

COLONEL THOMAS T. MUNFORD AND THE LAST CAVALRY OPERATIONS
OF THE CIVIL WAR IN VIRGINIA

by

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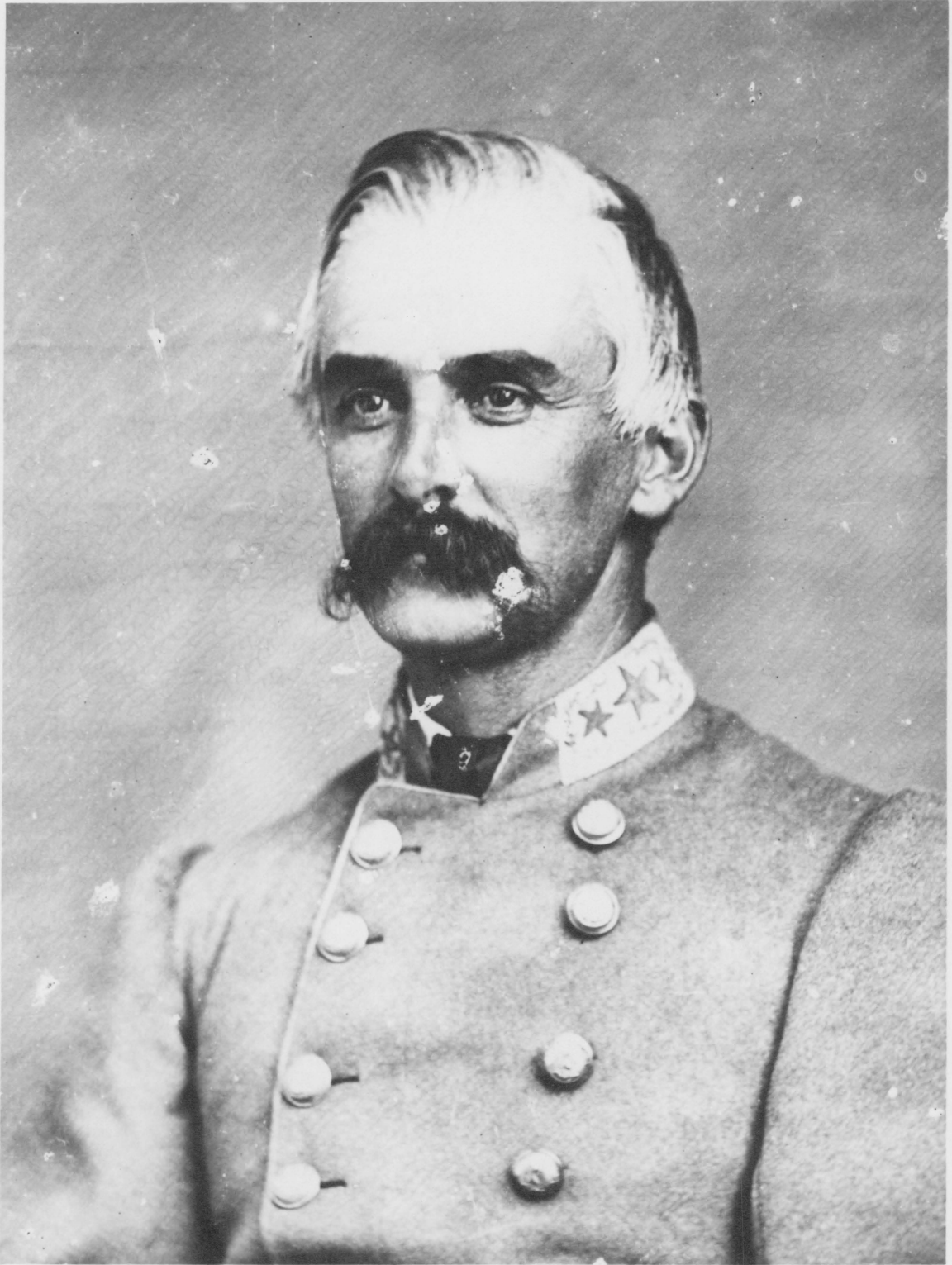
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Thomas Taylor Munford

CHAPTER I

MUNFORD: THE YOUNG MAN

Thomas Taylor Munford emerges from history a man out of focus. Of all the dashing, vivid personalities who were part of the Civil War, his name is obscure, his image blurred. A man who rubbed elbows with the likes of J. E. B. Stuart and capered with Stonewall Jackson's cavalry should be well-known in his own right. Munford is not. He stands unrecognized in the shadows of history.

Save for his war experiences, Munford's life was relatively quiet. A picture of his life before the war smacks of Southern tradition and a Virginia heritage. Born in the foreboding year of Nat Turner's rebellion, Thomas Taylor Munford became the fourth generation of a prominent Old Dominion family.

Presumably the first Munford in recorded genealogy to come to Virginia was with the expedition that discovered the Chesapeake Bay. Great-grandfather Robert Munford fought in the Indian Wars as a captain in George Washington's regiment and later in the American Revolution. He was also a member of the Virginia General Assembly. Grandfather William Munford came to Richmond around 1800 from Mecklen-

¹Richmond Times Dispatch, Mar. 1, 1918; "Munford Family Bible, Records of the Munford Family: Births, Marriages, Deaths," Jones Memorial Library, Lynchburg, Va., 3; "Munford Family Genealogy," Munford Family Papers, Duke University.

burg County and sought his fortune as a lawyer. Later he became Clerk of the House of Delegates, a position he held until his death in 1825. William Munford studied law under George Wythe, pronounced the oration at Wythe's funeral and, in ultimate admiration, had named his first child after the judge.²

George Wythe Munford chose to study law at William and Mary under the direction of Wyndam Robertson, who later became governor of Virginia. He continued his father's position as Clerk of the House of Delegates until elected Secretary of the Commonwealth, a position he held for twenty-five years. Colonel Munford, as he was known, compiled the Virginia Code of 1873. He also authored a book on early Virginians entitled Jewels of Virginia.³

Thomas Taylor Munford, born March 29, 1831, was the second son of Colonel Munford and Lucy Harrison Taylor. Munford was a child when his mother died. Colonel Munford later married Elizabeth Thorowgood Ellis. Letters written later in his life reveal that Tom Munford probably thought of Elizabeth Munford as his real mother. From his father's two marriages, Munford had a total of twelve brothers and sisters.⁴

Munford grew up in Richmond. He attended the Richmond Academy along with his good friend John Esten Cooke. On July 30, 1849, Munford

²Ibid.; Richmond Times Dispatch, Mar. 19, 1905; "Munford Family Bible," 3.

³Ibid.

⁴Ibid., 8.

entered the Virginia Military Academy as a third classman. He proved to be a capable student at the end of his first year, standing number twenty in a class of forty-five. In his second year, he rose to Sergeant-Major, ranking number thirteen out of thirty-one. At his July 5, 1852 graduation, he stood fourteenth of twenty-four cadets.⁵

Graduating with Munford were James A. Walker, who would become the last surviving commander of the Stonewall Brigade, and George Smith Patton, grandfather of the famous World War II general. Perhaps the most interesting of the people Munford met at V. M. I. was the new Professor of Natural and Experimental Philosophy (Physics) and Artillery Tactics, Thomas Jonathan Jackson, who came to the Institute at the outset of Munford's senior year. As a senior, Munford was Cadet Adjutant and he remembered distinctly Jackson's first review of cadets. On August 14, 1851, the regular commandant of cadets, Major William Gilham, was absent and no one had met his substitute. A ruckus occurred during the parade review when a cadet yelled at someone wearing improper boots. The someone turned out to be the substitute commandant, Jackson, who had slipped in unnoticed among the spectators to watch the review. In his role as Cadet Adjutant, Munford's first association with the future Confederate legend was an apology for the cadet who had criticized

⁵"Munford Family Bible," 1; John O. Beaty, John Esten Cooke, Virginian (New York, 1922), 15-16; The Southern Historical Publication Society, The South in the Building of the Nation (Richmond, 1909), XII, 220-21; Merit Roll, Virginia Military Institute, Lexington, Va., 1849-1850, 1850-1851, 1851-1852.

Jackson's boots.⁶

Munford served Jackson closely at V. M. I. throughout his senior year. He observed that Jackson seemed at his best when instructing cadets in artillery tactics. Munford stated:

"When he would give the command to the cannoneers to fire! the ring of that voice was clear enough to be heard and to burn amid the rumbling of the wheels, giving life and nerve to the holder of the lanyard. . . . No two individuals could be more unlike . . . than was Major Jackson in repose when thinking of some thing, way off, before he was aroused and interested, the brow that had appeared inanimate and almost drooping at once elevated itself in all the consciousness of power and the whole countenance and figure of the soldier the change [sic] as one who had become inspired. . . . I flatter myself to have had extraordinary advantage to learn to honor and to respect and to love . . . this grand, gloomy and peculiarly good man."⁷

Until 1852, Munford had followed a path commonly traversed by young Southern men of his class. He had been schooled in the proper subjects and educated at one of the finest military institutions in the country. Upon graduation he had several possible careers to pursue. He could, like his father and grandfather, study law. He could go into business. He could become a civil engineer. It seems, however, that Munford was a country boy at heart. Life at Lexington had led him to realize that he preferred the mountainous expanse to city confines. So he abandoned a job in Richmond as clerk to Judge John Mason of the I. R. & K. Railroad and joined a younger brother to seek his fortune

⁶Julia Smith Martin, Alumni Secretary, V. M. I., to writer, Jan. 7, 1977; Douglas Southall Freeman, Lee's Lieutenants: A Study in Command (New York, 1942), I, 707; Frank E. Vandiver, Mighty Stonewall (New York, 1957), 74.

⁷Ibid., ". . . I very much doubt if there was a man at the Institute at any time who had been thrown more directly with him [Jackson] or who knew him personally better than I did." Thomas Taylor Munford to E. W. Nichols, July 23, 1911, Munford Papers, V. M. I.

as a farmer.⁸

By October, 1853, he was engaged happily in a farmer's life. He wrote his father that his corn crop was in first-rate condition. He was concerned about the price of wheat and how his crop would fare against the "joint worm and fly." Munford boasted of having twenty-seven shoats that he would "guarantee" to weigh in at 180 pounds next year and twenty-five more which he thought would weigh in at an average of 140 pounds. He also reassured his father, who had apparently provided much of the financial backing for the Munford brothers' enterprise: "You may rest assured that the last pack of corn has been bought for the place that will come out of your pocket--Everything was improving when I left home."⁹

It is unclear exactly where Munford was farming. A letter written by his stepmother in 1853 told of visiting Tom at Rock Spring. A deed with his father, signed the next year, gave Munford property known as the Rock Spring Estate in Powhatan County, Va. Perhaps he had been renting this property to see if he could indeed succeed at farming before making a major purchase. Whatever the case, Munford's main news to his father was not of his wheat or corn or hogs; rather, it was of his impending marriage. He wrote: "I think about the 25th will be the day for my marriage."¹⁰

⁸R. A. Brock, Virginia and Virginians: Eminent Virginians (Spartanburg, S.C., 1973), 579; biographical sketch, Munford Papers, Virginia Military Institute, cited hereafter as V. M. I. Biography.

⁹Thomas Taylor Munford to George Wythe Munford, Oct. 14, 1853, Munford Family Papers.

¹⁰Article of Agreement between George Wythe Munford and Thomas

It was, in fact, November 7, 1853, when Munford married Elizabeth Henrietta Tayloe in Buena Vista, Roanoke County. Etta, as she was called, was the daughter of George Plater Tayloe and Mary Elizabeth Langhorne. After his stepmother had visited Munford in September, 1853, she discussed the forthcoming marriage in a letter to her brother Powhatan Ellis, Jr. "It seems right strange to think of Tom's getting married, but as he is really and truly a farmer and intends to remain so, I think his present life too lonely and I am delighted at the change in his prospects. She is said to be quite pretty and a remarkably intelligent accomplished girl. She is now at the head of her father's establishment in Roanoke and Tom says one of the most elegant managers he ever saw--of course his report is rather an interested one, but I have heard others concur in the same opinion."¹¹

Munford brought his bride to live at Rock Spring Estate, where she fulfilled her mother-in-law's hopes of being a good companion to a farmer. In September of the following year, she bore their first child, George Taylor. Munford could reassure his parents, "Etta is very well, but is very busy."¹²

Munford had an uncle in Bedford County who had kept his Irish setter while he attended V. M. I. Munford seems to have visited this uncle

Taylor Munford, Jan. 1, 1854; Lizzie Munford to Powhatan Ellis, Jr., Sept. 14, 1853, Munford Family Papers; Ibid.

¹¹"Munford Family Bible," 7; The Roanoke Times, Mar. 1, 1918; Lizzie Munford to Powhatan Ellis, Jr., Sept. 14, 1853, Munford Family Papers.

¹²Thomas Taylor Munford to George Wythe Munford, Sept. 6, 1854, Munford Family Papers.

often after his marriage. This gave the young farmer ample opportunity to view the surrounding countryside and probably made him realize the gently rolling land and mountainous horizon, so like Lexington, was more to his liking. However, before pulling up stakes in Powhatan County, Munford and his brother, Wythe, decided to try their hand at planting cotton, which they did on the Yazoo River in Cassell County, Miss. Not much is known about this venture, which ended with the sudden death of Wythe. By 1858, Munford had given up Rock Spring and acquired land closer to his uncle and apparently more to his liking.¹³

Making the move to Bedford put Munford in deep financial debt. Yet on the plantation of Glen Alpine, situated near the town of Coffey on the road between Boonsboro and Perrowville, his farming operations expanded greatly from the days of Rock Spring. In what was probably his first letter to his father from the farm, he apologized for not writing sooner because he had "a very heavy crop of everything." He was still green at the profession, Munford stated, and he had "little time to devote to anything but . . . farming operations." He was busy harvesting hay, topping tobacco, preparing to harvest oats and tending a huge crop of corn. "So you see," he concluded, "I have a plenty to do."¹⁴

By January, 1859, the winds of war had begun to stir. Munford

¹³"Munford Family Bible," 2; V. M. I. Biography; Thomas Taylor Munford to E. W. Nichols, July 23, 1911, Munford Papers, V. M. I.

¹⁴James B. Noell, "Lynchburg's Confederate Generals," in Munford Papers, Jones Memorial Library, Lynchburg, Va.; Thomas Taylor Munford to G. W. Munford, July 5, 1857, Munford Family Papers.

voiced his concern in a letter to his stepmother. "I do hope that there is yet patriotism enough at the North to save us from the horrors of a Civil War. . . . The people up here are not united, nor are they in Roanoke or Botetourt. I fear Virginia is in a bad way."¹⁵

In August of that same year, Colonel Munford made his first visit to Glen Alpine. He found everything much to his liking, and he wrote his younger son, Charles Ellis: "I have been delighted to find how well Tom was situated. He has everything around him suitable for a farmer upon a large scale, and though it has involved him in a heavy debt yet he is manifestly by struggling by industry and energy [managed] to work through and I doubt not will accomplish in a reasonable time."¹⁶

Colonel Munford described Glen Alpine in great detail in letters to his wife and to Charles Ellis. "Tom is situated here right at the foot of the mountains, surrounded on three sides by pretty aspiring hills," he stated to his wife. The house, he thought, was an "elegant brick mansion" with three porches. The front porch had Corinthian columns, steps made with granite from a quarry on the property, and cast iron ornamental balustrade. "It is spacious and commodious," he said, "built in the best style and not more than four years old." On the inside was a "handsome, spacious" hall through the center and to the hall above was a "massive" mahogany stairway. On the property was a brick kitchen, dairy, ice house, three buildings for raising fowl, a

¹⁵Thomas Taylor Munford to Elizabeth T. Munford, Jan. 10, 1859, Munford Family Papers.

¹⁶George Wythe Munford to Charles Ellis Munford, Aug. 1959; George Wythe Munford to Elizabeth T. Munford, Aug. 19, 1859, Munford Family Papers.

smoke house, a brick house for making lye soap, a corn house, a carriage house, and a pigeon house. A two-story, 18-horse stable in front of the house had separate stall doors for each horse. The top level stored hay and grain. The entire structure was underpinned with stone masonry and had lightning rods. The six slave quarters to the left of the house, also with lightning rods and underpinning, were frame houses with glass windows, sturdy doors, weather boardings, solid brick chimneys and were painted lead in color. The property also included an overseer's house, a tobacco house and an old mill "which at some future day Tom intends to repair and set in motion as a corn mill for himself and neighbors."

The Colonel's great objection to the farm was the fact that it was so hilly. On the positive side, the farm had a beautiful view of the Peaks of Otter, and the Colonel had to agree that the land was indeed productive.

Tom has delivered about a thousand bushels of wheat and has not quite finished his crop yet--There will be about a hundred bushels of oats and corn in abundance. I have never seen a finer stock of hogs--about one hundred--all thoroughbred--weighing from two to three hundred pounds each. About sixty will be ready for the knife by October. There are about forty head of fine cattle of good blood . . . a hundred head of sheep, twelve large good mules and about as many oxen and two or three riding horses. Every species of fowl, hens, ducks, turkeys, geese, peacocks, and one of the largest orchards of choice peaches, apples, pears, nectarines, damsons. . . . Nothing gives a parent more pleasure than to feel that his grown sons are taking the positions in life to which they are entitled and towards which the hopes of many anxious hours have been centered.

The Colonel then confided to his wife:

He has incurred a heavy debt to make the fun chase, but he is working like a Trojan and seems disposed to economics as far as possible to pay and work himself out of debt. But . . . handsome

houses require handsome everything else and I fear his nose will be kept to the grindstone sometime before he will accomplish his purpose.¹⁷

The following year and a half saw Munford with his nose indeed to the grindstone, yet the impending conflict could not be ignored. In 1859, Munford had sensed opinion in his locality to be divided. April, 1861, he beheld new evidence to the contrary. He wrote his brother, Charles Ellis: "I am happy to inform you that Old Bedford was disen- thralled and with her arms on, ready for the conflict, before the Gauntlet was thrown down by our would-be-masters. I feel better con- tented now than I have done for several months, all of my friends are with us heart and soul and we all stand together as a band of brothers."

In 1858, Munford had expressed worry, apprehension and perhaps even fear about the difficulties between North and South. Two years later, his attitude had hardened. He now had the perspective of "our cause" which he felt was "for the defense of our firesides, wives, and little ones." He also expressed a devotion to his State: "With each son in the field, old Virginia will soon retake her position as the first state and the first people of the world."¹⁸

Even with his expressions of loyalty and devotion, Munford had the personal responsibilities of a family and a large farm. Pressures from different directions tugged at his heart and conscience. Certainly his finances by the spring of 1861 were a significant consideration. His

¹⁷Ibid.

¹⁸Thomas Taylor Munford to Charles Ellis Munford, April 18, 1861, Munford Family Papers.

wife seemed to perceive her husband's worries, for it was an anxious Etta who wrote her mother-in-law:

These are indeed sad . . . times that have befallen us. One yet can foretell what the end will be--but I do trust that Civil War may be averted and that matters yet may be settled satisfactorily and peaceably. Mr. Munford feels gloomy at the prospects and is trying to find what course will be best for him to pursue--with his heavy debts but I trust a merciful provider may watch over to provide for us all.

Etta Munford's prayers were to no avail. Civil War would not be prevented and Thomas Taylor Munford would lay aside his farmer's ambition, in essence, to exchange his plow for a sword.¹⁹

¹⁹Etta Munford to Elizabeth T. Munford, Spring, 1861, Munford Family Papers.

CHAPTER II

MUNFORD: THE SOLDIER

The fragile serenity embracing farmer Munford's piedmont environs shattered with the intrusion of civil war. Munford, not so young or naive as to misjudge the seriousness of what lay ahead, reluctantly but dutifully marched off to war. He left behind a pregnant wife and four children.¹

Munford journeyed to Lynchburg as a first lieutenant in Company G from Bedford. On May 8, 1861, along with Companies A and F from Bedford, B from Lynchburg, C from Botetourt, D from Franklin, E from Amherst, H from Appomattox, I from Campbell and K from Albermarle, Company G formed the 30th Virginia Mounted Infantry and was mustered into service by Colonel Jubal A. Early. Colonel R. W. C. Radford received command of the 30th Virginia and Munford became his lieutenant colonel--one of twenty-three V. M. I. graduates who served under Radford.²

Munford remembered Radford as the best camp officer he had ever

¹"Munford Family Bible."

