeating carbines. These troops settled north of the Kentucky soldiers and near the house.

Rain was falling heavily when the soldiers arrived, so they dismantled a fence surrounding the field to use the rails to build cover. They stretched shelter tents, rubber blankets, and anything else that might repel water over the rails to create dry places to sleep. Others bent saplings, tied them down, and sheared off the limbs, then put covers over them and crawled underneath.

Cavalrymen probably also sought shelter in farm sheds, a pine log barn, and under the house. Archeologists discovered chunks of sandstone and a large sandstone block, which were probable remnants of footer stones used to raise the house above ground.

About 130 Confederate prisoners were herded into a tight circle near the wagons, with no shelter from the rain.

Union Colonel George Spencer, 3rd Brigade commander, chose to stay in the house, allowing soldiers to use his large headquarters tent. The tent stood toward the west, between Nicholson Creek and the house, near other tents. Joining Spencer in the house was Lieutenant Colonel William Way, commander of the 4th Brigade. Born in New York, Way was raised in Michigan and early in the war fought with the Michigan Cavalry.

Kilpatrick, fresh from his hair-raising escape, finally arrived, probably sometime before midnight. He, his staff, the two women, and the two brigade leaders, divided up the farmhouse rooms. Kilpatrick and one of the women apparently left the house for a while, staying part of the night in a nearby cabin.

The house, the cabin, other outbuildings, and the open field were on a ridge, running north and south, that sloped south toward Green Springs and a wide, deep swamp. The ridge made a good campsite on a rainy night because the rainwater drained away quickly to the south and west into the swamps. The drop-off was less than 100 feet, but high enough for anyone running downhill to gain considerable speed.

Soldiers parked the two cannons of the 10th Wisconsin Battery on high ground south of the house. Historical sources estimated that the cannons were about 50 yards from the house, but archeologist Douglas Scott found artifacts suggesting that the cannons were actually farther



away, about 160 yards south of the house. A local battlefield enthusiast, James Legg, also discovered artillery artifacts southeast of the house, between 50 and 100 yards away, perhaps representing the position one or both cannons occupied

late in the battle.

As Union soldiers settled in, Spencer ordered that pickets, armed guards, be stationed in the direction of Fayetteville. Way, 4th Brigade commander, was supposed to post pickets at the rear of the force. Because of heavy rain, getting a clear lay of the land was difficult. Spencer became disoriented about Fayetteville's direction, theorizes Ken Belew. Spencer's written description of the camp seems to show he was confused. Whatever the cause, much of the north and west sides of the camp were left unguarded.

Kilpatrick apparently was unworried about any potential danger as he retired, probably thinking that most of the Confederate cavalry was still some distance away, unlikely to arrive before noon the next day. Despite his earlier narrow escape, the Union general remained confident. He had survived one scrape after another throughout the war, so one more dust-up with a Confederate patrol likely didn't faze him.

Butler, the Confederate general, viewed the evening far more seriously. After nearly snaring Kilpatrick, his next step was to learn the disposition of Union troops. He ordered scouts to follow the horse tracks heading east toward Monroe's Crossroads. He also sent a message to Lieutenant General Wade Hampton about the capture of Union soldiers and the hundreds of fresh hoof prints on Morganton Road.

Hampton was conferring with Wheeler when the message arrived. The two officers rode quickly forward to meet Butler. About 10:00 p.m., the three were discussing options when scouts returned from tracking the hoof prints. They had discovered a large Union cavalry camp about four miles down the road and had returned immediately, leaving other scouts behind to explore further.

The Confederate generals analyzed the situation. Wheeler's Corps, stretched out some 10 to 15 miles to the rear, had been encountering Union troops off and on throughout the night. Scouts had just found the Union camp ahead. Hampton, Butler, and Wheeler concluded that they had cut off part of the Union cavalry from the rest of the force. These three generals, veterans of many campaigns, had faced few opportunities so tempting. For once, the rain was an asset, ideal for muffling sound and preventing detection. The Confederates had a rare chance to sneak close enough to launch an all-out assault on the Union camp.

Hampton issued preliminary orders - troops should prepare to attack at dawn. Butler's soldiers were already close to the Union camp, but many of Wheeler's men would have to ride through the night to get into position. With any luck, by dawn, enough of Wheeler's cavalrymen would be ready. In the meantime, Butler would move his division, taking care to avoid discovery, closer to the Union camp.

Butler clicked his tongue and guided his mount out onto Morganton Road, leading his

horse soldiers forward. They rode at a slow walk. Word passed through the ranks that everyone should be quiet. The Federals were up ahead.

Scouts rode some distance in front of the column. Butler strained to keep them in view, not easy on such a dreary night. The moon was full, about 94 percent of complete illumination, but the soldiers couldn't see it because of dark clouds and rain.

The road followed the gentle roll of the countryside, but was fairly straight. In daylight, approaching riders could be seen a mile away, but not on this rainy night. Butler could barely see his hands. He could have ridden closer to the scouts, but if they were attacked or challenged, Butler wanted room to maneuver. His priority was to keep his division concealed. He listened intently to every sound - the pounding rain, a horse snorting - anticipating the appearance of Union cavalry at any moment.

Suddenly, up ahead, the scouts turned off the road and vanished. Butler motioned for everyone to halt. Cautiously, he eased forward. There was motion ahead. Butler saw his scouts bending over their horses, talking to men on foot. Butler approached. The scouts were talking to the men they had left behind to spy on the Union camp. The bivouac was big, they told Butler, with wagons, artillery, and hundreds of Union soldiers clustered across a ridge. Unbelievably, the scouts had seen no pickets.

Did they spot any Confederate captives? Butler asked. The scouts thought they had seen an area for prisoners, but were unsure. By now, Butler probably suspected that the Union commander, Kilpatrick, was in the camp. Butler told his scouts to keep monitoring Union activities, then he rode back to the head of his column. He ordered everyone to move off to the side of the road and dismount. Officers relayed the message that soldiers could rest, but should keep their horses saddled and ready. No one was to build a campfire or talk above a whisper.

The soldiers, a few in overcoats, but mostly wearing ponchos or wrapped in rubber blankets, sprawled on the ground or against the big pine trees, the rough bark welcome after all the hours in the saddle. They had been riding and fighting with few breaks for days. "It was a cold rainy March night," remembered Butler. "In the open pine woods I established my headquarters, for the night on the road, and, with a pine knot for a pillow, slept on the ground, with my bridle on my arm, covered with my overcoat." Butler, like many combatants, had learned to nod off nearly anywhere and grab restful, deep sleep quickly, whenever he could. Soon, voices awakened him. A lone Union officer, a young lieutenant, probably a courier, had accidentally ridden among Butler's troops in the rear and was captured. Confederates brought him forward for Butler to question. Details of what Butler may have learned are unknown, but Civil War prisoners often were more forthcoming with information than soldiers of today who are instructed to give only name, rank, serial number, and date of birth if captured. Perhaps Butler learned for certain that Kilpatrick was at Monroe's Crossroads, accompanied by the 3rd and 4th Brigades. He may have also discovered the approximate locations of the Union's 1st and 2nd Brigades.

By 11:00 p.m., (shown as 2300 hours on [Map 9](#)), the Union 2nd Brigade was edging closer to Monroe's Crossroads. Skirmishes earlier in the evening had made the officer in charge, Brevet Brigadier General Smith Dykins Atkins, especially cautious. As Atkins rode at the head of his troops, a scout came trotting back to him with ominous news. A mass of Confederates blocked their way.

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8 - A Dangerous Opportunity

(Click here to open [Map 2 -Legend for Battle Maps](#), which will be used to interpret Maps 14-18 of this chapter)

The Confederates charged through the fog, battle flags waving in a breeze created by their rushing horses. They moved as one, with Lieutenant General Joseph Wheeler leading the center, Major General Matthew C. Butler



commanding the left, and the Texans surging forward on the right. Lieutenant General Wade Hampton, whose battle plan they followed, waited in the rear.

The attack came as a deadly surprise to the Union soldiers, some of whom were shot before they could climb out of their blankets. The Confederate cavalry rode full speed into the camp, shooting, yelling, spurring their horses at a

breakneck pace. Bullets ripped holes into tents where men slept. Everywhere Union soldiers grabbed their weapons and ran. Confederates bore down on them, slashing deep cuts into backs and shoulders with their sabers.

A host of Union soldiers near the north end of the camp threw up their hands in surrender. Resistance seemed hopeless, yet other Federals defiantly fought back. They crouched, lifted their carbines and fired, sometimes hitting their targets. Confederate trooper Jim Jack of the Cobb Legion, Georgia troops, was an early casualty. He was shot and tumbled dead from his horse. Union soldiers clustered in the barn, in sheds, behind tents, anywhere they could find cover and defend themselves.

Confederate horses were the easiest targets and stumbled onto the ground when hit, throwing their riders. Confederate J.H. Moses, a graduate of South Carolina's Citadel, lost his mount and was immediately pounced upon by a large Union soldier. They fought hand-to-hand, wrestling and biting until a Confederate private, Bill Martin, reached in under the Union soldier and fired. The blast lifted the man off Moses, killing the Federal instantly.

Further back in the camp to the south, Union soldiers who had a few more minutes to react leaped onto horses and fled. Many others didn't risk taking time to untie their animals. They sprinted on foot as fast as they could downhill toward the swamp at the south end of the camp. Hundreds of soldiers, many half dressed, streamed down the incline, running for their lives. Confederates on horseback rode hard after them, emptying their pistols. Some Federals somersaulted forward, wounded or dying.

"My command was taken completely by surprise, the enemy being in force in every part of my camp. The officers and men were completely bewildered for a short time," wrote Major George H. Rader of the Union's 5th Ohio Cavalry Regiment.

Standing on the porch of the house, Union Brevet Major General Judson Kilpatrick was transfixed as the first Confederate warriors poured out of the woods. Some galloped directly toward him. It must have seemed like a slow motion nightmare to Kilpatrick who was cornered, looking for a way out. Confederates swarmed everywhere. The Union commander resigned himself to capture.

Captain Bostick, followed by his detail, galloped up to the house, stopping his horse within a few feet of Kilpatrick. The Confederate pointed his pistol into Kilpatrick's eyes and demanded, "Where is General Kilpatrick?"

The Confederates didn't know who he was! Kilpatrick must have struggled not to reveal his surprise. He wore no insignia, no identifying uniform, just his shirt and long underwear. This young captain obviously had no idea he was pointing his weapon at the leader of General William Tecumseh Sherman's cavalry.

Kilpatrick's mind raced as he looked about. He spotted a Union officer swinging himself onto a moving horse and pointed at him. "There he goes on that horse!" he yelled. Bostick yanked the reins to one side and spurred his mount, racing after the man he thought was Kilpatrick. In the exuberance of the chase, Bostick forgot his orders. His commander, Butler, had told him to surround the house and wait.



Kilpatrick saw his chance. He leaped over the porch rail, landing on bare feet, and ran, dodging this way and that, disappearing into the swirling collision of horses and men.

In the first moments of the attack, some of Wheeler's troops also rushed forward, intent on capturing Kilpatrick, but headed toward the wrong target. Posey Hamilton from Alabama remembered their attempt. "Ed Knight and I were the only ones sent from our company. The objective was to ride up quietly to Kilpatrick's tent and capture the General and others with him. What we took for Kilpatrick's tent was a large one located on a round knob in the pine timber about 300 yards from where we waited [to begin the initial charge]."

Hamilton remembered that as the charge began his fellow soldiers were so devoted to their goal that they passed up chances to kill Union soldiers. "We soon came up to where the Yankees were lying under good blankets fast asleep, and while we were passing by we said nothing and did not intend to molest them. Our objective point was the big tent, and thus far we were moving in fine order and thinking we were going to make a good haul," Hamilton said. The detail galloped to within 50 yards of the big tent where some 25 horses were hitched nearby.

Hamilton looked around and saw scores of other Confederates pouring into the camp. The violent claps of hundreds of firearms filled the air. "The Yankees' camp looked like a cyclone had struck it all at once. Their blankets were flying in the air, and the men were running about in every direction in their nightclothes, while the men from the big tent were legging and heeling it down the hill to beat the band. If this was not a stampede on foot, then I never saw one."

Suddenly, the bullets were moving closer to Hamilton. A gunshot came toward him from some 200 yards away.

Then there was another close shot, and another, until it seemed as if bullets were flying all around the detail ordered to search for Kilpatrick. Just then Hamilton spotted fellow Confederates charging toward him, revolvers blazing.

"Our advance guard had to get out of the way of bullets fired by our own men as we were directly between them and the big tent," he explained.

At that moment, Hamilton and his comrades decided that their duty to find Kilpatrick was finished. "We could do no more and we had to look out for ourselves."

Indeed, confusion was rampant in the assault, almost from the start. Confederate prisoners near the house were already awake when the attack began, perhaps because of their uncomfortable night without shelter. Seeing the Confederate cavalry approaching, they taunted their Union guards, saying, "That is Wheeler charging," and warning, "You better save yourselves."

The guards quickly dashed away, dropping their weapons. Delighted with their freedom, the former prisoners, some picking up Union firearms, ran excitedly toward oncoming troops led by Butler. A few managed to grab Union horses to ride headlong into the Confederate charge.

"I had not advanced far into the camp when I was astonished to meet 130 or 140 Confederates rushing wildly towards us," Butler recalled. Mistaking them for the Confederates who had led the charge into the camp, Butler thought the soldiers had been repulsed and were running back in wild retreat. He and troops near him probably slowed their advance, preparing to take defensive positions. But other Confederates stormed menacingly forward into the former prisoners, mistaking them for Union troops. C.M. Calhoun of Butler's Division recalled that the escaping prisoners met "...us on the first sound of the rebel yell. This somewhat disconcerted some of our men at first, and, sad to say, one over joyous fellow was shot with his arms around the neck of one of our trooper's horse."

At least two former prisoners and perhaps more died in the early minutes of the battle, shot by fellow Confederates. Butler, realizing the fatal mistake, waded in and began shepherding other escapees to safety in the rear. He happened onto one former prisoner, Glenn Davis (perhaps Flinn Davis), who took a seat in the middle of the pandemonium to eat from a kettle of food left over a campfire. As Davis ate, a bullet smashed into the kettle, opening a round hole at the bottom. Butler yelled at Davis, asking him what he was doing.

"I am getting a little bite, General, the first in three days; will be with the boys in a minute," came the answer between mouthfuls of food.

Davis soon picked up an abandoned carbine, mounted a Union horse, and rode into the fight. His brother, also a Confederate soldier, handed Davis two pistols, adding to his arsenal. Davis then went searching for an especially cruel Union guard who had kicked the prisoners and slapped them in the buttocks with the broad side of a saber. Davis found the man, known to him only as "Dutchey," already dead, shot numerous times, perhaps in retaliation by other freed prisoners.

The Confederate scout, Lieutenant Clay Reynolds, who had been forced to walk behind the two womens' carriage, was now also free, and lost no time joining the fray. He grabbed a Union carbine and horse and galloped toward a Union officer. The officer, taking up the challenge, rode at Reynolds, both men firing pistols. After several rounds, one of Reynolds' shots knocked the Union officer out of the saddle and he fell, wounded.

The first wave of Confederates charged by the Union's 4th Brigade. Many of these 400 dismounted soldiers were partially blocked from view by the Monroe House, where their commander, Lieutenant Colonel William Way, was trapped inside. Way, many of Kilpatrick's staff, and Colonel George Spencer, 3rd Brigade commander, retreated upstairs where they barricaded themselves when the attack began.

Soldiers of the 4th Brigade were understandably unnerved by the ferocity of the surprise

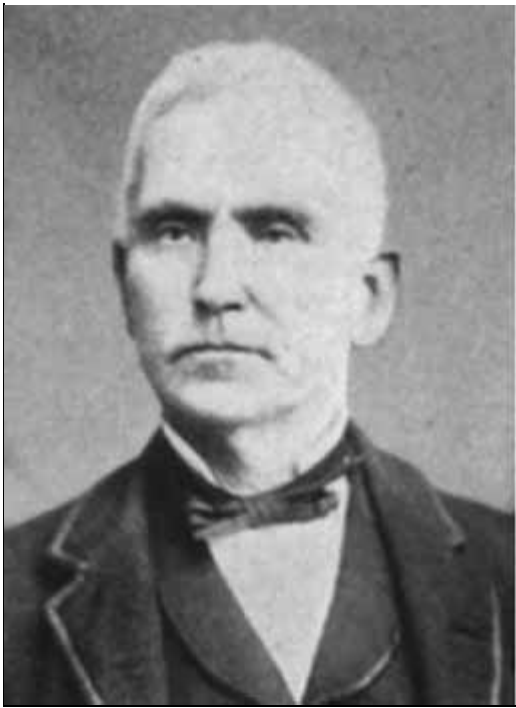
Confederate offensive. Because their commander was unavailable, a regimental leader, Lieutenant Colonel William Stough, took charge, preventing the soldiers from bolting. Trying to maintain order by the force of his will and firmness of his voice, he yelled for everyone to assume battle formation, then barked for soldiers to fix bayonets to their rifled-muskets.

When the next wave of Confederate cavalymen saw the flash of the Union bayonets, some screamed, "Infantry!" It was a dreaded call. The battle-hardened cavalymen all knew that their charge on horseback would inevitably falter against the lethal barrier of infantry in formation. The troops slowed their horses and pulled out of their units, breaking the momentum of the Confederate assault. Officers lost track of soldiers as they splintered away from the group. But the realization that Union soldiers were assembling on foot also ignited a cohesive assault from the Confederates, who seemed to fire as one against the dismounted troops of the 4th Brigade. Many Union soldiers fell. The rest broke rank and ran, chased by Confederates. Union Major Christopher T. Cheek remembered seeing the dismounted troops "flying in every direction, the rebel cavalry in hot pursuit." Many ran some 500 hundred yards to hide among the trees.

One of the women, sleeping in the house, was shocked awake by the commotion and rushed outside, still in her night clothes, according to one report. Apart from the violent chaos around her, she had to be apprehensive about how she would fare if captured, especially if the Confederates learned, as some stories contend, that she was a Southerner accompanying a Union general. Her companion and protector, Kilpatrick, was nowhere to be seen, while Confederate and Union soldiers fought to the death all around her. She looked frantically in the direction of her buggy some distance away. Bullets raked across the house, kicking up wood splinters. A young Confederate officer, seeing the woman's distress, forgot about his own perilous fight and galloped to her aid. Swinging off his horse, he charged up the steps, probably grabbing her hand and urging her to follow. Shielding her as best he could, the Confederate ran with her to the nearby ditch paralleling Blue's Rosin Road. This is where she apparently spent the rest of the battle, hidden from view. There are no reports detailing the other woman's whereabouts. Perhaps she remained inside the house.

Early in the battle, despite some serious setbacks, the Confederates seemed in control, except for Harrison's Texans. The Texans, along with Arkansans and Tennesseans, led by Brigadier General Thomas Harrison, a Texas lawyer and state legislator, had a terrible time. They were supposed to lead Humes' Division into the western side of the Union camp, but when Wheeler began his charge, they rode into a swamp much deeper and wider than expected. They had trouble seeing because of the thick fog and plunged deeper into the mire. Blindly thrashing their way forward, some riders were unhorsed by low limbs. Horses, panicked in the confined space, kicked and bucked, heaving riders into the underbrush. Riderless horses moved this way and that, compounding the chaos.

Because of the rain, Nicholson Creek had overflowed, creating a bog, and as Harrison's force drove deeper, their horses sank, becoming submerged up to their backs, necks, and heads.



Riders' legs disappeared into murky, chilly water as the horses strained to escape. Some men hung on, wrapping themselves around their horses' necks. Others dismounted into the muck and grabbed hold of saddles or their horses' tails or manes. Many, sunk into the muddy water up to their necks, risked being fatally kicked by their mounts or pulled under to drown. Their part of the charge dragged to a near standstill.

Soldiers from the rest of the division trying to pile in behind Harrison's force couldn't advance. Their adrenaline pumping, they cursed and gestured and pleaded for those in front to get out of the way. Some officers in the rear began stopping their men, preventing them from even trying to make their way across. The bottleneck worsened.

Most of Harrison's horse soldiers doggedly refused to turn back. Riding, wading, and swimming, covered in mud, some finally reached the other side and immediately began firing pistols and shotguns at Union troops. The shotguns, preferred weapons for many of the Texans, erupted with loud fiery booms. But by now the Union troops were ready and waiting, returning rapid fire with Burnside carbines.

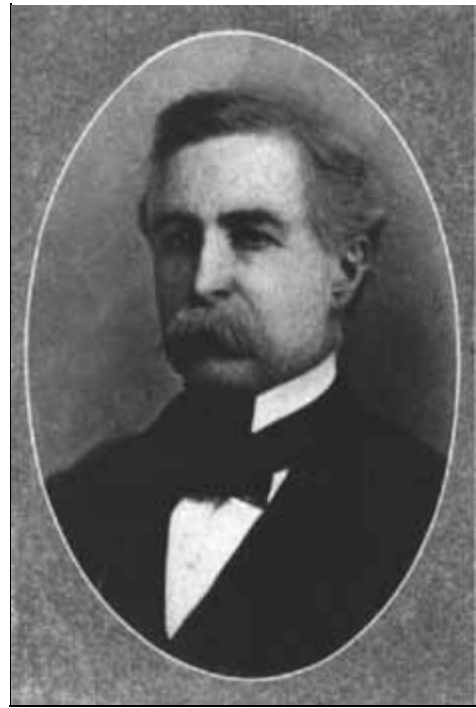
The Union soldiers shooting at Harrison's force were part of the 1st Alabama (U.S.) Regiment. They had settled on the far western side of the Union camp and therefore missed much of the impact of the first Confederate charge. However, soon after the attack began, the charging Confederates spotted the Alabama troops and subjected them to heavy fire.

"At the sounding of reveille on the morning of the 10th instant, we were aroused from sleep by the whistling of bullets and the fiendish yelling of the enemy, who were charging into our camp. Then followed a most bloody hand-to-hand conflict, our men forming behind trees and stumps and the enemy endeavoring to charge us mounted, with saber," explained Major Sanford Tramel of the 1st Alabama (U.S.) Regiment.

After they rallied to beat back these early attacks, the Union soldiers from Alabama watched as more danger in the form of Harrison's men struggled slowly toward them through the swamp. When the Confederates at last were free of the bog and began riding their way, the Federals were ready. They began their own fusillade, driving Harrison's men

back into the swamp. Soldiers and horses floundered as bullets ripped the air and popped against the water like rain. Trapped, the Confederates couldn't effectively respond. Some kept shooting, but their onslaught was all but finished. Expected to play a major role in the assault, instead they were temporarily blocked from the action.

Humes, waiting behind the swamp to lead the rest of his soldiers forward, saw this was impossible and ordered everyone to pull back. They would have to find another way to break through to the Union camp. Had Humes' cavalry remained and backed up Harrison's force, the Union troops from Alabama might have held their position, theorizes military manual author Ken Belew. As it was, the Alabama soldiers quit their campsite and hurried down the same hill where many of their fellow soldiers had retreated. There they joined other Union troops who were forming to counterattack.



[Chapter 8 \(continued\)](#)

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Conclusion

Shooting stopped at Monroe's Crossroads about 9:00 a.m., March 10, 1865, ending a comparatively short, but brutal battle. The Union cavalry, remaining after the Confederates departed, turned the main house into a makeshift hospital where soldiers carried the most seriously wounded to be examined and treated by physicians. An infantry brigade arrived soon after the battle ended and helped transport the wounded and bury the dead. Union troops buried both Confederate and Union soldiers in shallow graves they mounded over with sand.

Union Brevet Major General Judson Kilpatrick was anxious to leave because he was concerned that the Confederates might return reinforced with infantry. Therefore, by midafternoon, the cavalry division moved out. Because they were delayed by the surprise Confederate attack, they were not the first Union troops to occupy Fayetteville, after all, as Kilpatrick had hoped. Instead, the division camped that night within the protective reach of Union General William Tecumseh Sherman's infantry, still some distance from Fayetteville.

