

## **PURSUIT OF HUNTER.**

On the 12th of June, received verbal orders from General Lee to hold the corps, with two of the battalions of artillery attached to it, in readiness to move to the Shenandoah Valley. Nelson's and Braxton's battalions were selected, and Brigadier General Long was ordered to accompany me as Chief of Artillery. After dark, on the same day, written instructions were given me by General Lee, by which I was directed to move, with the force designated, at 3 o'clock next morning, for the Valley, by the way of Louisa Court-House and Charlottesville, and through Brown's or Swift Run Gap in the Blue Ridge, as I might find most advisable; to strike Hunter's force in the rear, and, if possible, destroy it; then to move down the Valley, cross the Potomac near Leesburg in Loudoun County, or at or above Harper's Ferry, as I might find most practicable, and threaten Washington City. I was further directed to communicate with General Breckenridge, who would co-operate with me in the attack on Hunter and the expedition into Maryland.

At this time the railroad and telegraph lines between Charlottesville and Lynchburg had been cut by a cavalry force from Hunter's army; and those between Richmond and Charlottesville had been cut by Sheridan's cavalry, from Grant's army; so that there was no communication with Breckenridge. Hunter was supposed to be at Staunton with his whole force, and Breckenridge was supposed to be at Waynesboro or Rock-fish Gap. If such had been the case, the route designated by General Lee would have carried me into the Valley in Hunter's rear.

The 2nd corps now numbered a little over 8,000 muskets for duty. It had been on active and arduous service in the field for forty days, and had been engaged in all the great battles from the Wilderness to Cold Harbor, sustaining very heavy losses at Spotsylvania Courthouse, where it lost nearly an entire division, including its commander, Major General Johnson, who was made prisoner. Of the brigadier generals with it at the commencement of the campaign, only one remained in command of his brigade. Two (Gordon and Ramseur) had been made Major Generals; one (O. H. Stewart) had been captured; four (Pegram, Hays, J. A. Walker and R. D. Johnston) had been severely wounded; and four (Stafford, J. M. Jones, Daniel, and Doles) had been killed in action. Constant exposure to the weather, a limited supply of provisions, and two weeks service in the swamps north of the Chickahominy had told on the health of the men. Divisions were not stronger than brigades ought to have been, nor brigades than regiments.

On the morning of the 13th, at two o'clock, we commenced the march; On the 15th we passed over the ground, near Trevillian's depot, on which Hampton and Sheridan had fought on the 11th and 12th. On the 16th, arrived at Rivanna River near Charlottesville, having marched over eighty miles in four days.

From Louisa Court-House I had sent a dispatch to Gordonsville, to be forwarded, by telegraph, to Breckenridge; and, on my arrival at Charlottesville, on the 16th, to which place I rode in advance of my troops, I received a telegram from him, dated at Lynchburg, informing me that

Hunter was then in Bedford County, about twenty miles from that place.

The railroad and telegraph between Charlottesville and Lynchburg had been but slightly injured by the enemy's cavalry, and had been repaired. The distance between the two places was sixty miles, and there were no trains at Charlottesville except one which belonged to the Central road, and was about starting for Waynesboro. I ordered this to be detained, and immediately directed, by telegram, all the trains of the two roads to be sent to me with all dispatch, for the purpose of transporting my troops to Lynchburg. The trains were not in readiness to take the troops on board until sunrise on the morning of the 17th, and then only enough were furnished to transport about half of my infantry. Ramseur's division, one brigade of Gordon's division and part of another were put on the trains, as soon as they were ready, and started for Lynchburg. Rodes' division, and the residue of Gordon's, were ordered to move along the railroad, to meet the trains on their return. The artillery and wagon-trains had been started on the ordinary roads at daylight.

I accompanied Ramseur's division, going on the front train, but the road and rolling stock were in such bad condition that I did not reach Lynchburg until about one o'clock in the afternoon, and the other trains were much later. I found General Breckenridge in bed, suffering from an injury received by the fall of a horse killed under him in action near Cold Harbor. He had moved from Rock-fish Gap to Lynchburg by a forced march, as soon as Hunter's movement towards that place was discovered. When I showed him my instructions, he very readily and cordially offered to co-operate with me, and serve under my command.