²Noell, "Lynchburg's Confederate Generals," 24-25; Thomas Taylor Munford, "A Confederate Cavalry Officer's Reminiscence," Journal of the U.S. Cavalry Association, IV 91891-1892), 279, cited hereafter as Munford, "Reminiscence"; U.S. War Dept. (comp.), War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Union and Confederate Armies (Washington, 1880-1901), Ser. I, 457. Cited hereafter as O. R.; unless otherwise stated, all references will be to Ser. I.

seen, "a good disciplinarian, a fine horseman, an excellent swordsman, and a thorough drill master. Personally he was a brave officer . . . but he had an exalted opinion of the regular service, and underestimated the value of volunteers, which made him very unpopular with his command."

Unlike Radford, Munford felt that the volunteers who comprised the 30th Virginia were "the best material in the land, mountainmen, expert marksmen, accomplished horsemen. Many of them could cut the head off a squirrel on the top of the highest tree, or kill a running deer with a rifle, and all had been accustomed to horse from early infancy, and could ride as well without saddles as with them."

These men had been issued only double-barreled, muzzle-loader shotguns and sabers with leather scabbards. They carried percussion caps in their pockets and buckshot in cloth haversacks. Generally they rode English saddles redesigned with rings for tying blanket straps. Leather pieces attached to the stirrups steadied the gun.³

Equipped and practiced, the 30th Virginia had yet to be tried. Its opportunity came with the summer when the war focused on northern Virginia. On June 26, Munford commanded four companies of the 30th at Fairfax Courthouse, where Munford received his baptism under fire.⁴ This taste of skirmish prepared the young officer for the real battle less than a month later.

At First Manassas, Munford commanded the Black Horse and Chester-

³Munford, "Reminiscence," 276, 279-80.

⁴Charles Minor Blackford, III, ed., Letters from Lee's Army (New York, 1947), 18; O. R., II, 457.

field troops, the Wise Troop from Lynchburg, the Franklin Rangers and three independent companies. Around 5 p.m. on July 21, Munford went in support of Radford on Gen. Thomas J. Jackson's right flank. He found the enemy in "wild confusion" and charged. Munford boasted that as a result of his activities, he "had the honor of delivering to his excellency the President of the Confederate States ten rifled guns, their caissons, and forty-six horses."⁵

Following the battle, Munford with four companies became attached to Maj. Gen. James Longstreet's Virginia Division and was stationed at the Stone Bridge near Cedarville. Summer and fall of 1861 passed quietly. The troops spent their time drilling and entertaining one another. In September, J. E. B. Stuart received commission as brigadier general and began reorganizing the cavalry. Stuart designated his regiment as the 1st Virginia Cavalry. Munford contended that Radford never forgave Stuart for putting his own regiment first when in fact the 30th had been the first mounted force organized. Further, Munford felt that Radford's attitude "soured" toward the cavalry when Stuart, instead of himself, was given command of the cavalry.⁶

Throughout the winter, Munford and his four companies picketed the roads from the Stone Bridge to Dranesville. One cold snowy night during this time, Munford returned with a report to Gen. Joseph E.

⁵ Ibid., 434, 481, 534-35.

⁶ Munford, "Reminiscence," 279-80; Ibid., 38-39; Freeman, Lee's Lieutenants, I, 164N.

Johnston and was invited to dine with the General on turkey and brandy. Munford found the usually formal officer to be "simply charming; full of life and graces . . . an elegant host."⁷

Besides being entertained by a general, Munford also amused himself apparently by flirting with the ladies. Captain Charles M. Blackford of Munford's command wrote that he and Munford took great amusement in being introduced to young women while failing to mention their marital status. They would proceed to bait the ladies by saying many "gallant things," then when they had the women particularly interested, they would make allusion to their wives and children--catching the unsuspecting females totally off guard.⁸

Throughout the early months of 1862, Munford saw action in northern Virginia. Stuart reported that "the detachment of Second Virginia Cavalry, under Lieutenant-Colonel Munford, has performed distinguished service along the Piedmont region and I commend to the notice of the general that officer's activity, good judgment, and unceasing vigilance, conspicuously displayed in the signal service he has rendered."⁹

During April, the Confederate army undertook a reorganization of regimental and company officers. Munford's regiment elected him colonel in place of Radford. He remembered that the elections had come at an unfortunate time before a major campaign. "Some of the best and

⁷Ibid., 280-81.

⁸Blackford, Letters from Lee's Army, 62-63.

⁹O. R., V, 511-14, 1025; XI, Pt. 3, 407; XII, Pt. 1, 417; Munford, "Reminiscence," 282.

most conscientious officers were retired or had to return to the ranks; untried men, sometimes politicians and demagogues were placed in command of regiments, which completely disorganized the old order of the workings . . ." Munford, however, was quite happy with the election results. "I became the Colonel of what I believed to be the best cavalry regiment in the army, and was more in love with it than ever." Even at this early stage of the war, the army felt the scarcity of materials. Munford recalled that "the old uniforms were faded and gone, and the new officers found it difficult to get even a coat and the necessary trimmings, with the insignia of rank they now delighted to wear."¹⁰

In May, during Jackson's Valley Campaign, Munford served picket duty and protected the army's flank. June brought action with Gens. Turner Ashby and George H. Steuart at Woodstock, where Munford's cavalry mistakenly came under fire from Confederate forces. "Such management I never saw before," Munford said of Steuart. He and Col. Thomas S. Flournoy of the 6th Virginia were so "mortified and annoyed" by Steuart's lack of control that they requested transfer to Ashby's command.¹¹

Soon afterward, Ashby received a mortal wound. Temporary command of his brigade went to Munford; but even as it did, Gen. Robert E. Lee contemplated a permanent successor for Ashby by noting that Munford

¹⁰Ibid., 282-83; O. R., V, 515-16; Blackford, Letters from Lee's Army, 81.

¹¹Freeman, Lee's Lieutenants, I, 346-47; O. R. XII, Pt. 1, 498, 501-2, 729-31.

"seems to be a good officer, judging at this distance, and was elected in place of Radford."¹²

At the June 8 battle of Cross Keys, Munford protected Gen. Richard S. Ewell's right flank and later pursued the routed enemy. Throughout the Valley Campaign, the cavalry served as Jackson's eyes; and as Jackson prepared to slip away to Richmond to assist Lee against Gen. George McClellan, he again turned to Munford. Jackson relied upon Munford to foster the impression that "a heavy advance" up the valley was being initiated. When under a flag of truce, Federal surgeons came to take their wounded back to their lines, Munford made sure they overheard a feigned report of a heavily-reinforced Jackson moving up the valley. Munford's ruse worked, because the Federals bolted for Strasburg and immediately began fortifying the town. All the while, Jackson was heading in the opposite direction.¹³

As Jackson hastened for Richmond, Munford reflected upon the recent Valley Campaign.

The weather had been extremely hot . . . The roads macadamized and the cavalry unprovided with horseshoes and being compelled to subsist them mostly on young grass without salt, I found my command in a most deplorable condition, our work had been eternal day and night. We were under fire twenty-six days out of thirty having gone in with more than 100 [men] unarmed, we returned generally well-equipped.¹⁴

¹²Freeman, Lee's Lieutenants, I, 432; O. R. XII, Pt. 1, 731-32; XII, Pt. 3, 907.

¹³Ibid., Pt. 1, 732; Pt. 3, 912; Munford, "Reminiscence," 74-75.

¹⁴O. R., XII, Pt. 1, 733.

Though Munford had led the brigade commendably after Ashby's death, permanent command went instead to Brig. Gen. Beverley H. Robertson, a West Pointer. Robertson remained in charge at Harrisonburg while Munford followed Jackson to Richmond.¹⁵

June 29 and 30 found Munford and the 2nd Virginia Cavalry with Jackson at White Oak Swamp. The lay of the land, however, prevented the cavalry from playing a large role during the Seven Days' Battles.¹⁶

In July, Munford and the 2nd Virginia accompanied Ewell to observe Maj. Gen. John Pope, then returned next month to lead Jackson's advance against Pope's supply base at Manassas Junction. During the Second Battle of Manassas, Munford's regiment returned ironically to the same place on the battlefield where it had stood during the first battle--near the Stone Bridge. Arriving at this point. Lt. Col. J. W. Watts with one squadron charged a company of Federals only to find that he had attacked the advance guard of Gen. John Buford's Union cavalry. Bringing up reinforcements, Munford surveyed the situation and attempted to position himself. The enemy, thinking Munford was retreating, began to advance, whereupon Munford wheeled his command about "and went at them with drawn sabers." As a result of Munford's audacity, the 2nd Virginia ripped through the enemy's first line and engaged in vicious hand-to-hand fighting with the second line. Over-

¹⁵Ibid., Pt. 2, 552; XII, Pt. 1, 733.

¹⁶Henry B. McClellan, I Rode with Jeb Stuart: The Life and Campaigns of Major General J. E. B. Stuart (Bloomington, Ind., 1958), 80-82; Freeman, Lee's Lieutenants, I, 578.

whelming numbers forced Munford back, but the arrival of the 7th and 12th Virginia Cavalry caused Buford's retreat. Munford commended his men afterwards by stating, "My regiment went up in splendid order, and made as gallant a charge as ever was seen." During the fight, Munford's horse was killed, and he suffered a saber stroke to the head.¹⁷

Stuart later wrote: "In this brilliant affair over 300 of the enemy's cavalry were put hors de combat they, together with their horses and equipment, falling into our hands. Munford . . . [and others] were wounded in the action, conspicuously displaying great gallantry and heroism." Robertson called Munford's charge "brilliant and dashing," while Lee noted that Munford had led the charge "with great gallantry."¹⁸

In September, Munford distinguished himself further at Crampton's Gap in Maryland. With a force including only his dismounted cavalry and fragments of Mahone's infantry, Chew's brigade and the Portsmouth Battery--no more than 800 men--Munford held the gap "at all hazards" for three hours against ten regiments and a brigade.¹⁹

On October 24, Stuart recommended Munford for promotion by stating: "No colonel in the brigade has been as deserving. He is a gallant soldier, a daring and skillful officer and is thoroughly identified with the brigade as its leader. . . . As a partisan he has no

¹⁷ McClellan, Stuart, 91; O. R., XII, Pt. 2, 726, 748.

¹⁸ Ibid., 558-59, 737, 746-47.

¹⁹ Ibid., XIX, Pt. 1, 814-15, 825-27; McClellan, Stuart, 126, 132-33.

superior . . . The assignment of a junior to this position would be prejudicial to the best interest of the service." Instead, with the reorganization of cavalry in November, and even though Munford had commanded the brigade since Second Manassas, William E. Jones of the 7th Virginia received command of Robertson's brigade. Munford and his regiment transferred to Maj. Gen. Fitzhugh Lee's brigade.²⁰

As 1862 drew to a close, Munford reflected over the past year in a letter to his sister. "I should like so well to be with the family circle to enjoy the quiet of a home feeling again, but this miserable war interferes with all our plans and wishes and we have given up everything deeply for our cause."²¹ The following two years would, indeed, tell just how much Munford had to give up for his cause.

In January, 1863, Munford wrote his mother that the troops were being kept "in a constant state of expectancy" by Yankees. By this third year, the toll of war had begun to fray Munford's edges. His men and horses were in a deplorable state. He counted three of every four horses dying daily, including his own beloved "Ewell" who perished from lung fever. Rations for his men were so reduced that Munford was "mortified to see the poor fellows suffer." He confessed: "I am becoming like the camel's back which was broken by a continued piling on of the agony."²²

²⁰Miscellaneous paper, Munford Family Papers; Southern Historical Society Papers (Richmond, Va., 1876-1944), III, 191; cited hereafter as SHSP; McClellan, Stuart, 186-87.

²¹Thomas Taylor Munford to Sallie Munford, Dec. 23, 1862, Munford Family Papers.

²²Thomas Taylor Munford to Mrs. George Wythe Munford, Jan. 27, 1863; Elizabeth Tayloe Munford to Mrs. George Wythe Munford, Mar. 4, 1863, Munford Family Papers.

The agony of war told on the homefront as well. Typhoid fever raged at Glen Alpine. Four of the servants, all of the children, and Etta Munford herself fell sick. She cried out her desperation in a letter to her mother-in-law. "If this terrible war would only end! I miss Mr. Munford each day of my life more and more." Perhaps it was the pressure of her world falling to pieces around her that made Etta Munford lament farther. "I am beginning to despair of Mr. M's promotion --though my heart is quite set upon it and I can but think it strange that his claims should be overlooked."

Munford also had cause to wonder about his promotion. He had been in command of a brigade for much of the time and had even been recommended for promotion once by Lee and once by Stuart. Strangely enough, Lee suggested Munford's name again in March as a possible replacement for W. E. Jones.²³

Before March slipped away, another sadness enveloped Munford--the loss of his second son, seven-year-old Beverly Carlton. Munford, the Confederate colonel wrote: "My precious little boy was so gentle and affectionate, and clung entirely to me that I feel his loss sadly indeed. What a mighty gap it leaves in my dear little circle--and how hard it will be to forget his little gentle ways. . . . Surrounded as I am by men, hardened by the circumstances of war--my own heart and feelings, blinded and changed until I can scarcely realize it."²⁴

²³Elizabeth Tayloe Munford to Mrs. George Wythe Munford, Mar. 4, 1863, Munford Family Papers; O. R., XXV, Pt. 2, 654.

²⁴"Munford Family Bible," 8; Thomas Taylor Munford to Mrs. George Wythe Munford, Mar. 25, 1863, Munford Family Papers.

In May, Munford's 2nd Virginia Cavalry led Jackson's advance to Chancellorsville and shielded his movements from Maj. Gen. Joseph Hooker's army. During that advance, Jackson rode for awhile with Munford and Maj. Gen. Robert E. Rodes. When Brig. Gen. Raleigh E. Colston came up to report, Jackson commented on how all four men present had been together at V. M. I. and how many men in the column were also graduates of the Institute. Later, Jackson instructed Munford to protect his left and, if possible, to secure Ely's Ford Road. Then, as an afterthought, he told Munford that V. M. I. would be heard from that day.²⁵

Shortly after Chancellorsville, Munford assumed command of Fitzhugh Lee's brigade when that general fell ill with inflammatory rheumatism. Munford commanded the brigade during the battles of Brandy Station and Aldie. The Battle of Aldie caused Munford to record: "I do not hesitate to say that I have never seen as many Yankees killed in the same space of ground in any fight I have ever seen, or any battle-field

²⁵Freeman, Lee's Lieutenants, II, 551, 554; Munford in a 1911 letter discussed Chancellorsville. "General Jackson, General R. E. Rodes, Gen. R. E. Colston and Colonel Stapleton Crutchfield were all of the faculty of the VMI. Crutchfield had roomed with me as a plebe. He was Jackson's Chief of Artillery. Gen. R. E. Rode's command led the Infantry Column and my classmate, Captain Henry E. Whiting, was his AAG to Rodes, and Colonel Thom. H. Carter (Rodes' classmate) was his chief of artillery, and General James H. Lane's Brigade was in Rodes' Division (class behind mine). General Colston had Trimble's Division with T. S. Tosh as APC (of class of 1860). They were supported by General A. P. Hill's Division and Colonel John M. Breckenbrough commanding Heth's Brigade was of the class of 1850, with Colonels R. M. Mayo, 47th Va., Colonel Frank Malony, 55th Va., who was killed that day (of class of 1853) and Lt. Col. Fleet W. Cox (of class of 49) severely wounded. Lt. Col. E. Poinsett Tayloe, 22nd Va. Battalion, all of Breckenbrough's Brigade, with Glen R. Lindsay Walker of A. P. Hill's Division (class of 1845) all graduates of VMI . . ." Thomas Taylor Munford to E. W. Nichols, July 23, 1911, Munford Papers, V. M. I.

in Virginia that I have ever been over." Stuart stated that "at Aldie ensued one of the most sanguinary cavalry battles of the war, and at the same time most credible to our arms and glorious to the veteran brigade of Brig. Gen. Fitz Lee."²⁶

At the end of June, Gen. Fitz Lee resumed command of his brigade in time for the second Northern invasion. On the 29th, the brigade cut through Gen. George Meade's only lines of communications with Washington by tearing up Baltimore and Ohio railroad track and destroying telegraph lines. Stuart, with the brigades of Lee and John R. Chambliss, reached Gettysburg on July 2 but too late to be of much consequence.²⁷

After Gettysburg, Fitz Lee's and Gen. Wade Hampton's commands guarded the flank of Lee's retreating army. Lee's shattered forces had to wait for the Potomac to recede, and the cavalry protected the army's front. On the night of July 13, Lee's army finally crossed back onto friendly soil. The Southern cavalry dismounted and occupied the trenches to satisfy any suspicions Meade might develop. The next day, the cavalry joined the army.²⁸

Lee's Army of Northern Virginia used the time after Gettysburg to rest and regroup. Late in July, Munford heard a rumor that the cavalry would again undergo reorganization. He pleaded with his father to inter-

²⁶O. R., XXVII, Pt. 2, 691, 739-41.

²⁷McClellan, Stuart, 326, 341.

²⁸O. R., XXVII, Pt. 2, 691; Ibid., 363.

cede with Lee on his behalf. As ammunition, he told his father that "I have been more in command of a brigade during the past year than in command of my regiment." Munford feared he would again be overlooked in favor of a West Pointer as had happened after Ashby's death and when W. E. "Grumble" Jones replaced Beverly Robertson.²⁹

In the reorganization, Munford was not promoted. When Brigadier General Williams C. Wickham resigned his commission to take his seat in the Confederate Congress, Munford took over temporary command of his brigade.³⁰ Permanent command, however, went to Thomas L. Rosser, a West Pointer. Not only was Rosser a West Pointer, which gave evidence to the allegation of prejudice; worse, he also was a junior officer, which added further to Munford's humiliation. Bad blood now developed between the two men.³¹

²⁹Ibid., 371; Thomas Taylor Munford to George Wythe Munford, July 30, 1863, Munford Family Papers; Thomas Taylor Munford to Anne Bachman Hyde, Sept. 25, 1915, Anne Bachman Hyde Papers, Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina. In this letter Munford said, "Not being a graduate of West Point I frequently had little clashings with some of the officers who were inclined to arrogate all the wisdom to themselves." Munford expressed further disdain for West Point graduates in Thomas Taylor Munford to E. W. Nichols, Feb. 14, 1916, Munford Papers, V. M. I. "Fitz Lee, Rosser and Lomax never seemed to comprehend that anything out of West Point was equal to themselves as soldiers."

³⁰Thomas Taylor Munford to James Longstreet, Feb. 19, 1899, Glen Irving Tucker Papers, Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina. "This reminds me vividly of my own services in our war. Gen. Wm. C. Wickham was Colonel of the 4th Virginia Cavalry of the 2nd Brigade Cavalry. I was Senior Colonel. Wickham was elected to Congress. Stuart had endorsed and recommended me to command the Brigade and I was commanding it, but Wickham, being a Congressman-Elect got himself made Brigadier and held both offices and drew the pay of both. I did his work . . ." In another letter, C. W. Chick to Thomas Taylor Munford, no date, Munford Family Papers, Chick, who had belonged to Co. I, Second Va. Cavalry said, "Every man in the brigade felt the injustice done you in the way of promotions."

³¹Freeman, Lee's Lieutenants, III, 596-97. Freeman says, "As

As if things on the war front were not discouraging enough, on the home front Munford also faced grim tidings. On January 30, Etta Munford died. Munford's sister described his misery at Glen Alpine: "Oh! You have no idea of how desolate it is to him here, and it makes me tearful to look at his sad and almost hopeless expression as he sits by the fire in his room. We were sitting in here yesterday evening, and he told me it was harrowing to him to look round on all the familiar objects in the room and to miss her in them all."

Perhaps it was fortunate that Munford had the war to which he could return. After two weeks at home, he went back to the front lines. His sister felt that "he feels so heartbroken at home where everything reminds him of his heavy loss, he probably thinks having something to occupy his mind will be better for him."³²

Munford returned to face a new Union team: Gens. Ulysses S. Grant and his cavalry chief, Philip H. Sheridan. The first confrontation with Grant in May was awesome, and it was the Southern cavalry that saved the day at Spotsylvania Courthouse. From this point on, the cavalry faced a new and stubborn Federal cavalry at Beaver Dam Station, Ashland, North Anna River, Cold Harbor and Travilian Station.³³

Rosser was assigned to Lee's Division which Wickham had been directing temporarily, Rosser's seniority over the Colonels then at the head of the other Brigades gave him command of the Division. This was, of course, in accordance with regulations but it had one unhappy aspect: When Wickham resigned, his Brigade passed to . . . Munford . . . a devoted officer who . . . never had received promotion to the rank of Brigadier."