Before anyone rested that night, Kilpatrick ordered soldiers to ax down pine trees to build defensive barriers surrounding the military encampment. Caution was the new watchword for the chastened Union officer. There would be no more buggy rides with women while in enemy territory, no more bivouacs left precariously ungarded.

After withdrawing from Monroe's Crossroads, the Confederate cavalry, at a funeral pace to protect the many wounded, approached Fayetteville late in the day. Some regiments fell out and camped at the Old Federal Arsenal, while others rode through town, escorting the long, sad column of prisoners and the wagons carrying the wounded. A young girl, Josephine Bryan Worth, watched the procession.



"Toward the close of the day the melancholy line of ambulances came in bearing the wounded, and to me the still more melancholy file of prisoners," she recalled. "I would have liberated them all if I could. I had not made the acquaintance of Mr. Sherman's bummers [soldiers who stole food, livestock, and supplies from civilians] then."

There were too many casualties for one hospital to care for, so the Confederates divided the wounded among three facilities in Fayetteville.

"About 9 o'clock they sent for me to come to the hospital, and the horrible scene I witnessed there I shall never forget, the wounded had been brought in....[The cavalrymen] had an engagement with Sherman's men," recalled a hospital volunteer, Mrs. James Kyle. "I stayed with them until just before daylight and did all I could to relieve their wants. Even then I did not hear a single murmur. Such fortitude has no parallel in history."

The Confederate infantry, commanded by Lieutenant General William Hardee, began marching across the Cape Fear River Bridge as Federal forces closed in from the west. Advance Union cavalry scouts surprised elements



of Confederate Lieutenant General Wade Hampton's Corps in Fayetteville early in the morning on March 11. Confederate Major General Matthew C. Butler was among those caught off guard. He and an aide were asleep when the Union scouts began shooting in the streets. The two Confederates had given their

filthy clothes to a servant to wash, so when the guns sounded, they leaped from their beds, hurriedly pulled on boots, and escaped, wrapped only in overcoats. Ultimately, Confederate cavalry subdued the Federal scouts, killing 11 and capturing 12.

Other Union troops followed, but by midmorning most Confederate forces had evacuated Fayetteville, leaving only a scattering of Confederate soldiers behind. At noon, as Union infantry approached the Cape Fear River, a Union soldier's horse bolted for the bridge. Federal troops rushed forward, thinking an assault had been ordered. Seeing them, the few remaining Confederate soldiers hurried across the bridge, their feet barely on the other side before their fellow troops torched rosin logs they had stacked high on the structure. The flaming bridge effectively delayed Sherman's pursuit of the Confederates and stopped the bloodshed briefly.

There is no accurate count of the casualties from the Battle of Monroe's Crossroads. Reports seem to show about 100 deaths, but official records, when maintained at all, vary greatly in reliability.

Records from one Union company from Ohio reported that 60 Confederates died in the battle, but Kilpatrick gave a higher estimate. He contended that Federal soldiers killed 80 Confederates, a number that cannot be verified because, late in the war, Confederates did not tabulate deaths among their ranks or file reports of casualties.

Incomplete Union records show 24 Federal soldiers killed, but there is no record of the 4th Provisional Brigade's casualties, and these dismounted troops suffered heavily. Again, no Confederate estimate of Union soldiers killed has been found.

Hundreds more on both sides were wounded, many quite seriously. Typically, four to five times more men were wounded than killed in Civil War battles. If the estimate of 100 total dead is accepted, perhaps 500 soldiers suffered wounds, although there is no certainty in this number. Union records for the 1st Alabama (U.S.) Regiment show 27 wounded, while the State of Ohio lists 73 soldiers killed, wounded or missing. Other Union states represented and units involved, along with the Confederates, did not compile data on the wounded. Both sides suffered painful losses of veteran officers, either killed, wounded or captured.

Confederates took as many as 350 to 400 prisoners and also freed about 150 of their own soldiers held captive at the Monroe farm. Union soldiers, according to Kilpatrick, took 30 prisoners. Some 300 horses and mules also fell in the battle.

The identity of the Union officer shot loading the cannon near the end of the battle is a persistent puzzle. Some researchers think that Union First Lieutenant Ebenezer Stetson was killed in the battle, but 10th Wisconsin Battery records do not list him or any other unit members among the killed at Monroe's Crossroads. Union Sergeant John Swartz, severely wounded, died soon after the battle and is buried near the site. Swartz reportedly was assigned to artillery, but his name does not appear in 10th Wisconsin Battery records, so it is unclear whether he was the officer shot while attempting to fire the artillery piece. Perhaps the story of one brave man continuing to operate the cannon while every other

Union soldier around him fell is only a legend, suggests military staff ride manual author Ken Belew. There seems little doubt that Stetson did seize control of the cannon and fire it, causing heavy casualties among the Confederates.

Efforts to honor the dead from Monroe's Crossroads began shortly after the battle. Neill S. Blue, 15 at the time, apparently saw the battlefield before Union forces finished digging graves. He remembered seeing many dead soldiers around the log barn where fighting had been particularly heavy. The boy returned to the farm again after the Union cavalry left and placed sandstone slabs to mark the graves.

A South Carolina soldier returning home at war's end visited the Monroe farm about a month after the battle. He arrived about dusk and never forgot the horrid scene. The house was still deserted, an empty shell. All around were rotting carcasses of some 300 horses and mules killed during the fight. Remains of some Union and Confederate dead were also visible, washed out of the graves or dug up by animals.

Local residents reburied the soldiers in mass graves, according to Ken Belew. Many killed Confederates were later transferred to Long Street Presbyterian Church cemetery, a few miles east of the battlefield. Other remains were reinterred in Fayetteville. Some families from farther away retrieved their fallen relatives and took them home for burial, which was the case for Confederate Lieutenant Colonel Barrington S. King, killed in the last minutes of the battle. His brother had his remains returned to Georgia.

Beginning in 1921, the Army marked various Union graves, which reportedly contain the remains of 39 unknown Federal soldiers, graves pointed out by Neill S. Blue. When National Park Service archeologist Douglas Scott determined that a mass grave of 27 unknown Union soldiers was likely to contain unknown Confederate remains as well, the Army placed a Confederate marker at the grave. In 1996, the Army erected a monument dedicated "To the American Soldier" on the battlefield at Monroe's Crossroads.

Now, as time and history provide distance, the significance of the Battle of Monroe's Crossroads can be measured. The delay of Kilpatrick's cavalry for a day was foremost among the consequences of the engagement. This delay prevented the Union cavalry from delivering a potentially punishing blow to the Confederate infantry as it crossed the Cape Fear River at Fayetteville. If Kilpatrick had not been stalled, and if Union cavalry had wreaked havoc on Confederate Lieutenant General William Hardee's infantry and blocked Confederate troops from crossing the Cape Fear River, there probably wouldn't have been a battle at Averasboro, North Carolina. In addition, Confederates, with an infantry weakened by Kilpatrick's cavalry, would have mounted less of a fight at Bentonville, North Carolina, speculates Ken Belew. Without the Battle of Monroe's Crossroads, the war in North Carolina probably would have ended a few weeks sooner, in his view. How many lives would have been spared, how many men would have escaped being wounded, can only be conjectured.

The impact of the battle on the Civil War that continued to rage elsewhere also stirs speculation. Because Hampton, Butler and their cavalry weren't in Virginia when Confederate General Robert E. Lee retreated from Petersburg, Lee had fewer mounted forces and inadequate leadership to fend off Union Lieutenant General Philip Sheridan's cavalry. Consequently, Lee had no choice but to surrender at Appomattox Court House in Virginia on April 9. Would the presence of Hampton and Butler in Virginia have made a difference? This is probably a moot point because the Confederacy was undeniably on its knees by this stage of the war. Only the timing of surrender might have been different. Lee's army in Virginia was starving, about to be overwhelmed, and Confederate General Joseph Johnston's army in North Carolina was vastly outnumbered in men and materiel.

As it happened, Johnston met with Sherman to discuss peace terms on April 17, 1865, at a farm near Durham's Station, North Carolina. Sherman shook hands with Johnston and was reportedly cordial to every Confederate officer present - except Hampton. Sherman was still angry over what he considered to be the Confederate cavalry's brutal treatment of Union prisoners.

According to some accounts, while Johnston and Sherman negotiated inside the farm house, outside Kilpatrick approached Hampton, trying to strike up amiable conversation. But Hampton rebuffed the attempt, saying he disliked any talk of surrendering. "I never could bring myself to live again with a people that have waged war as you have," Hampton reportedly said.

Kilpatrick countered by pointing out that Hampton's cavalry had burned parts of Chambersburg, Pennsylvania, on October 12, 1862, during Confederate Major General J.E.B. Stuart's second ride around Union forces. He also cited other instances when civilians in northern states suffered at the hands of Confederates, contending that such depredations required a Union response. Hampton reportedly didn't argue the matter, but threatened retribution for Union acts which he thought violated accepted standards of war. Nonetheless, the relationship between Hampton and Kilpatrick may not have been as acrimonious as the preceding story indicates. According to one account, Kilpatrick sent a message to Hampton under a truce flag shortly after Lee's surrender at Appomattox Court House. Kilpatrick asked for the return of his prized spotted horse and possibly other mounts of his taken at Monroe's Crossroads, and Hampton reportedly returned the horse or horses.

Still, there was ample bitterness among many others on both sides long after the war ended. In the South, men who were powerful before the conflict sought to reassert their control over former slaves through Jim Crow legislation sanctioning unequal treatment of blacks. Segregation became the law throughout the region, a separation sometimes violently enforced by hooded gangs calling themselves the knights of the Ku Klux Klan. The institutionalized inequality remained for some one hundred years until passage of civil rights legislation in the 1960s prodded by protests by blacks and others.

Reconstruction after the Civil War for the devastated South was a noble goal, but not one widely embraced. Defeated Confederates deeply resented the continued presence of Union troops in their midst, while in the North sentiment was strong among the citizens against spending any of their tax money to help rebuild the former rebellious Confederate states. The wounds healed slowly. Many former military leaders for both sides took up civilian careers, and some became prominent figures.

Among those who fought at Monroe's Crossroads, several became politicians, a likely development because their names and reputations were well-known due to their wartime service.

Hampton, one of only three Confederates without formal military training to be promoted to lieutenant general, was elected governor of South Carolina in 1876. He also served as a U.S. Senator from 1879 to 1891 and for five years was commissioner of Pacific Railways. He died in Columbia, South Carolina in 1902.

Butler, facing financial ruin after the war, recovered his fiscal equilibrium, and he too was elected to the U.S. Senate from South Carolina, serving from 1876 to 1894. Butler and his frequent comrade-in-arms, Hampton, served side by side in the Capitol for many years.

Butler eventually ran a mining company and became vice president of the Southern

Historical Association. He died in 1909 in Washington, D.C.

Kilpatrick was also active in politics after the war and eventually was named, for two separate terms, U.S. minister to the government of Chile. He married a wealthy Chilean woman and died in Santiago in 1881. His body was returned for burial on the grounds of the United States Military Academy at West Point, New York.

Confederate Lieutenant General Joseph Wheeler settled in Wheeler, Alabama, where in 1881 he was elected to the U.S. House of Representatives. Wheeler went to the floor of Congress when Sherman died on February 14, 1891, to praise his former adversary. "The entire country, the South together with North, the Confederate with Federal, forgetting all the feelings of the past, join in the deep grief which has befallen our country in the death of this distinguished man," he said.

Wheeler, later a major general in the U. S. Volunteers, fought in the Spanish-American War in 1898. Then in his 60s, he was part of a U.S. offensive that breached Spanish earthworks in Cuba. According to a journalist, as an exultant Wheeler stood atop the earthworks, cheering on his soldiers, he forgot which war he was fighting and yelled, "We got those damn Yankees on the run!" He was later commissioned a brigadier general in the U.S. Regulars and served in the Philippines. He died in Brooklyn, New York in 1906, and is buried in Arlington National Cemetery near Washington, D.C.

Although many generations have come and gone since the cavalry battle at Monroe's Crossroads, the sounds of combat persist because of modern military training exercises conducted where the Civil War soldiers fought that foggy March morning in 1865.

Today, Fort Bragg and the U.S. Army carefully protect the battle site, prohibiting any unauthorized digging or collecting of relics.

And by publishing this book with the National Park Service, the Army is further seeking to keep alive the memory of the sacrifices of Monroe's Crossroads and to honor those who made them.



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Foreword

Sharyn Kane's and Richard Keeton's book, *Fiery Dawn, the Civil War Battle at Monroe's Crossroads, North Carolina*, tells the story of the battle within the larger context of earlier cavalry actions fought by the participants. Although written for the general reader, this book will also be of great interest to the professional soldier seeking an understanding of the operational art of war. The authors draw from earlier works to illustrate the impact of a commander's personality upon his leadership style, and the human cost of combat. Monroe's Crossroads serves as an object lesson of a near disaster averted by soldiers' valor.

The Battle of Monroe's Crossroads took place during the Carolinas Campaign near the end of the American Civil War. The engagement occurred on what is now the Fort Bragg Military Reservation during the morning of Friday, March 10, 1865. At dawn, Confederate cavalry, commanded by Lieutenant General Wade Hampton, C.S.A., conducted a deliberate attack against a poorly guarded bivouac of Federal cavalry, commanded by Brevet Major General Judson Kilpatrick, U.S.A. Initially overrun, the Federal troops rallied, counterattacked and recaptured their camp. After a fight of about three hours, the Confederates disengaged from the action and withdrew in the direction of Fayetteville, North Carolina. Approximately one hundred soldiers, perhaps more, were killed outright or died later of wounds received in the action.

The outcome of the engagement delayed for a day the capture of Fayetteville by Federal troops. This interval permitted Confederate Lieutenant General William J. Hardee to withdraw his corps of infantry by conducting an organized crossing of the Cape Fear River. Once safely across, the Confederates burned the bridge before the Federal troops could close in and force a battle. Lieutenant Generals Hardee and Hampton reinforced Confederate General Joseph Johnston's command in eastern North Carolina. Because of Monroe's Crossroads, the U.S. Army had to fight Hardee's and Hampton's troops again in the delaying action at Averasboro (March 16, 1865) and the combined Confederate force in the three-day Battle of Bentonville (March 19-21, 1865). The action at Monroe's Crossroads has been known by various names including the Fayetteville Road Fight, and, among the Federal infantry, Kilpatrick's Shirttail Skedaddle. Whatever the engagement is called, it was a desperate struggle and a sharp fight which affected the rest of the campaign.

The National Park Service produced this book for the XVIII Airborne Corps and Fort Bragg. Funding came from the Legacy Resource Management Program, a cultural and natural resources grant program of the Department of Defense.

William H. Kern
Fort Bragg, North Carolina.

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Acknowledgements

There are many people to thank for their contributions to this book. William H. Kern of Fort Bragg's Public Works Business Center has long been committed to honoring the soldiers who fought at the Battle of Monroe's Crossroads, which is now part of the Fort Bragg Military Reservation. Recognizing the dedication and enormous sacrifices soldiers made during the Civil War has been the driving force behind this volume.

Working with him at Fort Bragg, and providing valuable help to us, are Beverly and Wayne Boyko. Wayne, an archeologist, has given many useful insights about the archeology of the battle. Beverly, a historian, similarly provided valuable information about the battle, the area, and Fort Bragg today. She also spent many hours compiling a careful transcript of a battlefield tour, which has been a tremendous aid.

Ken Belew's research about the battle has been particularly helpful. His military staff ride volume, *Cavalry Clash in the Sandhills, The Battle of Monroe's Crossroads, North Carolina*, is a succinct analysis for training soldiers. He also provided us with a comprehensive tour of the battlefield, highlighted by his insights gained as a professional soldier and student of military history. Judy Hewett drew the situation maps which explain the battle.

The research about the battle by Douglas Scott and William J. Hunt Jr., archeologists with the Midwest Archeological Center of the National Park Service in Lincoln, Nebraska, has also been important to our understanding. Their report, *The Civil War Battle at Monroe's Crossroads, Fort Bragg, North Carolina, A Historical Archeological Perspective*, gives fascinating insights about the conflict, perspectives gained, in part, from studying objects as small as buttons and nails they found in their excavations.

Martin Pate's work, as always, is a pleasure to include with our words. His paintings of the combatants and the battle are vivid reminders that these were flesh-and-blood human beings who faced each other on that foggy March morning. He captures what the soldiers must have felt, as well as the frantic pace of the engagement. The original paintings are permanently displayed at Fort Bragg in the post library.

We wish to thank John Ehrenhard, chief of the Southeast Archeological Center, for his continuing, enthusiastic support of our efforts to bring writing about history and archeology to the public. His colleague, John Jameson, has also offered consistent encouragement for us to do the best job possible of presenting stories of the past in a way that will capture the attention of people today. He initiated this volume and other interpretive projects at Fort Bragg and shows tireless dedication to seeing that these efforts reach the widest possible audience. His help extends from accompanying us on a battlefield tour to offering guidance in how best to convey the battle account. Edwin C. Bearss, retired chief historian for the National Park Service, generously gave his time to review the manuscript and provided valuable suggestions. Thanks also to Dwight Pitcaithley, current National Park Service chief historian, for his support.

We are also in debt to Kimberly Washington, National Park Service contracting officer, for her cheerful professionalism. Finally, our families and friends continue to be unstinting in their support, and we are deeply grateful.

Sharyn Kane and Richard Keeton

Marietta, Georgia
May 1999

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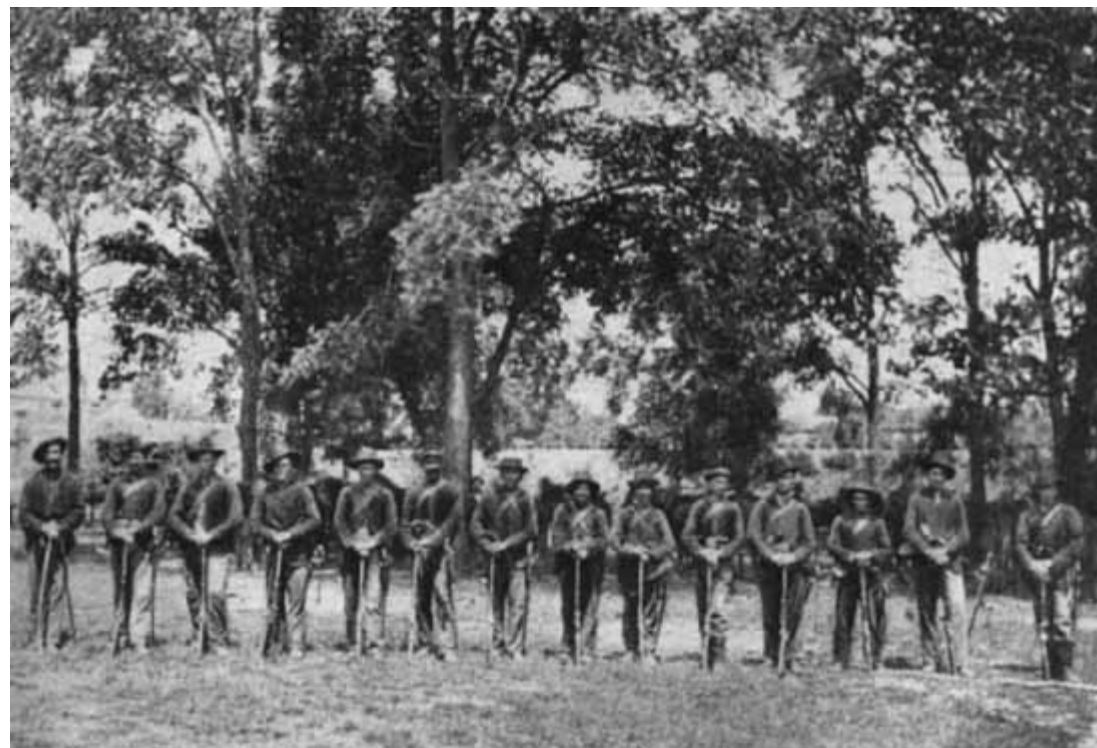
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Chapter 1 (continued)

A local newspaper editor and Republican leader, A.K. McClure, met Hampton that night and remembered the Confederate officer behaved "in a respectful and soldier-like manner." The bearded Hampton looked distinguished, he recalled, and granted McClure a full pardon, which meant that the editor could not be kidnapped and used as a hostage to secure the release of Confederates in Union jails. Even so, a cavalryman warned McClure that he wasn't safe and advised him to stick close to Hampton to avoid trouble.

McClure was stunned. "They gave me their promise," he insisted.

"Hampton gave it to you," the soldier replied. "And if you are arrested and can reach Hampton, he will parole you, for he's a gentleman. But J.E.B. Stuart wants you, and I'm not sure he would let you go on parole."

The newspaperman spent an uneasy night with Confederates camped all around his house while their horses ate through his cornfield. Some soldiers tore down his fences to use as kindling for campfires, but most, he wrote, were exceedingly polite. One trooper walked into his yard "and with a profound bow, politely asked for a few coals to start a fire."

Soon, soldier after soldier approached McClure to ask permission to draw water from his well. About 1:00 a.m., a small detail of soldiers, wet and shivering, climbed onto his porch. Seeking bread and coffee, they glimpsed the welcoming glow from his fireplace and asked if they might be allowed inside. McClure opened his house to them, and predictably more soon came, their heavy boots thudding on the wooden porch. They crowded into the house, creating a hub of activity. There was much lively conversation that night, and some of the soldiers revealed themselves to be quite cultured, McClure recounted. They filled his kitchen where, before the night was finished, McClure fed more than 100 men, also providing coffee and, when the coffee was gone, hot tea. The soldiers especially appreciated the coffee, which they hadn't had for several weeks. Coffee had grown scarce and soared to 10 dollars a pound in the South because of the Union naval blockade. All of the men were courteous, McClure remembered. Even when some took his prized tobacco, they asked his permission to smoke.

Not everyone that night had such favorable experiences with the Confederates. Some soldiers broke into a store and stole merchandise; several were arrested by fellow Confederates for pillaging. But on the whole, this was a well-disciplined force compared to some of their contemporaries. They left most stores and businesses alone.

The Confederates had sabotaged the Chambersburg telegraph soon after their arrival, but telegraph lines elsewhere were buzzing. Word spread quickly among Union officers and in official Washington that Stuart was on the loose. McClellan ordered heightened alert for his huge army. Union cavalry prepared to intercept the Confederates, while Federal infantry units waited at the most likely crossing places on the Potomac. Major General Henry Halleck, President Lincoln's general-in-chief, wired McClellan, "Not a man should be permitted to return to Virginia."

McClellan was confident that the Confederates could not elude him. Indeed, Stuart's force would be annihilated, he was certain. He telegraphed his superiors in Washington, D.C., "I have given every order necessary to insure the capture or destruction of these forces, and I hope we may be able to teach them a lesson they will not soon forget."

Before dawn, October 11, the Confederate cavalry assembled in downtown Chambersburg, then ransacked the Union Army depots for overcoats, pants, hats, under-wear, woolen socks, rifles, sabers, and pistols, as much as they could carry. A journalist reported, "The whole town was converted into one vast dressing room. On every hotel porch, at every corner, on the greater portion of the street doorsteps, might be seen Rebel cavalry donning Yankee uniforms, and throwing their own worn out and faded garments into the street."

Soon the Confederates were riding again. Most soldiers assumed they would now return in the general direction from which they had come, but Stuart surprised them. Following the axiom that the wisest move in war is often the unexpected, he headed east toward the small town of Gettysburg. He intended to try another ride around Union forces, a risky choice. Many of his soldiers were already worn out from the previous hard day's ride, followed by a night with little sleep. They were now some 80 miles from Confederate-occupied territory and the area between them and safe ground was honeycombed with enemy troops doggedly searching for them.

