

THE GEORGIA MILITIA DURING SHERMAN'S MARCH TO THE SEA.†

BY GUSTAVUS W. SMITH, MAJOR-GENERAL, C. S. A.

ON the 12th of October, 1864, I was ordered to assemble the State forces of Georgia at Lovejoy's Station, to support the small body of Confederate cavalry observing the Federal garrison of Atlanta, and, by threatening the latter, draw the attention of General Sherman to that place, whilst his army was in pursuit of Hood, who was moving on the Federal line of communications.

At Lovejoy's Station we were joined by two small regiments of Georgia State line troops that had previously served with the Confederate army, and by several detachments of home guards and work-shop troops, ordered to report to me by General Howell Cobb, commanding in Georgia.

On the 15th of November, when General Sherman's army started from Atlanta on its famous "march to the sea," I had at Lovejoy's Station 2800 infantry, 3 batteries, and 250 local reserve cavalry, supporting the very small Confederate cavalry force in observation around Atlanta. So far as I knew, or had reason to believe, mine was the only force, except the cavalry, that was likely to be brought into the field to oppose Sherman's march through the State.

That night I withdrew my command to the intrenchments at Griffin. Early on the 16th Wheeler's cavalry was jammed back to our position, and the Federals made serious demonstrations on our lines, but no real attack. Late in the afternoon it was ascertained that a large portion of their forces had passed through McDonough, ten miles or more to the east of us, and were nearer to Macon than we were. I fell back from Griffin at dark, and in less than twenty-four hours reached Forsythe, thirty-five miles distant, just in time to repel the advance of Sherman's cavalry and save the large depot of supplies at that place. In the meantime Sherman had commenced crossing to the east side of the Ocmulgee, and Wheeler had moved over that river. The next day I withdrew to Macon, in time to assist in repelling a formidable demonstration against East Macon, in which the Federals succeeded in forcing General Wheeler, with a portion of his command, to the bank of the Ocmulgee, in rear of our fortifications. During the night Wheeler extricated his forces, and passed out to the south and east, thus again placing his cavalry on the flank and in front of Sherman.

The militia had saved Griffin, Forsyth, and Macon; but as yet there had been no serious collision with the Federals. The face of the country was open, the roads were in good order, the weather was fine and bracing, the crops had been gathered, and were ready for use; in short, a combination of circumstances favored an easy march for Sherman's army. It was evidently no part of his purpose to attack the fortified places in the interior of the State. He was only passing through it to his ultimate destination—subsisting on the country along his route, and destroying a great deal of property, besides thoroughly breaking up

the railroads, thus cutting off communications between Richmond and the States of Alabama, Mississippi, Louisiana, and Florida.

When my command reached Macon, the work-shop troops, home guards, local reserve cavalry, and the artillery—except Anderson's battery—were ordered to report to General Cobb. In the meantime General Beauregard, Lieutenant-Generals Hardee and Richard Taylor, and other officers of prominence, reached Macon, but they brought no troops with them. General Hardee assumed the chief command. Whilst on the field in East Macon, he ordered one of the militia brigades to start at once to Augusta, and a few hours later he ordered me to move, next morning, with the remainder of my command and proceed to the same place. A few hours after I was ordered to move to Augusta General Hardee started to Savannah, and General Taylor succeeded to the command in Macon. Early on the morning of the 22d the militia moved in compliance with Hardee's order; I remained in Macon a few hours for the purpose of procuring ammunition, supplies, and transportation, having ordered the senior brigadier-general present with the troops to halt before reaching Griswoldville and wait for further orders. He was instructed not to engage the enemy, but, if pressed, to fall back to the fortifications of East Macon; or, if necessary, toward the south in the direction already taken by Wheeler's cavalry. Contrary to my instructions the militia became engaged about one mile beyond Griswoldville, and were badly cut up. They lost 51 killed and 472 wounded, but they remained in close contact with the enemy until dark. By authority of General Taylor I then withdrew them to Macon and moved by rail to Albany, thence across the country to Thomasville, and from the latter point by rail to Savannah. About one thousand of the command arrived at the latter place at 2 A. M. on the 30th of November.

Immediately upon the arrival of the leading train in Savannah, before I had left my seat in the car, an officer of Hardee's staff handed me two orders. The first, dated 10 P. M., November 29th, read:

"Lieutenant-General Hardee directs that you will proceed at once with the first two trains of your troops which may arrive at Savannah to-night, and in the same cars, to Grahamville and Coosawhatchie, on the Charleston and Savannah Railroad, which places are being threatened by raiding parties of the enemy, and if you find yourself the ranking officer present, that you assume command and drive the enemy back to their gun-boats."

The second order was dated one hour later:

"Lieutenant-General Hardee directs me to say that, from information received, he thinks it best that the first train of your troops which arrives shall go to Coosawhatchie, the farthest point, and the second to Grahamville."