³²Sallie Munford to Mrs. George Wythe Munford, Feb. 15, 1864, Munford Family Papers.

³³I. P. Whitehead, "The Campaigns of Munford and the Second Virginia Cavalry," Manuscripts Division, University of Virginia; Freeman, Lee's Lieutenants, III, 248-63.

While Lee faced Grant at Petersburg, Fitz Lee's cavalry joined Lt. Gen. Jubal A. Early in the Valley in a frantic effort to relieve some of the pressure on Virginia's western flank. A vicious fight ensued against Sheridan at Winchester, after which Munford covered Early's retreat. Fighting continued at Fisher's Hill, Milford and Tom's Brook. At Tom's Brook under Rosser's command, the cavalry suffered a terrible defeat. Munford called Tom's Brook "the greatest disaster that ever befell our cavalry during the whole war."

The ill will between Munford and Rosser intensified during the winter. As a result of Tom's Brook, Munford's command was sorely equipped. When Munford returned from "the roughest march we ever made," Rosser informed him that he wanted a detail of men to accompany him on an expedition to Beverley, West Va. According to Munford:

I told him that my men, as he knew, had lost everything, but that my quartermaster was expected from Richmond the next day, and after his arrival with the necessary supplies, and I could shoe up my horses, I would be glad to second him in his wishes. The snow was very deep and the weather very threatening. . . . I took the order back with me . . . It was sent to the colonels commanding regiments. They reported at my headquarters, and requested me to intercede for these men, saying, as I knew, they were not in condition. . . . I could not get a corporal's guard of volunteers and the detail was ordered. It was bitter. About sunrise the next morning, the time appointed for them to move, Rosser and his staff came by my headquarters to gather up the command. His Inspector-General, Captain R. B. Kennon, called at my tent and asked me where my complement for the expedition was. I replied that the orders had been issued the night previous, and the detail had been instructed to report to Colonel Morgan, of the First Virginia; that I had heard the reveille bugle, and had no doubt they were at Colonel Morgan's headquarters. In about half an hour Captain Kennon returned with a piece of paper in his hands with words to this effect: I would consider myself in arrest, and confine myself to within so many miles--charges: sedition, conspiracy, with an effort to thwart his efforts--signed by order of Thomas L. Rosser. Upon his return a military court was convened and I was actually tried upon these charges. The court acquitted

me honorably, and in dismissing the charges, recommended that charges be not made again against officers without sufficient foundation.³⁴

Yet while the personal feud between Munford and Rosser deepened, both officers became caught up in a more devastating struggle that rapidly plunged their beloved South into depths from which there would be no return.

³⁴Ibid., 115, 118-24; General T. T. Munford, "Reminiscences of Cavalry Operations: Operations Under Rosser," SHSP, XIII (1885), 134, 143-44; Thomas Taylor Munford to John W. Daniel, Aug. 1, 1905, Munford Family Papers. Munford writes, "The snow was deep and the thermometer crawling downward every hour; and in the morning when the detail reported to him, he asked where I was of my Adjutant? He told him I was at my shelter tent and that he had reported with the command. He then rode over near where I was, wrote an order 'That I should consider myself in arrest, and confine myself to Camp until his return' on a raid of a week or ten days. I forwarded it to Genl. Early and demanded a trial without delay--but Rosser was gone and when he returned it was with a wonderful flourish of trumpets and I doubt if any raid was ever made under half trials and suffering and at such cost that the men of my command suffered. I could never get a report of it as he furloughed all of my men when he got back to the Warm Springs (for a month) but these poor fellows, who were poorly clad, their horses unshod, and they toiled amid the coldest spell of winter _____ slippery mountains and swollen streams without a fire at any time. . . . and amid sleet and rain they tagged on to the end, many to die, many so badly frosted they never returned to duty and all to gratify the foolish ambition of a fellow who had but two qualities. He was brave and ambitious--BUT cared for no one but himself . . ."

Munford's account, which follows, picks up the action in 1865. Begun in the 1880's, and apparently finished shortly before his death, it is a reflection of history, a commentary, rather than a precise record of events. The fact that it is a memoir rather than a record or diary limits its historical value. Like all memoirs, it is colored by postwar sentiment, by eulogy, by vague recollection, by distortion. At times, the memoir resounds with the lament of a bitter old man.

Munford's emotionalism distorts his view of the importance of the battle. At the onset of his memoir, he says Five Forks was the "mortal wound" of the Confederacy. Five Forks, disastrous and humiliating, was but one wound of many that had already doomed the Confederacy. Victory at Five Forks would have prolonged the war, perhaps, but by 1865 defeat was inevitable. Some historians conclude that the war had been lost even before the summer of 1864. By the end of his memoir, Munford more rightly recognizes that Five Forks was just the straw that broke the camel's back.

For the most part, Munford's is an accurate account. It is a vivid and pathetic description of the final days of the Confederacy. Its importance and historical value result from the fact that it is a substantial narrative of Five Forks by an officer who actually participated in the battle. Generals Pickett, Fitzhugh Lee and Rosser, like Munford, gave accounts many years after the battle, but their memoirs detailed only as much as each man knew personally. As none of the three men reached the battlefield until after the battle had been lost, none could be expected to provide a satisfactory report. Though

tempered by time, Munford's is probably the best memoir of Five Forks in Civil War literature.

In an effort to strengthen and clarify this work, minor editorial changes in grammar, punctuation and style have been made. The astericks represent Munford's break points in the narrative.

CHAPTER III

FIVE FORKS: WATERLOO OF THE CONFEDERACY

My purpose in writing this story of the Battle of Five Forks, fought April 1, 1865, concerns itself with two main causes: one, to satisfy the demands of sentiment, and the other, to further the cause of history.¹

The first--as one who was a cavalry officer in the Army of Northern Virginia from its earliest organization until the last gun was fired, I wish to offer this interpretation of its demise as a tribute of affection to my old comrades who I have always loved more than I have been able to express and to whose gallantry and zeal I owe whatever of my military success I was able to achieve.

The second, I wish to narrate the true story of the Battle of Five Forks, the most disastrous engagement in the history of the Confederacy, as it has never been told in print. For forty and three years the blame for that disaster has lain against the valor of the Southern arms, and it is time that blame should be placed where it belongs. It is true that it must yet rest--and for all time--upon the heads of three

¹Munford sent this manuscript for editing to Charles K. Moser, an editorial writer for the Washington Post. Moser submitted it to the Sunday Magazine for publication. Before it could be printed, however, Munford had a change of heart. He decided that because many of the principal actors of the drama were still alive, publication of the manuscript would only cause unnecessary distress. The original manuscript is now the property of the Virginia Historical Society.

Southern chieftains known well to fame and in the annals of gallantry, but it should at least be expurged from the glorious record of the fighting rank-and-file of the Army of Northern Virginia.

Whenever my mind harks back to the scenes of that fateful day, three names appear foremost before me, hung in dusty streamers of regret. They are the names of the ranking Major-Generals--General Fitzhugh Lee, General Thomas L. Rosser and General George E. Pickett--Pickett, the hero of Gettysburg, but alas, not the hero of Five Forks.

There is not a child who cannot recall,

For want of a nail the shoe was lost;
 For want of a shoe the horse was lost;
 For want of a horse the rider was lost;
 For want of a rider the battle was lost.

But has anyone ever heard before that "for want"--or for the wanting--of a shad luncheon a country was lost?² Or can it be that a taste for viands can dull a soldier's ears to the din of battle? These things must surely seem but a mirage of the impossible; yet it was beneath such trifling clouds as these that a people's cause went down.

I wish to tell my story in the plain and simple language which becomes a soldier and I do not mean at any time to indulge myself in imagination or rhetoric. Moreover, at the very outset, I wish to disclaim any desire to detract from the fame of any others. Let praise always be given where praise is due. But truth is truth, and though it be kept hidden away, it can never die. My effort will be to speak the truth,

²While the battle of Five Forks raged, the three ranking Confederate officers were two miles to the rear enjoying a "shad-bake." Rosser had caught the fish in the Nottoway River on the previous day and had invited Pickett and Fitzhugh Lee to join him for lunch.

the whole truth, and nothing but the truth. What I shall say is drawn from my own personal knowledge or has been compiled from reliable sources--various, indeed, and scattered, but entirely worthy of trust--from official records, from letters written to me and from conversations with those who were participants within the scenes hereinafter described.

It was at the Battle of Five Forks, on the evening of April 1, 1865, that the sun of the Southern Confederacy went down and the star of its destiny set. No military event since the surrender of Cornwallis at Yorktown has exercised greater influence on the fate of America, or upon civilization itself, than the disaster which destroyed the power of the South and blasted her hopes of independence. It was but a battle on a small scale--compared with such struggles of armies as Malvern Hill, Sharpsburg, Second Manassas, or Gettysburg, it could be classified as a mere skirmish. But no other fight of the entire four years of war was followed by such important consequences. It was the immediate cause of the flight of President Jefferson Davis from Richmond; it compelled General R. E. Lee to evacuate the old fortifications he had held so long and against such tremendous odds before he was ready to do so;³ it forced his retreat towards Appomattox. It extinguished the campfires of the hitherto invincible army and was the mortal wound which caused the Southern Confederacy to perish forever.

Was there need for all these dire results? Had Five Forks resulted in a victory of Lee's veterans, would all these consequences have

³Munford is referring to the defensive lines in and around Petersburg.

followed like an ugly train of inevitable woes? Not an officer in that gray-garbed army who knew Lee's plans, who was cognizant of his matchless strategy and his foresight, believes it. And a victory might have been so easily achieved! Let us take up that campaign of the spring of 1865 and follow it to the end and we shall see for ourselves.

The campaign of 1865 opened on the 27th day of March when a conference was held at City Point, in the rear of the Federal army. Present were General U. S. Grant, President Abraham Lincoln, General William T. Sherman, General George G. Meade and General Phil[ip] Sheridan. The Army of the Potomac, on that day, numbered present for duty 127,700 men, and they were the best-equipped soldiers the world had ever seen.⁴ Included in this magnificent body of men were 13,000 sabres belonging to Sheridan's Corps, but apart from it was Sherman's powerful army at Goldsboro, North Carolina, 145 miles south of Petersburg and practically menacing the Confederate capital. At this City Point conference, it was agreed upon by the foremost chiefs of the Union Army that General Grant should order Sheridan to proceed immediately with his cavalry to Dinwiddie Court House and there await further orders. Grant did this and Sheridan executed the order promptly. Upon reaching Dinwiddie Court House on the 30th of March, General Sheridan received the order from Grant: "In the morning push round the enemy, if you can, and get on his right rear."⁵

⁴Freeman, Lee's Lieutenants, III, 345, puts Federal and Confederate strength at 116,000 to 64,000 men, respectively.

⁵O. R., XLVI, Pt. 1, 53. Munford underscored the phrase for emphasis.

The wording of the order indicates Grant's "soft spot" for that scowling, dark-browed cavalry officer who will long be remembered in Virginia as "the man that wore an iron gauntlet." He never commanded Sheridan to do the impossible but always requested a certain action "if you can." Grant expected that Sheridan would seize the railroads and thereby effectually cut off General Lee's communications with the South and West.

But meantime, General Lee had wind of what was going on. The arrival of President Lincoln and General Sherman in the rear of our army was whispered along and through out lines almost as soon as it happened, and Sheridan's cavalry hardly had had time to dismount from their horses on the south side of the James River before it was reported to General Lee at headquarters.

It was a very unpretending house, that headquarters, on the lean gray battle lines.⁶ A Confederate flag waved in the breeze before it and a few staff officers were generally to be seen standing about. Nothing could have suggested to a stranger that it was the headquarters of the Commander-in-Chief of the Southern Army--except that couriers were coming and going in and out of that house like bees at a hive. But it was the lodging place of a warrior whose genius ranks with that of Marlborough, Wellington and Napoleon. It is a tritism to say that General Lee was the very idol of his troops. He was nothing less. Such

⁶Lee's headquarters during the last months of the Petersburg siege were at "Edge Hill," the home of the Turnbull family. The house stood at an easily accessible site two miles west of town. See Douglas S. Freeman, R. E. Lee: A Biography (New York, 1934-1935), III, 525-26.

was their confidence in him that they believed themselves capable of accomplishing any task his tactics or strategy could devise. The Army of Northern Virginia, covering and defending Richmond that winter numbered, all told, 57,000 men who would have followed General Lee up to the very gates of perdition itself. Along his fortified lines, attenuated for 30 miles, could be seen the trusted veterans of a hundred battles. Their countenances were cheerful and bright; their rations were pinched and scanty. Their blankets were full of holes, their clothing but tatters and of various colors. Many were shod with moccasins that were fresh from the backs of slaughtered cattle. Some were housed in tents, patched in a thousand places, while others slept in daubed huts through which the cold winter winds might whistle as they would. But those old Confederates cared not; it was their own fight and "Marse Bob" was leading them; they waited hopefully always for the dawn of brighter tomorrows.

Having news of that conference at City Point and its resulting moves, General Lee acted with his customary promptness. On the 28th of March, or the very day after the conference in the Union lines, he called General Fitzhugh Lee with his mounted division of cavalry from the north side of the James River to his headquarters in Petersburg. (It is of very great importance in following this story to keep all the dates precisely in mind, as they will plainly indicate the movements and suggest the play and counterplay of the two great officers at the head of the contending armies.) At the same time, General Lee also instructed his cavalry lieutenant to leave behind his dismounted men, numbering about 600, in charge of that competent officer, Major William F. Graves

of the 2nd Virginia Cavalry. Then he ordered the Maryland Cavalry, under the command of gallant Colonel Gus [W.] Dorsey, from picket duty at Gordonsville and sent it with [Brigadier] General [John] McCausland's brigade of cavalry from Ashland to report promptly to Fitzhugh Lee at Five Forks. The ubiquitous command of Colonel John S. Mosby was ordered to occupy Dorsey's old lines.

Concerning these movements there exists a correspondence between [Lieutenant] General James Longstreet and General R. E. Lee which so clearly indicates how Lee anticipated the work Sheridan was to do and how he proposed to forestall it that I cannot refrain from inserting here a copy of one letter at least. This letter will further prove of value in that it shows beyond doubt how closely Generals Lee and Longstreet always stood together and refutes the contemptible charge, unfounded and unworthy, of Longstreet's disloyalty to his great chief.⁷ The two splendid soldiers worked together to the firing of the last gun and the beat of the last drum with the same zeal which characterized Marlborough and Eugene.

Headquarters First Army Corps
March 27, 1865

I would suggest that instead of stripping our flank of cavalry, it would be better to send an efficient cavalry force with Pickett's division and two or three batteries to watch Sheridan and to keep him off our railroads, or to reinforce General Johnston in case Sheridan goes to North Carolina to reinforce Sherman. I believe

⁷The strong postwar charges of insubordination and dereliction of duty levelled against Longstreet have withered under modern scholarly analysis. See, for example, James Longstreet, From Manassas to Appomattox, edited by James I. Robertson, Jr. (Bloomington, Ind., 1960), xix-xxiii; Glen Tucker, Lee and Longstreet at Gettysburg (Indianapolis, 1968), 44-59.

that our cavalry, supported by infantry, will be more effective against the enemies [sic] raiders than our cavalry alone. I believe that such a force in proper hands will be able to frustrate the object of the enemy, or nearly able to frustrate the object of the enemy, as nearly all his forces must be somewhat exhausted.

James Longstreet
Lieutenant-General⁸

To Col. W. H. Taylor, A. A. G.

That letter shows that on the very day that Sheridan was ordered to move, Lee had consulted Longstreet as to the best means of frustrating him. To this end, Lee finally resolved not to let Sheridan actually get started but to smash him up by taking the initiative.⁹ Accordingly, when General Fitzhugh Lee reported for orders at Petersburg he says himself that "General Lee sent me to attack Sheridan at Dinwiddie Court House and to break him up."¹⁰ To help him in accomplishing this daring maneuver, the Commander ordered General W. H. F. Lee and General Rosser with their divisions of cavalry to report to Fitz Lee and give him as infantry support the heroic remnant of General George E. Pickett's division of Gettysburg fame.

On the 29th of March, just at nightfall and in a terrible rain, General Fitz Lee arrived with his division at Sutherland's Station on

⁸O. R., XLVI, Pt. 3, 1357. Munford did the underlining. Freeman, Lee's Lieutenant's, III, 656, asserted that this was "a desperate, clumsy proposal."

⁹"It was an order in the old spirit of the army--to disdain odds and to attack." Ibid., 658.

¹⁰Fitzhugh Lee actually stated in his official report that the army commander gave him verbal instructions "to watch and counteract the operations threatened by the massing of the Federal cavalry at Dinwiddie C. H. under Sheridan." SHSP, XII (1884), 367.

the South Side Railroad. Early next morning, with the rain still coming down in blinding sheets, he marched out by the most direct road to Five Forks en route to Dinwiddie Court House. As we neared Five Forks, General W. H. Payne's brigade, being in advance, ran into the United States Cavalry under [Major] General [Wesley] Meritt who, with [Brigadier-] General [H. C.] Davies' division and [Brigadier-] General [Thomas C.] Devin's brigade, was under orders from Sheridan to occupy Five Forks. A sharp combat ensued, and in the first clash of arms General Payne was wounded and had to leave the field. Our whole division was at once dismissed and, after some heavy skirmishing, we pressed the enemy back to the Boisseau house, which was about a mile and a half in the direction of Dinwiddie Court House. We remained there until night and then, leaving a regiment on picket there (at the Boisseau house), we fell back to Hatcher's Run convenient to water and about two miles to the north of Five Forks.

It was about dark when General Pickett with five small brigades of infantry and a battalion of artillery under Lieutenant-Colonel W [illiam] J. Pegram with his adjutant, Captain W. Gordon McCabe, joined us by the White Oak Road. At about the same hour, General W. H. F. Lee and General Rosser with their divisions of cavalry came up also and thus made our entire force about 8,500 men of all arms.¹¹ General Pickett as ranking major-general at once assumed command of the whole force.

¹¹Freeman wrote: "When Pickett's mobile force was set up, it consisted of approximately 6400 infantry and 4200 cavalry." Freeman, Lee's Lieutenants, III, 670n.

General Fitz Lee was at the head of all the cavalry; I, being the ranking colonel of Fitz Lee's division and having been in command of the 2nd Brigade since [Brigadier-General Williams C.] Wickham's resignation six months before, was placed in command of Fitz Lee's division--a position which I held to the end at Appomattox. Colonel W. B. Wooldridge of the 4th Virginia Cavalry took command of the 2nd Brigade and Colonel R. B. Boston of the 5th Virginia Cavalry was given charge of Payne's brigade. These changes were of so serious a nature that I feel called upon to say that Major J [ames] D. Ferguson, the efficient and distinguished Acting Adjutant-General of our division, was suffering from an attack of typhoid fever at this time and his services were particularly missed by the whole division.

General Fitz Lee's staff of course went with him; General Wickham's A. A. G., Captain Fountain [Peter Fontaine] and his aide-de-camp, Captain John Taylor, were assigned elsewhere as Wickham had resigned. Captain Henry Lee and Captain Mort M. Rogers remained; Captain Beverly R. Mason, having succeeded Captain Jesse Heath, became the mainspring of the commissary department and the life of the command. Major John A. Palmer [Assistant Quartermaster] was splendidly efficient and ably supported by Captain Jack Palmer and Surgeon Lee [John R. Leigh]. My own most efficient regimental adjutant, Major John W. Taylor, was on a short leave of absence in Alabama. But I had Sergeant-Major Samuel Griffin of my old regiment, the 2nd Virginia, who had been distinguished on many a field and bore honorable scars, taken on my staff as Acting Assistant Adjutant General. We organized a staff of couriers from the ranks and

they were men who represented the elite of the division.

What they lacked in rank was made up in patriotism; they were young men of the best families of the South, glad and honored to serve their country with all the energies of will and intellect. Generally well-mounted, they made it a point of particular honor to carry out all orders regardless of time or surroundings, and they were never surpassed by the staff officers of any corps. Those attached to Division headquarters at the close of the war and who had served continuously under General Fitz Lee were Major J. D. Ferguson, Major Robert F. Mason, Major William B. Warwick, Major Thomas F. Bowie, Dr. Archie Randolph, Major George W. Ryals, and aides-de-camp Captain Charles Minnigerode and Henry C. Lee. Alas, with the single exception of Major J. D. Ferguson of Baltimore,

"These good knights are dust,
Their swords are rust,
Their souls are with the saints we trust."