Hunter's advance from Staunton had been impeded by a brigade of cavalry, under Brigadier General McCausland, which had been managed with great skill, and kept in his front all the way, and he was reported to be then advancing on the old stone turnpike from Liberty in Bedford County by New London, and watched by Imboden with a small force of cavalry.

As General Breckenridge was unable to go out, at his request, General D. H. Hill, who happened to be in town, had made arrangements for the defense of the city, with such troops as were at hand. Brigadier General Hays, who was an invalid from a wound received at Spottsylvania Court-House, had tendered his services and also aided in making arrangements for the defense. I rode out with General Hill to examine the line selected by him, and make a reconnaissance of the country in front. Slight works had been hastily thrown up on College Hill, covering the turnpike and Forest roads from Liberty, which were manned by Breckenridge's infantry and the dismounted cavalry of the command which had been with Jones at Piedmont. The reserves, invalids from the hospitals, and the cadets from the Military Institute at Lexington, occupied other parts of the line. An inspection satisfied me that, while this arrangement was the best which could be made under the circumstances in which General Hill found himself, yet it would leave the town exposed to the fire of the enemy's artillery, should he advance to the attack, and I therefore determined to meet the enemy with my troops in front.

We found Imboden about four miles out on the turnpike, near an old Quaker church, to which position he had been gradually forced back by the

enemy's infantry. My troops, as they arrived, had been ordered in front of the works to bivouac, and I immediately sent orders for them to move out on this road, at a redoubt about two miles from the city, as Imboden's command was driven back by vastly superior numbers. These brigades, with two pieces of artillery in the redoubt, arrested the progress of the enemy, and Ramseur's other brigade, and the part of Gordon's division which had arrived, took position on the same line. The enemy opened a heavy fire of artillery on us, but, as night soon came on, he went into camp in our front. Hunter's delay in advancing from Staunton had been most remarkable. He had defeated Jones' small force at Piedmont, about ten miles from Staunton. on the 5th, and united with Crook on the 8th, yet he did not arrive in front of Lynchburg until near night on the 17th. The route from Staunton to Lynchburg by which he moved, which was by Lexington, Buchanan, the Peaks of Otter and Liberty, is about one hundred miles in distance. It is true that McCausland had delayed his progress by keeping constantly in his front, but an energetic advance would have brushed away McCausland's small force, and Lynchburg, with all its manufacturing establishments and stores, would have fallen before assistance arrived. A subsequent passage over the greater part of the same route showed how Hunter had been employed.

Upon my arrival at Lynchburg, orders had been given for the immediate return of the train for the rest of my infantry, and I expected it to arrive by the morning of the 18th, but it did not get to Lynchburg until late in the afternoon of that day. Hunter's force was considerably larger than mine would have been, had it all been up, and as it was of the utmost consequence to the army at Richmond that he should not get into

Lynchburg, I did not feel justified in attacking him until I could do so with a fair prospect of success. I contented myself therefore with acting on the defensive on the 18th, throwing Breckenridge's infantry and a part of his artillery on the front line, while that adopted by General Hill was occupied by the dismounted cavalry and the irregular troops. During the day, there was artillery firing and skirmishing along the line, and, in the afternoon, an attack was made on our line, to the right of the turnpike, which was handsomely repulsed with considerable loss to the enemy. A demonstration of the enemy's cavalry on the Forest road was checked by part of Breckenridge's infantry under Wharton and McCausland's cavalry.

On the arrival of the cars from Richmond this day, Major Generals Elzey and Ransom reported for duty, the former to command the infantry and dismounted cavalry of Breckenridge's command, and the latter to command the cavalry. The mounted cavalry consisted of the remnants of several brigades divided into two commands, one under Imboden, and the other under McCausland. It was badly mounted and armed, and its efficiency much impaired by the defeat at Piedmont, and the arduous service it had recently gone through.