On receipt of these orders I directed the troops to remain in the cars, and ordered the two trains

† A continuation of the article on p. 331.

to be transferred through the city, to the depot of the Charleston and Savannah Railroad, and there to await further orders from me. I at once called on General Hardee, whom I found in bed, in his room at a private house, and showed him my conditional authority, from Governor Brown, to withdraw my command from the Confederate service proper. I said to him: "You know that the militia of this State cannot be legally ordered beyond its limits without a special act of the Legislature. But if you can satisfy me that it is absolutely necessary that my command shall go into South Caro-



INCIDENT OF SHERMAN'S MARCH—THE FATE OF THE RAIL FENCE.

lina I will endeavor to carry out your orders. If you do not satisfy me, and persist in your orders, I will be under the disagreeable necessity of withdrawing the State forces from your control."

General Hardee said that Governor Brown, being cut off from eastern Georgia by the advancing Federal forces, had been superseded by General Rantz Wright, the presiding officer of the State Senate; and that the latter, in view of the alleged disabilities of Governor Brown, had issued a proclamation from Augusta, declaring himself to be acting Governor of the State. The authority I held from Governor Brown was several days later in date than Wright's proclamation. General Hardee then explained the condition of affairs; upon which I told him I was satisfied that, in the existing emergency, it was right that the militia should be moved into South Carolina, although this was contrary to the laws of the State of Georgia. And I added that when the emergency was over the militia must be promptly brought back to their own State. To this he acceded.

On reaching the depot I found the troops all on board the cars. I called around me about a dozen representative men of the command, briefly explained the necessity for our going beyond the limits of the State, and told them to communicate this to the men, and let me know quickly what they said about it. The reply came in a few minutes. Nearly if not quite all of the officers said they were willing to go anywhere General Smith wanted them to go. But nearly all the privates said that, whilst they would like to do what General Smith wanted, they would not go into South Carolina even to please him, because the South Carolina militia for months remained on the heights of Hamburg, and refused to cross over to Augusta and relieve the home guards of that place, thereby enabling those guards to go to the front whilst Georgia was being invaded.

On receiving this message I told the representative men to go back and inform all concerned that they were going to South Carolina, because it was my order; and that they would start within ten minutes—would be engaged in a big fight before 12 o'clock—must win it—and would be brought back to Georgia within forty-eight hours. This message was promptly delivered. In a few moments I heard laughter from every car, and ordered the conductors to put both trains in motion immediately. The men understood that they were to protect the railroad from raiding parties, and thus enable the expected Confederate reinforcements to reach Savannah.

The leading train arrived at Grahamville Station on the Charleston and Savannah Railroad about 8 A. M. The men were immediately moved out on the road leading to the Broad River landing, along which route the Federals, in large force, were reported to be steadily advancing. The second train followed the first within half an hour.

About three miles south of the station, on the crest of the north bank of a small stream, a parapet for light guns had been previously constructed, and short trenches for infantry had been prepared. These earth-works were about one hundred yards from the little stream, and were located upon ground called Honey Hill, ten or twelve feet above the water-level. On the right of the battery there was a dense forest; on the left an open pine wood. The ground between the earth-works and the small stream was mostly open, with a skirt of bushes near the water. The road on which the Federals approached was bordered closely, on both sides, by dense forests.

There were five pieces of South Carolina light artillery in the battery; and about one thousand militia, partly in the trenches, were formed in line on the right and left. Dispositions to resist attack were completed about 10 A. M. In my official report it is stated:

"The 47th Georgia [expected earlier from Charleston] had not yet reached the field. Within five or ten minutes after these dispositions had been made, the battle began by an advance piece of our artillery firing upon the enemy. Their line of battle was soon formed, and

from that time until near dark they made continuous efforts to carry our position. . . . In an hour the enemy had so extended and developed their attack that it became absolutely necessary for me to place in the front line of battle my last troops, the 47th Georgia regiment, making in all about 1400 effective muskets on the field, and all engaged. . . . While we could not from the dense wood accurately estimate the number of the enemy, it was very clear their force largely exceeded ours, and I awaited, with some anxiety, the arrival of the 32d Georgia, and the forces expected from North and South Carolina. . . . About 4:30 P. M. Brigadier-General Robertson arrived with a portion of the 32d Georgia from Charleston, a battery of artillery, and a company of cavalry. These constituted an effective reserve, but came up too late to be used in the action. During the night the enemy retired rapidly in the direction of their gun-boats. Our loss, in every arm of service, was 8 men killed and 42 wounded. . . . Lieutenant-General Hardee arrived at Grahamville Station between 8 and 9 o'clock on the morning of the 1st of December. The enemy having been beaten back on the 30th of November, and the Confederate forces [between 2000 and 3000 in number] having now arrived, there was, in my judgment, no longer any necessity for retaining the State troops of Georgia beyond their legal jurisdiction. I therefore asked and obtained permission to bring these exhausted troops back to their own State."}

In the meantime General Sherman's army was steadily moving through Georgia. The Confederate cavalry under General Wheeler restricted the eccentric movements and depredations of the Federal cavalry under General Kilpatrick, but could not materially, if at all, affect the regular daily progress of Sherman's main forces. If General Sherman purposed crossing the Savannah River, and thus reaching the sea-coast of South Carolina, he abandoned such intention after the defeat of Hatch's forces at Honey Hill. Sherman's army continued to move down the Savannah River on the Georgia side.