Other gallant officers attached to Fitz Lee's headquarters, viz. Lieutenant Isaac Walke and Captain Henry Bolling, sealed with their lives their devotion to the Cause. Captain F [rancis] W. Dawson was wounded at Five Forks but fortunately recovered. With those stood Major Jim Breathed with his superb old battery. As King Louis XIV said of Marshall Villars, "Wherever the guns are playing he is sure to rise from the earth at the very spot," so it was true of Breathed and also of [Roger P.] Chew and [William M.] McGregor, p [hillip] P. Johnston, [James W.] Thomson and [John W.] Carter who were sustained with glorious

courage by that splendid body of Horse Artillery.¹²

But we lay that night on Hatcher's Run, content. We had felt the enemy that day and he had fallen back at our touch. It was the 30th of March and we only waited for the break of day to go at him and "smash him up," as our beloved Chief had commanded.

It was hardly daylight when our picket from the front reported to me that the enemy's axes could be distinctly heard in the woods beyond, as if he was barricading and preparing to hold his ground. The Federals made no attempt to advance when they discovered that my troops still held the road on their front yard, but when I was ready to move out, General Fitz Lee came to the head of my column and gave me instructions to move to the front and get into position. He wished me to hold the road to Dinwiddie Court House while he would take W. H. F. Lee's and Rosser's division, supported by General Pickett's infantry, and by a concealed route attempt to reach Little Five Forks west of Chamberlain's Run. This stream he expected to cross at Fitzgerald's and Dance's Fords and then turning to the left he would attack the Federal cavalry in flank and rear. I was to attack in my front as soon as I heard the rattle of Fitz Lee's guns in sufficient volume to indicate a serious engagement and was to force a junction with his command. After giving this order, General Lee left me, waving his hand as he rode away and adding in a manner not unusual with him: "Farewell, we will meet again in the Paradise of the faithful--or somewhere else more convenient and

¹²For further praise of Maj. James Breathed, a comparatively unknown artillery officer, see SHSP, XXXVIII (1910), 379, 381, 384; XLII (1917), 157-59.

handy."

The battle did not open in earnest for many hours and I, knowing that the whole of Sheridan's cavalry was in my front, regarded Fitz Lee's orders as a little bilious. However, after some slight skirmishing, I dismounted my men and took position, ready to attack as soon as I heard the expected firing; but we waited long and anxiously for the sound of those promised guns. Hour after hour passed and the day was far spent before we heard anything that could be called severe firing. The Federals, indeed, seemed to have anticipated such a move upon the part of Pickett and General Lee for before our troops reached the fords, they had not only occupied them but were prepared to defend them.

At last, however, the artillery guns of the gallant Pegram began to belch their thunderous volleys, and I realized that the time had come for us to move in. The sound of the bugle from my headquarters was echoed in turn by each regimental bugle along my line. The 2nd Brigade took the advance as Payne's had done the day before, and the whole division nobly responded to the bugles' call. Among my gallant officers were such heroes as Captains Connally [T.] Litchfield and [Martin J. Billmyer] Billmire of the 1st Virginia; Captains James Breckinridge and William Steptoe of the 2nd Virginia; Captains John Lamb and J [ohn] E. Jones of the 3rd Virginia; Captain Joe Hobson of the famous Powhatan troop; Captain Alex Payne of the Black Horse and Captain Billy Hill and Lieutenant John A. Holzman of Culpepper of the 4th Virginia Cavalry, acting as sharpshooters with their squadrons dismounted. I had as fine a body of practiced riflemen as could be found in the army, and Payne's

brigade, under the command of Lieutenant-Colonel Daniel A. Grimesly, acquitted itself with its accustomed splendid dash.

With the first clear note of the bugles, my brave fellows dashed forward with the "rebel" yell, firing steadily and surely. In a very short while we had "gotten a move" on those fellows in front of us. The country in front was broken, crossed with branches and ravines and very swampy in places. It was patched with briars and bamboo, clustered with alder thickets and clumps of stunted old field pines. Owing to such obstructions, we could see but a short distance in front, and the order was given to press obliquely to the right in the direction of the sound of Pickett's guns.

This was done; but owing to the rugged face of the country, it was about as difficult to keep alignment as it would be to keep in touch a number of greasy ivory balls on a billiard table. My line, necessarily thin, became somewhat disconnected, but it penetrated obliquely in between the troops of the Federal cavalry under Generals Devin and Davies, isolated them from their support and compelled them to retreat in the direction of the Boydton Road, leading to Dinwiddie Court House, which we passed on my left. At the same time, the 3rd Virginia Regiment connected with our infantry on our right rear into an open field, where the enemy's horse artillery had greatly annoyed us. General Fitz Lee, in his report, has this to say of the fight:

Munford, in command of my old division, held our lines in front of the enemy's position whilst the remaining two divisions of cavalry, preceding the infantry, moved by a concealed wooded road to turn and attack their flank. A short stream, strongly defended at its crossing, presented an unexpected obstacle to the sudden attack contemplated. It was finally carried, however, with loss to W. H. F.

Lee's and Rosser's divisions. Munford, attacking about the same time, also successfully carried the temporary works thrown up in his front, and by a gallant advance again united his command with the other divisions. Darkness put an end to our further advance.¹³

This ended the second day's fighting at Five Forks. It is worthwhile to remark that we had arrived in sight of the birthplace of General Winfield Scott, later Commander-in-Chief of the armies of the United States, the hero of Lundy's Lane in the War of 1812 and the warrior who had planted the Stars and Stripes upon the walls of Mexico. Virginia had showered honors upon General Scott, had taught her sons to toss their caps at the sound of his honored name. She had named a county after him and presented him with a gold medal and a jewel-encrusted sword. And he had said of that sword that "it would never be drawn save in her defense and that it would never be forgotten."

[Emphasis added by Munford.] But--when the Civil War came, his unsolicited pledge was forgotten. As we stood there on the bloody battlefield beneath the darkening battlements of that stern old house which had given him birth, our voiceless thoughts turned back to the words he spoke of George B. McClellan who had superseded him, "The eaglet I have taught to soar has fouled my nest?" So might his mother--Virginia--speak of him and realize how "sharper than a serpent's tooth it is to have a thankless child." We stood and gazed, silently, at the "nest"--but not with heads uncovered.

Let that pass. When the battle in Scott's field was over, instead of Sheridan being around in the right of Robert E. Lee's army--as Grant

¹³O. R., XLVI, Pt. 1, 1299.

had planned--we were 10 miles in the rear of Grant's left with Sheridan calling loudly for help!¹⁴

Right here, in the face of victory, came the first rift in the chain of things that should have been. We stopped! General Pickett wrote in his official report: "The enemy was severely punished. Half an hour more of daylight and we would have gotten the Court House."¹⁵

This, of course, is mere conjecture--but why did we halt? We had Sheridan in full retreat. He had been driven three or four miles at a headlong run and General Pickett's orders from General R. E. Lee, as stated by Fitz Lee, were "to drive him out and break him up!" [Emphasis added by Munford.] It was a golden opportunity; an opportunity egregiously lost as the records now show. I believed then, as I believe now, that it could have been done. The order from our beloved Commander was to attack Sheridan and drive him away from Dinwiddie Court House. General Pickett's excuse is "half an hour more of daylight." To me, daylight had nothing to do with it. Every step Pickett advanced meant just that much ground Sheridan had to abandon; and he was now crying loudly for help--which could not possibly have reached him in time to be of any use to him. Ah, if General Pickett had only pressed forward and kept pressing forward! He was sent there for attack. But he stopped and deliberated; he hesitated, waited for "daylight," and the

¹⁴Sheridan's official report of the engagement contained no mention of any loud call for help, and his postwar memoirs would lead one to believe that he had the situation that night well under control. O. R., XLVI, Pt. 1, 1102-3; Personal Memoirs of P. H. Sheridan (New York, 1888), II, 152-55.

¹⁵LaSalle Corbell Pickett, Pickett and His Men (Atlanta, 1899), 395.

opportunity was lost. That "proper officer"--of whom General Longstreet had written but whose name he had not called--was not there to meet the occasion.

* * * * *

In support of this view let us turn to the Federal account and see what our opponents, on that occasion, have to say.

General [Andrew A.] Humphreys writes that "at about five o'clock in the afternoon General G. K. Warren, commanding the Fifth Corps, U.S.A., heard the sound of Sheridan's guns coming from a southwesterly direction."¹⁶ The sounds seemed to him (Warren) to have receded and continued to recede. Warren at once sent [Brigadier] General [Joseph J.] Bartlett with his brigade of [Major General Charles] Griffin's Division to hurry across country to Sheridan's support, instructing him to attack the enemy in flank. But Bartlett could not join Sheridan. (As a matter of fact, General Merritt who was next in rank to Sheridan, left the command to go after help.) At half-past six o'clock, General Merritt reported to General G [eorge] G. Meade that the enemy had penetrated between Sheridan's main command and General Warren's position. At half-past nine in the evening, General Warren was ordered to send Griffin's Division at once to Sheridan by the Boydton Road. (!)

Such is the Federal report. Up to half-past nine that night, then, Sheridan had no help. Had he been vigorously and continuously attacked, the wisdom and foresight of General R. E. Lee's strategy might have been brilliantly displayed. But see how the scene changed! The whole left wing of Grant's army was stirred up. Humphreys' and Wright's

¹⁶Andrew A. Humphreys, The Virginia Campaign of '64 and '65 (New York, 1883), 336.

Corps, which had been brought up, screened by Sheridan's cavalry when it moved for Dinwiddie Court House to support the 6th Corps, were now "faced west," says the Federal officer, and General Grant ordered them to "begin digging and fortifying." General Grant's own account of this movement differs from our version, however. He says:

At Dinwiddie Court House General Sheridan displayed great generalship; instead of retreating with his whole command on the main army to tell the story of superior forces encountered, he deployed his cavalry on foot, leaving only mounted men enough to take charge of his horses. This compelled the enemy to deploy over a vast extent of wooded and broken country and made his progress slow. At this juncture, he, Sheridan, dispatched to me that he was falling back slowly to Dinwiddie Court House. General McKenzie's cavalry and one Division of infantry were immediately ordered to his assistance and the two other divisions of the 5th Corps were soon ordered to follow.¹⁷

Such is Grant's statement and it is good to know that the morning reports of both armies are now too accessible for the Union leader's statement to go unchallenged. As a matter of fact, we know that General Pickett's whole force was a third less than Sheridan's¹⁸ (who was supposed to be the aggressor) and that his "slowly falling back" was a bit too hurried for good strategy. The simple truth is Sheridan had been thwarted in his design by General Lee's anticipation of his move and was driven every foot he gave up. We had him "on the run" and he was really calling for help, which Grant's own words show was not available at the time of the fighting. General Pickett pleads "half an hour more of daylight," etc. That magnificent soldier, Wade

¹⁷O. R., XLVI, Pt. 1, 54.

¹⁸Freeman, Lee's Lieutenant's, III, 670, states that "Sheridan's full strength did not fall below 30,000 as against Pickett's 10,000."

Hampton, attacked Sheridan at Trevilian Station after sundown and in the night and got the scowling, black "Fighting Demon" of the Federal cavalry started running before he quit.¹⁹ That was what General Lee asked and expected of his command.

Instead, we were halted. The lines were reformed and orders given to hold our lines and "be ready to renew the attack at dawn."

But still, after all, that was hardly a military crime. A blunder, perhaps, a piece of bad judgment--but what soldier is free from it? There is still another day in which to retrieve the mistake, to send Sheridan scampering back to hide under cover of Grant's main lines. Meantime, however, General Robert E. Lee, himself in anticipation of good results, had made a diversion in Pickett's favor. He was personally out on his right with General [Richard H.] Anderson's corps in support of Pickett (on Pickett's left) and held his force at the intersection of the White Oak and Claiborne roads, ready to meet any emergency, in expectation that Pickett would fulfill his orders. But nothing happened; the stars were not set more motionless in the studded sky than were Pickett's lines in their place.

That night, the 31st of March, orders came to me from Fitzhugh Lee to send out pickets towards the Boydton Road, on my left, but to hold my position. We were dismounted and in line of battle on the left of General M [ontgomery] D. Corse's infantry when the orders came and we settled there. About nine o'clock, two scouts of the Dinwiddie troop

¹⁹Munford was referring to the June 11-12, 1864, battle of Trevilian Station, in which Confederate cavalry repulsed a stab at Richmond by Sheridan's forces. See SHSP, VII (1879), 147-51.

of the 3rd Regiment came in with two prisoners from Bartlett's brigade of Warren's Fifth Corps, which was not far off. I sent the prisoners immediately to General Fitzhugh Lee, who was resting with Pickett. Within the hour I got an order back from him to the effect that our whole force was to fall back to Five Forks at the first sign of day-break, and that he expected me to cover the rear of General Corse's infantry.

He found it very easy to instruct me to do this, but I found it more difficult to do it. My command were all cavalrymen, dismounted and with their horses a mile in the rear. The men had been in line of battle since early morning; the horses had been without feed or water all day. (Here let the military student pause and think upon what sort of cavalry that was which could endure and keep this up.)

With the approach of dawn that memorable first day of April, we began to execute the order. There is considerable difference of opinion between those who wore the gray and those of the blue who fought that day out as to the first movements of it and I may be pardoned if I digress upon it for a moment. I promise to be very careful of my words and to be sure of their correctness in every particular. General [Romeyn B.] Ayres of the 5th Corps, United States Army says of it: "About dawn of April 1st, soon after entering the Brooks Road, one of Munford's videttes was seen moving off." And both Generals Sheridan and Merritt speak of their "pressing us back nearly all the way to the line of battle assumed by Pickett at Five Forks."²⁰

²⁰Ayres's statement is not in the O. R., but both Sheridan and

I cannot remember feeling, that morning, anyone pressing me. I had had some experience as a cavalry officer as far back as 1861 under that paladin Turner Ashby in Stonewall Jackson's Valley Campaign and, if I am not mistaken, had learned thoroughly the meaning of the word "press" on our retreat up the Valley. But I recall nothing like it on that morning of April 1st. If we were pressed, we did not know it-- but then my men were veterans and so used to that kind of work that they possibly didn't give it a thought. They were as steady on a retreat as they were daring in a fight. General Merritt says, however,

It was a great source of satisfaction to our gallant men to drive the enemy, outnumbering us as they did, over the same ground from which he had forced us the day before. Not until the enemy's breast heights, glittering with bayonets, were within 50 yards of our front did our brave cavalymen, baptized with the blood of fifty battles, cease the advance--and then only for a moment. The time was occupied in supplying the command with ammunition and resting the men, who had marched and fought on foot for miles.²¹

For miles! If it was for miles, let us not forget that it was also the ground "from which he had forced us the day before," and that hardly tallies well with Grant's fulsome praise of Sheridan's "strategy." But General Merritt, dashing cavalryman that he was, could not boast of his arithmetic when he made that "outnumbering" statement. He had 13,000 sabres, according to his report, to begin with, and continually received recruits. So that instead of outnumbering him, Merritt outnumbered us fully three to one. But anyhow, they "pressed" us, they say, and let them take what comfort they can from it; we do not be-

Merritt reported that they "pressed" forward against the Confederate lines. O. R., XLVI, Pt. 1, 1104, 1117.

²¹Ibid., 1117-18.

grudge the Federals the amount of ammunition they wasted upon an imaginary foe--for they threw the bulk of it away, as our loss was trifling.

Thus far I have endeavored to narrate what occurred under my own observations prior to the first day of April. I come now to the account of a more unfortunate day, and I enter upon it with many misgivings. It has been truly said that soldiers most competent to afford history their evidence are not seldom the least willing to speak out, this side of the grave. The spirit of comradeship which clings to a soldier long after the campfires have grown cold and their ashes scattered into the winds of years restrains him from speaking the truth lest it hurt some who are endeared to his memory. But the facts of history belong to the living. It is not right that they should go down into the grave with the forever muted lips of those who, alone, could give them voice. Besides, to the value of posthumous testimony there is an insuperable difficulty--it cannot be cross-questioned.

So I shall tell the truth, here and now, make it plain and open unto the day--even as the deeds of the soldier are performed in the face of the sun where man, for the most part, can neither deny nor dispute them. Truthfully then, "with malice toward none and charity for all," I begin the tale of the battle of April 1st, 1865, known as the Battle of Five Forks.

In order to follow the movements of the day, it is well to follow the statement of the positions of the two armies, as they faced each other. The situation of each body of troops on both sides had a vital

bearing on the results of the battle. General Pickett's infantry formed its line of battle on the north side of White Oak Road, facing south, at about nine o'clock in the morning, with General Corse's infantry on the right. Next, General W [illiam] R. Terry's brigade, then commanded by Colonel Joseph Mayo, straddled Ford Road at its intersection with White Oak Road. Next upon the left came General George H. Steuart, next General [William H.] Wallace and last, on our extreme left, General Matt Ransom's brigade which was refused--that is, bent north at right angles to our main line. Of the disposition of our cavalry, General Fitz Lee, in his sworn testimony at the Warren trial 16 years later said,

The line of battle was formed between eight and nine o'clock in the morning. On the right of Pickett's infantry I posted W. H. F. Lee's Division consisting of Beal's and Barringer's brigades. I posted one regiment of General Munford's Division, supported by the remainder of the division, a little distance in the rear (of Pickett's infantry). On the left of Munford was a small brigade of North Carolina cavalry under General Roberts whose duty it was to picket the road from Five Forks down in the direction of Burgess' mill. This was in front of the right of our main line (of General R. E. Lee's line). Roberts was not under my command at the time but reported to the commanding officer of R. E. Lee's right and picketed his front. Rosser's Division was posted in the rear of Hatcher's Run so as to guard the ammunition wagons, ambulances, and all other wagons with that number of troops.²²

(Note: It is well to find on the map the location of Rosser behind Hatcher's Run at the point where it crosses the Ford Road and note the

²²At Five Forks, Federal Gen. Warren's corps attacked tardily and haphazardly, with the result that 5,000 Confederates all but routed 15,000 Federals. Sheridan, with Grant's approval, promptly removed Warren from command. A subsequent investigation vindicated Warren and resulted in a large compendium, Proceedings, Findings, and Opinions of the Court of Inquiry . . . in the Case of Gouverneur K. Warren . . . (3 vols., Washington, 1883), from which Munford extracted the quotations by Fitzhugh Lee, Merritt and Sheridan.



Battlefield of Five Forks, April 1, 1865

distance from it to Pickett's front.)

This is Lee's statement of the disposition of the Confederate forces. We will now find the positions of the Federals according to their Cavalry General Merritt and General Joshua L. Chamberlain of Warren's 5th Corps. Says General Merritt:

In front of Ransom's Confederates were Stagg's brigade of cavalry and connected with General Gibbs who confronted General Stuart's brigade. Next came General Fitzhugh's brigade in opposition to Colonel Joe Mayo (Terry's) with General A. C. Pennington's and General Willie's brigades in front of General Corse. General George A. Custer's Division, mounted, held the left in front of General W. H. F. Lee's Division. (General Beal's brigade of Confederate cavalry was dismounted and on Corse's right. General Barringer was held dismounted and on Pickett's right flank thrown a little forward.) The bulk of our (the Federal) cavalry from right to left were dismounted and pushed up as close as they were allowed to come by Pickett's infantry line of skirmishers out in front of his battle line. The 5th Army Corps which very early in the morning had reported to Sheridan was now moved to occupy its position. At twelve o'clock its commander (Warren) was ordered to get into position in a field about 1000 yards southeast of the intersection of Gravelly Run Church Road with the White Oak Road.

We will now take General Chamberlain's version of the position of the 5th Corps in the field. He says in his paper upon the battle,

The corps formation was: Ayres on the left, west of the Church Road, the division in double brigade front in two lines, and Winthrop with the First Brigade in reserve in rear of his center; Crawford on the right, east of the road, in similar formation; Griffin in rear of Crawford, with Bartlett's Brigade in double column of regiments three lines deep; my own brigade next, somewhat in echelon to the right, with three battalion lines in close order, while Gregory at first was held massed in my rear. General McKenzie's cavalry, of the Army of the James, had been ordered up from Dinwiddie to cross the White Oak Run and move forward with us covering our right flank. . . . At four o'clock we moved down the Gravelly Run Church Road, our lines as we supposed nearly parallel to the White Oak Road, with Ayres directed on the angle of the enemy's works.²³

²³Joshua L. Chamberlain, The Passing of the Armies (New York, 1915), 124.