Hampton's division occupied the rear position. His soldiers, the last to depart Chambersburg, torched the Union Army depots and machine shops, destroying 6,000 weapons and damaging supplies worth perhaps \$1 million. Explosions rocked Chambersburg throughout the morning.

Heavy fog concealed the Confederates' movements in the early hours of their ride. Many wore the stolen clothes of their foes, including Union blue overcoats. They trotted forward without pause throughout the morning, stopping only briefly to feed their horses. Stuart propped himself against a tree and promptly fell asleep for about 30 minutes during the break.

At Cashtown, seven miles from Gettysburg, the column turned south. There were zig zags in their course to throw off pursuit, but their destination was clear - the Potomac River where colliding with Union forces guarding access to the water seemed inevitable.

The cavalry crossed the border into Maryland, reaching the town of Emmitsburg about 4:00 p.m. Startled residents looked at the Confederates as if they "had fallen from the clouds," according to one account, but the townspeople were friendly and fed some of the soldiers, who remained on their horses. The first of the Confederates to arrive barely missed encountering about 150 Union cavalymen, part of the 6th Pennsylvania Cavalry, who had passed through on their way to Gettysburg a mere hour before.

The Confederates traveled on. By sundown, hungry and tired, their muscles and backs ached from the continuous pounding on horseback. Still, they were alert enough to snare some Union scouts and a courier, who, as luck would have it, carried details about Federal positions. Stuart learned from these captured papers that a powerful Union cavalry force was perhaps only four miles away. He immediately changed course to avoid a clash, but now knew for certain that Union soldiers were closing in on him from both sides. Other Union troops, though farther away, were also a threat because they were loaded into railroad cars ready to travel on a moment's notice to confront Stuart's cavalymen wherever they tried to cross into Virginia. Still more Union troops barred the way across most major fords of the river. If the



Confederates had any chance of escape, they would have to ride all night and hope luck was on their side.

As they drove forward, Stuart kept a string of couriers moving back and forth to Hampton and his other commanders with messages weighing their next moves. Rain stopped for a while, but had fallen so steadily for days that they all worried that the Potomac might be flooded when they reached its banks, if they reached its banks. Yet, there was a bonus from the deluge. The roads were damp, so no dust clouds arose from their horse hooves to reveal their location as the long procession advanced and the last daylight faded.

Conditions seemed perfect for a night ride. The moon, in its last quarter, lit the road in a soft glow, and the air was pleasantly cool. But riding at night had its own perils because the soft jangle of spurs, creaking of leather, and drone of pounding hooves compounded drowsiness. To stay awake, some soldiers climbed off their horses and walked short distances, then remounted and rode hard to regain their places in the ranks. No one dared fall behind. A number of men slept as they rode, their snores sometimes loud enough to be heard above the thudding wheels of the four cannons the Confederates pulled.

By 1:00 a.m., still some 40 miles from the Potomac, Stuart remembered that a young woman he admired - he called her "the New York Rebel" - was visiting a Maryland family at Urbana nearby. Incredibly, considering the urgency of his mission and potential risks, Stuart decided to visit her. While most of his troops forged ahead, Stuart rode west some six miles, accompanied by several officers and a guard of 10 cavalymen from North Carolina. They arrived at the house in the wee morning hours. When a knock at the door brought a sleepy inquiry from upstairs demanding who was there, Stuart laughed and bellowed, "General Stuart and his staff!" There was much scurrying inside. Then a woman, her head studded with curl papers, stuck her head out a window. "Who did you say it was?" she asked. Laughing again, Stuart repeated, "General Stuart and staff! Come down and open the door."

Within moments the front yard filled with young women animatedly chatting with the cavalry officers. Pleasant as the exchanges must have been, the convivial scene was brief. Stuart permitted a stay of only 30 minutes. As the women waved farewell with handkerchiefs, the horsemen lifted their hats and spurred their mounts for the return to the main body of troops. For a while, one of the riders played a banjo, adding to the spirit of revelry, but the men soon pushed their steeds to a gallop and rejoined the other soldiers near sunrise. It was Sunday, October 12, 1862.

Fall colors were nearing a peak of vibrant golds and yellows in the leaves of oaks and poplars. As the sun rose, tension heightened. The Confederates were still 12 miles from the Potomac, and everyone assumed that getting across would require a fight. Orders passed through the ranks: If they met Union forces, they should hold their fire and charge using only sabers because quiet was essential to avoid summoning any more opposition soldiers. The concern was justified. Nearby, both to the east and west, several thousand Union troops were deploying.

The Confederates feigned in one direction, then headed to an abandoned road remembered by a scout who had lived in the area as a boy. The troopers tore down several fences to access the overgrown, but passable road, which they hurried down for a mile and a half through thick woods. Then they were out in the open on a major thoroughfare again.

Stuart led the way. Many of the troops still wore Union overcoats, which served dual purposes of staving off the morning chill and providing disguise. Up ahead they sighted Union cavalry. The Confederates began to reach for their sabers, but Stuart quietly signaled that they should wait. The Union cavalry hesitated, briefly unsure. According to their commander, Brigadier General Alfred Pleasanton, the Confederates were "dressed in the uniform of U.S. soldiers. The officer in command of the [Confederate] squadron made signal in a friendly way, which was returned."

Stuart, waiting until they were almost face to face with the Union troopers, yelled, "Charge!" Out flashed the sabers as the Confederates galloped straight into the Union force, which fired a few shots, then broke in retreat. The Confederates pursued for about a mile, then halted atop a ridge to fire down on the Union cavalry, which was quickly being reinforced. The Confederates mounted a cannon atop the ridge to help hold off the growing Union force.

Stuart remained on the ridge, directing its defense, while most of the Confederates began streaming past in a race to reach the Potomac, still more than a mile away and defended by more Union troops. Stuart had another worry besides crossing the river to safety. Couriers sent to his rear guard commander, Butler, hadn't returned. Were Union soldiers also attacking from the rear? Had Butler been cut off?

When the first Confederate troops halted within sight of the Potomac, they found Union infantry in strong positions behind the walls of a rock quarry. Confederate Brigadier General William H.F. "Rooney" Lee, Robert E. Lee's son and commander of the advanced troops, quickly deployed his soldiers for attack. There was no way to estimate how many Union soldiers hid in the quarry, but even just a few could create havoc for Confederates trying to cross the river.

Lee chose a brazen move. He sent a soldier with a flag of truce to confront the Union forces with a note demanding their surrender. Confederates had an overwhelming advantage, the note stated, and wished to avoid unnecessary bloodshed. Union troops had 15 minutes to surrender.

The Confederates anxiously watched and waited. Gone was concern about how deep the Potomac might be. Fatigue of only moments before was also forgotten. The only pressing thought was whether they would reach the river or be trapped, and in all likelihood, killed.

The 15 minute deadline passed with no sign of movement in the quarry. Lee ordered an attack. The Confederate cannon belched out shells, but even before the smoke cleared all action abruptly stopped. Amazingly, the Union troops began pulling out, their drums beating and flags fluttering as they retreated. With a triumphant cheer, the Confederates

galloped toward the river and found White's Ford still shallow enough to cross.

The Confederates were ordered not to allow their exhausted horses to drink until they reached the other side of the river. If they halted midstream, they would block the way for others. Speed was essential. Danger was mounting by the minute that the Confederates would be overwhelmed by Federals from the sides and rear. Horses denied food and water for hours were spurred and whipped as they plunged into the river. A few animals did stop to drink, but not enough to halt the furious parade of cavalry splashing across.

Hampton soon brought most of the rear division into view, leading them quickly toward the river. There was still no word from Butler and the final regiment. What had happened to them? Stuart had sent four separate couriers searching for them; none had returned. He had tears in his eyes as he contemplated abandoning some of his finest troops. His voice choked as he told an aide, "We are going to lose our rear guard!"

Captain W.W. Blackford, Stuart's engineer, volunteered to try one final time to find Butler. Gunshots and cannon explosions were deafening around them as Stuart conveyed the message to be delivered if Blackford found Butler. He should come on a gallop if possible, Stuart yelled. If not, Butler should "strike back into Pennsylvania and try to get back [into the South] through West Virginia." As Blackford rode away on what seemed to be a certain suicide mission, Stuart called, "If we don't meet again, good bye, old fellow."

Blackford, retracing the path the Confederates had just covered, encountered one after another the returning couriers Stuart had sent to find Butler. None had seen him. Blackford rode on, heading north. Finally, after some three miles, he rounded a bend and came upon a battle. Butler's soldiers were under attack from the rear.

Butler's soldiers in battle formation were firing back, using their one cannon to fend off the pursuers. Blackford informed Butler that unless he and his soldiers broke away immediately and hurried to the river they would be cut off by Union forces that already nearly surrounded them. Butler said he wasn't sure his fatigued horses could pull the cannon quickly enough through the mud to escape. The artillery piece had been entrusted to him, and he didn't want to abandon it. Blackford urged him to forget the cannon and save his men. "We'll see what we can do," Butler replied. Soldiers whipped the horses pulling the artillery piece until they gradually picked up speed. Everyone made a mad dash for the river, sabers drawn and ready for any opposition. They had only the narrowest avenue of escape open to them. As they neared the Potomac, riding along a ridge, they were under fire from both left and right.

Finally, Butler and his force reached the river and plunged in, stirring cheers from the other Confederates who waited on the opposite side. Exhausted soldiers who had crossed the river first watered their horses and rested on the banks, while fellow troops sent cannon shells booming at the Union forces closing in behind Butler's troops. Once the Confederates were safely across, the Union soldiers gave up the chase.

Surprisingly, the Confederates suffered no casualties during the entire three days and 130 miles of the ride, the last 80 of which they covered in just slightly more than 24 hours. Two soldiers who fell behind were presumed captured. Stuart's personal slave, known only as Bob, also fell into Union hands.

The Confederates, reinforced with some 1,200 stolen horses, left behind about 60 lame or exhausted mounts. Overall, they considered their venture a success. They had destroyed massive amounts of Union Army materiel, but more importantly, they had won a significant psychological triumph. They had stirred doubt among many, including President Abraham Lincoln, about the Union Army's effectiveness. Stuart, basking in the praise that

followed, credited God for the achievement. Hampton and Butler also received accolades, including official commendations for proving themselves under fire. Soon, the trio would face added responsibilities and dangers.



[Chapter 2: The High Price of Vanity](#)

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Chapter 3 (continued)

Soldiers from North Carolina or Virginia, sources differ, led the main column. From the heights above Hanover, Pennsylvania, these troops spotted some of Kilpatrick's cavalry and charged, chasing the Union soldiers through the town and capturing several. The Confederates were returning through Hanover when more of Kilpatrick's force suddenly rode in behind them, firing weapons.

Now it was the Confederates' turn to escape, with Union soldiers in hot pursuit. Town residents added to the tumult, firing rifles out their windows at the now panicked Confederates. Stuart, with several aides, met the retreating soldiers as they rode outside of town. He yelled at them to turn and fight, but the men, terror in their eyes, thundered past Stuart, who soon followed as shooting Union soldiers raced toward him.

Stuart and his aides leaped their horses over a tall hedge bordering the road. Landing in a grassy meadow, the Confederates began firing back over the hedge at Union soldiers still dashing by on the road. Suddenly, other Union troops appeared in the field, riding straight for Stuart who spurred his horse, as did Captain W.W. Blackford beside him. The two plowed through the field as bullets whistled by. The grass whipping at the horses' legs was so tall that the riders couldn't see approaching danger and spotted the deep gully only when they reached the edge. Their horses jumped. Blackford, slightly ahead of Stuart, remembered looking back. "I shall never forget the glimpse I then saw of this beautiful animal a way up in midair over the chasm and Stuart's fine figure sitting erect and firm in the saddle."

Both riders cleared the gully, which was some 15-feet wide. Other Confederates were not so fortunate, tumbling from their horses into the muddy water, then frantically scrambling up the other side of the gully. Somehow, all the Confederates escaped. Federal troops continued to fire at them as they fled, but did not pursue the chase any farther.

Stuart found his way back to his men who were stunned to see him. Word had passed quickly through the ranks that their commanding officer was captured, so his appearance stirred a cheer of relief and admiration. Stuart quickly formed the troops on a hill in defensive positions, preparing for another assault by Kilpatrick's force.

Some distance away, hearing the gunfire, Hampton ordered soldiers to prepare the supply wagons for destruction. If Union troops appeared, they should torch every wagon, he commanded. Hampton then hurried forward with most of his soldiers, arriving in time to bolster Stuart's position. There were more exchanges of gunfire, but Kilpatrick's soldiers did not make another charge.

The Confederate cavalry waited until nightfall to escape Kilpatrick's soldiers, who were positioned to the north and northwest. The Confederates, still leading the cumbersome wagons, headed east in the opposite direction away from Gettysburg,

They rode through the night, eventually turning north, steadily moving farther away from Gettysburg, heading toward where they mistakenly thought Confederate infantry might be found. The ride seemed interminable. The cavalry had captured more prisoners who now rode in the wagons, many of them serving as drivers. More than once, part of the column was forced to halt because a driver, falling asleep, dropped the reins and his wagon wandered off course or simply stopped. Soldiers patrolled up and down the line in the dark, searching out reasons for delays. The tired and hungry wagon mules also caused problems.

Now and then, one suddenly darted off the road, hauling a careening wagon with it. Other mules bucked and kicked in protest.

Fatigue gnawed at the soldiers. Entire regiments slept in their saddles, their horses often moving forward only because the other animals headed in that direction. More than one sleeping soldier toppled from his horse with a thud. Once his comrades might have laughed and teased as the fallen rider scrambled to catch and remount his horse, but now they were too tired even to smile.

The next day, July 1, 1863, Stuart still couldn't find Lee's army. Seven days had passed since he had communicated with his general, and now Lee moved blindly toward disaster because Stuart had failed to warn him about Union troop numbers and locations. That same day, Lee's forward units launched attacks near Gettysburg, with Confederate infantry driving Union soldiers back through the town and up onto formidable bulwarks, Cemetery Hill and adjacent Culp's Hill.

Stuart, who didn't learn until that evening of the battle unfolding at Gettysburg 27 miles away, ordered troops to ride all night to reach the battlefield, a command that sparked protest from an officer who warned that Stuart was overestimating the men's stamina. Cavalrymen were so exhausted that they slept even when their mounts jumped fences. Chastened, Stuart rescinded his order and slept an hour himself before leaving after midnight for Gettysburg.

Hampton's troops arrived at the Pennsylvania fields first and almost immediately rode into battle, catching Kilpatrick's cavalry maneuvering toward the rear of Lee's infantry. Hampton halted Kilpatrick's advance by ordering a charge by South Carolina and Georgia cavalry. The Union troops gradually withdrew, but Kilpatrick, in a report filed after the encounter, claimed that he had battled not only Hampton, but a much larger force commanded by Stuart. Kilpatrick also claimed that he whipped the Confederates, apparently not the only instance when after a battle he stretched combat facts in his favor.

Stuart reached Lee's headquarters in the afternoon to find Lee fretting over how slowly Longstreet was moving his two divisions into position for attacks on the Union left. An aide who attended the meeting between Lee and Stuart said, "It was painful beyond description."

Lee reddened when he saw Stuart, writes historian Burke Davis. Fighting to control his rage, Lee may even have lifted his hand as if to hit the cavalry chief, but stopped short of a blow.

"General Stuart, where have you been?" he demanded.

Stuart's usual aggressive composure deserted him. He tried to explain his actions of the past week, but the general was unappeased.

"I have not heard a word from you for days," Lee seethed.

Stuart countered that he and his force had captured 125 wagons.

"Yes, General, but they are an impediment to me now," scolded Lee.

Suddenly, Lee's mood softened.

"Let me ask your help now. We will not discuss this matter longer. Help me fight these people."

That day at Gettysburg, some 16,000 casualties fell in the titanic struggle between two powerful armies. When the fighting was over, the Union still held a tight grip on its defensive positions. Confederates faltered, suffering in part because of inadequate intelligence from the cavalry.

The pain and loss only increased July 3. While infantrymen wrestled in a deadly embrace, Stuart positioned himself on Cress Ridge three miles from the battlefield. His small force



held a commanding view of the rolling farmland near the rear of the Union Army. Stuart sent word to Hampton to hurry to his position to reinforce his troops, but was attacked by Union cavalry before Hampton arrived. When Hampton finally appeared, leading a charge, a pitched battle with hand-to-hand combat was already underway.

As Hampton's force rode forward to help Stuart, another unit of Union cavalry countercharged, led by Brigadier General George Custer who raced in front of his troops, riding directly toward Hampton's men. At the same time, Union artillery blasted into the Confederate ranks, sending shrapnel flying and terrified horses rearing. Cavalrymen yelled in pain and fell from their mounts. As some other riders hesitated, reining their animals, they allowed a gap to open in the Confederate ranks, although most of the troops surged forward, closing together.

A Union soldier recalled, "The speed increased, every horse on the jump, every man yelling like a demon. The column of the Confederates blended, but the perfect alignment was maintained.... As the opposing columns drew nearer every man gathered his horse well under him, and gripped his weapon tighter."

Suddenly, other Union cavalry charged from hidden positions, ramming into the flanks of the Confederate column. But this attack didn't slow the Confederate advance toward Custer. The Union soldier remembered, "...the two columns [one led by Custer and one by Hampton] had come together with a crash, and were fighting hand-to-hand. For minutes which seemed like hours, amid the clashing of the sabers, the rattle of the small arms, the frenzied imprecations, the demands for surrender, the undaunted replies, and the appeals for mercy, the Confederate column stood its ground."

Union soldiers fought their way to Hampton and slashed him in the head twice with sabers, piercing his skull. He was also hit with artillery shrapnel. Seriously wounded and bleeding heavily, he crumpled in his saddle. Seeing Hampton wounded likely disheartened the spent Confederates who retreated to nearby woods where they were not attacked again by Custer.

The cavalry battle between Hampton's and Custer's forces occurred about the same time that Confederate Major Generals George Pickett and Isaac R. Trimble and Brigadier General Johnston J. Pettigrew led a futile infantry attack up Cemetery Ridge three miles away.



Some 12,600 men swarmed up the slope, carrying 47 different regiment flags. Their bayonets glinted in the hot sun as artillery fire blew the soldiers apart. In a final, awful charge into a torrent of Union gunfire, some 100 men managed to scale the stone wall and briefly push back Union lines. For a few moments, their Confederate flags waved atop the wall before a hail of bullets felled these soldiers.

About the same time, Kilpatrick led a rear assault on Lee's infantry. Kilpatrick's troops attacked nearly impregnable positions held by Confederate Brigadier General Evander Law's Texans and Alabamians who had carved out defensive sites behind rock walls and boulders.

Kilpatrick's soldiers from West Virginia charged repeatedly against Law's troops, amid devastating losses. Some tried to break through to the Confederates by hacking with sabers at a wood fence barring their way, even as they were torn apart by bullets.

In the midst of the carnage, Kilpatrick remained on his horse, creating an easy target. Turning to Brigadier General E.J. Farnsworth, he ordered him to lead the Vermont cavalry in another charge.

"General, do you mean it?" Farnsworth asked, incredulously. "Over this ground, against an infantry brigade? These are too good men to kill like this."

Kilpatrick angrily fired back. "Do you refuse to obey my orders? If you're afraid, I'll lead this charge."

Farnsworth, outraged, demanded, "Take that back!"

"I didn't mean it," Kilpatrick shouted.

Relenting, Farnsworth said, "General, if you order the charge, I'll make it, but it must be your responsibility."

Kilpatrick ordered him to proceed. The cavalry surged forward, passing by retreating Union troops who begged them to turn back. The Vermonters, ignoring the pleas from their fellow soldiers, charged and quickly suffered staggering losses. Farnsworth was among the casualties. As he lay wounded, a Confederate soldier stood over him, demanding his surrender. Instead, Farnsworth turned his pistol on himself and fired, killing himself.

As time passed, critics concluded that Kilpatrick on more than one occasion recklessly and needlessly endangered the lives of his troops. Some of the men under Kilpatrick's command must have agreed with the assessment because in a flash of gallows humor they nicknamed him "Kill-cavalry."



Chapter 4: Hampton Takes Charge

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Chapter 4 (continued)

Several Union cavalymen who lost their horses in the fight soon ran by Stuart's position, seeking escape. One, Private John Huff, 45, a carpenter by trade, lifted his pistol and fired at the officer on horseback near the fence.

Stuart clutched his side and slumped over. His hat fell to the ground.

"General, are you hit?" came the query.

"Yes."

"You wounded bad?"

"I'm afraid I am."

Soldiers crowded around to lead Stuart on his horse away from the front lines. But the animal, unaccustomed to any hand but his master's, bucked and kicked, forcing grimaces of pain from Stuart, who asked to dismount. Soldiers propped him against a tree while they found a gentler mount. Stuart urged an officer helping him to return to his soldiers. Everyone expected another attack, but Stuart was safely placed in an ambulance before firing resumed. Seeing some Confederate soldiers fleeing the front lines during the lull in fighting as he was taken away, Stuart cried angrily, "Go back, go back and do your duty, as I have done mine, and our country will be safe. Go back, go back!" After a moment's pause, Stuart added, "I had rather die than be whipped."

The ambulance followed a long and circuitous route toward Richmond, a detour made necessary because the countryside was flooded with Union cavalry. For Stuart, the trip was torture. He gritted his teeth and held his hand tightly over the wound in his side. Finally, late at night, the ambulance arrived at the Grace Street home of Stuart's brother-in-law, Dr. Charles Brewer. Doctors concluded that Stuart's liver was damaged and had little hope for his survival. The next morning, Stuart hearing cannon blasts, asked for news. The Confederates were still grappling with Sheridan, he was told. "God grant that they may be successful," Stuart said. The old fire lit up his eyes. Then he turned, sighed, and said, "But I must be prepared for another world."

President Davis arrived and asked, "General, how do you feel?"

"Easy," Stuart said, "but willing to die if God and my country think I have fulfilled my destiny and done my duty."

A crowd gathered in a death watch outside the home. Tears stained the faces of many. Throughout the day of May 12, Stuart lingered. Delirious at times, he shouted orders as he fought some imaginary battle; during other moments, he was lucid. During these periods of clarity, he helped apply ice to his side to ease the pain. Several times he asked for his wife who had been sent for, but not arrived. Stuart, asking if he could survive the night, was told death was near. He nodded and said, "I am resigned if it be God's will; but I would like to see my wife."

Two clergymen approached his bedside around 7:00 p.m. They prayed and, at his request, sang the hymn, *Rock of Ages*. Stuart, in faltering voice, joined in. Then about 7:30 p.m., Stuart said, "I *am* going fast now. I am resigned; God's will be done." Then he was dead.

Sheridan's thrust toward Richmond gradually lost steam and he withdrew, with the Confederate cavalry following but unable to inflict serious damage on the Union force. Because of the skirmishing, most of the cavalry couldn't attend Stuart's funeral, but President Davis and Bragg were there. Tributes poured in for the fallen cavalry leader, but perhaps the most poignant came from Lee. Still in the midst of desperate fighting at Spotsylvania, Lee received a telegram. He tore it open, then paused, struggling to control his emotions. "Gentlemen," he told assembled officers, "we have very bad news. General Stuart has been mortally wounded." He paused, struggling for composure. "He never brought me a piece of false information!" Later, when Lee learned that Stuart was dead, he said, "I can scarcely think of him without weeping."

Stuart's legacy was the cavalry leadership he helped train. While the Confederate infantry suffered because of too few capable replacements for slain or wounded officers, the cavalry did not. Stuart had always provided promising soldiers in his command with increasing responsibilities and chances to advance. A number of key Confederate officers who would soon fight at Monroe's Crossroads served with Stuart. Either directly or indirectly, they learned from him.