About fifteen thousand Confederate troops from the Carolinas had reached Savannah, and General Hardee sent large detachments out on the Georgia Central Railroad to delay Sherman's progress, but without success. On the 9th of December the Federals were close against the fortifications of Savannah.

During the siege of that place, the line occupied by my command—about two thousand men—was about three miles above the city, and ex-

† The Federal forces engaged at Honey Hill consisted of about 5500 men and 10 guns, under General John P. Hatch, sent by General John G. Foster, commanding the Department of the South, to secure a foothold for Sherman's army and to cut off Confederate reinforcements from Savannah. The Federal loss was 88 killed, 623 wounded, 43 missing,—total, 754.—EDITORS.

‡ In my lines in front of Savannah there was a small battalion made up of released Federal prisoners of war, who had taken the oath of allegiance to the Confederate Government, and were enlisted in the Confederate army. Because of suspicious circumstances reported to me, I

tended from the Savannah River to the Ogeechee Canal. This line was nearly two and a half miles in length. Batteries had been constructed at the Central Railroad, the Augusta road, and at Williamson's plantation, near the bank of the river. Between the batteries there were some slight trenches or rifle-pits, leaving three-fourths of a mile on my front without earth cover.

A short distance in front of the left of my line there was a swamp, and, nearer the river, a rice-field, both of which were flooded by means of a dam at the river-bank; and this sheet of water formed a serious obstacle to the two Federal corps jammed close against our front. But there was nothing at the far end of the dam to prevent its being cut, thereby draining the swamp and the rice-field; in which case the position could easily have been carried. To prevent this a work was begun, under the direction of Colonel B. W. Fobel, in front of the rice-field, but before it was completed the enemy appeared in front. The small militia garrison made a gallant and successful resistance, and saved the dam from being cut.

The enemy, after the capture of Fort McAllister, on the Ogeechee River, effected a permanent lodgment on Hutchinson's Island, crossed the Savannah River, and established works on the South Carolina shore, almost within range of our only line of retreat.

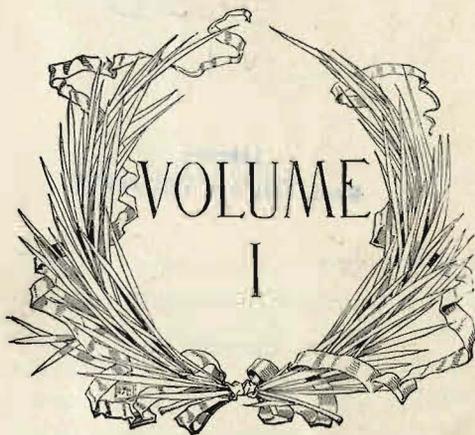
By collecting boats and using the city wharves for flooring and car-wheels for anchors, Colonel Fobel, of my command, constructed a pontoon-bridge, about half a mile in length, from Hutchinson's Island over the river, and on December 20th the city was evacuated. The artillery, baggage wagons, and all the troops, except the permanent garrisons of the forts below, passed over the bridge, the militia bringing up the rear and encamping on the sand-hills on the South Carolina side.

After the evacuation of Savannah my command was ordered to proceed through South Carolina to Augusta, Georgia, and were put in camp on the sand-hills west of that place. Later we were transferred to the lines on Briar Creek; and in the latter part of the winter took position for a short time in South Carolina, covering the approaches to Augusta on that side. †

had given orders to the troops in the line on the right and left of this battalion, to fire upon and destroy these renegades in case they committed any overt act of treachery to us. These enlisted prisoners were styled "galvanized Yankees." Shortly before the evacuation of Savannah, our troops on the extreme left needing reinforcements, these "galvanized Yankees" were detached from my command by General Hardee, and within a very few days several of them were put to death for overt acts of mutiny and attempted desertion. After the war the general by whose order this was done was tried for murder by a military commission, and acquitted.

G. W. S.

 BATTLES AND
LEADERS OF THE
CIVIL WAR 



BEING FOR THE MOST PART CONTRIBUTIONS
BY UNION AND CONFEDERATE OFFICERS.
BASED UPON "THE CENTURY WAR SERIES."
EDITED BY ROBERT UNDERWOOD JOHNSON
AND CLARENCE CLOUGH BUEL, OF THE EDI-
TORIAL STAFF OF "THE CENTURY MAGAZINE."

NEW-YORK
The Century Co.