

**HEADQUARTERS DEPARTMENT OF WEST VIRGINIA,**  
Harper's Ferry, August 8, 1864.

GENERAL: I have the honor to submit the following report of operations in this department since my last, of date June 8, forwarded from Staunton, Va.:

On the day after the defeat of Jones at Piedmont, I marched on Staunton (June 6) and occupied the town without opposition, the enemy, with the shattered remnant of his army, having retreated to Waynesboro and Rockfish Gap, in the Blue Ridge. At Staunton I destroyed a large amount of public stores, consisting of shoes, saddles, harness, and clothing. 3 cannon and about 1,000 stand of small-arms. Also several extensive establishments for the manufacture of army clothing and equipments. I also had the Virginia Central Railroad entirely destroyed for several miles east and west of the town, burning all the depot buildings, shops, and warehouses belonging to the road. About 500 prisoners (for the most part wounded and invalids) fell into our hands here.

On the 8th I was joined by the forces under Generals Crook and Averell, about 10,000 men, with two batteries. This command returning from a successful raid on the Virginia and Tennessee Railroad and moving to join me at Staunton, had struck the line of the Virginia Central at Goshen and had totally destroyed this road as they marched to the point of junction, making in all a total destruction of the road for a distance of fifty miles.

From this point I sent back by way of Buffalo Gap and Beverly a convoy of wagons, prisoners, and refugees, guarded by 800 men whose term of enlistment had expired, the whole under the command of Col. A. Moor, of the Twenty-eighth Ohio Volunteer Infantry.

Having rested and reorganized the combined forces under my command I started on the 10th toward Lexington, moving up the Valley in four columns by roads nearly parallel. The infantry division under General Crook, and the cavalry division under General Averell, moving on the right-hand road, were opposed by McCausland, with about 2,000 mounted men and a battery.

He was easily driven, however, and on the 11th took refuge in the town of Lexington, behind the North River, a tributary of the James. Generals Crook and Averell arriving about midday on the 11th, found the bridge across this stream burnt, and the crossing disputed by sharpshooters and artillery. The infantry division under General Sullivan, which moved on the road to the left, and which I accompanied in person, had met with no enemy thus far, but at the sound of Crook's guns moved rapidly forward and took position in front of the town. I found the enemy's sharpshooters posted among the rocks and thickets of the opposite bluffs and in some store-houses at the bridge, and also occupying the buildings of the Virginia Military Institute, which stood near the river. Their artillery was screened behind the buildings of the town, and on some heights just beyond it the whole position was completely commanded by my artillery (thirty guns).

This unsoldierly and inhuman attempt of General McCausland to defend an indefensible position against an overwhelming force by screening himself behind the private dwellings of women and children, might have brought justifiable destruction upon the whole town, but as this was not rendered imperative by any military necessity, I preferred to spare private property and an unarmed population. Instead of crushing the place with my artillery, I sent General Averell with a brigade of cavalry to cross the river some distance, and fall upon the enemy's flank and rear. Before this movement was completed. the enemy perceived it and hastily retired on the road toward Buchanan. The battalion of Cadets, about 250 muskets, took part in the defense and retired by the Balcony Falls road toward Lynchburg. I was told that Colonel Smith, principal of the Institute, and commanding the Cadets, protested against the attempted defense as entirely futile, purposeless, and unnecessarily exposing the town and its helpless inhabitants to danger and destruction. In occupying this place a few prisoners were taken, 5 pieces of cannon, with numerous caissons and gun carriages, some small-arms, and a quantity of ammunition fell into our hands and were destroyed; 6 barges laden with commissary stores, artillery ammunition, and 6 pieces of cannon were captured and destroyed on the James River Canal near the town. A number of extensive iron-works in the vicinity were burned.

On the 12th I also burned the Virginia Military Institute and all the buildings connected with it. I found here a violent and inflammatory proclamation from John Letcher, lately Governor of Virginia, inciting the population of the

country to rise and wage a guerrilla warfare on my troops, and ascertaining that after having advised his fellow-citizens to this course the ex-Governor had himself ignominiously taken to flight, I ordered his property to be burned under my order, published May 24, against persons practicing or abetting such unlawful and uncivilized warfare. Having had information that a train of 200 wagons, loaded with supplies and guarded by two regiments of infantry, was en route following our march, I delayed one day in Lexington to allow it time to overtake us. I had also begun to feel anxious in regard to Duffié, from whom I had not definitely heard for two days.

While awaiting news from Duffié, on the 13th I sent Averell forward to Buchanan with orders to drive McCausland out of the way and, if possible, secure the bridge over the James River at that place. Before starting General Averell detached a party of 200 picked men, with orders to ride around Lynchburg, cutting the railroad communication and obtaining all possible information of the enemy.