Let us bear in mind General Chamberlain's last sentence. It was at four o'clock, he says, that Sheridan's whole army moved down upon us with Ayres's division headed for the angle of our works where General Ransom's brigade stood refused to Pickett's main line. Now let us go back to General Fitz Lee's testimony at the Warren trial as to what he knew about the matter. He was asked by the Court to "state about what hour, as nearly as you can fix it, all of your forces or substantially the whole of them, were in their entrenchments at Five Forks?"

General Lee's reply was, "Between eight and nine o'clock in the morning." He then went on to testify:

Everything continued quiet. We were followed up by the Federals but there was very little if any skirmishing and my recollection is the one impression that it was simply a force following our movements back to Five Forks for the purpose of watching them and not for aggressive purposes. I personally remained in front from nine until twelve o'clock that morning. (!) Everything being quiet, I then left the line and rode down the road to the crossing of Hatcher's Run to see General Pickett. I found him just on the other side of Hatcher's Run. He had ridden back to give some directions about wagons. After talking with him a little while, I passed on still further down the road north, towards the Church Road, to see General Rosser in reference to ammunition and rations for his Command.

This clearly establishes where the wagons were--and also where the three ranking Major Generals of the Confederate forces were! When the enemy was actually skirmishing with our line of battle, they were about two miles in the rear of it--"talking." But while these three officers are "talking," let us see what General Sheridan was doing! Sheridan, who had all the while kept Merritt's dismounted cavalry in front of Pickett's line of battle--and that line was over a mile long stretching east and west, did his talking afterwards. He says that he

dispatched General [Ranald S.] MacKenzie with his division of cavalry (about 2,000 sabres with which Grant had reinforced him from the Army of the James) to seize the White Oak Road at a point three miles east of Five Forks. He adds: "It was about twelve o'clock that MacKenzie made his attack and after a sharp combat with General Roberts' pickets he forced them from and occupied the White Oak Road, getting in between General R. E. Lee's main line and Pickett's position at Five Forks." (!)

That was what Sheridan did after twelve o'clock and while his three chief opponents were more than two miles in the rear of their line "talking." But that was not the worst. The fact was not reported to General R. E. Lee. This bit of success gave Sheridan the key to the situation and yet the Commanding General of the Confederate Army was not informed of it! Somebody blundered. But, of course, it could not have been the fault of the three Major Generals in the rear "talking"--for they did not know about it!

The result of MacKenzie's attack was to divide Robert's men. Some of them came to my picket, the 8th Virginia Cavalry of Payne's Brigade, and the rest were forced back on Burgess' Mill, reporting to General R. H. Anderson's command on General R. E. Lee's main line. The adjutant of my picket, Lieutenant Wythe B. Graham, 8th Virginia Cavalry, promptly reported the arrival of these North Carolina troops and the cause of it by courier to me.

At this point I must state that General Fitz Lee was in error when he testified that my Division was posted by him "a little distance in the rear of the 8th Virginia Cavalry," which he had ordered on picket on General Ransom's left at the intersection of the Gravelly Run Church

Road and the White Oak Road. As a matter of fact, my Division was located on the Ford Road by General Fitz Lee himself, near Hatcher's Run, which was convenient for corn and the wagon trains, and my headquarters were in sight of his own headquarters, not far from the C. Boisseau house.

It was very near one o'clock when the courier reached me with the information of a stir up of General [William P.] Roberts' cavalry and of the 8th Virginia on General Pickett's left. I felt the importance of the news and rode immediately and as rapidly as I could over to General Fitz Lee's headquarters. I found him mounted and about to ride off. I handed him Lieutenant Wythe Graham's dispatch. He read it over and said, "Well, Munford, I wish you would go over in person at once and see what this means and, if necessary, order up your division and let me hear from you."

Hurrying to my camp, I started for our picket line in a few minutes, taking with me Captain Henry C. Lee and several couriers. Just as we were going to the front, General Fitz Lee and General Pickett passed along, going still further north (toward the rear) in the direction of the crossing of Hatcher's Run. Leaving the Ford Road, my escort and I went eastward along the rear of our infantry's line of battle, and I found that they had made much progress in fortifying our works with logs and dirt. The skirmishing along the front of our infantry line had now become very brisk and the sharp whistle of the enemy's carbine balls was audible at every few rods.

There was a menacing whine in the air, but it did not prevent the

usual flow of badinage and joking that passes between infantry and cavalry, which the sight of my couriers excited in the ragged, gray fellows in the earthworks. When we reached the point where Wallace's and Ransom's troops joined at the "angle," I found a couple of wounded men belonging to Captain Thomas Roulhac's Company of North Carolina sharpshooters with Ransom's men, and they directed me to the best route to get to the cavalry picket. At the picket, I found a portion of Roberts' cavalry which had been cut off by MacKenzie when he forced them from the White Oak Road to the east of us.

Suddenly one of the pickets pointed out to me a large body of Federals--the 5th Army Corps--forming in a field southeasterly from us and on the left hand side of the Gravelly Run Church Road. Upon the instant, I realized the situation and hurried off couriers to find General Lee and General Pickett. I then sent an order for my Division to come up quickly through the woods by a narrow road.

My couriers returned with the information that they could not find Pickett or Lee. Neither of them was at his headquarters. Courier after courier was dispatched, but the two officers could not be found. Captain Henry Lee rode hurriedly down the whole length of Pickett's line but was unable to learn where the Commanding Officer of the expedition was.²⁴

²⁴Pickett, along with Fitz Lee, were somewhere in the rear at Rosser's "shad-bake." Freeman, Lee's Lieutenant's, III, 668, added: "If there was 'something to drink' it probably was not shunned." Yet there is no evidence to prove that any of the officers were intoxicated. One of Munford's couriers stated that he found Fitz Lee and Pickett "sitting under a fly tent at least two miles in your rear--with a bottle of whiskey or brandy, I don't know which, for I was not invited to partake

Meantime, I was hurriedly reconnoitering. The battle was imminent and there was need of haste. Discovering that the enemy had no artillery visible, and that where my picket held the intersection of the White Oak Road with the Church Road was an admirable place for the use of a battery, I galloped down to Ransom and urged him to let me have the use of a section of his battery. He refused to do so, saying that it was General Pickett's formation and that he did not feel at liberty to make any change. Twice after that, I sent and begged him to come and see the opportunity that was going to waste, but Ransom was inexorable.

Now I knew well enough that the formation was Pickett's, but Pickett was not there. And I knew fully as well that an officer had the power to attack anything that was on his front, to receive or to meet an attack and also to pursue--though not further than the obstacle or works behind which his position lay. But I felt then and know now that had a battery been run up to that point and opened against Warren's Corps, the face of the ensuing battlefield would have been changed considerably. The official reports of the Federals, and the history brought out by the Warren Trial sixteen years later, amply sustains my opinion.

Meantime, my Command had been brought up, mounted, and was in a narrow road among the thick pines. The important question for me to solve was: where should it be located? Fitzhugh Lee and Pickett had

of it." John B. Phillips to Thomas Taylor Munford, Sept. 7, 1895, Munford Family Papers.

not yet turned up; they had not been found. It began to appear that the Battle of Five Forks was about to be like the Battle of Lutzen-- fought without a Commander, or rather with half a dozen. It seemed to me that my only hope was to occupy the woods in the rear of my picket, the 8th Virginia Cavalry, which was now engaged in the fiercest kind of skirmishing, and I moved in to take that position. My men dismounted and formed as they arrived and the horses were sent back to the rear. All this time, Warren's swarming blue lines were plainly visible from the road, forming into line and preparing to assault Pickett's left. Merritt's dismounted cavalry was keeping up a sharp, continuous skirmish fire along the whole of our infantry front, as if preparing to attack our right, and Custer's mounted Division was demonstrating. Now a small mounted force of Federals made a quick dash behind Colonel Mayo's infantry skirmish line, gobbled up about a hundred of them and dashed out again, creating a little flurry in our infantry front on Five Forks Road. The 8th Virginia Cavalry, still holding the Church Road at its intersection with the White Oak Road about a half mile east of Ransom, was now skirmishing heavily with MacKenzie's horsemen, who had by this time swept down the White Oak Road. And I was still without orders!

As we had no breastworks, and as General Ransom's brigade was refused at right angles to Pickett's main line, which faced south while Ransom faced east, I had to take a position on Ransom's left to avoid his front fire. The country was very broken; and to enable me to cover and support my picket regiment, I moved my Division forward about 600 yards east to a little field which was enclosed. Here my men went in

dismounted. On the edge of the woods skirting the field, they gathered some rails together and hastily put up "pens," cavalry fashion, as fast as the regiments could get into position. But before two-thirds of them were in, the Federals had moved upon us and their sharpshooters began crowding us.

The air was now filled with the "sweet mysterious singing" and whining of rifle bullets. They seemed to come whistling and gurgling from every direction, or buzzing like angry bees ere they struck among the pines. Suddenly two full Divisions of Warren's Corps, [Major General Samuel W.] Crawford's and Ayres', debouched upon the White Oak Road. They were in magnificent array, exposing a full front of probably 1000 yards long--as tempting a target as ever stood before a soldier's guns. It was a sight never to be forgotten by those who had the opportunity to salute it with a soldier's greeting. My old veterans pulled their guns up to their faces and every shot seemed to tell. Of the effect of our fire, the redoubtable Sheridan himself says, "The confusion and timidity on the part of the men of the 5th Corps was very great; in fact I began to have my doubts as to whether I was going to succeed. One skirmish line lay down; the firing was very slight; the line became confused and commenced firing straight in the air."²⁵

General Ayres says, "As we entered the woods I got a sharp, full volley from out of a dense woods on my left flank, raking my left and

²⁵This postwar statement by Sheridan to the Warren court of inquiry would seem to be in direct contradiction of Sheridan's official report of the battle, in which he stated: "The Fifth Corps on reaching the White Oak road made a left wheel and burst on the enemy's left flank and rear like a tornado, and pushed rapidly on . . ." O. R., XLVI, Pt. 1, 1105.

indicating to me at once where the enemy was."²⁶ By a blunder of the Federal officers (engineer officers), Ayres had come out a full half-mile east of the angle he had been ordered to attack. That was Ransom's refused brigade peppering him in good earnest while we were paying our compliments to Crawford's Division.

Perceiving that we were in the woods in front of him, Crawford moved straight at us while Ayres wheeled to his left and went at Ransom. The battle was on in deadly earnest now. I had almost 1,200 carbines, though all of them did not at any time get into line, and they were popping merrily. And there, right in front of us, 12,000 infantry and 2,000 cavalry were within less than two hundred yards! It was indeed a glorious target.

²⁶Ayres's report of the battle is in Ibid., 869-70.

* * * * *

But what could we do? A handful to a houseful! We could do nothing but shoot and run. At their first fire, the smoke enveloped them completely and as soon as it drifted so that we could see them advancing again, we poured into them our salute of death--then turned and scooted through the woods like a flock of wild turkeys. Away in the distance through the trees, we could see now MacKenzie's mounted horsemen with their flurrering colors and their gleaming sabres; the yellow facings upon the blue coats burned to gold by the rays of the descending sun. They looked like some storied legion of bright "avenging cavalry"--but they took it out in looks. Crawford's extended right movement had thrown them out of the battle and they could not harm us.

On all sides the battle raged now. My men, though scattered like wild turkeys, came together like wild turkeys at the bugle's call. The sharp cracking of their carbines was answered as they fell into skirmish line, now firing, now retreating as it became necessary to elude their pursuers. Many were crack shots, indeed, and unless their bullets struck the trees, it was Crawford's disordered masses which caught them. Over to the right we could hear the hot volleys of Ransom and Wallace and now McGregor's Horse Artillery, with Ransom, begin to boom. Shells went shrieking and screeching through the air or dropped with a long, mellifluous wh-o-o-m! into the tops of the mourning pines.

Soon came the bursting fusilade of Pickett's whole line; then the roar of gallant Pegram's thunderous guns and the crashing of [General

Alfred T. A.] Torbert's ten thousand carbines gave volume to the tumultuous voice of battle. The earth trembled under the shocks of the thundering guns; rolling volumes of sulphurous smoke wreathed the trees in ghostly, trailing garments. The low sun shown faintly through the smoke-clouds like a pale moon and the woods were stifled in their sulphurous draperies. No enemy was in sight because of the smoke, but still the hellish din of war arose on every hand, the deadly balls spat against the boughs or whined like pettish voices above our heads. Occasionally a man crumbled down in his place and a little rivulet of blood trickled away on the ground. It was bloody war.

But it did not last long. The day was fast drawing to a close and we were falling back. We had heard nothing from our three ranking Major Generals. We knew not if Fitz Lee, Pickett and Rosser were lying dead or prisoners in the enemy's ranks. We had not heard of them.²⁷ Meantime, we were being pressed back as slowly as we could make it. Crawford had extended his right and in consequence we were forced to extend our left to keep from being turned by him. It was a rough, broken country, cut up by creeks, covered with briars and brambles and in places exceedingly boggy. Only at certain places could the creeks be crossed and the mire was so deep that, at one of these, Sergeant-Major [John H.] Harrison of the 4th Virginia Cavalry went in above his knees. When he came out he was obliged to leave one of his boots; the mire wanted it more than he did. However, he kept on

²⁷In 1908, Munford wrote of Five Forks: "The Generals left on the line were left like tin soldiers, to hold their position without orders for any emergency." Thomas Taylor Munford to R. E. Cowart, July 27, 1908, Munford Family Papers.

with the command, swearing that he would "kill a Yankee before night just to get his boots."

I was riding beside the gallant Colonel W [illiam] B. Woolridge, the senior officer of my brigade, when suddenly his horse tumbled over and the Colonel himself manifested signs of having been shot. A little investigation disclosed that the bullet which killed his horse had indeed hit the fighting Colonel but in his artificial leg. My own horse, at about the same moment, got mired up to his belly, but being of great power he finally extricated himself and carried me across the brook.

Over this miry country the men were ably handled: Colonel Gary Breckinridge of the 2nd Virginia and Colonel William Morgan of the 1st Virginia, Major Charles Irving of the 1st and Lieutenant Colonel Charles Old of the 4th Cavalry especially distinguished themselves. But we were steadily pushed on further and further back until at last we arrived at Hatcher's Run and crossed the Ford Road. Here the main body of my Division reached their horses and mounted, but a portion of the 3rd Virginia Cavalry under Adjutant [Robert T.] Hubard crossed a little higher up and joined Colonel [J. Risque] Hutter of the 11th Virginia Infantry. A moment later, the Federal General Joshua Chamberlain, who had broken off from Crawford and attacked Ransom's left with great dash and spirit, brilliantly captured Hutter and the entire 11th regiment, but Hubard and his men managed to escape.²⁸

²⁸Chamberlain's brigade alone captured more than 900 Confederates, so the loss through escape of a few of the prisoners was not surprising. O. R., XLVI, Pt. 1, 851.

When we reached the Ford Road, I came upon General Pickett. Although the battle was now practically over, we were still being vigorously pushed by Crawford's men; and as Pickett came galloping toward me, he saw the Federals not a hundred yards away. He was coming down the road evidently on his return from the wagon train on the north side of Hatcher's Run. Looking at the blue coats advancing so closely upon us from the east, he asked me, "What troops are these?"

I told him, and he said, "Do hold them back 'till I pass to Five Forks."

Captain James Breckinridge of the 2nd Virginia Cavalry overheard our conversation. He was in command of our sharpshooters, and he at once turned his men, moved to the front and, with a magnificent attack, checked the enemy's advance. But alas! Breckinridge yielded up his glorious career in doing it.²⁹ I say "glorious career" because if there was ever a braver soldier than James Breckinridge I never saw him. James E. Tucker, our dashing color-bearer, who was always conspicuous in danger, rushed to Breckinridge's aid, but already death had claimed him. He lay "like a warrior taking his rest with his martial cloak around him." In the language of a knightly soldier who fought upon the other side on this same field, "I saw him . . . fighting like a very god . . . half an hour afterwards, amidst the smoke of battle, as in a chariot of

²⁹The attack cost Breckinridge his life, "but it probably saved Pickett's." Freeman, Lee's Lieutenants, III, 669. For more on Breckinridge, a distinguished soldier from Botetourt County, see the many references in Mary D. Robertson (ed.), Lucy Breckinridge of Grove Hill: The Journal of a Virginia Girl, 1861-1864 (Kent, Ohio, 1979).

fire, he was lifted to his like." His body fell into the hands of the enemy and now it rests in an unknown and unmarked grave.

Meantime, General Pickett had thrown himself forward upon his horse and, leaning on the right side, ran the gauntlet of a withering fire for several hundred yards. He made it successfully and dashed on to his broken lines ahead of him. It was the first time he had been with them since the battle began. These things I saw with my own eyes. I do not know the exact time of it as I did not look at my watch--but the attack was begun after four o'clock and we had been fighting and skirmishing over a rough country for two full miles, by actual measurement. The long shadows of evening were very perceptible as the sun was but a little above the trees.

That shows where General Pickett had been during the battle. He had been with the wagon trains behind Hatcher's Run two miles in the rear of his fighting line. I did not see General Lee there, but I will quote now a part of his testimony given during the Warren Trial and we shall find out from that where he was. The Court asked him,

"Were you in person at any time on the extreme left of your line of works during the day?"

Answer: "Yes, when I first posted a portion of Munford's Division there."

Question: "Were you still north of Hatcher's Run when you first heard firing?"

Answer: "I was with General Rosser north of Hatcher's Run, and I think that is one of the incidents of the contest so far as I was personally concerned, for as soon as I got information of the attack on

the left, I immediately mounted my horse and before I could get to where the road crosses Hatcher's Run to go to Dinwiddie Court House from my position north of it, I found that road was in possession of the enemy's infantry. I saw the infantry myself. I rode up and was shot at. I rode back and moved General Rosser's command up and attempted to force the Division across but was repulsed."

Question: "Was that the spot where General Pickett crossed, at that point just before?"

Answer: "As I came galloping up the road I saw him crossing. I saw him throw himself down on his horse. I heard the firing and knew he was being shot at."

Question: "He was lying down on his horse so as to protect himself from the fire?"

Answer: "Yes."

Question: "Can you fix the time when the Federal Infantry got possession of the Ford Road in that way?"

Answer: "I can only fix it in this way. My report, written three weeks afterwards, stated that the main attack began at three o'clock. I understood that there was an hour and a half or two hours fighting on our left before the road was reached. That would make it about half past four or five."

Question: "During that time how much fighting did you hear?"

Answer: "I did not hear a shot."

Question: "Was the whole country south of Hatcher's Run thickly wooded?"

Answer: "My recollection is that it was thickly wooded; a great

many bushes."

Question: "You say that until you got back to the Ford you did not hear any firing?"

Answer: "General Pickett was closer than I was for he was just along the Run. He evidently did not hear it either, for he only got across the Ford just about the time the Federal Infantry got possession of the road. As I reached the Ford on the north side, he crossed it and was on the south side."

Question: "Will you state by what road the Confederate forces withdrew from Five Forks during the evening of the battle?"

Answer: "No, sir. I could not state it with certainty from my own position. W. H. F. Lee and Munford, with their commands, joined me during the night at my position on the north side of Hatcher's Run and I was also joined during the night by General Gracey and Generals Hutton and Wise's brigades under General R. H. Anderson."

Skipping part of General Lee's testimony as not sufficiently essential to this story to give it place here, we come to this, the following statement--the most pregnant in his entire evidence because it tells with his own tongue what he was sent out to do by his great Commander. We have seen what he did. This is what he was told to do,

I state that our movements were in consequence of the concentration of the force at Dinwiddie Court House threatening our line of communications. I was brought from the south side of the James River for the purpose. In a conversation with General Lee in Petersburg, as I passed by his headquarters, he stated to us that we should attack that force, and had better attack it as the best way to break it up and prevent any movement on the enemy's part. After we made on attack on March 31st, I considered that that movement had been broken up, temporarily at least. Therefore, when we moved towards Five Forks, hearing nothing more of the infantry's

moves which we had heard of the night before, I thought that the movements just there, for the time being, were suspended, and we were not expecting any attack that afternoon, so far as I know. Our throwing up works and taking position were simply general matters of military precaution.

Comment is unnecessary. General Lee did not, by his own testimony, participate in this battle.