Replacing Stuart proved hard for Lee. Hampton was an obvious candidate, but had no formal military training, a significant concern. Equally qualified was Lee's nephew, "Fitz" Lee, an 1856 graduate of the United States Military Academy. Unable to decide, the commanding general postponed making an appointment. For the time being, all cavalry division leaders would report directly to him. Along with his other heavy responsibilities, Lee would now command the cavalry corps. He would let future battles determine Stuart's successor.

The awful bloodshed continued. At Cold Harbor, Virginia, near Richmond, the armies clashed in early June 1864 in trench warfare that proved to be a forerunner of World War I devastation. Union soldiers charging Lee's earthworks on June 3 were so sure of dying that they pinned their names and addresses to their uniforms so their corpses could be identified. Men fought nearly nonstop, with some 7,000 gunned down in a matter of hours. At night, the combatants tried to sleep listening to heart-wrenching moans and screams of the wounded trapped in the no-man's land between them.

In one month, nearly 100,000 soldiers were killed or wounded. The Union Army alone suffered more than 65,000 casualties, enough to constitute an entire Civil War army. Grant was losing, on average, more than 1,000 soldiers a day, many of them skilled veterans. The general was so devastated by the losses that he was seen falling on his cot and weeping. Nevertheless, unlike other Union commanders who had retreated when faced with severe losses, Grant kept hammering away at Lee. The Union general stumbled and made mistakes, but was relentless in pursuing Lee's army and pushing closer to the capital of the Confederacy. President Lincoln never wavered in his support of his commander, but many of his constituents began to lose heart and resolve. The presidential election was less than six months away.

Grant's weakened army settled into a siege of Confederate forces around Petersburg, Virginia, south of Richmond, in the third week of June. Union and Confederate soldiers were at a stalemate. If there was to be a major Union victory to secure the President's re-election, perhaps Grant would not provide it, but rather it might come from Sherman who was well into a major offensive into Georgia while Grant seemed stymied by Lee.



The Confederates suffered about half as many casualties that June as the Union, but the losses hobbled Lee. Especially crippling was the loss of so many officers and plummeting soldier morale. Desertions mounted, shrinking the army, already diminished because fresh recruits were insufficient to replace the number of dead and wounded. In contrast, the Union Army was steadily reinforced by recruits and draftees, many of them black, eager to fight. And unlike the Confederates, the Union Army had plenty of food, ammunition, and weapons, as well as strong horses.

Confederate soldiers were sorely frustrated by the stagnant, dirty, dangerous life in the trenches. Although small battles erupted daily, there were few opportunities for victory. An army accustomed to bold offensive maneuvers hunkered down, nearly always on the defensive. Still, Lee had confidence the Confederates could continue to hold off Grant, and there were moments when the old spirit of invincibility revived, with Hampton providing the spark. On June 8, 1864, Hampton ordered cavalry units to prepare three days rations. Each soldier could carry only eight ounces of bacon and hardtack for himself and one bag of corn for his horse. They had to travel light and fast because Sheridan had launched another Union raid into Confederate territory. Only a furious response could stop him. Sheridan was heading west into central Virginia toward Charlottesville and then a planned link-up with Union forces in the Shenandoah Valley.

By dawn June 9, Hampton's and "Fitz" Lee's cavalry began the chase. Hampton, as senior officer, assumed command. They rode hard, with little rest, until near midnight, when they stopped briefly, then resumed riding. Hampton, a disciplined leader, tried to avoid exhausting men or their mounts. Still, he used every opportunity to move forward. After another brief rest, the soldiers were riding again before dawn.

Throughout much of the next day, the Confederates pounded forward beneath a merciless summer sun. There had been no rain for sometime. Soldiers toward the rear of the Confederate column could barely see because thick dust kicked up by the horses hung like a heavy cloud. Throats were parched and choked by the dirt. As one cavalryman wrote, "...The only water obtainable for man or beast was from small streams crossed, and this, churned up by thousands of hooves, was almost undrinkable."

By nightfall on June 10, Hampton located a lush valley where soldiers and horses rested in thick, cool grass. While the cavalry slept, Hampton collected reports from his scouts, studied maps, and plotted strategy. He learned from scouts that his force had managed just barely to race ahead of Sheridan's troops. Officers roused the Confederate soldiers before dawn without bugles. Silence and surprise were important to an outnumbered force. The men, as they stretched and yawned, heard the Union buglers nearby playing reveille. The camps were so close that a clash was inevitable. Voices were hushed as the Confederates saddled their horses and prepared to fight. Hampton assigned Butler's brigades to lead the first charge. Confederate forces advanced on two converging roads to meet Sheridan's Union column head on. South Carolina soldiers let out a yell and galloped straight at the Union cavalry, while Hampton dispatched dismounted troops to follow close behind them.

They drove the Union forces back until the Federals were reinforced and stopped retreating. Both sides hammered at each other with bullets and artillery shells. Forward movement stopped, and the battle settled into a brutal standstill. Hampton sent the Cobb Legion from Georgia into the fight. Closing in behind them from the east was "Fitz" Lee's cavalry. The tide seemed to be swinging back in favor of the Confederates.

Then a courier, racing full speed, jolted to a stop at Hampton's side to deliver startling news. A major Union force was approaching from behind. At first, Hampton didn't believe the intelligence. How could this be happening? He had so carefully choreographed every move, considered every contingency. But reconnaissance proved the courier accurate. Union cavalry commanded by Custer had slipped in behind the Confederates at Trevilian Station and captured many of Hampton's support wagons and 800 of their horses belonging to troops now fighting dismounted.



Faced with disaster, Hampton fired off new orders. His troops withdrew from the battlefield, seemingly bowing to a stunning Union victory. In fact, the Confederates were about to tear into Custer's cavalry. Suddenly, Custer was being attacked on three sides. The Union troops fought furiously and managed to escape, but not without heavy losses. Hampton's men took back all the wagons and horses they had lost earlier in the day and captured Union vehicles as well, including Custer's headquarters wagon, filled with his papers and plans.

Sheridan broke off all attacks and didn't pursue the Confederates until the following afternoon, and by then, Hampton's forces had erected breastworks. Sheridan, who threw waves of dismounted troops at the Confederate barriers to no avail, withdrew. The Union suffered many killed and wounded, stinging Sheridan so badly that he dropped all plans for further movement west. With ammunition dwindling and rations depleted, he turned his force around and returned to Grant and the protection of the infantry. Neither side recorded a strict tally of the casualties in these battles near Trevilian Station, Virginia. Hampton probably lost about 1,000 men killed or wounded, according to historian Douglas Southall Freeman. No estimate of Sheridan's losses is available, although during the three months in which these battles occurred he suffered almost 5,000 killed or wounded.

Throughout the summer and fall of 1864, Hampton continued to win skirmishes and make shrewd decisions in the heat of battle. He even managed a raid in September that netted the Confederacy 2,000 badly needed cattle. Hampton's record prompted Lee to place him in charge of all of Lee's cavalry. Butler also took on greater responsibility, commanding Hampton's cavalry division.

On October 27, 1864, Union forces attempted to break the deadlock around Petersburg. Grant, determined to push the Confederates out of their trenches, ordered his infantry to advance against both the north and south flanks of Lee's lines. Confederate troops commanded by Lieutenant General James Longstreet quashed attacks on the left flank, north of the James River, while to the south near the Boydton Plank Road, Hampton's cavalry joined infantry units in repulsing the Union thrust.

Hampton had scored another victory, but at great cost. His son, Frank, fell wounded during the battle, and another son, Wade Hampton Jr., was shot rushing to help his brother. Hampton rode to his sons, arriving in time to see Frank die and Wade Hampton Jr., gasping for air. Hampton kissed his dying son good-bye and yelled to nearby soldiers to care for Wade. Then he had to ride away to continue directing his forces. Afterwards, Hampton reflected on the horror of those moments with his sons. He decreed that Wade Hampton Jr., who survived, would never again serve in a unit he commanded. "The agony of such a day, and the anxiety and the duties of the battlefield - it is all more than mere man can bear," he said. Nonetheless, Hampton continued to lead the cavalry effectively, inspiring loyalty in his men, though he lacked his predecessor Stuart's flamboyance. There was also another, more significant difference between the two. Observed a cavalryman, "'Jeb' would attempt any necessary task with whatever force he had at hand, and sometimes he seemed to have a delight in trying to discharge his mission with the smallest possible number of men; Hampton believed in superiority of force and exerted himself to concentrate all the men he could at the point of contact."

Hampton's fame grew even as the Confederacy's fortunes faded. Privately he agonized over the destruction he saw and yearned for hostilities to cease. As he wrote his sister, "We gain successes but after every fight there comes in to me an ominous paper, marked 'Casualties,' 'killed' and 'wounded.' Sad words which carry anguish to so many hearts. And we have scarcely time to bury the dead as we press on in the same deadly strife. I pray for peace. I would not give [up] peace for all the military glory won by Bonaparte...."



[Chapter 5: Sherman Burns Confederate Hopes](#)

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Chapter 5 (continued)

In contrast, Sherman had the advantage of not being second guessed by his Union superiors. President Abraham Lincoln gave him a free hand deciding everyday strategies, and General-in-Chief Ulysses S. Grant was a friend since early in the war when Sherman was deeply troubled. Stationed in Kentucky, Sherman grew despondent over failures of Union forces and what he perceived as his superiors' ineptitude. He was plagued by anxiety, often pronouncing, incorrectly, that Confederate forces vastly outnumbered his own. Pacing through his hotel at all hours of the night, he looked haggard and worried. He worked almost around the clock, rarely ate, and continued pacing during daylight hours as well. Sherman's extreme behavior and habit of wearing the same unlaundered clothes for days sparked rumors about his mental state, rumors he fueled by becoming obsessed with reporters. Worried in the winter of 1862-63 that they might ferret out information that he thought shouldn't be published, he tried to banish journalists from his presence, even threatening one New York reporter with hanging.

Several influential Union officials decided the strain of command was pushing Sherman to a mental breakdown. Thomas Scott, assistant secretary of war for the United States, said bluntly, "Sherman's gone in the head, he's loony." Sherman, removed from command in Kentucky, fell into deeper depression and considered suicide. A Cincinnati newspaper flatly labeled him insane.

Seemingly doomed, he was assigned to Grant's command. Here was a general, at last, who seemed organized, acted decisively, and had realistic goals for how to win. Far from shunning Sherman, Grant encouraged him. They fought together and won at Shiloh, and gradually Sherman recovered a sense of balance and confidence. Later, when Grant was lampooned for excessive drinking, Sherman jumped to his defense. "General Grant is a great general," he said. "I know him well. He stood by me when I was crazy and I stood by him when he was drunk; and now, sir, we stand by each other always."

Sherman, like Grant before the war, had trouble adjusting outside the military. Born in Lancaster, Ohio, he was prophetically named for the Shawnee Indian chief, Tecumseh, whom Sherman's father admired for his courage and skill as a warrior. At nine, Sherman lost his father to a fever, and he and his 10 brothers and sisters were parceled out to various families. His father, a respected justice on the Ohio Supreme Court, had suffered serious financial reversals prior to his death, instilling fear in Sherman that he would also fail financially.

He grew to manhood in the home of U.S. Senator Thomas Ewing, treated as part of the family. Called "Cump" as a boy, Sherman loved baseball, playing frequently in a field next to a carpenter's garden. Occasionally, the homemade yarn ball sailed into the garden, and one of the boys would jump the fence to retrieve it. The carpenter, infuriated by the trampling of his plants, chopped up the baseballs whenever they landed in his path, prompting the boys to retaliate by placing rocks inside subsequent baseballs. When the carpenter attacked the next ball, he broke his hatchet. After that, the man threw the wayward baseballs into his stove, inspiring the boys to put gunpowder in the next ball, which exploded, as hoped. Singed and enraged, the carpenter ran down one of the boys and beat him.

Senator Ewing's daughter, Ellen, was Sherman's faithful correspondent after he left home, and with her father's approval, the two eventually married. Through the senator's influence, Sherman attended the United States Military Academy, graduating sixth in his class in

1840. Frustrated early in his military career, he was stationed in Florida in the midst of the second war against the Seminole Indians, but saw no action. Then, during the Mexican-American War, he was again distanced from decisive fighting and became depressed. As he wrote, "To hear of the war in Mexico and the brilliant deeds of the army, of my own regiment, and my own old associates, every one of whom has honors gained and I out in California - banished from fame." While he did not gain recognition in Mexico, he did win notice for meritorious service in California.

Stationed at Charleston, South Carolina, Sherman had rediscovered an early passion, painting. He had finished first in his drawing class at the military academy, and in Charleston produced both landscapes and portraits. He enjoyed painting so much that he found it "painful to lay down the brush" and worried that his compulsion would cause him to neglect his military duties. But after leaving Charleston, Sherman rarely drew again.

At his wife's urging, he quit the military after the Mexican-American War and tried banking, an unfortunate choice because the firm he worked for went bankrupt. In the process, Sherman developed an avid distaste for all bankers, calling them "selfish scoundrels." He wrote, "If one ever assisted an honest poor man without exaction and usury I would like to hear of it." Sherman next tried practicing law, but again proved unsuccessful.

Then, appointed superintendent of a military academy (now Louisiana State University), Sherman finally found an occupation away from the battlefield that he enjoyed. He was highly regarded in Louisiana, and because of his stay there and earlier military posts in the South developed a fondness for Southerners. Sherman, a slave owner as a young adult, seemed at times to support the practice, but he staunchly opposed any state seceding from the United States and later denied any endorsement of slavery. Soon after the Civil War began, he rejoined the military.

Sherman, who loathed the press, called reporters "infamous lying dogs" and carefully restricted their access to information. One journalist, from the same Ohio paper that earlier called Sherman insane, told his editors during the general's Atlanta campaign that they could get more accurate information from Southern newspapers than from his on-the-scene accounts because he was so restrained. Sherman's muzzling of the press meant that his actions went unnoticed for long periods in northern states, which apparently bothered him not at all.

Early in his march through Georgia, Sherman also tried to curb his troops from pillaging, but like Confederate generals had mixed success. Particularly notorious for stealing from civilians were cavalry units from both sides, although strong leaders enforced discipline when they were present. Wheeler acknowledged the problem in an order to his troops, stating that civilians were "frequently robbed of their horses, provisions, and grain by mounted men" claiming to be Confederate cavalry. He instructed officers to stop these "marauders" and to enforce rules that nobody should confiscate supplies without authorization.

As the summer wore on, Sherman steadily pushed south, making few serious errors, avoiding big battles with Johnston's forces. While there was nearly continual fighting, Sherman was never long



diverted from his goal, Atlanta. He methodically evaded the Confederates when they ducked into fortifications. Only once did Sherman lose patience, ordering head-on assaults on June 27, 1864 on Confederates dug in at Kennesaw Mountain, north of Atlanta. In futile attacks against Confederates entrenched on the mountain, 3,000 Union soldiers were killed, wounded or captured before Sherman called a halt and resumed the advance to Atlanta. The toll of Sherman's ongoing Georgia assault was mounting rapidly for both sides. In May and June, each army lost about 17,000 soldiers, wounded, killed or captured.

By July 1864, Sherman was finally knocking on Atlanta's front door, and Johnston, continuing to retreat, was at last ready to make a major counterattack. But President Davis had run out of patience. He removed Johnston from command on the eve of the battle for Atlanta. Many Confederates thought getting rid of Johnston was a ghastly mistake, and several key generals appealed to President Davis to wait while the fate of the city hung in the balance. But he was adamant and on July 17 placed General John Bell Hood in command.

A brave and religious man, Hood was simply outmatched in developing grand strategies. His entire plan was simply to attack. Three furious battles erupted on the edge of the city under his leadership, all failing to dislodge Sherman. What was worse, there were heavy Confederate casualties, with some 17,000 killed, wounded or captured in a single week. Out of options, the Confederates retreated behind Atlanta's earthworks, hoping to survive a siege.

Confederate cavalry, heavily engaged in the battles around Atlanta, had fought little on horseback, battling dismounted so often that many had discarded their sabers. But on July 28, 1864, they rode hard after alarm spread that much of Sherman's cavalry was rampaging south of Atlanta. Wheeler led about 3,000 men, two divisions. These troops had to contend with three divisions of Union cavalry on the move in different locations. The Confederates attacked one division in the morning, sending it in scattered retreat. Then Wheeler and his men headed south, pursuing the other two divisions.

These two Union divisions were supposed to meet the night of July 28 to destroy sections of the Macon and Western Railroad, the main Confederate supply line, but they were both delayed and never connected. The division commanded by Brigadier General Edward McCook was sidetracked attacking a Confederate wagon train. The Union troops took hundreds of prisoners and burned some 500 wagons. They also slaughtered more than 1,000

mules, killing the animals with sabers.

The other division, led by Major General George Stoneman, moved slowly because soldiers plundered along the way, stuffing their saddlebags with anything useful. Many, drunk from stolen whiskey and brandy, could barely stay in their saddles. Furthermore, Stoneman decided that he would not join up with the other Union cavalry after all. Instead, he would ride south after trophies more noteworthy than a mere railroad. He would attack the important central Georgia city of Macon, and after conquering Macon, would proceed to the Confederate prison at Andersonville in southwest Georgia and free all the Union prisoners.

The first part of his plan, attacking Macon, had some expectation of success if Stoneman's soldiers had not been diverted by scavenging. As it was, they didn't arrive near the city until July 29, and by then the alarm had spread about their approach. More than 2,000 defenders crouched behind fortifications, ready to defend Macon.

Stoneman attempted a halfhearted assault anyway. His soldiers dismounted and ran toward a fortified hill, but quickly retreated after Confederates fired their first few shots. Stoneman soon gave up his plans for glory, and hearing that Confederate cavalry might be near looked for a way back to Sherman's infantry.

Throughout July 29, Wheeler, south of Atlanta, pushed the Confederate cavalry hard to find the Union raiders. He divided his force, heading off with part of the cavalry to chase after McCook and sending Brigadier General Alfred Iverson with the rest to search for Stoneman.

After traveling all day and into the night, Wheeler and his soldiers came upon McCook's rear guard, which was moving rapidly forward. The Confederates fired their pistols, triggering return fire from Union soldiers who shot back over their shoulders. The two forces, Union in front, Confederates in back, rode like this, swapping gunfire, the rest of the night and into the morning. McCook's soldiers finally stopped in the afternoon near Newnan to face their pursuers. Wheeler's troops and other Confederate units soon converged and seemed to have the Union force penned, but suddenly, Union soldiers charged, scattering a group of Texas cavalymen and capturing many. Wheeler's troops responded by bringing more cavalry into the fight and managed to rescue the captives. McCook, realizing the fight was hopeless, advised his soldiers that it was every man for himself. The Federals scattered in various directions. Many escaped, including McCook, but many others did not. The Confederates took 600 prisoners.

On July 31, the rest of Wheeler's force, commanded by Iverson, surrounded the Union cavalry led by Stoneman at Sunshine Church. A number of Union soldiers escaped, leaving Stoneman with 700 men atop a hill with two cannons. When the Union force seemed out of ammunition, the Confederates closed in. Union soldiers jammed the last shell into a cannon and fired, then Stoneman ordered the raising of a white flag of surrender. He sat slumped on a log, his face buried in his hands, as the Confederates approached.

Wheeler's Confederate cavalry, over several days, had defeated three separate Union forces, disabling nearly two thirds of Sherman's cavalry. When the Union general received word of the disaster, he immediately guessed what would happen next. Wheeler's cavalry, freed of constraints, would now raid behind the Union Army. Sherman dictated orders and fired off telegrams, alerting all Union supply stations in north Georgia and Tennessee to be ready for a Confederate assault.

On August 9, Sherman ordered a massive bombardment of Atlanta. Some 3,000 shells rained down, destroying downtown. Sherman telegraphed Washington, D.C., that he

planned to "make the inside of Atlanta too hot to be endured...I am too impatient for a siege... One thing is certain, whether we get inside of Atlanta or not, it will be a used-up community by the time we are done with it."

The 2,000 to 5,000 terrified residents who had not fled city huddled for long hours in cellars and dugout bombproofs, any shelter they could find. Despite the enormous destruction, there were surprisingly few casualties, according to historian Albert Castel. Bombardment continued for nearly two weeks before Sherman ordered a halt. The Confederates still held Atlanta.

By mid-August, the Confederate cavalry raid began that Sherman had predicted. Wheeler, with 5,000 to 6,000 troopers, rode north into the same battle-scarred landscape that the two warring armies had passed through earlier. The Confederates destroyed railroad tracks, seized cattle, fought skirmishes, and burned buildings, then moved into southern Tennessee. Sherman, well prepared for all this, seemed unconcerned. Instead, he saw the absence of the Confederate cavalry as an opportunity for him to stage a cavalry raid of his own.

On August 17, he met outside Atlanta with Kilpatrick, recently recovered from his leg wound. The two men and their staffs sat on flimsy stools and upended barrels, discussing Sherman's plans. Kilpatrick would take 4,700 men, most of what remained of the cavalry, and try again to destroy the Macon and Western Railroad south of Atlanta. Kilpatrick was told to wreck as much of the line as possible before Confederate soldiers interfered.

Kilpatrick's force set out the next day. Pockets of Confederates shot at them from behind trees, then disappeared only to reappear farther down the road, fire quickly, then vanish again. The Confederates also built barricades and destroyed bridges, slowing the Union soldiers who plodded forward, traveling only some 20 miles in 24 hours.

Finally, late in the afternoon on August 19, Kilpatrick's force reached the Georgia village of Jonesboro and the railroad where they encountered a small Confederate detachment. They fought briefly, then the Confederates withdrew, leaving the Union soldiers to pull up the tracks. Heavy rain began and persisted just as the troops tried to build fires to heat the iron rails to make them pliable for bending out of shape. Rather than wait for the rain to stop, they merely tossed the rails to the side, a mostly wasted effort. As one Union cavalryman later wrote, the rails could be "relaid and repaired about as quickly as we had torn [them] up."

Kilpatrick wanted to move quickly because Confederates were nearly everywhere around them. The Union soldiers torched several buildings in Jonesboro, including the county courthouse, then left about 10:00 p.m. By late the following morning, a large contingent of Confederate soldiers finally located Kilpatrick's men and attacked. The Union troops fell back, only to run into more Confederates. Trapped, Kilpatrick ordered a cavalry charge. Slashing with sabers, the Union soldiers scattered their attackers and managed to break free. When they returned to Union positions near Atlanta, Sherman summoned Kilpatrick, who exaggerated his success, claiming that the railroad would be useless for at least 10 days, when, in fact, a train pulled into Atlanta within a day. Sherman, alert to Kilpatrick's bragging, nonetheless admired him for his fearlessness, his willingness to battle whatever the odds, and his coolness under fire. "I know Kilpatrick is a hell of a damned fool, but I want just that sort of man to command my cavalry on this expedition," Sherman wrote later that fall.

Still, the general's forbearance was exhausted by Kilpatrick's inept attempt on the railroad, which Sherman fervently wanted destroyed. He ordered most of the Union infantry to

maneuver toward Jonesboro, with the railroad once again their objective. Confederate soldiers stormed out to confront this Union force, and many from both sides died, but Sherman ultimately succeeded. He won control of the railroad and held on, strangling the Confederate lifeline. Hood had no choice but to abandon Atlanta. On September 2, 1864, the city fell into Union hands.

Hood marched his soldiers out of Georgia, while Sherman dispatched part of his army, under Major General George Thomas, to keep watch on them. With his remaining 62,000 soldiers, Sherman prepared to leave Atlanta and head east toward the Georgia coast. The Union soldiers destroyed everything in the city that might be useful to any returning Confederates. Union forces also dismantled train bridges and telegraph wires farther north in the state that they had earlier risked their lives to protect. They would now live off the land, cut off from supplies and communications.