On the afternoon of the 13th General Duffié arrived and made a report of his operations in person. On the 10th he had moved from Staunton simultaneously with the other columns. A regiment sent to demonstrate toward Waynesborough drove the enemy through that place and then followed the division by the road running southward along the western base of the Blue Ridge. Driving a small force from White's Gap, General Duffié crossed the ridge and came upon the Charlottesville and Lynchburg railroad, menacing Lynchburg from the vicinity of Amherst Court-House,

and breaking the road at Arrington Station. He was followed from Waynesboro by a large mounted force under Imboden, who, however, never hazarded a general attack, and who was signally defeated in every attempt to harass or impede the movements of our troops. In addition to the damage done to the railroad, General Duffié captured 100 prisoners, about 500 horses, and destroyed large quantities of stores and a considerable portion of Imbodens train. He returned by Tye River Gap, without serious loss.

On this day I received positive information from a scout that Breckinridge was in command of the rebel forces at Rockfish Gap, while from prisoners and others we had rumors that a formidable rebel force was hastening toward the Valley from Richmond, and that Sheridan had met with a reverse near Louisa Court-House. At the same time I had assurance that there was no considerable force of the enemy in or near Lynchburg.

On the morning of the 14th I moved with my whole command toward Buchanan, and on arriving there found it occupied by Averell. He had driven McCausland sharply from the place, capturing some prisoners and a number of canal barges laden with stores, but had not succeeded in saving the bridge. As there was a convenient and accessible ford at hand the advance of the army was not retarded by its loss. In view of this fact and of the danger incurred to private property the inhabitants of the village protested against the burning of the bridge, but McCausland, with his characteristic recklessness, persisted in the needless destruction, involving

eleven private dwellings in the conflagration. The farther progress of this needless devastation was stopped by the friendly efforts of our troops, who extinguished the flames.

On the 15th I moved from Buchanan, crossing the Blue Ridge by the Peaks of Otter road. This road was blockaded by felled trees, and our advance feebly contested by some light parties of the enemy. It was, however, easily cleared, and on the evening of the same day my cavalry occupied Liberty, the county town of Bedford, on the Virginia and Tennessee Railroad, twenty-four miles from Lynchburg. At this point the detachment of picked men (200), which had been sent out by General Averell from Lexington to make the circuit of Lynchburg, reported, having accomplished their perilous undertaking with trifling loss. Moving eastward from Lexington they crossed the Blue Ridge and struck the Charlottesville railroad near Amherst Court-House. tearing up the track for a short distance. Thence moving southeastward they crossed the James River below Lynchburg, destroying the South Side Railroad for a short distance, and burning two trains at Concordia Station; from thence making a circuit within a few miles of Lynchburg they turned westward, meeting the advance of the main army at Liberty.

Neither from this scouting party nor from other sources could we obtain any clear or reliable information in regard to the enemy. Through rebel channels we had exaggerated rumors of disasters to our armies both under Sherman and Grant. Some reported that Sheridan had been defeated near Louisa

Court-House, while others said that he was already in Lynchburg. Negro refugees just from the town represented that it was occupied only by a few thousand armed invalids and militia, and that its inhabitants in the greatest panic were fleeing with their movable property by every available route. At the same time from other sources equally worthy of respect, we were assured that all the rebel forces of West Virginia were concentrated there under Breckinridge, and that Ewell's corps of veteran troops, 20,000 strong, had already re-enforced them.

To develop the truth I determined to advance on Lynchburg immediately. Early on the 16th General Duffié moved with his cavalry on the Forestville road, sending a strong reconnaissance toward Balcony Falls to ascertain the truth of a report which located a considerable force of the enemy at that point. General Crook's division of infantry moved by the railroad, destroying it effectually as they marched.

General Averell led the advance on the Bedford turnpike, followed by Sullivan's infantry, the reserve artillery, and the baggage train. General Averell continued to drive McCausland before him, but in the afternoon reported that the enemy had been reenforced. and was becoming stubborn. Encamped at night near the Bedford turnpike, seven miles east of Liberty, my cavalry advance near the Great Otter River. From this point I sent back the supply train of 200 wagons which had overtaken us at Lexington. Colonel Putnam, with his regiment of Ohio 100-days' volunteers, was detailed to guard it, and the train put under the direction of Captain McCann, assistant quartermaster. This train was accompanied by a large number of loyal refugees, both whites and negroes, and the route proposed

for its return to our lines was by way of New Castle, Sweet Springs, Lewisburg, and Charleston, Kanawha. During the night received information from General Averell that he had had a sharp contest with the enemy at New London and had driven him, but that he had evidently been re-enforced and was becoming aggressive.