After General Pickett had escaped and passed us to join his command, I called to my much stretched out and scattered troops and mounted them. We moved steadily through the woods in a southwesterly direction toward the Confederate right front, having thus made in our retreat a complete half-circle around the rear of our own army with the Federals pursuing us as far as the Ford Road. We left Crawford in full possession of the crossing and the Ford Road to Five Forks, and also left a small rear guard from my command to watch him. When we had made nearly to Pickett's right front on the White Oak Road, we halted, a little in the rear of General Corse's position. I rode on up to the front, hoping to get orders and find out the rear condition of affairs from General Fitz Lee, whom, I supposed, of course, was there. (I did not then know that he was still beyond Hatcher's Run.)

I found everything in confusion along the front, with Pickett working energetically to stave off utter rout. It is my desire to be wholly fair in this account and so, in now discussing Pickett's conduct at Five Forks more in detail, I will let him speak for himself. His official report can be found in a book published by his wife.

"General Ransom sent word to me," reported General Pickett, "that the cavalry were not in position. General Fitz Lee was again ordered to

cover the ground at once, and I supposed it had been done, when suddenly the enemy in heavy infantry column appeared on our left front, and the attack . . . became general . . . The few cavalry, however, which had taken position, gave way, and the assailants came pouring in on Wallace's left, causing his men to fall back."³⁰

Now as Pickett was with General Fitz Lee continuously from near twelve o'clock of that day until after five o'clock (as seen and described previously by General Lee and myself), and as, according to two letters of General Rosser's which I will shortly introduce, Pickett had authorized Rosser to take his Division--a part of Fitz Lee's command!--north of Hatcher's Run, and as General Pickett had been with Generals Rosser and Fitz Lee about five hours (!), it is difficult to understand how he could have been ignorant of the exact position of Fitz Lee's command! Lee and Pickett had been together since before one o'clock and were appraised of the approach of the enemy when I was ordered to "go in person and find out what it meant." But the enemy's general attack was not made until four o'clock--nearly three hours later!--and it lasted until seven o'clock.

After Pickett succeeded in reaching his front, however, he was active enough, as appears from his report:

. . . I succeeded, nevertheless, in getting a sergeant, with men enough for one piece, put in position on the left, and fired some eight rounds into the head of the Federal column, when the axle broke, disabling the piece. I almost immediately withdraw Terry's brigade from its position, and threw it on the left flank, charging over Wallace's men and forcing them back to their position. Even

³⁰Pickett, Pickett, 259-96.

then, with all the odds against us, we might have held till night, which was fast approaching, but the ammunition was rapidly failing. . . . Although the Federal dead lay in heaps, we were obliged to give way, our left being completely turned. Wallace's brigade again broke, though some of its officers behaved most gallantly and used their utmost exertions to reform it, but in vain! Everything assumed the appearance of a panic, when, by dint of great personal exertion on the part of my staff . . . we compelled a rally and stand on Corse's brigade . . .

One of the most brilliant cavalry engagements of the war took place on this part of the field, near Mrs. Gilliam's residence. Here the Federal cavalry made a most determined attack in heavy force, but were in turn charged by General W. H. F. Lee and completely driven off the field. This, with the firm stand made by Corse's men, and those that could be rallied at this point, enabled many to escape capture. . . . Colonel Munford, commanding General Fitz Lee's division, was quite active, and lent great assistance personally. . . .³¹

General Pickett then goes on to take the hypothetical assumption that, "Had the cavalry on the left done as well as that on the right, the day would probably have been ours . . ." ³²

It might have been so. We will not deny it; nay, we will not doubt it. But if General Pickett and Fitzhugh Lee had been on the field with their commands and had apprised General R. H. Anderson of the perilous

³¹Ibid., 396.

³²Ibid. Longstreet, quoted in ibid., 392, defended Pickett strongly by stating: "The cavalry of his left was in neglect in failing to report the advance of the enemy, but that was not for want of proper orders from his headquarters. . . . His defensive battle was better organized [than Sheridan's], and it is possible that he would have gained the day if his cavalry had been diligent in giving information on the movements of the enemy." John Gibb Simpson, "The Battle of Five Forks: March 31, 1865-April 1, 1865" (unpublished M.A. thesis, Duke University, 1966) 95-96, discussed this statement and concluded that it was more probably a reprimand of Fitz Lee than of Munford. Here, Munford does not acknowledge the statement as referring to himself. A letter from Longstreet to Munford has the following comment which reflects Longstreet's opinion of Fitz Lee: "Fitz Lee, . . . was anything but an efficient cavalryman . . ." James Longstreet to Thomas Taylor Munford, Sept. 5, 1894, Munford Family Papers.

position of Warren's Fifth Corps of the Federals, so that Anderson could have attacked the rear of Warren's Corps while it was driving me full two miles, there would have been a repetition of the rout of the Austrian army at Hohenlinden when General Moreau sent Richepense against the Austrian rear in the Black Forest. General Phil Sheridan said at the Warren Trial, sixteen years afterward, that had this been done he would have probably been sent to Libby Prison for a little time. But this was not done. General Anderson was not kept posted; he was not notified until it was too late. When at last he was reached, he sent the veterans of [Eppa] Hunton's, [John A.] Wise's, [Samuel] McGowan's and [Archibald] Gracie's brigades to Fitz Lee's aide--but they reached us in the night and the opportunity was gone. They were then of no use to us, but their absence was a loss to General R. E. Lee's main line.

Finally I come to some of the statements of General Thomas L. Rosser. Personally, I do not endorse them. They are from a published account, the first, to be found in the Philadelphia Weekly Times, April 5, 1885. Although they were much commented upon by the press at large of that day, these statements of Rosser's were never denied by his comrades of Five Forks. After describing the fight of March 30th in which he was wounded, Rosser says:

I found Pickett at Five Forks and as the country was too heavily wooded for the operations of Cavalry I asked permission to move back about a mile in his rear, on the other side of Hatcher's Run to remove saddles and feed. I had brought some excellent fresh shad from the Nottoway River with me and I invited General Pickett to go back and lunch with me. He promised to be with me in an hour. He and Fitz Lee came back to me. While we were at lunch couriers came from officers in command of the picket on the White Oak Road and other parallel roads reporting the advance of the enemy. Some time was spent over the lunch, during which no firing was heard

and we concluded that the enemy was not in much of a hurry to find us at Five Forks. A courier sent to Five Forks from us was fired at over the creek and came galloping back reporting that the enemy were in the road in front of us and in the rear of our position at Five Forks. General Pickett made an effort to join his command. But he came riding back in a great hurry and called for the Dinwiddie Troops as guides (they were never with him) and rode off with them but I think his troops were routed before he reached them. The Battle of Five Forks was of short duration but it quite used up that portion of our army which was engaged. It seems to have been a surprise to General Pickett: one would have supposed that he would have been on the alert in the presence of the enemy he had been so recently fighting.

Is any comment required upon this letter of Rosser's? If so, I will copy verbatim another one written by him to Captain A. S. Perham, 905 Westminster Street, Washington, D. C. The letter is as follows:

Charlottesville, Va.
April 29, 1902

It has been a long time since the battle of Five Forks was fought and I have no notes or reports before me, yet I think I remember enough about it to aid you in your research. I reached Five Forks from a forced march from Nottoway River about 8:00 p. m. on the 30th of March. I found General Pickett and Fitz Lee near the Forks and learned that the enemy was near Dinwiddie Court House and arrangements were being made to attack him there. I had two brigades commanded by Dearing and McCausland, and as I had camped on the Plank Road for quite a while, about three miles north of Dinwiddie Court House, and knew the ground, it was determined that I should sweep around behind Pickett's attacking column as soon as he moved out and make a raid on the Plank Road and destroy communications and such transportation as I could find. About 12 o'clock, Pickett moved out across Chamberlain's Run and I began to move for the Plank Road. But as I was passing the left flank of Pickett's rear, where the Ford Road crosses the Chamberlain Run I found Fitz Lee's Cavalry Division under Colonel T. T. Munford so pressed that I had to abandon my raid and assist the attack in the direction of Little Five Forks on the Court House Road and in this attack I was painfully wounded but did not leave the field. I pressed the enemy slowly, and when night came on bivouaced in line of battle with the understanding that the fight would be renewed the next morning. I had been fighting dismounted, and the horses were not brought up to the line at night as we expected to renew the fight on foot. At daylight I mounted my horse and as I was riding along my skirmish line I received a message from General Pickett

informing me that he was moving back to Five Forks and that I should cover the retreat on the Ford and adjacent roads. I found Generals Pickett and Matt Ransom there (Five Forks) and saw the men felling trees and preparing for defense. I had just come from the Valley, having followed Sheridan, and my horses were in very bad condition with sore backs and after explaining that fact to Pickett I asked that I might go back across Hatcher's Run and have the backs of my horses looked after. The country was so unfavorable for the operations of Cavalry that he made no objection. After putting out pickets on the Ford, Vaughan, Quaker, and White Roads, I took my two brigades across Hatcher's Run. The day I spent on Nottoway River I caught quite a lot of very fine shad by dragging a borrowed seine and, having them along with me in my ambulance, I invited Fitz Lee and Pickett back to a shad bake. While we were thus enjoying a most delightful meal two pickets reported the advance of the enemy on all the roads I was picketing. These reports were made to Pickett and to Lee and as the position at Five Forks was considered as well chosen and strong but little attention was given to the enemy's advance. I was suffering from my wound and as I was not immediately in command of the pickets I took no steps to reinforce them. Indeed the pickets were a part of General Munford's command and I, reporting directly to General Lee and as he was present, felt little or no concern about them.

Sometime after we had finished lunch, I should say three or four o'clock, Pickett asked for a courier to take a message to Five Forks, about a mile in front. (Over two miles) I gave him two of my couriers with the usual instructions, that is, one to follow in sight of the other but not to keep together. The foremost courier, while passing through a clearing on the other side of Hatcher's Run, and in full view of us, was fired at and captured and at the same time a line of Blue Coats crossed the road. We had not heard a shot and a heavy mist filled the atmosphere so we could not see distinctly. (This mist seems to have happened very curiously after Rosser had just seen the courier captured in full view.)

I pushed a line of dismounted men from Dearing's brigade to the Run and as the country about us was open, mounted McCausland's brigade and prepared for emergencies. The 3rd Virginia was with me, in which the Dinwiddie Troops served, and taking a guide from this troop, Pickett left me to join his command at Five Forks. Fitz Lee remained with me. About sunset Pickett returned and asked for the entire Dinwiddie troop and again left me and I saw nothing more of him. (Nobody but Rosser saw this. The Dinwiddie troops were of and with my (Munford's) Division.)

Pickett's conduct at Five Forks was the cause of General R. E. Lee's losing all confidence in him and had the opportunity been given he would have been courtmartialed. He failed to guard

his left flank and he failed to join his command when Colonel T. T. Munford reported the enemy advancing.³³

Thus have I, and I fear at too great a length, told the story of the Battle of Five Forks, fought April 1, 1865. From my tale I do not doubt but that any military student can take in the situation. It was never a victory won by Sheridan; it was a triumph donated to Sheridan by his generous enemies. When, during the course of the battle, General Warren, who commanded the enemy's 5th Corps, had driven us to the Ford Road crossing in our rear, he sent a message to his chief exultantly announcing that he was cutting off our retreat and had taken a number of prisoners. Sheridan, who hated Warren with all the bitterness of his harsh nature, greeted the message with a burst of fearful rage, "By God, sir!" he yelled in the courier's face. "Tell General Warren I say he wasn't in the fight!"³⁴

That was brutal injustice to the Federal Corps Commander--but it was true of Fitz Lee and Rosser. They were never in the fight. It was nearly true of Pickett; he did not get into it till it was all over but the running.

In all military history there is but one parallel to this--the case of the Russian General Kutusoff. He was found at a critical moment in the Battle of Borodino feasting with the whole of his staff two miles in the rear of the line of fire and ignorant of the state of action, while his junior, General Barclay, was holding the front with his aides

³³Freeman, Lee's Lieutenants, III, 721 disagreed with Rosser's harsh statement that Lee would have courtmartialled Pickett.

³⁴Another account has Sheridan shouting, "Tell General Warren, by God! I say he was not at the front. That is all I have to say to him." Simpson, "The Battle of Five Forks," 74.

falling around him like wheat stalks before the sickle. The only difference in these two cases lies in the motive--Kutusoff was accused of an attempt to allot to General Barclay the fate of Uriah the Hittite!--while the fate of the Confederacy was left to a "mess of pottage."

It was the appetite of a man that caused the evacuation of Richmond. I do not mean to say that had it not been for Five Forks the South would have won the war. It came too late to stem the inevitable tide of defeat for the Southern arms--but it did bring about the end when there was no need for it. It did put to naught the skill and genius of Lee, and what the final result might have been had we driven Sheridan back to Grant's lines in defeat, can never be known.³⁵

In further proof of the statements I have made in this article, I feel that I ought not to close without quoting two letters from the pens of mightier men than I, whose ashes now enrich the soil of their State even as their memory enriches the meditations of her living sons. I shall take first that of General R. E. Lee to glorious Wade Hampton, the "Murat of the Confederacy," and written but four months to the day after the battle of Five Forks. General Lee wrote:

You cannot regret as much as I did that you were not with us at the final struggle. The absence of the troops which I had sent to North and South Carolina was, I believe, the immediate cause of our disaster. Our small force of Cavalry--a large portion of the men who had been sent to the interior to winter their horses had not re-joined their regiments--was unable to resist the United States

³⁵"The number of Confederates captured that afternoon and rounded up on the morning of April 2 by the V Corps was 3244, with eleven flags and one gun, at a cost of 634 casualties. Prisoners taken by the cavalry were not listed fully in reports, but they doubtless reached 2000." Freeman, Lee's Lieutenants, III, 671.

Cavalry under General Sheridan, which obliged me to detach Pickett's Division to Fitz Lee's support, thereby weakening my main line and yet not accomplishing my purpose. If you had been there with your cavalry the results at Five Forks would have been different. But how long the contest could have been prolonged it is difficult to say. It is over and though the present is depressing and disheartening, I trust the future may prove brighter. We will at least hope so. That happiness may attend you and yours is the earnest prayer of your friend,

R. E. Lee

General Wade Hampton
August 1, 1865

My last word upon this painful subject of the disaster at Five Forks will be to quote a letter addressed to me a little more than 24 years later. The name and the fame of its noble writer will give it all the credence it needs.³⁶

Beauvoir, Mississippi
28 May, 1889

General Thomas T. Munford

My dear Sir:

Many thanks to you for your kind letter of the 22nd inst. and the accompanying papers. It was with very sad feelings, especially, that I read the statement of Rosser. I knew that General Lee did not anticipate the necessity for leaving Petersburg as soon as he did, and had heard of his dissatisfaction with Pickett at Five Forks, but I had no idea that the case was as bad as Rosser presents it. Sometime before the event to which you refer, General Lee confessed to me that the retreat from Petersburg was a mere question of time and said delay was necessary in order that the roads might become harder and his draft horses become somewhat recruited. It was one of the very few occasions in which we did not entirely agree, for I then thought the weak horses with comparatively empty wagons

³⁶Six days before Davis' letter, Munford sent the ex-President what apparently was an early draft of his manuscript on the battle of Five Forks. See Dunbar Rowland (ed.), Jefferson Davis, Constitutionalist: His Letters, Papers and Speeches (Jackson, Miss., 1923), X, 113-14.

going over a soft road would so cut it up that stronger horses could not readily pass over it. The purpose to reach the Roanoke River was defeated by the success of the enemy on our right flank and it is hardly exaggerating when you speak of that fatal Lunch as the ruin of the Confederacy. It certainly did, at least, hasten the catastrophe. It has ever been to me painful to notice the misconduct of a Confederate soldier and I shall probably never have use for the papers you have kindly sent me--unless there should be occasion for the renewal of the expression of the high estimation in which I hold your services.

With assurances of sincere regards, I am

Fraternally yours,

Jefferson Davis

CHAPTER IV

LAST DAYS OF FITZ LEE'S CAVALRY DIVISION

On the night of April 1st, when it began to be whispered among the tents that orders had been issued for the evacuation of Richmond, many an old veteran heard the tale with a jeer and greeted it with a grinning, "Aw, git out. April Fool!" But a little later, when the terrible truth became known for what it was, those dauntless old battle-scarred daredevils of a thousand wild charges--bold dashing fighters who could smash into the face of a murderous rifle-fire whistling a tune--went about soberly. Into their faces and into their legs, which had borne the day's defeat without wearying, there suddenly seemed to come an unconscious aging.¹ Now, at last, they looked worn with battle.

About twilight, my Division, which was in the woods beyond the range of the enemy's fire and to the rear of that brave old hero, General Corse, began to retreat northward, carrying with us a large number of the straggling infantry. To avoid capture, many of my dismounted men crossed Hatcher's Run up to their arm-pits in water, swollen by the chilly March rains. That gloomy night, as we wended our way back to the wagon train near Sutherland's Station, with probably

¹"The day's defeat," was the battle of Five Forks, in which Grant's Federal army smashed Lee's right flank after a nine-month seige for Richmond and Petersburg.

1000 stragglers from the Infantry with us, we realized,

"There are spots where spirits blend,
Where friends hold comradeship with friend."

It was late when I reported to Fitz Lee at Sutherland's Station, but luckily a blunder of the Federals had afforded us time to make good our immediate escape. General Grant had not been informed of Sheridan's attack until five o'clock, and it was nine o'clock before he learned of the victory. Then he ordered Meade to jump out and attack all along our line at early dawn of the next morning, while Sheridan with the 5th Corps and the reinforcements of General [Nelson A.] Miles's Division was to sweep up the road toward Petersburg. General Merritt, being left by these orders in command of the United States cavalry, began cautiously feeling for our cavalry. General R[ichard H.] Anderson now assumed command of all the troops lately under Pickett and was in charge of General R. E. Lee's entire right flank.

The morning of the 2nd of April will never be forgotten by Fitz Lee's cavalry division. All hearts and thoughts were turned toward Petersburg and Richmond. All night we were anxious and troubled about the effect of the previous day's defeat. The main lines of Lee and Grant were locked together in a death grip; the very heavens were illuminated by the pyrotechnics of the contending armies. The din and roar of cannon, the booming of mortars, the sharper rattle and the re-echoing of musketry raged eternally--it seemed to us--until late in the day. We stood "to horse" awaiting orders; finally I was instructed to move out on the Coxe Road and throw out pickets nearest to the approaches to the south bank of the Appomattox River. There were any

number of roads and byroads intersecting each other, leading to the Southside Railroad and the churches, and all of them had to be guarded as General Merritt was now afield, feeling for our position.

At three o'clock that afternoon, General R. E. Lee gave the order to prepare for abandoning his lines, and at eight o'clock the retreat from Richmond and Petersburg began. Soon stragglers, generally as smart as rats on a leaky ship, began to arrive among us, saying that the wagon trains and artillery were moving out with the infantry soon to follow. What memories of my boyhood home at Richmond came flooding over me then! Dear parents and beloved sisters, most of the things that made life worth living, floated through my anguished visions of a city sitting in her ashes--a city soon to lie desolated amid the embers of her burned and sacked dwellings.² Sheridan's and General William T. Sherman's raids of Virginia's beautiful Valley and of Georgia's prosperous midland came to mind with vividness. Every man of us who had passed through that desolated Valley in Sheridan's trail recalled the smoking fields, the stark chimneys, the blackened piles where mansions once had stood, and our tears came at the thoughts of unhappy Richmond's fate.³ But there were no tears of weakness; tears, rather, of a bruised

²Richmond burned on April 3, 1865, not because of the Federal occupation, but because Confederate troops set fire to warehouses to keep the stores of tobacco from enemy hands. Winds swept these warehouse fires out of control. Freeman, Lee's Lieutenants, III, 686.

³Sheridan's 1864 destruction of the Shenandoah Valley was physically crippling to Virginia. His report of the Middle Military Division from August 10 to November, 1864, cited the following property captured or destroyed: 3,772 horses; 71 flour mills; 7 furnaces; 1,200 barns; 10,918 beef cattle; 12,000 sheep; 15,000 swine; 435,802 bu. wheat; 20,000 bu. oats; 77,176 bu. corn; 874 barrels flour; 20,397 tons

rage that nerved us to clasp our weapons the more fiercely and cry unto ourselves out of the agonies of our heart: "Lay on! Lay on, MacDuff-- and damn'd be he who first cries 'Hold; Enough!'"