On November 15, 1864, the triumphant Union Army paraded out of Atlanta, with Kilpatrick riding at the very front. Sherman, deeply stirred by the experience, wrote of glancing back at Atlanta and seeing it "smouldering and in ruins, the black smoke rising high in the air, and hanging like a pall over the ruined city." A band struck up *The Battle Hymn of the Republic*, and the soldiers, witness to so much bloodshed, survivors of so many hardships, began to sing. Nothing he had ever heard, Sherman recalled, was "done with more spirit, or in better harmony" as all those voices mingling together singing the chorus - "Glory, Glory Hallelujah; Glory, Glory Hallelujah."

By Christmas, Sherman reached the Georgia port city of Savannah.

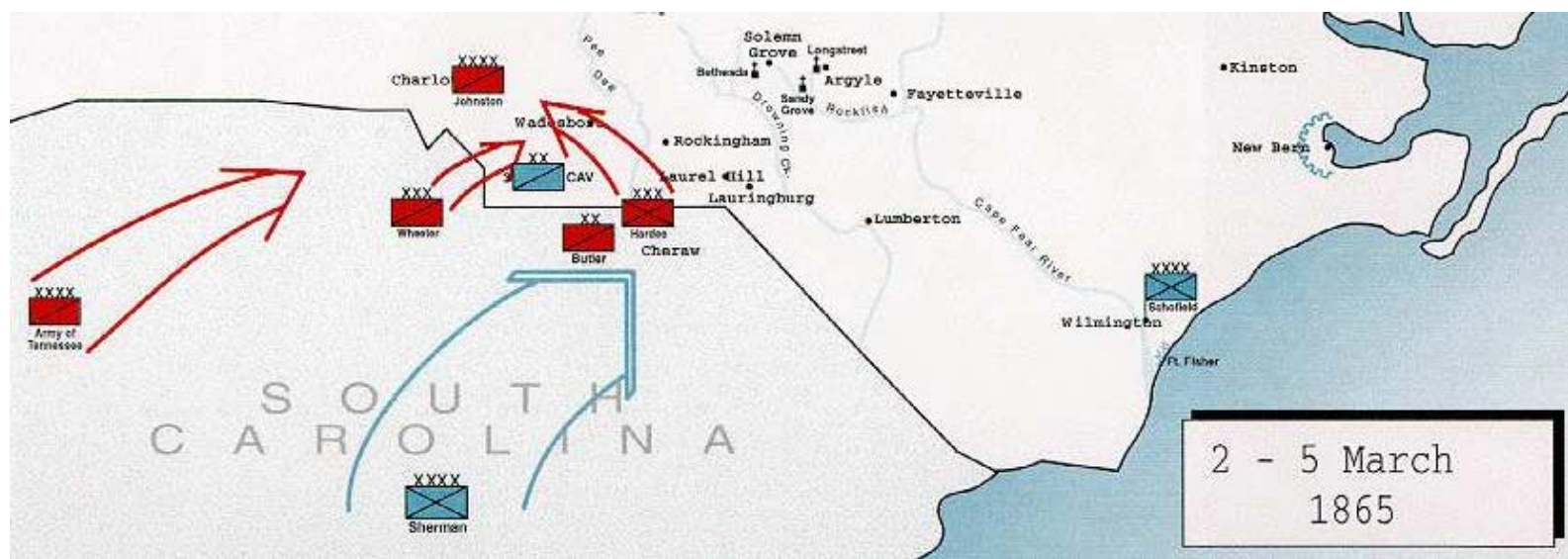


[Chapter 6: The General's Close Call](#)

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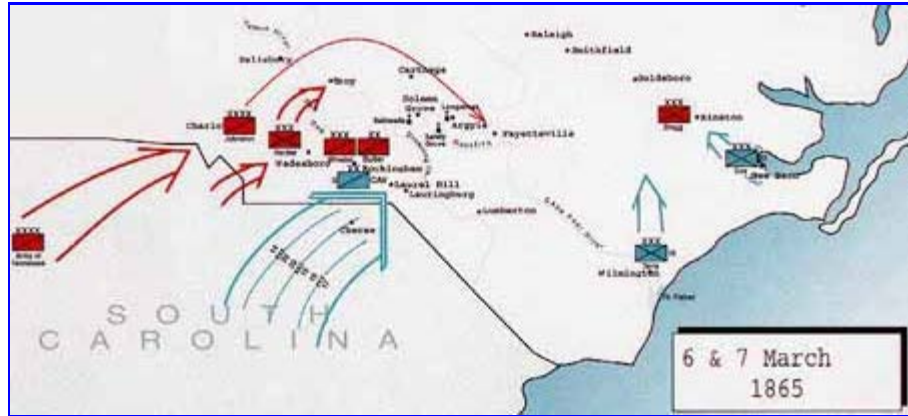






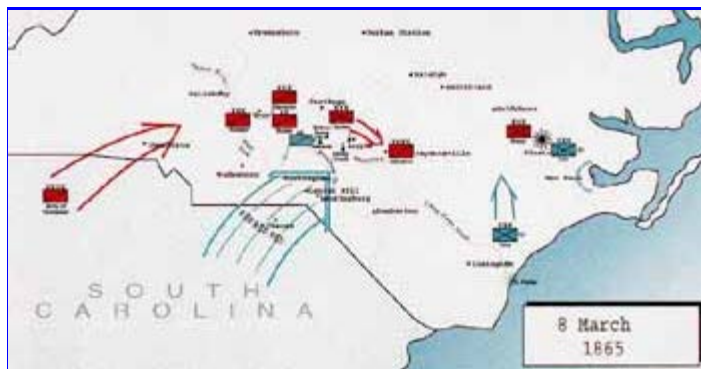
Chapter 6 (continued)

With troops from both sides abruptly changing course, confusion was inevitable. On March 5, to learn where Union and Confederate infantry were headed, Wheeler decided to swim the Pee Dee River to see what was happening on the other side. The river was flooded from heavy rain as Wheeler and two privates plunged into the cold, swift water. "The oldest river men had never seen higher water nor a more angry current," noted an observer.



Safe on the other bank, what they learned spurred Wheeler to change direction from Charlotte toward Fayetteville instead.

So many Confederate and Union soldiers funneling toward the same location made one or more violent collisions unavoidable. On March 7, Confederate cavalry clashed with the 1st Brigade of the Union cavalry at the small community of Rockingham where Wheeler reported that his force killed or captured 35 soldiers.



By March 8, the two Union armies stationed along the North Carolina coast at Wilmington and New Bern were moving inland to link up with Sherman. General Braxton Bragg's Confederates attempted to block the way of troops leaving New Bern in a battle at Kinston, North Carolina.

Sherman's army was now in North Carolina, pouring toward Fayetteville. Also on March 8, the first Confederate infantry arrived in the city. Josephine Bryan Worth, a school girl at the time, described the scene: "...the vanguard of Johnston's Army consisting of Hardee's Corps entered Fayetteville. Only a few detachments and some officers with their staffs came in the first day and the greater part of the night...the defenders of Charleston poured through the place, making an incessant moving panorama of men, horses, cannons, and wagons."

The day was also significant for Confederate cavalry because Wheeler's Corps and the division commanded by Hampton and Butler united, with Hampton placed in charge. The appointment rankled some of Wheeler's soldiers, most of whom were unfamiliar with Hampton, Butler, and their subordinate officers.

Hampton, 47, and Wheeler, 29, shared many similar war experiences, but in different campaigns. Wheeler had fought just as hard and frequently just as successfully as

Hampton, but had not drawn the same attention. Still, he had briefly outranked Hampton and commanded a cavalry corps before him. Competitive friction could be expected between them, but other factors favored their cooperation. Hampton, for example, had experience collaborating with a younger rival, Major General Fitzhugh "Fitz" Lee, in Virginia, and both he and Wheeler were astute leaders devoted to their soldiers and to the Confederacy. They also considered themselves gentlemen and therefore above petty quarrels. Nonetheless, to avoid aggravating a delicate situation, Hampton limited his commands to Wheeler, especially in the presence of Wheeler's men.

Despite good intentions, there was little time to develop a smooth working relationship. The Confederate cavalry had to overtake the infantry to protect them from Union strikes. As the Confederates advanced, their patrols, spread throughout the area, continued encountering Federal cavalry.

One patrol rode up a hill to a farm house near Drowning Creek, a tributary of the Lumber River, about noon on March 8. Evander McLeod, a Confederate soldier on leave from duty on the Carolina coast, was visiting home at the time. He later wrote how his mother and sister prepared food for the cavalymen.

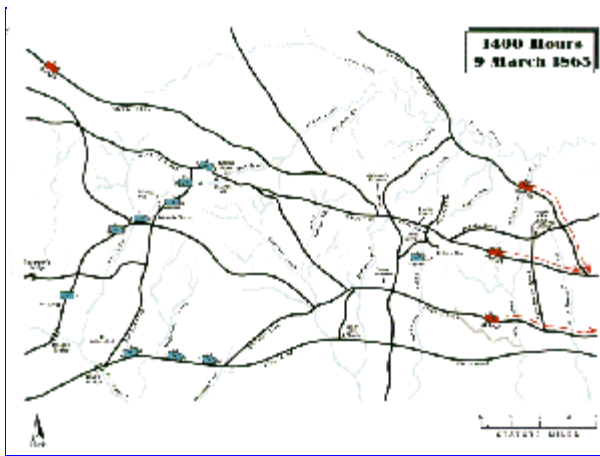
"They were splendid dashing young fellows from Mississippi, who said our patrols were in touch with Yankee cavalry all through the Pee Dee [River] country, and that they [the Union soldiers] would be along directly. They said to mother, 'Stand up to them, old lady. They will try to scare you, but they won't kill you.'"

Later, after the Confederates left, McLeod heard shooting. Guessing that the Union soldiers were arriving, he ran down to the swamps by the creek where his brother and a friend were hiding the family's horses. McLeod related how Union cavalry rode into the yard and entered his house where they "drew their shining swords and demanded of mother 'her gold, her sons, and her horses.' Mother stood up to them all right, and told them to wipe their feet before they came into the parlor."

The soldiers belonged to Kilpatrick's 3rd Brigade. The remaining force stretched out far to the rear, taking the rest of the day and late into the night to reach the area. Kilpatrick arrived with his staff around 8:00 p.m.

"For a little after dark a body of officers covered with mud and wet to the skin, dashed up to the house, and without ceremony took possession," said McLeod. "There were about 12 of them, led by a stocky bald headed man of medium height, who took instant charge of everything. He ordered dinner, but the girls wouldn't cook it. A soldier came with a bushel of sweet potatoes, which he said were to be prepared for the general and his staff. But the girls threw them in the pot and all got together with their mother in the east room. It was Judson Kilpatrick in command of all of Sherman's cavalry. He was really very decent to the women. He left them unmolested in their room."

Kilpatrick's 1st Brigade spent much of the night of March 8 struggling to cross Drowning Creek and nearby swamps and tributaries. Artillery and wagons bogged down in the swamps, forcing the cavalymen to dismount to help haul the equipment through. They struggled in muddy water up to their armpits. Exhausted, the 1st Brigade finally camped about 4:00 a.m., March 9, just a little more than 24 hours before the confrontation at Monroe's Crossroads.



By 8:00 a.m., the entire Union cavalry division was pushing forward again. With little sleep, everyone must have been tired from the previous day's grueling travel. Rain fell, sometimes heavily, off

and on throughout the day. Roads were more muck beds than byways; streams overflowed.

The cavalry passed through rolling hill country, covered in longleaf pine. Pine needles, accumulated over many years, formed a dense blanket on the forest floor. Many of the trees were hundreds of years old and enormous in this era before widespread clear cutting. Slashed scars were visible on the trunks of many trees, evidence of a common local source of revenue, tapping pines for sap. The sap was converted into turpentine used, among other things, to caulk the seams in wooden ships, spawning the term naval stores for turpentine. Small farms, often tucked into the forests, were widely distributed in the region.

As Kilpatrick ordered the Union cavalry to begin moving, first in line were the dismounted soldiers of the 4th Brigade who gradually fell behind as the mounted brigades overtook them. Kilpatrick was taking a risk pressing so hard because of the big gaps that developed between the brigades. If one were attacked, the others might be too far away to help. But Sherman's army was keeping a brisk pace, and Kilpatrick wanted to lead the first Union outfit into Fayetteville.

Despite the rush, Kilpatrick found time the morning of March 9 for more leisurely pursuits, riding in a buggy with two women. Kilpatrick developed a reputation as a lady's man after his wife died in 1863, and some sources reported that several young women accompanied him on his North Carolina campaign. His companions are variously described as stranded school teachers, disreputable characters, and females in men's clothing whom troops called Charley and Frank. In one persistent story, disputed as a legend by some historians, Marie Boozer and her mother were with the general.

Whether Marie Boozer accompanied Kilpatrick or not, she has been described as one of the prettiest women of the time in South Carolina. She and her mother, according to the story, began traveling with the Union cavalry after the fall of Columbia, their home.

Although the womens' identities are uncertain, Kilpatrick rode with his feet dangling outside a buggy and his head resting on the lap of a woman, according to Lieutenant H. Clay Reynolds, a Confederate prisoner walking directly behind them. Reynolds, who served under Wheeler, had been captured the night before. His feet were hurting terribly because his captors had taken his prized riding boots, forcing him instead to wear brogans, heavy work shoes that raised blisters and rubbed off his toenails.

Couriers occasionally brought messages to Kilpatrick from his various commanders and scouts. Scouts, common for both Union and Confederate armies, were vital during the Civil War. They knew how to move undetected in enemy territory, roving in teams across the countryside at all hours, gathering information about the opposition and details about possible routes for their own troops. Kilpatrick probably maintained a company of about

100 scouts, estimates Ken Belew, author of the military staff ride manual about the Monroe's Crossroads battle. On March 9, Union scouts, commanded by Captain Theo F. Northrop, patrolled 10 to 15 miles in front of the vanguard of Kilpatrick's main column.

Northrop arrived about 11:00 a.m. at Monroe's Crossroads, named for Charles Monroe who established the adjacent farm. By the time Northrop and his troops arrived, or shortly thereafter, the farm residents had fled to evade Union troops. The Monroe farm included the main house and a small cabin, apparently the residence of a black woman known to researchers only as Aunt Hannah. There were probably several additional buildings, including sheds and a barn, according to Douglas Scott, National Park Service battlefield archeologist.

Northrop, surveying the area, decided that the nearby field was too big and exposed for his headquarters or as a campsite for his small group of scouts. Instead, he led them south of the farm to the other side of a swamp, which is where Northrop and many of the scouts were when the battle began.

Some 10 miles away, the Union cavalry's 3rd Brigade began arriving at the town of Solemn Grove about 2:00 p.m. (shown as 1400 hours on [Map 6](#)). Solemn Grove, now gone, was a small creek-side community with a post office, country store, mill, and a few houses. A focal point for the surrounding rural area, Solemn Grove was where farmers bought supplies and visited far-flung neighbors. With the arrival of the 3rd Brigade, the community experienced a different sort of visitation.

The 3rd Brigade, with some 1,500 soldiers in three regiments, would bear the brunt of fighting at Monroe's Crossroads. Colonel George Spencer, a New York native who practiced law in Iowa before joining the Union Army early in the war, led the brigade after distinguishing himself during Sherman's campaign through Georgia.

As the 3rd Brigade moved into Solemn Grove, Union scouts approached, riding along Morganton Road, which passed through the community. The scouts reported to Spencer that a large body of Confederate infantry had recently marched through Solemn Grove, heading east on Morganton Road toward Fayetteville. Other Confederate infantry was also moving toward Fayetteville on another road just to the north. The scouts further relayed that numerous Confederate cavalymen were some distance away to the northwest. In short, the 3rd Brigade would soon reach a point between the Confederate infantry and Confederate cavalry, commanded by Hampton.

Spencer, quickly grasping that he was in a situation offering both great opportunity and danger, ordered his troops to prepare defensive positions. They would wait where they were until the rest of the Union cavalry moved closer and until Spencer could talk directly to Kilpatrick. Kilpatrick soon arrived, and Spencer briefed him about the rapidly changing events requiring quick decisions.

Kilpatrick had two options, suggests author Ken Belew. He could wait for his entire division to close up and then hurry toward Fayetteville to try to slam into the exposed Confederate infantry. This probably appealed to Kilpatrick, Belew thinks, because it might garner him favorable notice in Northern newspapers, something Kilpatrick craved. But speeding ahead could prove disastrous. The Union cavalry units might be attacked while fragmented and in motion, when they were at a disadvantage. Even more serious was the chance that Confederate cavalry could slip behind the Union cavalry to attack Sherman's marching infantry, some of which, the XIV (14th) Corps, was already fewer than 10 miles to the south.

Kilpatrick's orders to protect the infantry made the second option his choice. He would divide his force to try to block every conceivable route the Confederate cavalry might use. But this strategy was also hazardous. Kilpatrick planned to avert a crippling Confederate attack by stationing each brigade close enough to the others so that if one fell into trouble the others could rush to the rescue. He underestimated the impact the bad roads and rain would have in providing such a defense.



Kilpatrick dispatched a courier to the 1st Brigade, still some distance away, ordering the troops to head toward Chicken Road, one possible Confederate cavalry route. That night, the 1st Brigade camped at Bethesda Presbyterian Church. Because of the continuing rain, many of the Federals crawled under the church to sleep. The 1st Brigade would be too far away to play any role in the upcoming battle.

Shortly before 5:00 p.m. (shown as 1700 hours on [Map 7](#)), Kilpatrick's 4th Brigade of 400 dismounted troops arrived at Solemn Grove. The soldiers, who had been walking vigorously to catch up with the 3rd Brigade, collapsed from fatigue. Now Kilpatrick had two brigades, the 3rd and 4th, assembled, along with some artillery. The 2nd Brigade was close by to

the south. Kilpatrick was ready to enact the rest of his plan. He ordered the 3rd and 4th Brigades to head east on Morganton Road toward Fayetteville. They were to camp at Green Springs, a well-known haven among local residents, just south of Monroe's Crossroads. Farmers, on their way to market in Fayetteville, frequently camped at this cool spot with fresh water. Kilpatrick, and his Confederate counterparts, often used local guides, as well as scouts, to help find such key landmarks in an age when maps were often poor, if available at all.

All too soon, the tired 4th Brigade was marching again, followed shortly by the 3rd Brigade on horseback. Bringing up the rear were two horse-drawn cannons and the men who operated them. Together, this force heading for Monroe's Crossroads amounted to about 2,000 soldiers. The two women continued to ride in their buggy beside the troops, but Kilpatrick remained at Solemn Grove to await the 2nd Brigade. As rain started again, daylight began to fade.

Sometime before 6:00 p.m., the 2nd Brigade started arriving at Solemn Grove, commanded by Brevet Brigadier General Smith Dykins Atkins. Atkins, from Illinois, was another longtime veteran of the war and also a lawyer before military enlistment.

Kilpatrick explained his strategy to Atkins. When the entire 2nd Brigade reached Solemn Grove, the troops were to proceed down Morganton Road and camp within a few miles of Monroe's Crossroads. Once they were in camp and the other troops were stationed at Monroe's Crossroads, the Union cavalry would effectively obstruct Confederate access to two routes into Fayetteville - Morganton and Yadkin Roads. Kilpatrick thought he was springing a trap, unaware that instead the trap was about to be set for him.

Kilpatrick left Solemn Grove, while horse soldiers of the 2nd Brigade waited for the rest of the brigade to arrive. About 6:00 p.m., Kilpatrick rode down Morganton Road and into danger, accompanied by a small contingent of Kentucky cavalry riding in front. Kilpatrick, a few escorts, and his staff traveled close behind. There were about 40 men in all, trotting through the rain.

Thundering toward them was much of Hampton's Confederate cavalry. Kilpatrick still thought that the main opposing force was far behind, when in fact the Confederates were advancing down Yadkin Road which deadended at Morganton Road, just a short distance ahead of the Union commander. What's more, the Confederates intended to camp that night at Green Springs and Monroe's Crossroads, precisely where Kilpatrick planned to bed down.

Hampton rode some distance back in the long lines of Confederate cavalymen. Butler's Division of about 1,200 soldiers led the column. Wheeler's Corps, numbering some 4,600 troops, followed. By 9:00 p.m., (shown as 2100 hours on [Map 8](#)), the first Confederates, part of Butler's Division, reached the intersection of Yadkin and Morganton Roads where they reined their horses to a stop.

The night was virtually pitch black. Saddles creaked; rain drummed on the men and their mounts. South Carolina troopers, alert for signs of Union soldiers, noticed thousands of hoof prints in the soft roadbed. They alerted their squadron commander, Lieutenant John Humphrey, who cautiously peered around through the dark, but could spot no Union troops. Humphrey walked his horse out onto Morganton Road, turned, and issued a quick command to a nearby soldier who spurred his mount back along the Confederate column to tell Butler to come forward at once.

Humphrey showed the hoof prints to Butler, pointing out that they were only partly filled with water, despite the heavy rain, indicating that the riders had traveled the road within the past hour. The two Confederate officers speculated that at least a brigade of Union cavalry was just ahead, a correct guess. Kilpatrick's 3rd and 4th Brigades and their artillery section, on the way to Monroe's Crossroads, had made the tracks shortly before.

A hushed voice behind them announced that riders were approaching. Humphrey and Butler grew still to hear the faint clip clop of horse hooves, steadily growing louder in the splashing rain. Did he have any patrols in that direction? Butler asked Humphrey. "No, sir," came the answer.

Quietly, the two officers backed their horses out of the intersection. The thick pine woods and darkness shielded them from the view of the oncoming riders. Butler motioned for everyone to keep still. He rode alone out to the middle of Morganton Road.

"Who comes there?" he shouted. The approaching horsemen, about 30 of them, brought their horses to a stop.

"Fifth Kentucky," was the reply.

Butler now knew he was dealing with Union troops commanded by Kilpatrick.

"Ride up, sir. I want to talk with you," Butler instructed, his voice commanding authority. A Union officer and an orderly obediently walked their horses toward Butler, who then turned his own mount, telling the two to follow him. Darkness, and the heavy mud splattered on them all, made distinguishing their different uniform colors impossible, so Butler easily led the pair toward a cluster of Confederate soldiers. Whipping out his revolver, he pointed it at the Federals, and quietly, but firmly, ordered their surrender. At that moment, the South Carolina troops charged out and surrounded the other 26 Union soldiers farther down the road. With no chance of escape, the Federals dropped their reins in submission. Their part of fighting in the Civil War had come to an end. They were captured without a shot.

A second group of riders, not far behind, escaped by riding into nearby woods. Kilpatrick, the Union cavalry commander, was among them. They crashed blindly through the trees, branches grabbing at their clothes, sometimes lashing their faces. Some riders lost their hats as they fled.

The Confederates decided not to pursue. Kilpatrick apparently assumed he had just narrowly eluded another small Confederate patrol, not the first wave of Hampton's entire corps. Riding through the woods, Kilpatrick made his way toward Monroe's Crossroads, some four miles to the east.