Early in the morning of the 17th orders were given for the troops to move, but the march was delayed for several hours at the Great Otter River. owing to the difficulty in crossing the artillery, and in consequence we did not overtake the enemy until 4 o'clock in the afternoon. At that hour Averell's advance came upon the enemy, strongly posted and entrenched at Diamond Hill, five miles from Lynchburg. He immediately attacked, and a sharp contest ensued. Crook's infantry arriving at the same time, made a brilliant advance upon the enemy, drove him from his works back upon the town, killing and wounding a number and capturing 70 men and 1 gun. It being too late to follow up this success, we encamped upon the baffle-field. The best information to be obtained at this point of the enemy's forces and plans indicated that all the rebel forces heretofore operating in the Valley and West Virginia were concentrated in Lynchburg, under the command of General Breckinridge. This force was variously estimated at from 10,000 to 15,000 men, well supplied with artillery, and protected by strong works.

During the night the trains on the different railroads were heard running without intermission, while repeated cheers and the beating of drums indicated the arrival of large bodies of troops in the town, yet up to the morning of the 18th I had no positive information as to whether General Lee had detached any considerable force for the relief of Lynchburg. To



settle the question on this morning, I advanced my skirmishers as far as the toll-gate on the Bedford road: two miles from the town, and a brisk fire was opened between them and the enemy behind their works. This skirmishing with musketry, occasionally assisted by the artillery, was kept up during the whole of the forenoon.

Their works consisted of strong redoubts on each of the main roads entering the town about three miles apart, flanked on either side by rifle-pits protected by abatis. On these lines the enemy could be seen working diligently as if to extend and strengthen them. I massed my two divisions of infantry in front of the works on the Bedford road ready to move to the right or left as required, the artillery in commanding positions, and Averell's cavalry division in reserve. Duffié was ordered to attack resolutely on the Forestville road: our extreme left, while Averell sent two squadrons of cavalry to demonstrate against the Campbell Court-House road on our extreme right. This detachment was subsequently strengthened by a brigade.

Meanwhile I reconnoitered the lines: hoping to find a weak interval through which I might push with my infantry, passing between the main redoubts, which appeared too strong for a direct assault. While the guns were sounding on the two flanks, the enemy, no doubt, supposing my center weakened by too great extension of my lines, and hoping to cut us in two, suddenly advanced in great force from his works. and commenced a most determined attack on my position on the Bedford turnpike. Although his movement was so unexpected and rapid as almost to amount to a surprise, yet it was promptly and gallantly met by Sullivan's division, which held the

enemy in check until Crook was enabled to get his troops up.

After a fierce contest of half an hour's duration, the enemy's direct attack was repulsed, but he persistently renewed the fight, making repeated attempts to flank us on the left and to push between my main body and Duffié's division. In this effort he was completely foiled, and at the end of an hour and twenty minutes was routed and driven back into his works in disorder and with heavy loss. In the eagerness of pursuit, one regiment, the 116th Ohio entered the works on the heels of the flying enemy, but being unsupported, fell back with trifling loss. Our whole loss in this action was comparatively light. The infantry behaved with the greatest steadiness, and the artillery, which materially assisted in repelling the attack, was served with remarkable rapidity and efficiency. This affair closed about 2 p.m.

From prisoners captured we obtained positive information that a portion of Ewell's corps was engaged in the action, and that the whole corps, 20,000 strong, under the command of Lieutenant-General Early, was either already in Lynchburg or near at hand. The detachment sent by General Averell to operate on our right had returned, reporting that they had encountered a large body of rebel cavalry in that quarter, while Duffié, although holding his position, sent word that he was pressed by a superior force. It had now become sufficiently evident that the enemy had concentrated a force of at least double the numerical strength of mine, and what added to the gravity of the situation was the fact that my troops had scarcely enough of ammunition left to sustain another well contested battle.

I immediately ordered all the baggage and supply trains to retire by the

Bedford turnpike, and made preparations to withdraw the army as soon as it should become sufficiently dark to conceal the movement from the enemy. Meanwhile, as there still remained five hours of daylight, they were ordered to maintain a firm front, and with skirmishers to press the enemy's lines at all points. I have since learned that Early's whole force was up in time to have made a general attack on the same afternoon (18th)--an attack which under the circumstances would probably have been fatal to us but rendered cautious by the bloody repulse of Breckinridge, and deceived by the firm attitude of my command, he devoted the afternoon to refreshment and repose, expecting to strike a decisive blow on the following morning. As soon as it became dark I quietly withdrew my whole force, leaving a line of pickets close to the enemy, with orders to remain until 12 o'clock (midnight), and then follow the main body. This was successfully accomplished without loss of men or material, excepting only a few wounded who were left in a temporary hospital by mistake.

Major-General David Hunter