Merritt, Custer, Crook and MacKenzie were on the alert now and feeling for us, but as yet with "velvet gloves." Anderson's troops, now concentrated along the Appomattox River Road, were headed for Amelia Court House. The enemy's cavalry was moving across the Southside Railroad, midway between Sutherland's depot and the Ford meeting house, in a north-westerly direction. It was very difficult to guard the interminable roads and byroads which cut up the whole country and, at the same time, avoid the elated and victorious enemy which was following us. The cavalry, being "the eyes of the Army," must necessarily keep a sharp lookout for it, and this we endeavored to do. In a recent letter to me, Colonel Cary Breckinridge of the 2nd Virginia [Cavalry] regiment reminds me of one of the incidents of that morning. He says:

Being sent out by you on a road in an easterly direction, we had proceeded but a mile or more when we came within hearing distance of the enemy. We deployed along the side of a bushy hill about two hundred yards from the enemy's position. Our orders were to stay there concealed, to talk only in whispers and, after a certain time, to retire one by one and rejoin the brigade where it was awaiting further orders. Shortly after our deployment there arose from the Federal position, just below us but out of sight, the greatest sounds of jubilation we ever heard. The men seemed to be thousands. They huzzahed and cheered and their bands played the most stirring airs. This great demonstration on the part of the enemy was the first announcement to us of the general breakup of the Confederate lines. (The whole of Lee's army.) We left them to their enjoyment and rejoined the brigade without further incident.

hay; 12,000 lbs. bacon and ham; 10,000 lbs. tobacco; 947 miles rail; 2,500 bu. potatoes. O. R. XLIII, Pt. 1, 37.

Late that day we retired across the Southside Railroad and spent another anxious night in bivouac there. The next day began our slow retreat toward Amelia Court House.⁴ We were not pressed vigorously by the enemy, although a small force in our rear annoyed us considerably and caused us frequently to dismount and prepare for action. These preparations, however, did not often result in the firing of a gun. A part of the Division was kept north on a road nearer the Appomattox River, and it too experienced about the same gentle pursuit by mounted reconnoitering parties.

As we approached Namozine Creek, the dividing line between Amelia and Dinwiddie counties, a party of Federals made a dash at the rear of a brigade of our column--Barringer's brigade of General W. H. F. Lee's Division, which brought up our rear.⁵ It was a complete and sudden surprise, the enemy coming in on a byroad. The brigade was thrown instantly into a panic, and a stampede resulted. The panic spread rapidly from the rear and soon we were in a perfect jam of fleeing horsemen. But the 2nd Virginia Cavalry was extricated from the mass and formed in a field to the left of the road and possibly aided in checking the stampede and getting the column back to its normal state. But General Barringer was captured in this sally along with most of his

⁴Amelia Court House was a depot, with sidings, on the Richmond and Danville Railroad. Lee hoped to obtain food and other supplies there as he moved toward a possible rendezvous at Danville with General Joseph E. Johnston's forces, then retiring up through North Carolina.

⁵During one of the temporary halts as the army retreated toward Amelia Court House in the vicinity of Namozine Church, the North Carolina brigade of W. H. F. Lee's division at the rear of the column received this surprise attack. O. R., XLVI, Pt. 1, 1301.

brigade of North Carolinians and his gallant Acting Adjutant-General, Major J [ames] D. Ferguson. I beg to mention here, however, the gallantry of Major George D. Treanor of Maryland and Captain [Milton] J. Billmyer of the 1st Virginia, who distinguished themselves in rallying their troops and attempting to hold the rear. Panic may occur with the best of troops at times--especially when they are without a reserve and are attacked unexpectedly upon flank and rear. Thus it was this time, but order was soon brought out of chaos and we proceeded into Amelia County.

The "Amelia Troop" of my brigade now acted as our guides.⁵ They were a veteran corps which had followed Jeb Stuart at 1st Manassas and they were now within sight of their homes and the end of their warlike career, but they were as full of fight as they were in '61.

Our next brush with our bluecoated friends was at Deep Creek. Of this General Fitz Lee's report says:

At Deep Creek, en route, the command was placed in line of battle to take advantage of the defensive position offered and to give a check to the enemy's rapid advance. Wise's and Hutton's brigades constituted a part of the rear guard at that time. The attack was not made upon us until after dark and was principally sustained by Munford's command, of my old division, with a steadiness reflecting high credit upon the valor and discipline of the men. Owing to the fact that General Heth's troops were expected to arrive by the road by which the enemy advanced, they were permitted to approach very close to our lines, and it was not until Lieutenant-Colonel [Mordecai W.] Strother, Fourth Virginia Cavalry, was sent to reconnoitre that it was ascertained who they were, he having walked into their line of skirmishes, which were so near to ours that the questions they asked him were distinctly heard by our troops.⁶

⁵Company G of the 1st Virginia Cavalry was known variously as the "Amelia Troop" and the "Amelia Light Dragoons."

⁶O. R., XLVI, Pt. 1, 1300-01.

We had parleyed there a good while with the bluecoats; but when Strother was captured, one of the Yankees called out to us from the darkness: "All right, Jonnies! We have got your Major Strother."

This was a little more audacity than could be tolerated. My men were lying down behind temporary works, ready for the word and they got it with emphasis: "Let 'em have it!"

A sheet of flame burst from our carbines along the whole line. (Colonel W. B. Tabb's regiment of infantry from Wise's brigade was with us and heartily co-operated.)⁷ Considerable firing was kept up during the early part of the night; but when they found we were there to stay, the enemy fell back out of reach and hearing.

During this engagement, we did not get a fair return for "our Major Strother," but we did get something from the Yankees--as a sort of consolation prize, perhaps. Colonel Cary Breckinridge tells it that amidst the roar and flashing of the guns a Yankee mule got scared and dashed into our lines, braying at every jump. When he finally stopped near our bivouac, he was caught and tied to a tree. Long and loudly, amid the sounds of dreadful war, he kept up his persistent song--singing through his nose, as we thought most Yankees did. Finally he subsided for a time; but when our command attempted quietly to slip off late in the night, the mournful old mule did not want to be left alone. Once more he attuned his voice and we left him still braying us to "Hold the lines, boys, here's your mule."

⁷William B. Tabb commanded the 59th Virginia Infantry, a regiment formed in 1861 but which saw little action until the last year of the war.

Upon our arrival at Amelia Court House, where I hoped to secure rations for my men, our rear was crowded considerably by [Colonel William] Wells' brigade of United States Cavalry. But information was at hand that the enemy was also ahead of us in the direction of Amelia Springs, and the 2nd Virginia Cavalry was hurried forward, without being allowed to halt, to make reconnaissance. They found that the enemy's cavalry was attacking our wagon trains, covered by General [Martin W.] Gary's cavalry, and in a few minutes my whole Division was ordered to go to help Rosser, who had also been sent to Gary's aid in the direction of Jetersville and Amelia Springs. We were soon engaged in a long running fight in which the Federals were severely punished.⁸ When the fight ended, the old 2nd Cavalry brigade dismounted and held the road and finally brought off the rear, supported by Payne's brigade mounted. Two gallant young officers of Rosser's staff fell in this fight. Captain James Rutherford and Captain Hugh McGuire were dropped at the last rattle of the guns. Rutherford had just returned from Europe with the dashing Jimmy (James E.) Tucker and the (now) Right Reverend Beverly D. Tucker, who had been students abroad. Rutherford had lately been married and fell in his first battle, making, in defense of his native state, "the public cause the whetstone of his fortitude."⁹

⁸Munford was in error. In the cavalry fight at Amelia Springs on April 5, the Federals had the upper hand from start to end. More than 320 Confederates were taken prisoner during the engagement. For Federal reports of the battle, see O. R., XLVI, Pt. 1, 732, 1142, 1145, 1149-50, 1158.

⁹Fitz Lee reported: "Our loss was not very heavy, and I can only

One of the incidents of this retreat, near Amelia Court House, is related by Colonel Gary Breckinridge. He was standing in the road at the head of his regiment, with videttes thrown to the front looking for the enemy, when he was surprised to hear a stealthy cracking of the brush to his left. The next moment, a small party of well-mounted men leaped into the road no more than 30 paces ahead of him. He immediately recognized his cousin the Secretary of War, General John C. Breckinridge, with a few of his staff officers. They had escaped from Richmond and were making their way south across country, without regard to roads, as hard as they could ride. The situation and his danger were quickly explained to the Secretary, and in a few moments the little hard-riding party was heading for Dinwiddie.

Of our ensuing movements General Fitz Lee says correctly:

I was ordered to move with my command on the Paineville Road to protect the wagon train, a portion of which was reported to have been attacked by some of the enemy's cavalry. W. H. F. Lee was detached and sent in advance of Longstreet, who was moving from the Court-House toward Jetersville. I found the enemy had attacked and burned a portion of the cavalry train, including my own headquarters wagons, and had retreated again toward Jetersville. I started at once in pursuit, and soon closed up on Gary with his brigade, who had been previously dispatched in that direction, and was engaging their enemy near Paineville. Re-enforcing him, the enemy were rapidly driven within a mile of Jetersville, where their infantry were found in large force. . . . In this encounter 30 of the enemy were killed, principally with the sabre, and 150 wounded and captured. The attack was made with Rosser's Division mounted, supported by a portion of my old division, dismounted.¹⁰

recall in this connection the mortally wounding of two of my bravest and best young officers, Capt. Hugh McGuire, Eleventh Virginia Cavalry, and Capt. James Rutherford, assistant inspector-general, General Dearing's staff." O. R., XLVI, Pt. 1, 1301.

¹⁰Ibid.

The enemy did not reach the wagon train of my division. That was carried out and landed in Bedford County by Major Albert McDaniel of the 2nd Virginia Cavalry. There it was abandoned by him in sight of his mother's home where he was born. We remained all night at Amelia Springs. "The next morning (6th of April)," General Lee continues, "I started the main portion of my command, under Rosser (the senior officer present), and remained, in compliance with instructions, to explain in person to the first infantry officer who came up the situation of things, and to urge the importance of his keeping a sharp watch upon his left flank, as it was feared by the commanding general the enemy might tap the marching column coming from the Amelia Springs and Jetersville road."¹¹

Here General Lee is in error. I was ordered by him to report to General Longstreet in the direction of Rice's. I found Longstreet there, his troops actively engaged in throwing up works, and I was ordered by Longstreet to "look out for his right," his troops facing east. In a little while came an order to report in person to General Longstreet. He informed me that he had just dispatched Rosser to attack the enemy, which was moving as if to destroy High Bridge. He directed me to take the road and follow rapidly on Rosser's trail and join him in the attack.

When we neared the road which Rosser had taken from the Farmville Road to reach High Bridge, we heard firing in our front and right and

¹¹Ibid.

moved hurriedly to his support. Payne's brigade of my Division, being in front, went in to the right, mounted. I dismounted the 2nd brigade and went in accompanying Colonel W. W. Woolridge.¹² The woods were thick, but as we scurried through them we came to a broad field, across which, in another piece of woods opposite us, the enemy's infantry were distinctly seen.

Our skirmishers opened vigorously and the Federals responded equally so. We could see Rosser's mounted men charging and we pushed on, losing some valuable officers and men. During our advance across the field, orders came from Rosser by courier to close into the right, but we were too near the retreating enemy to make the movement and so we pushed on, instead, and carried our front. Upon entering the woods, Colonel Woolridge and I came across Colonel Theodore Read, who had commanded the enemy's troops. He was mortally wounded, and one of my couriers, Jim Scruggs of Co. K, 2nd Virginia Cavalry, took his sword.¹³ It was in this attack that Lieutenant Robert C. Wilson, commanding Co. A of the 2nd Virginia [Cavalry], was killed. This noble young soldier was on a detail to get a horse; he was married while at home and lost his life in this fight before his furlough was out. He was one of the bravest and most accomplished gentlemen in my command.

So much has been written on both sides about this sanguinary action that I feel called upon to mention some of the brave men in it.

¹²William B. Woolridge commanded the 4th Virginia Cavalry.

¹³Read fell mortally wounded in a personal duel with Gen. James Dearing at High Bridge. See William L. Parker, "Brigadier General James Dearing, C. S. A." (unpublished M. A. thesis, VPI&SU, 1969).

Colonel R [euben] B. Boston of Payne's brigade was killed.¹⁴ Major Jim Breathed of the Artillery of my Division and the most terrible personal fighter I ever knew, especially distinguished himself that day.¹⁵ Colonel R. Preston Chew, also of the Horse Artillery, with the lamented Major James Thompson of the same command and General Dearing were also in the hottest of the melee. In the midst of it the two latter laid down their noble lives. It must be said that the Federals put up a most desperate fight, though greatly outnumbered by us (a fact for once!), but their whole command fell into our hands.¹⁶

Here an opportunity is afforded me to mention a rather delicate subject--delicate to me at least. I sent Captain Henry Lee to make a verbal report of the action to his brother, General Fitz Lee; and when he returned he informed me that his brother had told him that he would see that I got my promotion at once. That night, I received from General Fitz Lee, by courier, a corps order in his own handwriting, announcing my promotion to be Brigadier General. This was entirely

¹⁴In the fighting of Apr. 6, Col. Boston of the 5th Virginia Cavalry was temporarily in command of Payne's brigade. O. R., XLVI, Pt. 1, 1275.

¹⁵Years after the war, a Confederate veteran wrote of Breathed and Maj. John Pelham ("the Gallant Pelham") that they were "kindred spirits indeed; loyal to the cause of the South; terrible hard fighters, with a stubbornness that would not yield; an aggressiveness that was irresistible." SHSP, XXXVIII (1910), 379. McClellan, Stuart, 407-8, also details Breathed's furious fighting.

¹⁶Out of a Federal force of 800-900 men, Fitz Lee reported taking 780 prisoners! Eleven Union officers went into the fight. Three were killed, 5 wounded, and 3 were captured. O. R., XLVI, Pt. 1, 1168-69, 1302.

upon his own volition. My commission has been unnecessarily discussed by others in the columns of the press. I wish to say that it was never asked for by me. Furthermore, and as a matter of fact, I never received the commission. Indeed, I had never received any commission from the Confederate government--though I had been Lieutenant-Colonel and was unanimously elected Colonel of the 2nd Virginia Cavalry three years before and had been serving in that capacity all the time I was in Wickham's brigade. Wickham was a member of Congress (Confederate) and held both commissions.¹⁷

Resting after the fight near High Bridge and not far from the bloody field, we had exceedingly short rations and were even a bit shorter on other comforts. We showed sadly the marks of battle. We had lost some very valuable men and the enemy, especially [Francis] Washburn's Cavalry, had made a desperate effort to get away. I knew from previous experience what a crack troop that cavalry command was; we had tackled them at Ashland the day before Stuart the Magnificent received his death wound, and they had shown their mettle and spirit there.

In the morning, Fitz Lee joined me and directed me which way to move en route to Farmville so as to bring up the rear of Longstreet's command. We were to keep on the road nearest the railroad, if I remember correctly, while Rosser was to our left on a parallel road.

¹⁷Freeman says, "E. J. Harvie, of the War Records Office, wrote Munford, Oct. 2, 1886, that he found Fitz Lee's recommendation of Mch. 20, 1865, for Munford's promotion to date from Wickham's resignation, which was accepted Nov. 9, 1864. Gen. R. E. Lee, on March 23, had endorsed this favorably and had forwarded the paper to the Adjutant General's Office where it was received Mch. 29, 1865." Freeman, Lee's Lieutenants, III, 667N.

We come now to another fight upon which much has been written. Farmville was the objective point of both armies, and this stiff brush took place close to the town.¹⁸ My command was really suffering, both men and horses, for something to eat by this time; and General Crook's cavalry, which had trailed us from our bivouac at High Bridge, was closely following us. Many times we were compelled to dismount and be on the qui vive for "trouble."

My orders were to move to Farmville and cross the river on the Turnpike bridge, east of the town, upon which combustibles had been placed. Colonel Daniel A. Grimsley of the 6th Virginia Cavalry, commanding Payne's brigade of my Division since the death of Colonel Boston, was directed to hold the town as long as he could, then to set fire to the bridge and follow Woolridge's brigade on the retreat. But the rear guard of Woolridge's brigade, finding itself closely pressed, and observing that Rosser was coming in on the road to the south of us, seems to have set fire to the bridge before Grimsley's men could reach it to cross. Thus cut off, Payne's brigade was forced to ford the Appomattox under the shelter of Colonel [William T.] Poague's artillery fire.

After we had gone up the north side of the river, we saw the 21st Virginia Cavalry of Rosser's command sharply fighting with Crook's United States Cavalry in the streets of Farmville. Major [Stephen P.]

¹⁸The plan was for the Confederate army to cross the Appomattox River and burn the bridges behind it. This would give the army the day lost at Amelia Courthouse. The missing rations would be at Farmville. The plan failed when Federal troops succeeded in saving the High Bridge and caught up with the Confederates at Farmville. Freeman, Lee's Lieutenants, III, 712-16.

Halsey, who served two years with me in the 2nd Virginia [Cavalry] and was promoted therefrom to a captaincy in the 21st Cavalry, writes me a letter saying: "I brought up the rear of my regiment at Farmville. Young William Langhorne of my regiment was mortally wounded there and I brought him out on my horse." This shows clearly how closely Rosser was followed by Crook's cavalry as we retreated west.

Near Farmville, my command secured some rations by sending a detail forward. But such work was exceedingly perilous as the enemy was very much alive and in every direction. We were then hurried to the heights north of Farmville to assist the divisions of Generals [Henry] Heth and [William] Mahone, which were engaged in some lively skirmishing with General Humphreys' Corps. Here, for the first time and only time during the retreat, I saw General R. E. Lee, and it was then for only a few moments. Heth's skirmishers were falling back, but there were several wagons turning in the road and I was directed to assist Heth in checking the enemy's advance.

In a very little time the order came for me to move my whole command to the rear and across the road from Farmville. Riding with Captain John Lamb, then in command of the 3rd Virginia Cavalry, we suddenly struck General [J. Irvin] Gregg's column in the flank (of Crook's cavalry). I knew I was then with the 3rd Virginia Cavalry because Lieutenant Hubard of that regiment was killed not far from me by a shell from Colonel Poague's guns,¹⁹ and also at this spot W [illiam H.]

¹⁹For the confusion that reigned in this disjointed engagement, see Col. Poague's reminiscences, Gunner with Stonewall (Jackson, Tenn., 1957), 117-19.

N. Cubine of the 1st Virginia greatly distinguished himself by capturing a squad of the Yankee cavalry. Captain Lamb, ably supported by such splendid fighters as Bernie [Beverly F.] and Junie [John M.] Harwood, led his company from Charles City with superb dash into this action.

I recollect very distinctly, also, the capture of General Gregg along with several other Federal officers.²⁰ I remember seeing General Gregg and was personally with a part of the 3rd Virginia when we struck Crook's flank. Hence it is not true, as has been claimed, that I was being pressed by the enemy when Rosser came to my aid. We were facing south when I first saw the Federals, and the bulk of Gregg's command was west of mine. As my command was not on the road that General Gregg moved on, after we crossed the Appomattox east of Farmville, he was not following me--but Rosser!--when I was sent to attack him in flank and rear.

The credit for capturing Gregg has been claimed for Colonel E [Ilijah] V. White of Leesburg, of Rosser's Division, as a fact of personal valor; and if he claims it, I am sure it is true.²¹ He served many months in my regiment and a more chivalrous, brave, dashing soldier never graced a Confederate regiment. Colonel White has since died as a distinguished clergyman; but in those days he was well paired

²⁰It was while "gallantly fighting his brigade" that Gregg and two of his staff officers fell into Confederate hands. O. R., XLVI, Pt. 1, 1112, 1155.

²¹For an account of Gregg's capture, written by one of White's men, see Frank M. Myers, The Comanches: A History of White's Battalion, Virginia Cavalry (Baltimore, 1871), 384-85.

with the gallant and dashing chaplain of my regiment, the Rev. Dr. Randolph H. McKim--now the brilliant and distinguished rector of a great parish in the city of Washington, but in those days of '64-65, the very paragon of a chaplain, a soldier of his country and of the cross, gifted in prayer, faithful in precept and example, always at his post and beloved by the soldiers, regardless of denomination, because his watchword was ever: "For God and Our Country."²²

When Colonel White was raising his battalion after he had left my regiment, he sent me a characteristic letter asking me to give him a good man to be his adjutant. I sent him Sergeant-Major Thomas Brown Watts of the 2nd Virginia [Cavalry], who was nearly as good a fighter as his brother, Lieutenant-Colonel James W. Watts. Colonel Jim Watts carried as many sabre scars to prove his quality as any cavalry officer in the Confederate army and two bullet wounds, beside, just to keep them company. At the Battle of Second Manassas, he received seven slashes from the sabre while Major Cary Breckinridge, my left bower in those days, received five sabre wounds at the same battle. This was in the fight with General John Buford's brigade of United States cavalry, which was so severely handled that no report of it, by Buford, has ever appeared in the records of the War Department.