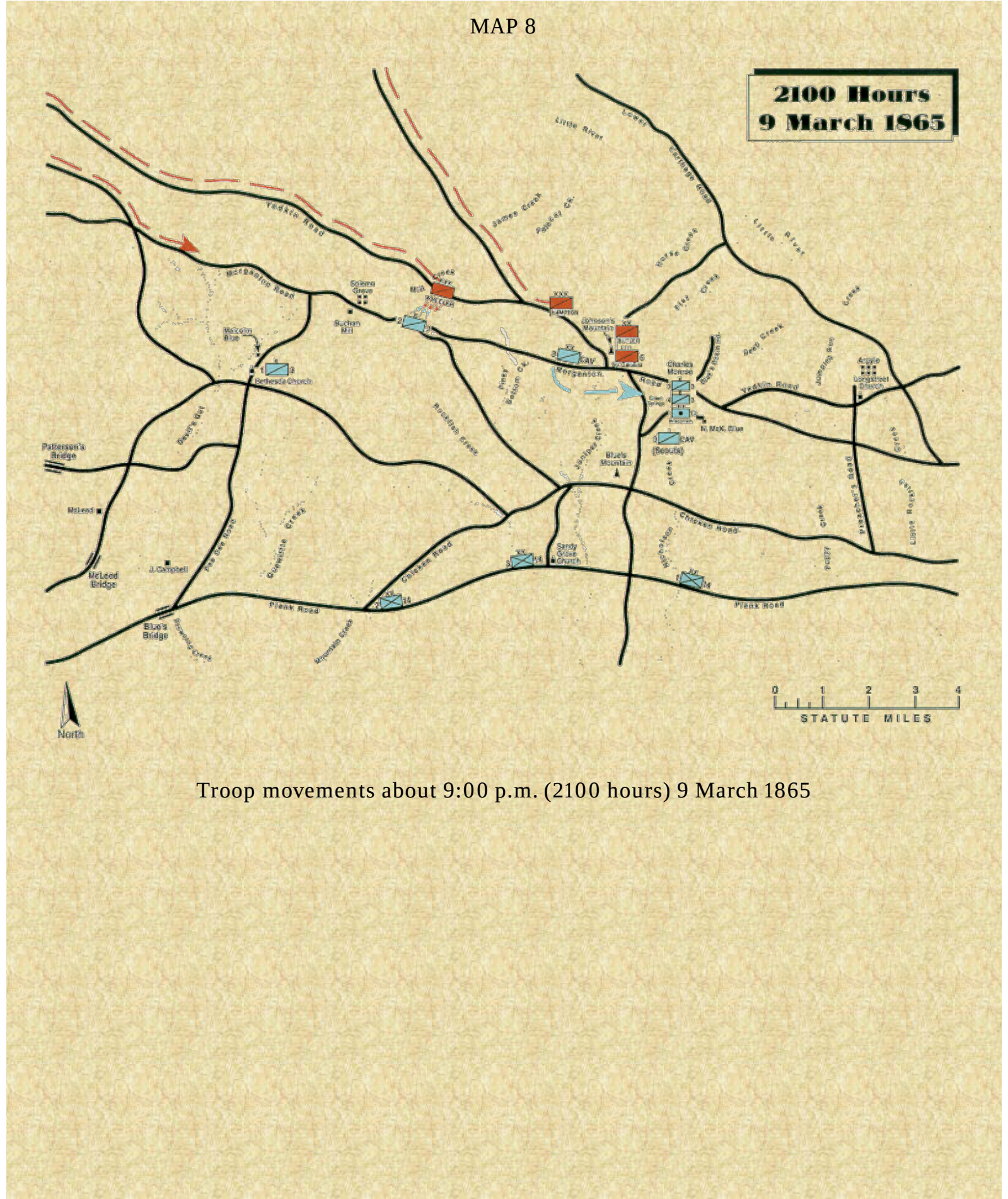


[Chapter 7: Under Cover of Darkness](#)

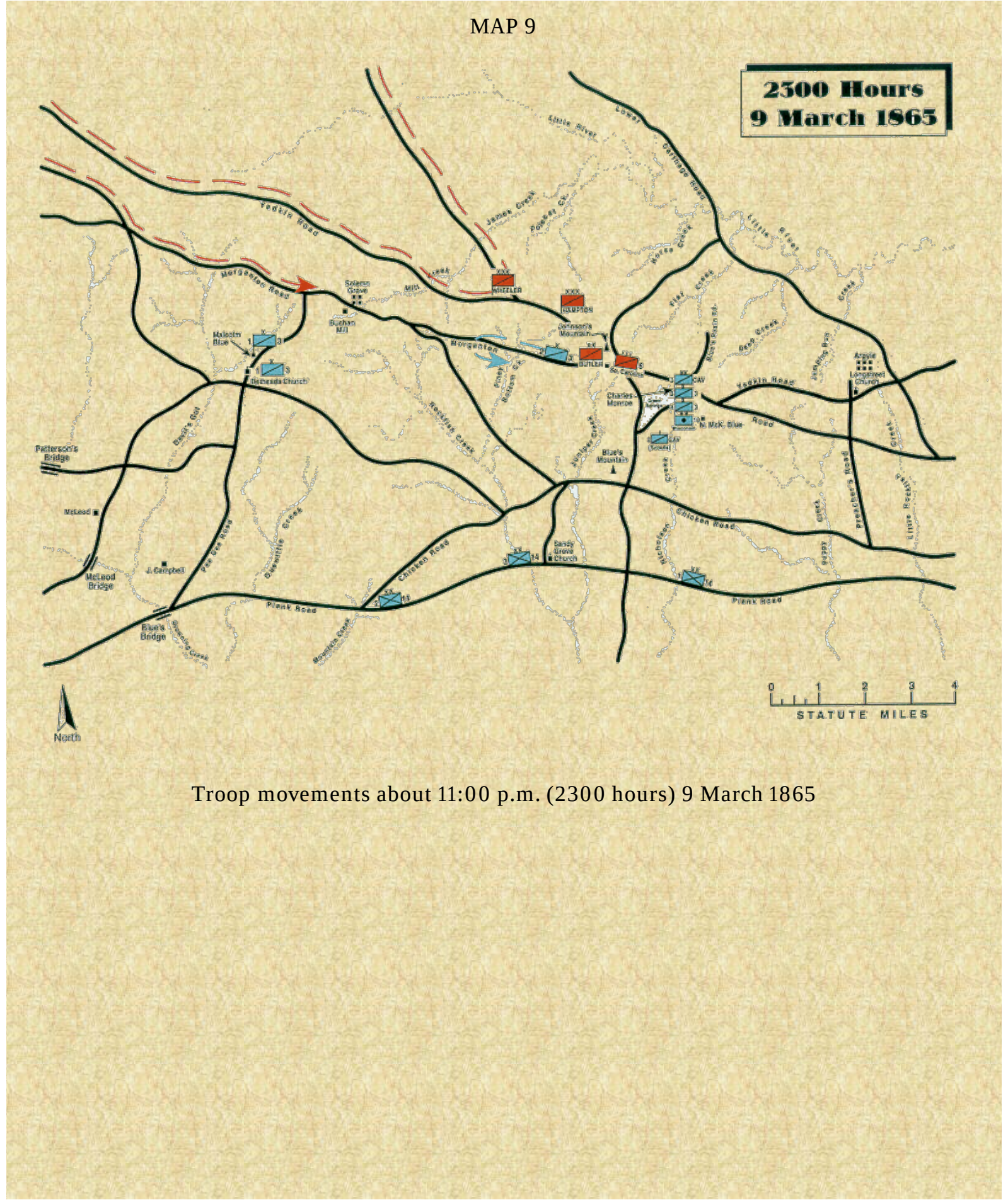
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MAP 8



Troop movements about 9:00 p.m. (2100 hours) 9 March 1865



Chapter 7 (continued)

Atkins halted his brigade, then rode with the soldier to a slight valley. They slowed their horses to a walk as the road climbed a hill. At the summit, they could make out the figures of a large gathering of Confederates below on both sides of the road. He was glimpsing Butler's Division from behind. None of the Confederates noticed Atkins, perhaps because their attention was riveted ahead toward the Union camp. Atkins had seen enough. He turned his horse and gradually picked up speed as he headed back to his troops. Confederates, perhaps outnumbering his own force, were between him and Kilpatrick's camp. Atkins guessed that Kilpatrick was unaware of the imminent danger. He ordered the brigade to turn and retrace the steps they had just taken. They would try to discover some way around the Confederates to reach Kilpatrick, who would soon be in dire need of their help.

Atkins rode through his ranks so he could again be near the lead, searching as he went for a road leading south. Atkins knew Confederates were to his north because his soldiers had already battled with them, and he knew more Confederates were to his east because he had just seen them clustered by the road. He also may have surmised that Confederate cavalry was pouring in behind him to the west. Atkins was running out of time. He and his horse soldiers had to head south quickly.

Sometime during the night the rain diminished to a drizzle and visibility improved slightly, especially in open spaces along major roads. Because there were few residents in the area, there was little light from dwellings, but some light may have come from burning turpentine or pine rosin. Union infantrymen, some of whom were now within about five miles of the Union cavalry, often set such fires by torching containers collecting pine sap from trees. Flames from the burning sap sometimes shot high in the sky, making the trees look like giant torches and causing Union infantry traveling through North Carolina to complain about being covered with soot.

Atkins soon discovered a trail heading south snaking through thick woods where visibility was especially poor. The Union forces had stumbled on a path probably carved out of the woods for reaching a turpentine pit or rosin pile. The 2nd Division slowed to a walk because the trail became so narrow that soldiers had to ride in a single file. Atkins had to squeeze his horse by rider after rider as he moved forward to lead the column. The trail played out in less than a mile. The Union forces forged ahead through the woods, heading east in the direction they hoped would lead to Kilpatrick. The vegetation thickened and became more tangled. Soon some men plunged into a swamp.

"After marching about three miles we turned to our left, striking a swamp which, on account of the recent heavy rains, we found almost impassable for a man on horseback," a soldier with the 9th Ohio Cavalry recalled. "Our artillery stuck, the horses floundering in the mud and water until it was with great difficulty they could be saved from drowning."

Water rose to the hubs of wagon and cannon wheels. Some wagons were so pinned in by other vehicles and trees that there was no way to turn them around. Extracting themselves from their predicament took the soldiers of the 2nd Brigade until past dawn. Now both Kilpatrick's 1st and 2nd Brigades were out of range to help him, at least till midmorning, and couriers dispatched to warn him couldn't get through. When the fight came, Kilpatrick would have to depend on what he already had at Monroe's Crossroads - two cannons, the 3rd and 4th Brigades, and a company of scouts well south of the Union camp.

During the early hours of March 10 ([Map 10](#)), while most Union soldiers at Monroe's Crossroads slept, many of the Confederates were busy. Curious about his scouts' easy access to the Union camp, Butler decided to make his own reconnaissance ([Map 11](#)). He rode with some of the scouts into the thick underbrush near Nicholson Creek to the west of the Union camp. At the edge of a low-lying area, he parted leaves and looked up a gradual incline toward the Monroe farmhouse. The trees thinned into an opening where he could see the dwelling, probably lit by a few lanterns in the windows. Near the house, the light colors of tents stood out like beacons against a canopy of black. Small campfires flickered here and there along the ridge. Butler saw no guards, which "enabled us to ride almost up to his [Kilpatrick's] campfires without being discovered."

Butler rode back toward Morganton Road to report his findings to Hampton and Wheeler. Hampton began to plan the assault. Sometime after the meeting, Wheeler met his chief of scouts, Captain Alexander May (A.M.) Shannon. Wheeler told him what he knew about the layout of the Union camp and asked Shannon to learn more. Wheeler was particularly interested in any details about where Kilpatrick was spending the night.

Shannon, a Texan, was a daredevil. His scouts sometimes dressed as Union soldiers and frequently infiltrated close to Union camps and guards. They were also known for terrorizing Federal foraging parties and stragglers. Skillful as they were, their bravado sometimes led them to take foolish chances, and many were captured.



To meet Wheeler's request for more information, Shannon and his scouts investigated by riding along a ridge west of the Union camp. This ridge ran parallel to the other ridge where Union troops were, allowing the Confederates to see over thick underbrush along Nicholson Creek into the camp. The creek bank was heavily matted with turkey oaks and huckleberry and blueberry bushes. The ridge where Shannon rode had little understory because the tall long leaf pines shut off sunlight to the ground, choking off growth. Ground between the large tree trunks was quite open. Pine needles muffled the sounds of their horses.

The scouts rode several hundred yards along the ridge before spotting movement ahead. Shannon gave hand signals to his soldiers. Silently, they converged on a handful of Union troops. The Union soldiers didn't see the Confederates until it was too late. Surrounded, they surrendered. They were the first and only guards the Confederates discovered around the camp.

While some of the scouts returned to Wheeler with the prisoners, Shannon concocted one of his risky moves. He wanted to know more about the Union camp, particularly the location of any prisoners, including his close friend, Lieutenant Clay Reynolds, who was captured March 8. Reynolds was the Confederate prisoner forced to walk behind the buggy occupied by Kilpatrick and the two women.

Shannon decided to send volunteers into the Union camp on foot, cautioning them that even one misstep would endanger the entire Confederate plan. The volunteers, leaving their

horses with fellow scouts, crept forward from different directions and disappeared. Scout A.F. Hardie waited in the woods.

"While sitting on our horses and keeping a strict watch for any movement, we heard someone coming from the direction of our command on horseback," he remembered. "We sat alert, with pistols cocked, waiting for him to ride up, as we were too close to the enemy to challenge him. When he rode up, we discovered that it was General Wheeler; and as he knew each member of the scouts by name, I said: 'This is Hardie, General.' He asked: 'Where are the enemy?' Pointing to them, I said: 'There they are, General.'"

Wheeler looked where Hardie pointed, then, incredulous, said, "What, that near and all asleep? Won't we have a picnic at daylight?" He asked to be directed to Shannon, who was waiting elsewhere on the ridge, and rode toward him. As Wheeler and Shannon conferred, Confederate scouts Joe Rogers and B. Peebles emerged from the woods, each leading several horses. They had walked around unnoticed inside the Union camp and stolen the animals.

Furthermore, they had learned that prisoners were located near the farmhouse where they thought Kilpatrick was quartered. Wheeler complimented them on getting the new mounts, then ordered Shannon to station men on the camp perimeter. They would appear to be the Union's own pickets. That way, if some Union officer glanced about, he would think proper guards were in place.

Later, Wheeler may have also ordered other soldiers to enter the Union camp on foot, according to Natt Holman of the 8th Texas Cavalry, known as the Terry Texas Rangers. "General Wheeler called for four men from my regiment to go on foot, as horseback was considered too risky, to spy out the situation of the enemy, telling the volunteers to meet at a designated place.... After several hours, the men returned, riding bareback, and each led a horse that he confiscated for his trouble. The Terry Texas boys had much aversion to walking."

As daylight approached, more and more of Wheeler's cavalry arrived after a long night of hard riding on bad roads, but it became obvious that not everyone would be in place in time for the battle. Wheeler and his officers moved the soldiers they had into position according to Hampton's plan.

The Confederates would form a modified semicircle around the west and north of the Union camp. Wheeler's two divisions would occupy the center of the semicircle, as well as the southernmost point. To the north would be Butler's Division. These were the soldiers who would probably reach the farmhouse first. Sometime in the predawn hours, Kilpatrick and his female companion moved back into the house.

Near daybreak, Wheeler ordered Brigadier General William Y.C. Humes to lead his division nearer the Union camp ([Map 12](#)). Humes' soldiers would charge from the southernmost part of the Confederate lines. Born in Abingdon, Virginia, Humes, 35, graduated second in his class of 1851 from the Virginia Military Institute and practiced law in Tennessee before the war.

Humes directed his soldiers to take their places behind the long ridge that blocked their view of the Union camp. According to Hampton's plan, Humes' Division was to form for attack on dry ground between U-shaped wetlands created by the confluence of two small streams, Nicholson Creek and a tributary.

In the darkness, Humes' soldiers bogged down in the swamp, pulled back, and swung away about 20 yards. This small directional error proved costly because they moved outside the

U-shaped lowlands. When the battle began, instead of crossing a relatively small area of swamp, they confronted some 200 yards of deep, virtually impenetrable muck. Brigadier General Thomas Harrison's Texas Brigade would lead the division's charge into the swamp.

Major General William Wirt Allen's Division would charge from the center of Confederate forces. Allen, 30, owned an Alabama plantation and graduated from Princeton University. He had convalesced from serious battle wounds most of 1863 before returning to action. Allen had Wheeler's utmost confidence.

Brigadier General James Hagan's Alabama Brigade would spearhead the charge of Allen's Division. Allen chose 20 Alabamians for a special detail. Once fighting started, they were to ride to a large tent in the Union camp where Allen thought they would find Kilpatrick.

The third Confederate division, Butler's, was to be led by Young's Brigade, led by Colonel Gilbert J. Wright, with troops from Georgia, Alabama, South Carolina, Kentucky, and Mississippi. A few soldiers from this brigade were also picked to help capture Kilpatrick. Butler instructed a Captain Bostick to race with this detail toward the house where he thought Kilpatrick was. They were to surround the house and wait for reinforcements.

Wheeler also sought the honor of capturing Kilpatrick, ordering Shannon, his chief of scouts, to ride to the house when the battle began. These three separate schemes to capture the Union commander demonstrated that none were sanctioned or coordinated by Hampton, theorizes Ken Belew. Pouring so much energy into chasing one man diverted precious resources from the far more pressing concern of winning the battle.

By 5:30 a.m., Butler's Division maneuvered into position in woods north of the Union camp. Butler had about 1,200 soldiers, with some held in reserve, ready to spring into action when called. Wheeler's two divisions usually consisted of slightly more than 4,000 soldiers, but some units were slow arriving because of the bad weather and poor roads. One source contends Wheeler had 1,189 troops when the battle began, but his total strength may have been greater. He, like Butler, kept some soldiers in reserve to be summoned when needed.

At the start of the battle, each side had at least some 2,000 soldiers, but the Confederates may have had more. Also, Confederate troops kept arriving during the battle. Monroe's Crossroads presented an uncommon chance for the Confederates, who had become accustomed to fighting forces more numerous than their own.

There was one final conference before the charge. Wheeler met with Hampton to review last-minute details. He suggested that the best results would come from soldiers dismounting before charging into the Union forces, but Hampton disagreed. With great dignity, according to a private who viewed the exchange, Hampton replied, "General Wheeler, as cavalymen, I prefer making this capture on horseback." Wheeler didn't argue. Everything was set, except for one last graceful gesture. Hampton, demonstrating again the deference to Wheeler he had shown since being appointed his superior, asked the general to command all the Confederate forces and to lead the charge. Hampton would wait with Wheeler's reserve troops until called.

Wheeler accepted the honor and swung onto his white charger, raised his pistol, and rode with his escort to the front to take his place at the center of the bristling semicircle of troops. A bugler named Pelote, whose first name is unknown, rode beside Wheeler. Shannon's scouts, riding in front of Allen's Division, were next in order. The rain had stopped. A thick fog floated up from the swamp and drifted into the Union camp. Birds chattered. Horses flicked their tails. Soldiers' hearts thumped inside their chests.

Wheeler gave the command, "Forward!"

His white horse took its first steps. Officers echoed Wheeler's orders down the line. Some distance away, Butler watched Wheeler's troops, waiting for movement. When he saw them stir, he waved for his own men to advance.

Wheeler commanded, "The Walk!"

Now, most of the cavalry, a sea of uniforms and horses, was moving. On Wheeler's right, many of the cavalrymen hadn't yet seen the Union camp because they had formed in the dark behind the long ridge. Even when they reached the ridge summit, they couldn't see much because of the fog, but they could make out the Monroe House above the fog about 500 yards away.

Kilpatrick stepped onto the porch, perhaps not yet fully awake. He must have intended to be outside only briefly because he wore only a shirt and long underwear. Perhaps he was checking to ensure his prized horses were well cared for and fed. He leaned across the porch railing. All around him, hundreds of soldiers slept. Here and there, a few stirred. Some yawned as they rolled up their blankets. Others folded their makeshift shelters. A few early risers had coffee brewing and breakfast cooking over open fires.

Wheeler shouted, "The Trot!"

Horses quickened their pace. Soldiers gritted their teeth, clenched their sabers, checked their revolvers. Some must have murmured prayers and wished their friends good luck. On Wheeler's right, the cavalry rode down the ridge slope into the fog. On his left, Butler's soldiers were now almost in the open.

Wheeler yelled, "The Gallop!"

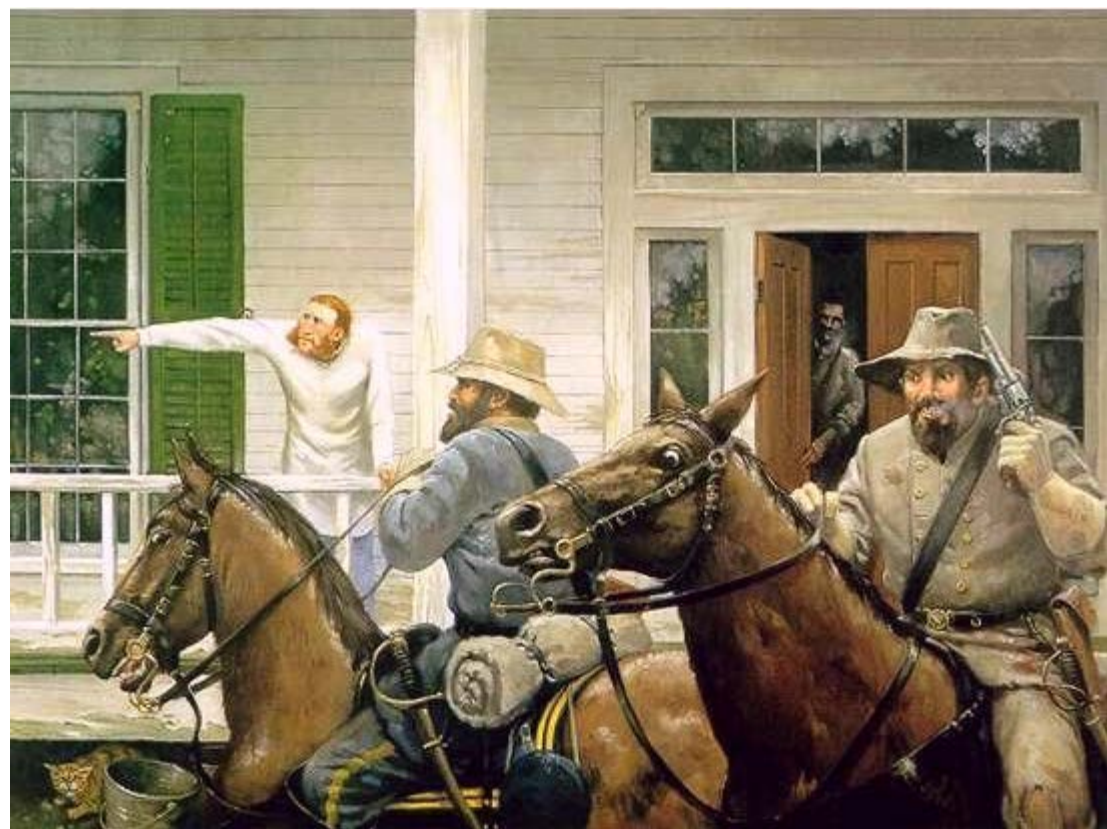
The entire force leaped forward almost as one. Wheeler, Butler, and hundreds of others streaked toward the camp ([Map 13](#)). Wheeler lowered his pistol, pointing it straight ahead. The bugler lifted the horn to his lips to play the notes signaling a charge. Loud, chilling war cries knifed through the air.



Chapter 8: A Dangerous Opportunity

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Chapter 8 (continued)

From the first shots of the dawn assault, most Union soldiers who escaped raced down the steep incline south of the main camp. They kept running through the field into a pine forest that grew denser the further they ran, with Confederates on horseback chasing close behind them. The Federals ran past the trees and into thick undergrowth bordering Nicholson Creek and the adjacent swamp ([Map 14](#)). Some rushed into the swamp, splashing deeper and deeper until the water was up to their necks. A few pressed on, so desperate to escape that they made it all the way across the bog and still kept going.

Many others hit the deep water and went no further. Most couldn't swim. They floundered desperately about, getting caught in and slipping on underwater snags and tree branches. Fearing being shot while tangled helplessly in the bog, they waded back the way they had come to find fellow soldiers crouched behind trees near a slight rise in the land. These Federals were waiting for the next Confederate assault. Some of them were half dressed, and most had left all of their meager possessions behind, except for their weapons. Experienced soldiers, almost all had instinctively grabbed their firearms and ammunition as they fled. Now they grimly trained their weapons forward, prepared to die rather than submit.