As soon as the remainder of my infantry arrived by the railroad, though none of my artillery had gotten up, arrangements were made for attacking Hunter at daylight on the 19th, but some time after midnight it was discovered that he was moving, though it was not known whether he was retreating or moving so as to attack Lynchburg on the south where it was vulnerable, or to attempt to join Grant on the south side of James River. Pursuit could not, therefore, be made at once, as a mistake, if either of the

last two objects had been contemplated, would have been fatal. At light, however, the pursuit commenced, the 2nd corps moving along the turnpike, over which it was discovered Hunter was retreating, and Elzey's command on the right, along the Forest road, while Ransom was ordered to move on the right of Elzey, with McCausland's cavalry, and endeavor to strike the enemy at Liberty or Peaks of Otter. Imboden, who was on the road from Lynchburg to Campbell Court-House to watch a body of the enemy's cavalry, which had moved in that direction the day before, was to have moved on the left towards Liberty, but orders did not reach him in time. The enemy's rear was overtaken at Liberty, twenty-five miles from Lynchburg, just before night, and driven through that place, after a brisk skirmish, by Ramseur's division. The day's march on the old turnpike, which was very rough, had been terrible.

A great part of my command had had nothing to eat for the last few days, except a little bacon which was obtained at Liberty. The cooking utensils were in the trains, and the effort to have bread baked at Lynchburg had failed. Neither the wagon trains, nor the artillery of the 2nd corps, were up and I knew that the country, through which Hunter's route led for forty or fifty miles, was, for the most part, a desolate mountain region; and that his troops were taking everything in the way of provisions and forage which they could lay their hands on. My field officers, except those of Breckenridge's command, were on foot, as their horses could not be transported on the trains from Charlottesville. I had seen our soldiers endure a great deal, but there was a limit to the endurance even of Confederate soldiers. A stern chase with infantry is a very difficult one, and Hunter's men were marching for their lives, his disabled being carried in his

provision train, which was now empty. My cavalry was not strong enough to accomplish anything of importance, and a further pursuit could only have resulted in disaster to my command from want of provisions and forage.

My command had marched sixty miles, in the three days' pursuit, over very rough roads, and that part of it from the Army of Northern Virginia had had no rest since leaving Gaines' Mill. I determined therefore to rest on the 22nd, so as to enable the wagons and artillery to get up, and to prepare the men for the long march before them. Imboden had come up, following on the road through Salem after the enemy, and the cavalry was sent through Fincastle, to watch the enemy and to annoy him as he passed through the mountains towards Lewisburg, and also ascertain whether he would endeavor to get into the valley towards Lexington or Staunton.

In his report Grant says: 'General Hunter, owing to a *want* of ammunition to give battle, retired from before the place ~Lynchburg. Now it appears that this expedition had been long contemplated and was one of the prominent features of the campaign of 1864. Sheridan, with his cavalry, was to have united with Hunter at Lynchburg and the two together were to have destroyed General Lee's communications and depots of supplies and then have joined Grant. Can it be believed that Hunter set out on so important an expedition with an insufficient supply of ammunition? He had only fought the battle of Piedmont with a part of his force, and not a very severe one, as Jones' force was a small one and composed mostly of cavalry. Crook's column, not being there, was not engaged. Had Sheridan defeated Hampton at Trevillian's, he would have reached Lynchburg after destroying the railroad on the way, and I could not have reached there in time to do



any good. But Hampton defeated Sheridan and the latter saw "infantry" too strong to successfully assault." Had Hunter moved on Lynchburg with energy, that place would have fallen before it was possible for me to get there. But he tarred on the way, and when he reached there, there was discovered "a want of ammunition to give battle."

The scenes on Hunter's route from Lynchburg had been truly heart-rending. Houses had been burned, and women and children left without shelter. The country had been stripped of provisions and many families left without a morsel to eat. Furniture and bedding had been cut to pieces, and old men and women and children robbed of all clothing except what they were wearing. Ladies' trunks had been rifled and their dresses torn to pieces in mere wantonness. Even negro girls had lost their little finery. We now had renewed evidences of outrages committed by the commanding general's orders in burning and plundering private houses. We saw the ruins of a number of houses so destroyed. At Lexington Hunter had burned the Military Institute, with all its contents, including its library and scientific apparatus; and Washington College had been plundered and the statue of Washington taken. The residence of Ex-Governor Letcher, at that place, had been burned, and but a few minutes given Mrs. Letcher and her family, to leave the house. In the same county a Christian gentleman, Mr. Creigh, had been hung because he had killed a straggling and marauding Federal soldier while in the act of insulting and outraging the ladies of his family. The time consumed in the perpetration of those deeds was the salvation of Lynchburg, with its stores, foundries and factories, which were so necessary to our army at Richmond.

Jubal Anderson Early

Autobiographical Sketch and Narrative of the War Between the States