But the expected assault never came. Confederates pursuing Union troops into the swamp soon turned around and scattered, concluding that the escaping Union troops would continue running for miles. In fact, momentum of the Confederate attack was spent, although some fighting continued in the camp as pockets of Union soldiers continued to resist. Despite the continuing gunplay, many Confederates were already celebrating victory. Hooping and hollering, they tore into the Union wagons, ripping apart boxes and sacks laden with clothing, ammunition, food, and other supplies. The spoils were irresistible. Scores of Confederates dismounted, became separated from their regiments, and began hauling away whatever they could grab. Seeing this frenzy, other Confederates eagerly rode toward the wagons for their share of the goods, carelessly turning their backs on a still potent foe. Wheeler, growing concerned, commanded troops to cease plundering and to hitch horses to the wagons and artillery to haul them away. But his orders came too late.

Union officers were assuming control, organizing troops on the edge of the swamp, joined at some point by Kilpatrick, who added his voice to encourage the soldiers. Recovered from their initial shock, the Union forces were now ready to fight. They crept forward, using the cover of pine trees, and began firing into the camp.



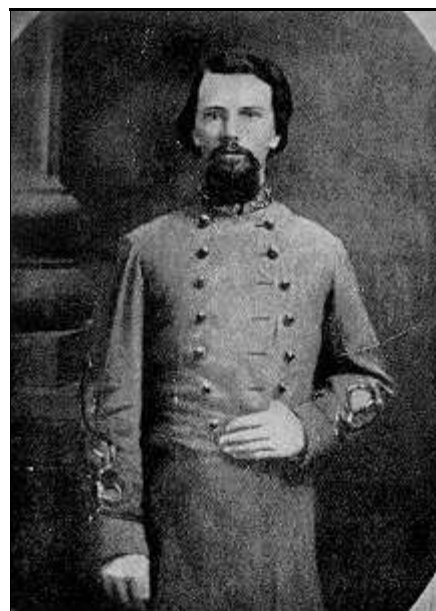
This time it was the Confederates who were caught unaware. Startled by the flurry of gunshots behind them, they turned to see hundreds of Federal firearms flashing. Mimicking the Union troops just moments before, some Confederates hunkered down behind whatever cover they could find. Others, carrying loot from the wagons, dropped their loads and ran to their horses. Many retreated to the north end of the camp. Officers tried organizing them to fight, but halting the confusion amid gunfire was difficult. Regiments mingled together; some soldiers had strayed far from their own units. Commanding officers were also separated from their

troops.

Confederates north of the camp began shooting back at the blue-coated soldiers climbing the hill, catching fellow Confederates, and perhaps some Union troops, in the crossfire. Wheeler was among those trapped between the lines, separated from most of his staff. He was determined to regain the initiative. Spotting Reynolds, the former prisoner, Wheeler ordered him to act as his escort and staff. Reynolds was dumbfounded. "General," he shouted, "we are between our line and the enemy's, and both are shooting this way!"

"Never mind that," Wheeler insisted. "We must keep our men advancing." Wheeler, alarmed by the growing disarray of Confederate troops, sent a courier to find Humes' Division, which had been blocked by the swamp. Wheeler sent orders that the division should move toward Morganton Road and storm into the camp from the northwest, the same route Wheeler had followed at the beginning of the battle.

Butler, in another part of the field, also saw that the Confederates were in increasing danger and dispatched a courier to summon his reserves. The reserves, commanded by Brigadier General Evander McIvor Law, waited at the intersection of Morganton and Blue's Rosin Roads. Or so Butler thought.



The courier, arriving at the crossroads where Law was supposed to be, found neither him nor the reserves, and galloped back to tell Butler that no back-up troops were coming. While Butler considered his next move, Wheeler rode across the field to confer with him. Later, Butler remembered that Wheeler "...came through himself with a few of his staff and escort. He rode up and inquired about my command. I replied, 'scattered like the devil; where is yours?' He said he had encountered a bog through which his division could not pass, and that he had ordered it to make a circuit to the left, and come around on my track. This, of course, took time, and in the meantime Kilpatrick's 1,500 dismounted men recovered from the shock of our first attack and gathered themselves behind pine trees and with their rapid-firing Spencer carbines, attacked us savagely."

Wheeler rode back to his troops. As Butler waited for Wheeler's missing division to appear, he watched a developing duel between soldiers whose joust on horseback resembled the clashes of knights of old.

"You can imagine my surprise, then, when I discovered a mounted man approaching us and showing fight," Butler wrote. "About the same time I noticed a Confederate moving out to meet him, who, I supposed was a member of the Cobb Legion. His back was turned to me and I could not identify him in the early dawn. However, I said to myself, 'They are about matched; I will see it out without interfering.' They got within about 10 paces of each other, when the Federal fired first, followed in an instant by a shot from the Confederate's revolver.

"The Federal fired a second time and the Confederate fired almost simultaneously, and, I discovered, hit his antagonist, but the Federal managed to fire a third shot and with the report of the Confederate's third fire the Federal tumbled from his horse, mortally wounded. I dismissed the matter from my mind and was surprised afterwards to learn the

Confederate was my brother, Captain James Butler. It was the gamest fight I ever saw."

About the same time, Butler's other brother, Nat, was shot in the right elbow, a wound so serious that surgeons later amputated his arm.

Hand-to-hand combat continued. Confederate Private Wiley C. Howard recalled watching another Confederate named Shed fighting with a Federal trooper. Howard hurried to help, slashing the Union soldier's head with his saber, presumably killing him and sparing Shed's life. But only for a time. Shed soon died at the Battle of Bentonville, North Carolina.

The confusion, the close contact fighting, and troopers shooting this way and that, sometimes at their own comrades, became too much for some Confederates who tried to get away from the battle. Posey Hamilton and a companion thought they could ride across the swamp on the western side of the battlefield, but ran into the Harrison's Confederate horsemen finally emerging.

"My friend and I rode down about 250 yards to find a crossing where some men and horses had crossed, but when we got to it nothing could go through," Hamilton recalled. "We saw horses all covered in mud except their heads and necks, and their riders trying to save themselves by clinging to tuffs. Knight and I looked at that black mud hole and decided at once that we would not attempt to cross, so we turned back and retraced our steps, finding that we were completely hemmed in."

Union forces formed a concave line, following the ridge line, and advanced to the southern limits of their former camp and stopped. The ongoing battle before them now seemed to be a draw. Bullets filled the air. Neither side gave an inch.

Wheeler sent a courier to summon his reserve brigade, commanded by Brigadier General George Gibbs Dibrell, a Tennessee merchant and farmer who had fought with Lieutenant General Nathan Bedford Forrest. The courier rode to where the reserve soldiers were supposed to be, but they were gone, and he couldn't find them anywhere. Disaster loomed closer for the Confederates. Now, neither Wheeler nor Butler could muster their reserves to charge the Federals. Hampton, when the Confederates began faltering in the Union camp, apparently had gathered both Wheeler's and Butler's reserves and moved them out of assigned position. Hampton then led at least some of the troops into action himself. They were swallowed up in the free-for-all of the battle, mingling with other units. Confederate Scout J.C. Covin recalled glancing up and seeing Hampton in the thick of fighting, shooting down a Union soldier.

Nonetheless, although Wheeler and Butler could not summon their reserves, Confederate and Union reinforcements were approaching the battlefield, including Union scouts ([Map 15](#)). The scouts, encamped on the opposite side of the Nicholson Creek swamp, south of the main camp, were awakened when fugitives from the battle began pouring into their midst. The fleeing soldiers arrived dazed, almost in shock, and they were covered with mud, having pushed all the way through the bog. Other Union troops soon followed on horseback, sometimes riding three to an animal, having managed to ride around the swamp.

Sizing up the situation, Captain Theo Northrop, Union scout commander, pulled together a mounted force numbering about 200 by combining the escaped horse soldiers with his scouts. Northrop later recalled what the fleeing soldiers had reported about the battle at their camp.

"They told us General Kilpatrick and the 3rd Brigade had all been captured, and they seemed to think they alone had escaped. We mounted and started for the camp, hoping that we might recapture some of the prisoners; but we soon heard the fighting and knew by that

that all hadn't been captured."

Northrop's soldiers rode furiously toward the Monroe farm. They circled the nearly impenetrable swamp, then galloped north on Blue's Rosin Road where they were spotted by Union soldiers lined up south of the camp. "Here comes the 1st Brigade!" the Union line cheered, mistaking Northrop's small band for the approximately 1,500 men of the 1st Brigade. In reality, the 1st Brigade was still some distance away.

Northrop's force of 200 rode through one side of the Union line and charged wildly into the camp, meeting some 2,000 Confederates head on. Carbines and pistols blazed from both sides for a few fierce moments. Then the Union horsemen wheeled around and retreated. Despite its brevity, their assault reinvigorated dismounted Union comrades. Kilpatrick's soldiers advanced and the fighting intensified.

All the deafening noise and rampant confusion provided Union artillery officer First Lieutenant Ebenezer Stetson with a dangerous opportunity. Slipping in front of the rest of his troops, Stetson somehow reached the two Union artillery pieces Confederates had captured, then forgotten about in the heat of battle. How the Union officer evaded detection and reached the weapons is unclear. Some said he ran; some said he moved in a hesitant crouch. Others contended that he crawled.



Surrounded by Confederates, Stetson rammed a shell into one of the 3-inch Ordnance Rifles, usually operated by 11 men. Then he darted behind the weapon, primed it, and pulled the lanyard firing mechanism, sending a shell directly at Confederates ([Map 16](#)). The shot exploded with a roar, ripping a smoldering hole in the Confederates, who were blown back and crushed, as if smashed by some gigantic hand. Some died instantly. Others crouched in pain, their bodies sliced and mangled by hot shards of metal. Still other Confederates sat stunned on the

grass, unable to move, as horses nearby sprawled on the ground, twitching in death throes.

Union Major Christopher T. Cheek with the 5th Kentucky Cavalry (U.S.) recalled the episode's impact on soldiers from both sides. "Lieutenant Stetson quickly fired a round of grape and canister into the rebel ranks, which greatly encouraged my men and demoralized and discouraged the rebels to an equal extent."

Heartened by the blast, several Union soldiers, including Sergeant John Swartz, scrambled ahead to help Stetson and to prepare the second artillery piece. At the same time, all the Confederates in the area pointed their weapons on the Union soldiers now swarming around the cannons.

One of Butler's men, Confederate Lieutenant John DeVaux, yelled above the din for soldiers to join him in a charge against the lethal artillery, but few heard his call in the swirling confusion and racket. DeVaux and a handful of others galloped forward anyway. Confederate Lieutenant John Humphrey, who earlier discovered the horse tracks leading to Monroe's Crossroads, rode in the pack. As the Confederates moved forward, another shell exploded, knocking DeVaux, Humphrey, and their horses to the ground. Shrapnel sliced into DeVaux in five places, but broke no bones, and he survived. Humphrey was not as fortunate. His arm was badly mangled, and he later died after a delayed amputation.

When Humes' Division finally arrived, the 4th Tennessee Cavalry mounted another attempt to stop the Union artillery. "I think the 4th did the most gallant fighting that I ever saw men do," stated one Confederate.

The Confederates' bullets and minié balls hit every Union soldier working the artillery pieces except for one man, who continued alone trying to fire one of the weapons after the others fell around him. This Union officer, whose identity is unknown, struggled to fire the cannon amid a hailstorm of bullets, all aimed at him. He remained standing until Confederates, charging while he was reloading, felled him with a pistol shot. "General Butler, when he saw it, said that it was a pity to kill so brave a man," writes author W.S. Nye.

On the grounds of the Union camp, confusion grew as the remainder of Humes' Division poured into the relatively small battleground. There were probably too many Confederate troops from too many disparate units rushing about to organize them successfully, especially considering all the gunfire, observes author Ken Belew. Nonetheless, Wheeler decided to rally another charge ([Map 17](#)), enlisting Humes, his division commander, and other officers in the effort.

Wheeler and the other officers managed to gather a group of soldiers, then Wheeler directed the bugler Pelote to play the notes signaling a charge. The Confederates, with Wheeler leading the way, rode quickly toward the western flank of the Union line. Their fast approach caught dismounted Union soldiers off guard. The Federals briefly faltered, then took cover behind trees where they returned fire, sometimes at point blank range against the Confederates who continued to pursue them. The Confederates circled the trees, slashing with sabers and shooting at the Union soldiers, but despite their ferocity, the mounted Confederates were relatively easy targets for armed men on the ground.

The Union stand broke the Confederate assault and resulted in many wounded cavalymen. Wheeler, determined to try again, recalled the troops. Guiding his horse into a moving circle, he waved his hat in the air, showing troops where to reassemble. They obediently rushed back, some on foot because their horses had been killed in the charge. Soldiers on horseback lifted fellow troopers up to ride behind them, while the Federals kept shooting with their rapid firing carbines and other weapons.

Wheeler ordered another assault, and Pelote again sounded the bugle. The Confederates shouted a grim and determined rebel yell as they galloped forward. But this time Union soldiers were prepared and responded with a blistering shower of bullets. The charge wavered. Confederates and their horses fell. Badly injured, Confederate commander Humes hung over his horse's neck, motioning for his soldiers to pull back. Every field grade officer in Hagan's Alabama Brigade was also wounded, including brigade leader Colonel James Hagan, who lay on the ground, surrounded by dead or wounded Confederate Alabama troops. Union troops from Alabama likely fired many of the bullets that killed or wounded the Alabama Confederates. For their part, the 1st Alabama (U.S.) Regiment also suffered, losing between three and eight officers killed.

Seeing Wheeler's unsuccessful attacks to the west, Butler, on the opposite side of the field, decided to lead his troops into the teeth of the Union strength toward the two deadly artillery pieces ([Map 17](#)), which the Federals had recovered again. As Butler's charge began, Wheeler spurred his horse across the field to shout encouragement. Hampton also cheered Butler's soldiers forward.

Confederate Lieutenant Colonel Barrington S. King of Roswell, Georgia, was near the front of the attack. As the Confederates bore down on the Union soldiers, the rapid firing

carbines blanketed the air with bullets. Smoke floated across the battlefield like acrid fog. The Confederates raced to within 15 yards of the Union troops. Then the artillery erupted, spitting out canister and shell. Shrapnel exploded into the Confederate cavalry. Hot metal tore into King, severing a femoral artery, his blood splattering Private Wiley C. Howard. Howard and several companions reacted quickly, retrieving King's lifeless body, as the Confederates retreated. They carried King's body behind the Confederate lines and buried him in a shallow grave. Butler, like Wheeler before him, had failed to break the Union line.

"They had got to their artillery and, with their carbines, made it so hot for the handful of us we had to retire. In fact, I lost 62 men [wounded and killed] there in about five minutes time," Butler wrote.

With so many officers wounded or killed, Confederate commanders doubted whether they could mount another assault. They probably still outnumbered their opponents, but Union forces had the deadly efficient Spencer repeating carbines and artillery in their arsenal. Confederates feinted more charges here and there, but neither side attempted another serious offensive. Both forces had suffered a great deal.

Hampton, now concerned that Union infantry would soon arrive, ordered the cavalry to withdraw ([Map 18](#)). It was a timely move. The 2nd Brigade of the 2nd Division of the XIV (14th) Corps, some of Union General Sherman's best infantry, was just minutes away. The rest of Kilpatrick's cavalry was also riding hard to reach the camp.



Wheeler took command of Dibrell's Tennessee Brigade to cover the withdrawal. As Confederate units dropped back onto Morganton Road, Dibrell's Brigade deployed to hold off the Union forces while the Confederates withdrew from the action.

Some Union horse soldiers pursued, moving in close, firing their carbines, but most hung back. Some who chased the Confederates belonged to the 5th Ohio Cavalry Regiment, using rapid firing Spencer carbines, learned National Park Service archeologist Douglas Scott.

Scott traced the location of cartridge cases found at the battle scene from several individual Spencer carbines, and the cartridge case locations seem to show movement from south of the battlefield to far north of the Monroe House, in the direction of Morganton Road.

While Union soldiers fired on the withdrawing Confederates, Wheeler's forces faced them and fired back, not about to be hurried. Behind Wheeler's rear guard, Hampton organized his column of troops, placing some 400 Union prisoners and the wagons near the front. At Hampton's signal, the Confederates began a slow ride toward Fayetteville, careful not to move too fast for fear of jostling the many wounded.

Wheeler's force continued to face the Federals for long moments after the rest of the Confederates rode away. Then Wheeler's soldiers fired a few parting shots, turned, and rode to catch up with the rest of the cavalry.

Like the fog that morning on the North Carolina farm, the chance for Confederates to wage a victorious dawn attack against the Union Army drifted away and vanished. Monroe's Crossroads was the site of one of the last major Confederate cavalry charges of the war.

The Confederates continued to fight with dwindling resources of men and materiel, but soon the only realistic option would be surrender.



Conclusion

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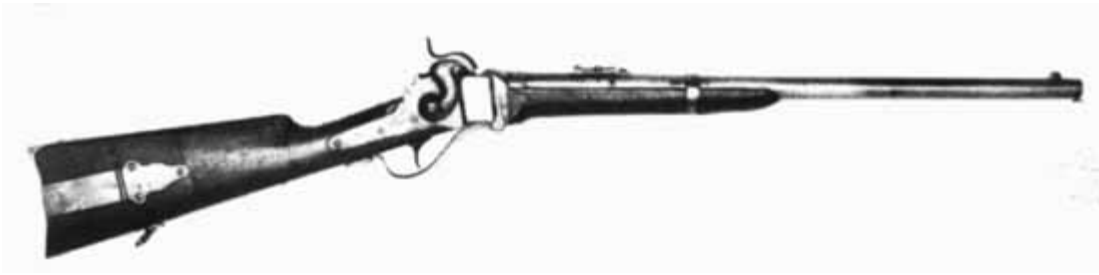




























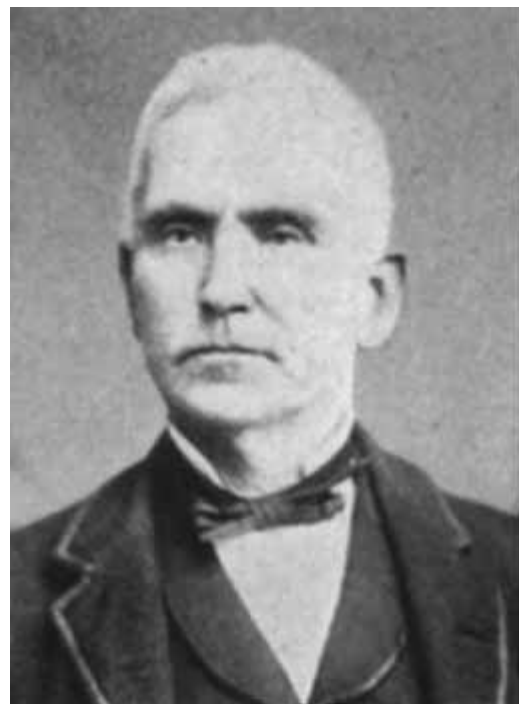






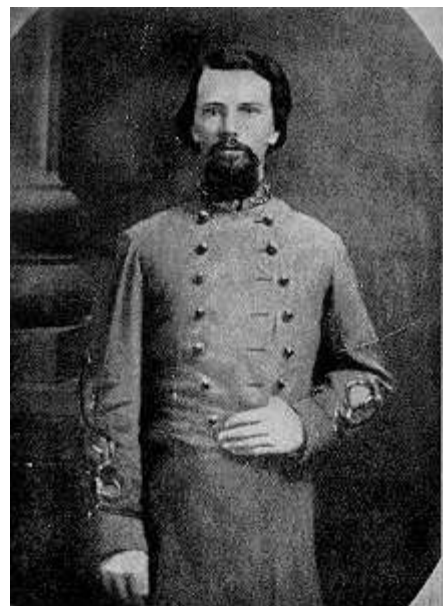


















Legend for Monroe's Crossroads Battle Maps FM 100-5, Operations

BASIC SYMBOLS	
Geometric figures form the basic symbol used to represent units, installations, and activities	
Description	Symbol
Unit	
Headquarters	
Logistical, medical, or administrative installation	
Observation post	
UNIT ROLE INDICATOR	
Description	Symbol
Cavalry or reconnaissance	
Field artillery	
Infantry	
Prisoners of war	

UNIT SIZE	
The size of units and installations is shown by placing the appropriate size indicator directly above the basic symbol.	
US Description	Symbol
Squad/crew	
Section or unit larger than a squad but smaller than a platoon	
Platoon or detachment	
Company, battery, or troop	
Battalion or squadron	
Group or regiment	
Brigade	
Division	
Corps	
Army	

MANEUVER SYMBOLS

Attack

General symbol for main attack -- double arrowhead



General symbol for other than main attack -- single arrowhead



Double arrowhead for direction of main attack and axis of advance for the main attack



Single arrowhead for supporting direction of attack and supporting axis of advance

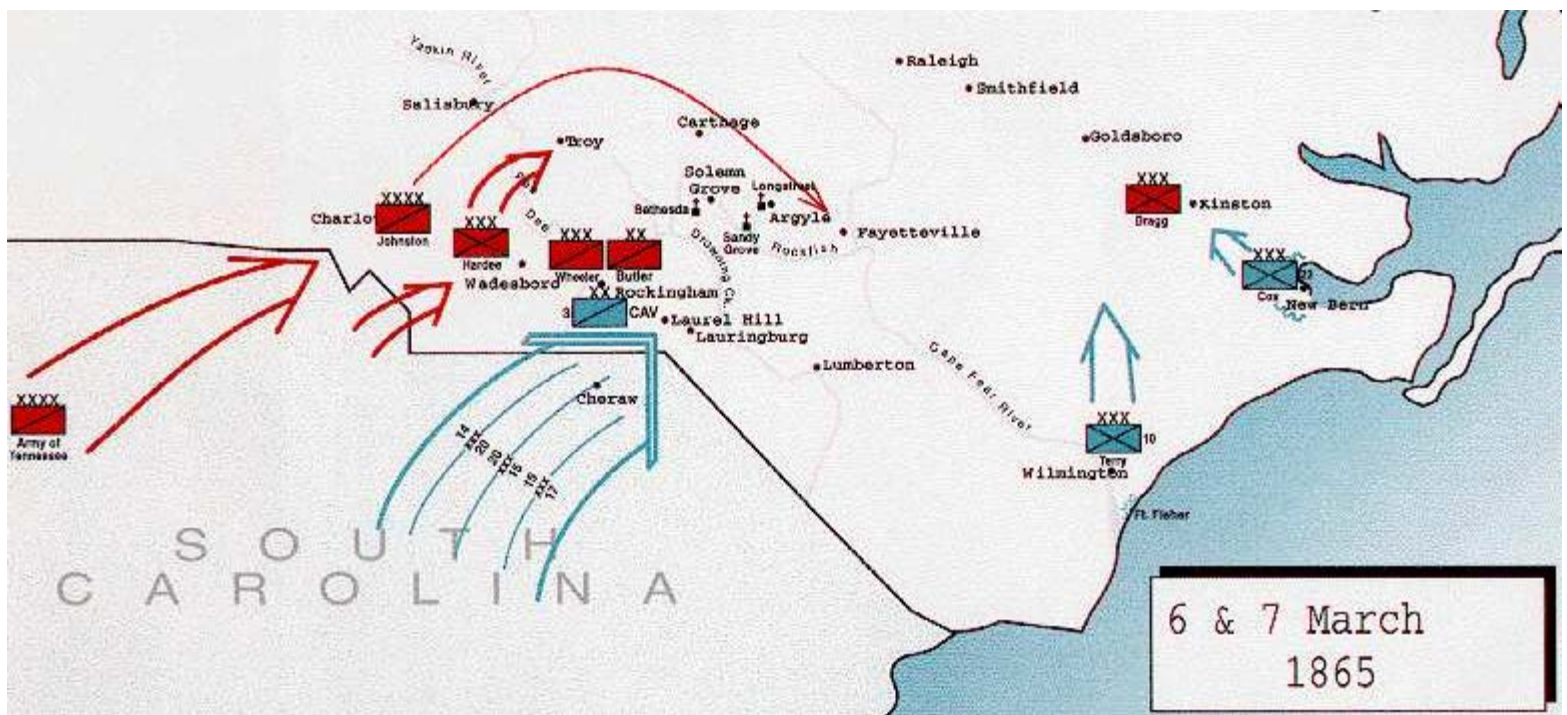


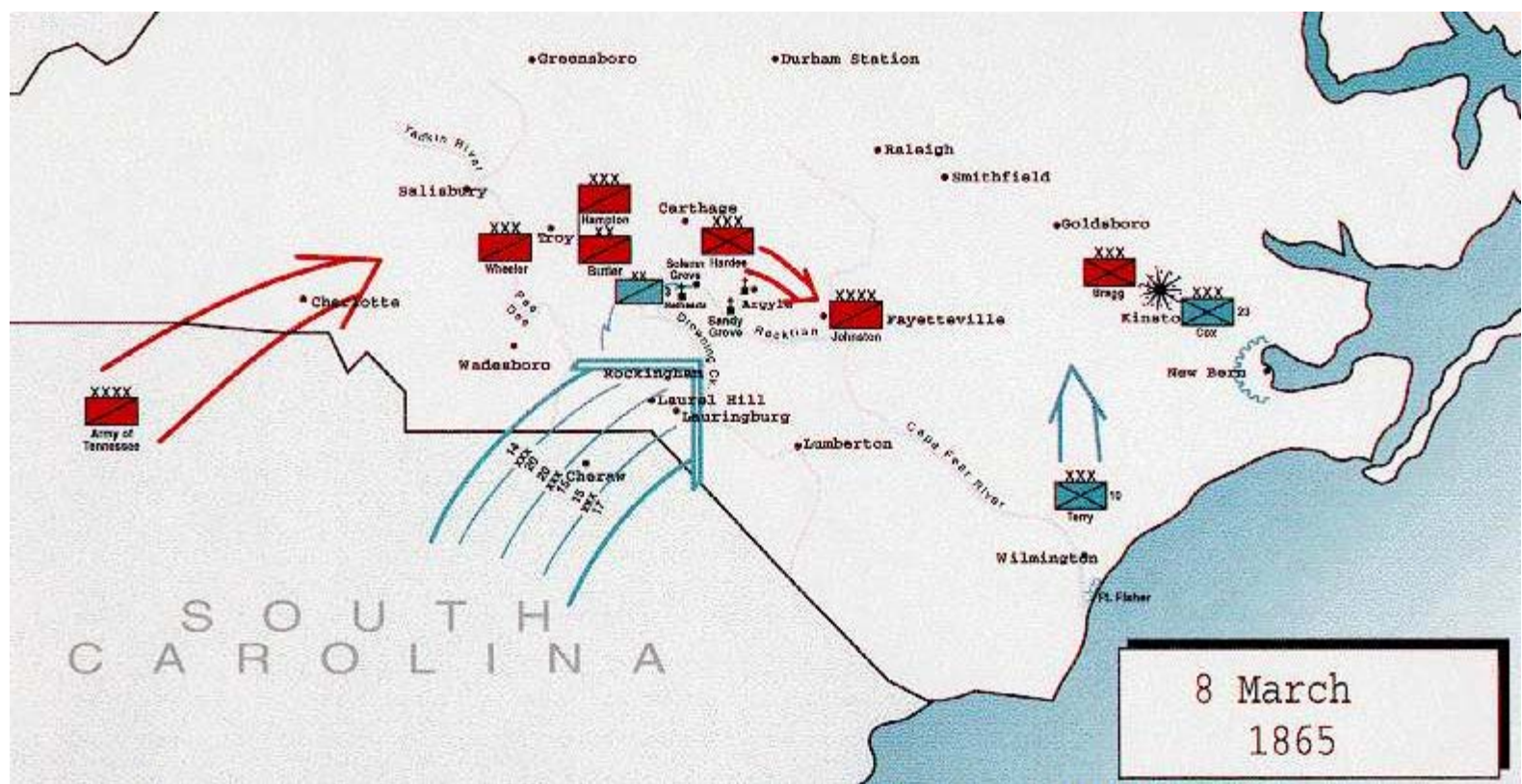
EQUIPMENT INDICATOR

Weapon

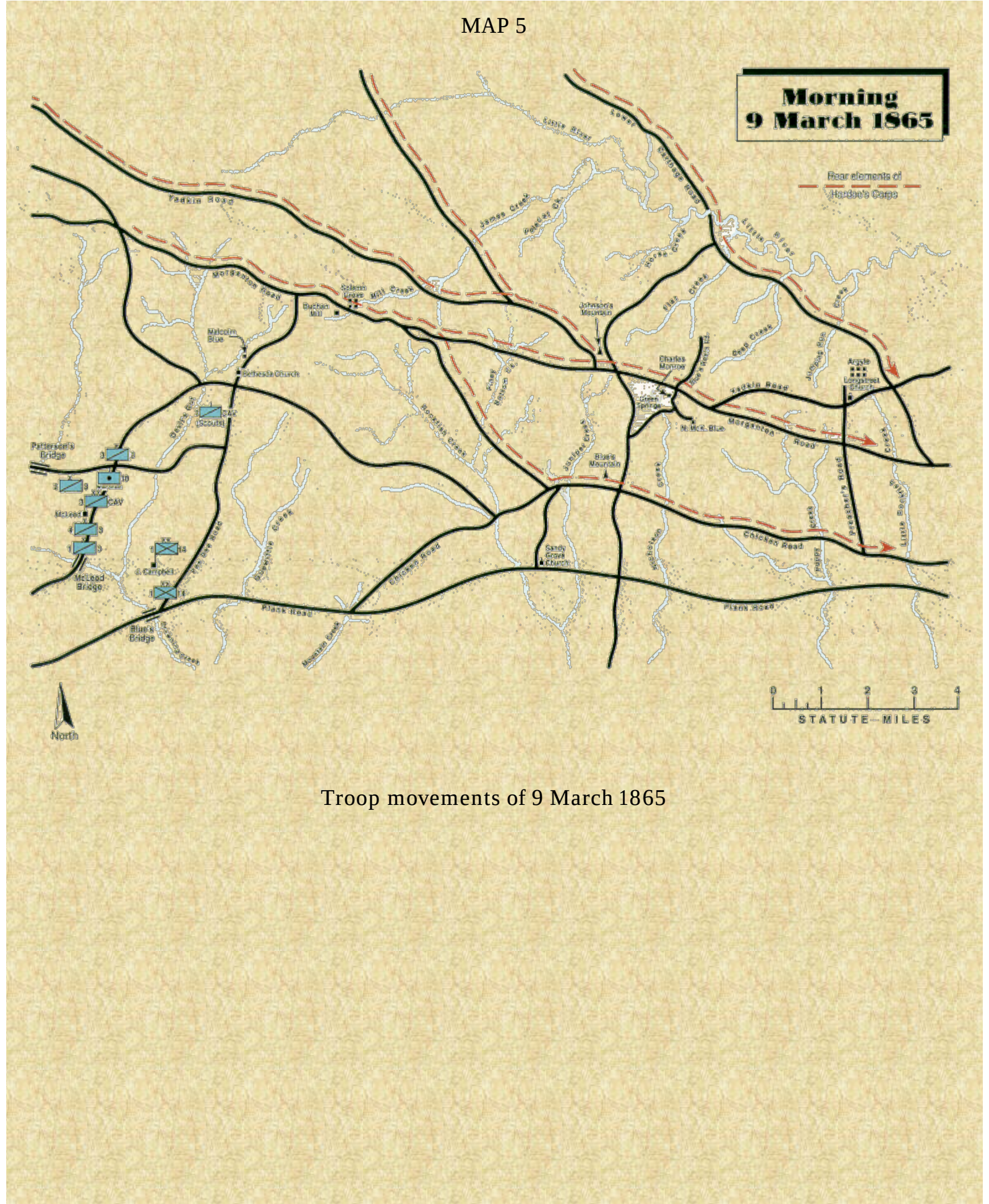


(gun)





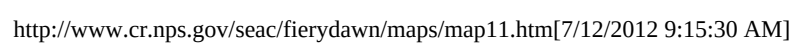
MAP 5



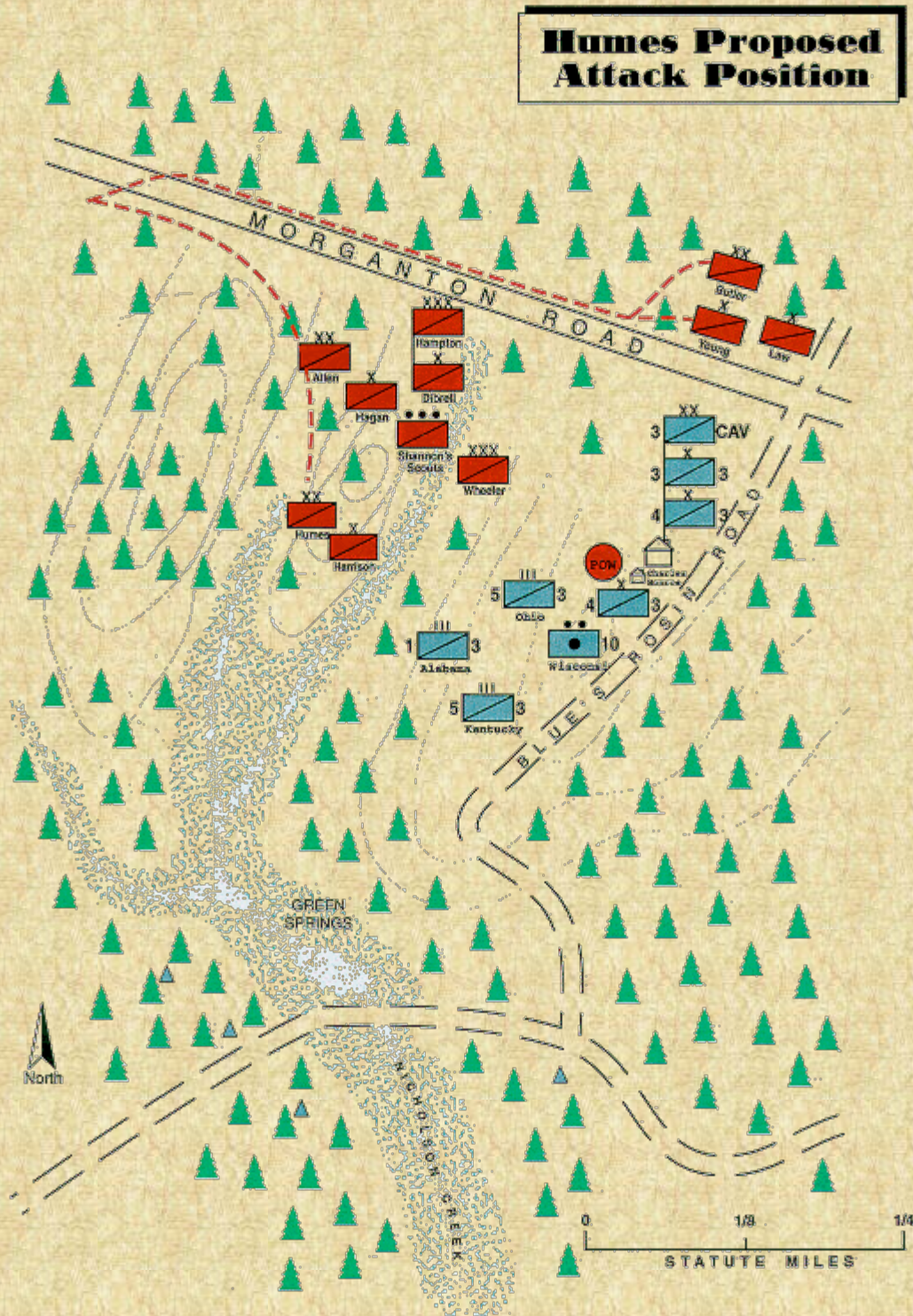
Troop movements of 9 March 1865

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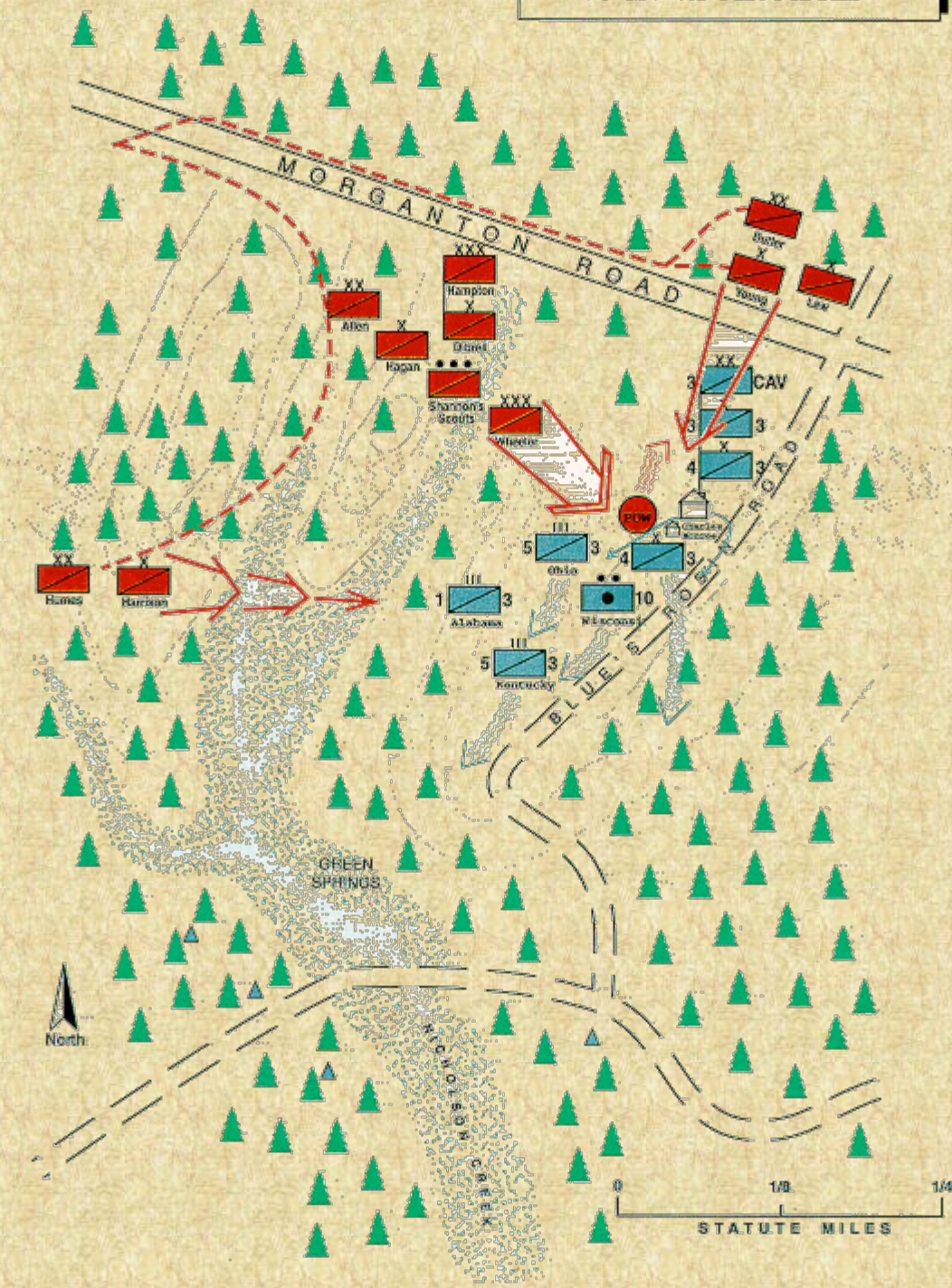


MAP 12

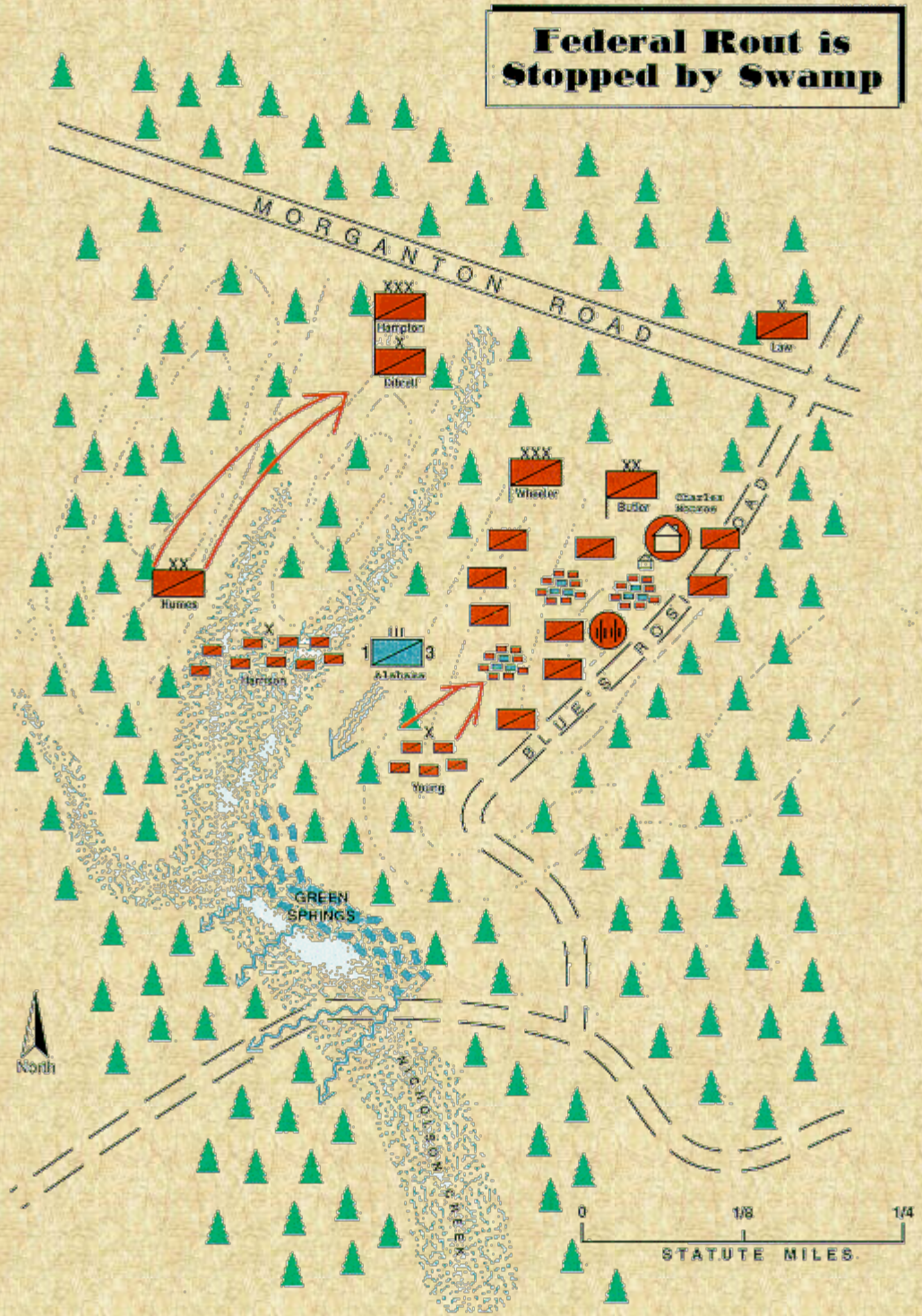


MAP 13

Dawn Attack



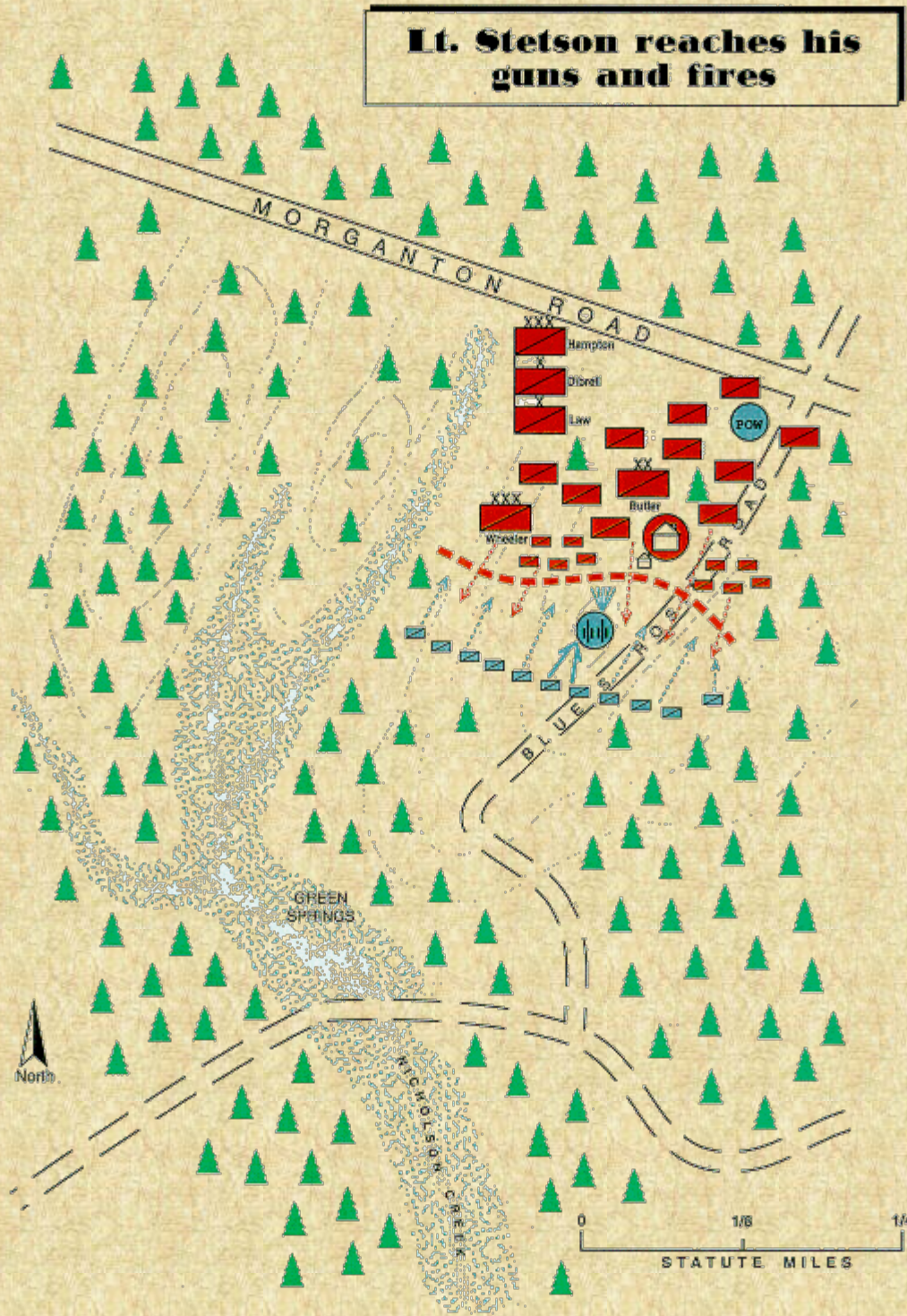
MAP 14

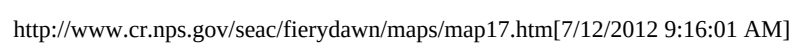


MAP 15



MAP 16





MAP 18