After the capture of Gregg, the enemy left us for awhile and moved by a circuitous route to tap the Southside Railroad and cut off our supplies and impede our trains. We were now in Cumberland County; and

²²McKim also penned one of the most quotable memoirs of the Civil War: A Soldier's Recollection (New York, 1910).

as General Lee's movements had been somewhat delayed by inefficient guides, the Cumberland and Buckingham Troop of my Division, and composed of the elite of those counties, became exceedingly useful.²³

But while the Cavalry of the enemy were gone, we who were in the rear of Longstreet's Corps were being closely followed and persistently pressed by the enemy's infantry. My men were dismounted constantly and deployed as rear guard. Colonel Cary Breckinridge, writing of this 8th day of April, 1865, says:

Munford's brigade brought up the rear and the 2nd regiment of cavalry was given position of rear guard. In this position we naturally looked for much trouble and we were mystified as time passed not to feel the least pressure, but we were still more mystified when flags of truce commenced passing and repassing us. On the last night of the retreat, being in close touch with the enemy, Humphrey's Corps, we exercised unusual vigilance. The men were ordered to unbridle their horses and after feeding them (if there was anything to feed them) to rebridle and stand ready to mount at a whispered command. There was no talking and no fires. Shortly before day the whispered command came to move quietly away. . . . When we reached Appomattox Court House the enemy's cavalry, backed by his infantry, was between our army and Lynchburg. It was decided to get the Cavalry out of the trap!

²³Munford was referring to Co. G ("Cumberland Light Dragoons") of the 3rd Virginia Cavalry and Co. K ("McKinney's Company") from Buckingham County in the 4th Virginia Cavalry.

* * * * *

After the army had gone into bivouac that night of April 8th, I received a courier from General Fitz Lee ordering me to report in person at General R. E. Lee's headquarters, where he was with his staff. I reported at once to Fitz Lee and learned from him the exceedingly close quarters occupied by our army between the two wings of General Grant's overwhelming force before us and behind us. He told me to be ready at daylight to move out with the Division to an attack. If we were successful in clearing the Lynchburg Road, the infantry would follow. I reminded him that Company H of my old regiment was from Appomattox; that Company I was from Campbell, adjoining Appomattox on the west and south; that E Company was from Amherst, directly across the James River; and that B Company of Lynchburg was, like the rest of the companies mentioned, virtually in sight of their homes. And as the rest of the regiment consisted of the three companies from Bedford and the others all mountain men, I told him that a Federal cavalry division did not live which would either coop us up or keep us out of Lynchburg.²⁴ I told him I had no right to ask for a position, but if he would give me the right of line, I would stake my life that we could get to Lynchburg. His reply was: "Bully for you, Munford! You shall have the right of line!"

²⁴The 30th Virginia Mounted Infantry, which later became the 2nd Virginia Cavalry, included Companies A, F and G from Bedford County, B from Lynchburg, C from Botetourt County, D from Franklin County, E from Amherst County, H from Appomattox County, I from Campbell County and K from Albermarle County.

It may be immodest to state this, but if history is to be written, it should be written with all the truth obtainable. When I got up to leave, Fitz Lee said, "Did you get the order I sent you with your promotion? Take care the Yankees don't get it in the morning."

At daybreak on the morning of the 9th, [Gen. John B.] Gordon's command, numbering about 1,200 muskets,²⁵ was formed in line of battle half a mile west of Appomattox Court House on the Lynchburg Road. The cavalry corps was formed on his right, W. H. F. Lee's division nearest to the infantry, Rosser in the center and my division on the extreme right. Our total mounted force was about 2,400 men.²⁶ Of the activities of this formation that day, General Fitz Lee wrote: "Our attack was made about sunrise, and the enemy's cavalry quickly driven out of the way, with a loss of two guns and a number of prisoners. The arrival at this time of two corps of their infantry necessitated the retiring of our lines, during which, and knowing what would be the result, I withdrew the cavalry."²⁷

My own recollections of the fight at Appomattox are that Fitz Lee was with a part of W. H. F. Lee's division and went out with it. Rosser was in the center and I was on the extreme right. It was my business to find a weak point in the enemy's left, but at the same time it was

²⁵Fitz Lee reported that Gordon's division numbered 1,600 muskets. O. R., XLVI, Pt. 1, 1303.

²⁶The extent of the deterioration of Lee's army can be seen in this figure (2,400 men). Had the army been at full strength, the total should have been at least ten times that number.

²⁷O. R., XLVI, Pt. 1, 1303.

necessary for me to keep in touch with Rosser on the left. W. H. F. Lee and Rosser became engaged before I did and threw the cavalry in front of them back upon the infantry of the 24th Federal Corps, as Fitz Lee says. My scouts had posted me with the location of the enemy's left for which I was making and, as my recollections run with the following account from Goldsborough's Maryland Line, I copy it:

General Fitz Lee's division of cavalry, now under command of Brigadier General Munford . . . moved through Appomattox Court House and formed in line of battle on the right of the road about half a mile beyond that place. The halt was brief, and it moved in column obliquely to the right and entered a heavy wood, where it soon came into contact with the enemy.

Throwing out skirmishers to engage them, General Munford moved again to the right oblique until they were again struck, when more skirmishers were thrown out (by 1st Virginia Cavalry), the (4th Virginia) having fallen in the rear, and these movements were continued until he found a picket of a Union regiment (General Henry Davis' brigade). Meantime Rosser and W. H. F. Lee and Gordon were heavily engaged pushing back the enemy's cavalry in their front. The sound of a severe fight was plainly heard and the movements of this cavalry excited much surprise and comment among the men and officers composing the division.

At first it was thought it was the intention to get in the rear of the enemy and charge him, while engaged in front, by the infantry; which opinion was much strengthened by a near approach to a battery of the enemy in full action against Gordon's infantry and Rosser's command. But another detour proved its fallacy and we were all lost in conjecture until the Lynchburg road was reached, when it became evident that the immediate object of the movement was to reach that road--as the division at once formed on each side of it. From this point the masses of Grant's army were plainly visible, standing as if on Dress Parade.

The firing had now ceased and surprise at what at first seemed unaccountable (the ceasing of the fire) suddenly gave place to alarm. Surrender of the army was whispered, but it was heard with indignation by men who would not acknowledge their own fears even to themselves.

The 1st Maryland happened to be nearest to the road and to the enemy. The men were dismounted but standing to horse; the usual precautions of skirmishers in front having been observed of course.

Everything was still: . . . not a sound betrayed the presence of that great host of armed men and but for the sight of that long line of blue coats upon the hills in front we might have taken it all for a hideous dream.

Suddenly a heavy column of cavalry moved rapidly along Munford's front and parallel to his line. It was about a quarter of a mile distant, marching towards the road which was presently reached and a part of the force, still in column, advanced by the road while the remainder came through the fields to the right of the road and drove in our skirmishers.

So soon as the design of the enemy was perceived, Colonel Gus Dorsey mounted his men and moved in column to the road from which he was separated by a fence in which gaps had been made. Through one of these gaps the 1st Maryland poured as fast as was consistent with good order but hardly had the first squadron cleared the fence when the enemy, now in full charge, was seen coming at them not a hundred yards distant. Captain W. J. Raison, commanding the first squadron²⁸ and riding with Colonel Dorsey at the head of his regiment, turned to his chief and said: "Colonel, we must charge them: it is our only chance!" The words had not left his lips when Dorsey roared "Draw sabres! Gallop! Charge!" and the little band of Marylanders hurled themselves against the heavy column of the enemy, driving them back with the fierce impact.

In this last charge, the last blow was struck by the Army of Northern Virginia. While still pushing the Federals back vigorously the battalion was met by an officer carrying a flag of truce, who suddenly made his appearance from the right of the road. The fight instantly ceased.²⁹

Before the flag had reached them, however, Private C. W. Price, who had been charging considerably ahead of his comrades of Raison's Company, was killed. I feel sure that he was the last man of the Army of Northern Virginia to fall in battle, and the honor of it belongs to his comrades of my Command as well as to his own memory. For when the

²⁸Captain William I. Raison originally commanded Co. E of the 1st Maryland Cavalry. Gustavus W. Dorsey was colonel of that regiment. William C. Price, cited a few lines farther (but with incorrect initials), was a member of Raison's company.

²⁹Munford took considerable liberties in quoting W. W. Goldborough's The Maryland Line in the Confederate States Army (Baltimore, 1869), 280-83.

bearer of the flag of truce was seen coming up the road, the firing at Appomattox Court House ceased with the fire of Colonel Dorsey's men, and Captain William Steptoe of B Company, 2nd Virginia Cavalry, was immediately sent to the flag bearer to find out what he wanted. Steptoe returned and said that the bearer was from the Union army with information that General R. E. Lee was negotiating the surrender of his Army-- and also bearing an order for the cessation of hostilities. The end of the war had really come!

Accompanied by two staff officers, I rode towards the Union lines with the bearer of the flag (whose name, I think, was Lieutenant Thomas C. Lebo)³⁰ until we met General Ronald Mackenzie, General S [amuel] B. M. Young and General Davies, of Crook's and Mackenzie's Divisions, with their staffs. The Federal officers were very civil and courteous to me. My recollections are that General Mackenzie was the first to greet me and introduced me to his brother officers. Mackenzie explained to me that the Southern Commander was negotiating with Grant for the surrender of our army, and intimated, of course, that I would emulate General Lee's example.

My reply to General Mackenzie was that--as he very well knew--I was outside of the Confederate lines and therefore not necessarily included in the terms of the surrender. I said that if he would allow me to communicate with General R. E. Lee and receive word from him that I was included, I should cheerfully submit--but that unless it was clearly

³⁰Lebo was on the staff of Gen. Charles E. Davies, Jr., a Federal cavalry commander. O. R., XLVI, Pt. 1, 1151.

shown, I felt at liberty to withdraw and only asked of him to be sent back to the point where we had met their flag. Even before I had left my command, my skirmishers out in front had reached the Lynchburg Road and I had started my mounted men up that thoroughfare. Thus, I was well within my claims of not being within the lines of the Army of Northern Virginia at the hour of its surrender.

While we were discussing the status of affairs, a little incident occurred worth relating. Captain Buck Trent, the Quartermaster of my regiment, lived very close to Appomattox Court House, and that morning, as we had been forming, ready to move out, he had ridden up and handed me a canteen filled with fine old peach brandy. He said, "The Yankees would take it all anyhow," if he left it at home, and as it was of the best, I accepted it.

It was a big canteen, but I do not think I had yet tasted it when I rode into the Federal lines. As we stood talking together, one of the bluecoated officers with an exceedingly delicate nose must have detected its presence. He looked at me rather meaningfully, smiled thirstily, and asked me if I knew where there was a good spring about. I took the hint and told him, no. But, I added, "Here's some old peach brandy a friend of mine gave me this morning--if you could make that do?"

The light in his eyes was a lovely thing to see. "Well," said he, "it is not often soldiers meet under such circumstances. I believe I could."

I handed the canteen to him and said to them all, "Gentlemen, you are welcome!" and sent it around the circle of officers.

It was quite a large circle to begin with but it continued to enlarge at a rate that was amazing. I would scarcely have believed there were so many officers in the whole Union Army--and so amazingly thirsty! When my canteen returned to me, it was more like a powder horn than a flask of brandy; all the aroma was there but the fluid was gone. One of the merry ones advised me then: "Look out, General, that the bees don't attack you. It smells good enough. You see we are your friends now." They were in the best of spirits and the best of spirits was in them.³¹

But civil though they were, they either could not or would not give me satisfactory answers, nor would they agree to send to General Lee. Knowing that my men were by this time well out on the Lynchburg Road, I said to General Mackenzie: "Permit me, sir, to thank you for your civilities. I will now return to my lines." And I was permitted to go back just as I had come in.

That is all my command ever saw of the surrender of Appomattox. We turned our backs upon it, and I may say that it is literally true that we "never surrendered."

³¹"It wasn't ___ water nor typhoid milk but wholesome old brandy--fine as silk: I cannot recall to mind the particular officer--although I remember distinctly sending him--who galloped forward toward your line with a white handkerchief on his saber as a truce to inform you that Lee had surrendered. This was just as you had succeeded in passing around Davies' left flank on to the Lynchburg Pike and I had changed front at Davies' request to meet you in Davies' rear while Mackenzie was coming rapidly to my support. Mackenzie, Davies and I all met you. . . . The general impression among our officers that morning of April 9, 1865 was that you had made a good fight and were entitled to the credit of carrying your cavalry division out of the chaos." General H. B. M. Young to Thomas Taylor Munford, June 19, 1905, Munford Papers, Jones Memorial Library.

Upon returning to my command after the interview with the Federal officers, I came across Captain Steptoe's line of skirmishers covering our retreat. I ordered him to hold his position for awhile and then gradually withdraw his men to follow us up the Lynchburg Road. I overtook the main body of my troops about two miles further up the road and had a conference with my officers who, upon being informed that I could obtain no satisfaction from the Federals, agreed with me to move on to Lynchburg.

But the command had already halted at a crossroads, one leading to the ferry over James River and the other to Campbell Court House and Lynchburg. I have understood that most of Payne's brigade took the James River Road as the Horse Artillery and part of our wagons had gone that way. A good many of the Amherst Company (E of the 2nd Virginia) led by that chivalrous soldier, Sergeant John Thompson Brown--afterwards as distinguished on the Bench as he was as a leader of his fighting comrades--went over into Amherst. Consequently, it was only my old brigade, greatly reduced, and the Maryland Cavalry, which rode with me into Lynchburg.³²

³²Private N. W. Harris, Co. G, 1st Virginia Cavalry remembered hearing that Lee had surrendered. Fitz Lee told them the road to Lynchburg was still open. "General Munford, who was sitting on his horse, said: 'All of you men who do not wish to surrender, follow me; I am going to Lynchburg.'" From an undated newspaper clipping in the Munford Family Papers.

* * * * *

I would feel, however, that I had belittled Fitz Lee's Division and made it appear ungenerous and selfish in wanting to gobble up all the glory lying around the close of the great contest if I should undertake to detract from the wartime accounts of my friend Captain Theodore S. Garnett who served as acting Adjutant-General of Roberts' brigade. Garnett was a soldier who was honored and respected by all who served with glorious Jeb Stuart at the time when Garnett was a member of his staff.³³ He belongs to a race of soldiers, too, does Captain Theodore Garnett, which could always be counted upon, and his paper is drawn up secundum artem; but his premises are just a little too broad, after describing what had been done--just as he saw it, I have no doubt. As he tells us what became of General Fitz Lee in his peroration, I will quote it verbatim.

After the fight, riding back, I met General Roberts coming toward the Courthouse, and he asked me if I had heard any rumor of our surrender. I replied "no," and the question at the moment struck me as quite absurd. But seeing the General's expression of countenance was serious, I asked him: "What do you mean!" His reply was: "General Lee is going to surrender this army. I have just received orders to leave here and march to Buckingham Court House, where General Fitz Lee says the cavalry will rendezvous."

Directing me to take our little remnant of the brigade of the field, General Roberts left me for a few moments. I passed a few hundred yards west of the Courthouse, and struck a trot with the column, soon reaching a good road, and pushed on towards Buckingham. The General rejoined us a short distance northwest of the Courthouse, and we fell into a walk, a silent and solemn procession of about 100

³³More information on this soldier-jurist may be found in W. Gordon McCabe, "The Hon. Theodore S. Garnett," SHSP, XLI (1916), 68-81.

men, but men who were ready to obey any order, and would be faithful unto death.

We had gone about two miles in this way when Major Robert Mason of General Fitz Lee's staff overtook us and said that General Fitz Lee wished the column halted to await his coming. I gathered from this message that General Fitz Lee wanted to give us some parting instructions or to say "farewell" to the men. Arriving on top of a hill, I faced the men into line on the right of the road, looking back towards the Courthouse, and in a short time General Fitz Lee arrived. General Roberts rode to meet him and soon returned, ordering us to disband the brigade, which I did in these words:

"Men, General Roberts says you can break ranks and disband. We bid you goodbye, and you may go back to North Carolina in any way you choose."

Unclasping my sabre from my belt, I threw it far from me so as to let the men know that I, at least, considered the war at an end.

In two minutes there was not a man to be seen, and General Roberts, his Adjutant-General, and Courier Forbes were left there, the sole representatives of Roberts' Cavalry Brigade.³⁴

Thus it can be seen from these letters, and what I have said, that General Fitz Lee went east, that we got actual possession of the Lynchburg Road and marched in an organized body to that city, carrying a few prisoners with us! At Lynchburg we found General L. L. Lomax in command of the town, by reason of his seniority, and we found also some rations for the men and horses at the old fair grounds whither I had previously dispatched the Quartermaster and Commissary to collect them.

We reached Lynchburg on the night of April 9th, scarcely yet a sun's journey from the surrender. Again what memories came back to those veterans as they trailed wearily into the city which had been--had been!--home to so many of them. Now, again, they of the 2nd Virginia

³⁴Garnett was a prolific writer, but this narrative apparently was never published.

Cavalry stood on the exact spot where four years before they had formed, organized, and drilled and gone out to fight a glorious war for their beloved Southland. Here, on the spot where it was born, the remnant of the grand old fighting Second Brigade came back again--to die! Accompanied by their ragged comrades of the Maryland Line, the scarred and tattered remains of that splendid brigade Cary Breckinridge had led out moved to the fair grounds and was disbanded.

On the morning of the 10th of April, the old comrades said good-bye to each other, with heavy hearts and eyes in which were tears. I shall never forget that scene. We had disbanded "subject to re-assembling for a continuation of the struggle," as General Fitz Lee said in his last report.³⁵ But--(leave the sentence unfilled!) There were many others of those broken men, worn and aged before their time, as adrift as I myself. I had left a home filled with happiness and a wife and four children. My wife and my beautiful little boy of but seven years had now been buried two years. My other little ones had been taken to Roanoke; many of the old servants had died and the others had been carried off by the vandal Hunter.³⁶ Home had no charms for me; and I knew that the Federals would soon be coming after me. So I rode out with my staff and spent but one night at "Glen Alpine," my home in Bedford, and then passed on to Roanoke to await coming events.

I had not long to wait for the coming of the Yankee. On the 13th

³⁵O. R., XLVI, Pt. 1, 1303.

³⁶Reference here is to Federal Gen. David Hunter's May-June, 1864, atrocities in the Shenandoah Valley.

of April, the following note was left at my Glen Alpine home by a detachment of Federal Cavalry--which had been sent to capture me.

Lynchburg, Va. April 13th, 1865

Brigadier-General Mackenzie, commanding Cavalry Brigade, sends his compliments to General Munford and requests he report to his headquarters in Lynchburg as soon as possible. Lieutenant-General Grant also requests Colonel Munford to report to General Mackenzie.

(Signed) Thomas Little
1st Lieut. Fifth Penn.
Cavalry

This was a very civil note, but I felt sure that Lieutenant Little who left it would have rather taken me to Lynchburg a prisoner had he found me.

Meantime, I had seen the address of President Jefferson Davis, dated April 4th, 1865, at Danville, Virginia and delivered "to the people of the Confederate States of America." It concluded: "Let us not, then, despond, my countrymen, but relying on the never-failing mercies and protecting care of our God, let us meet the foe with fresh defiance, with unconquered and unconquerable hearts."³⁷

Those words decided me. I at once sent the following reply to General Mackenzie by Lieutenant Thomas Tosch:

Headquarters Lee's Cavalry Division
April 17th, 1865

Brigadier-General Mackenzie
Commanding Cavalry Brigade
U.S. Army, Lynchburg

General:

I have the honor to enclose a copy of a paper sent me last night

³⁷O. R., XLVI, Pt. 3, 1383.

by Lieutenant Little, commanding detachment; it places me in an embarrassing position and I must decline to accept your polite invitation until I can ascertain my status. It is only necessary for me to say that I will obey orders when I am certain that they are by proper authority. I beg leave to state that my Command succeeded in driving the Federal Cavalry from Appomattox and Lynchburg Road in our front on that Sunday, that I apprehend the disaster which befell our army and moved back rapidly into the main body of my Command, leaving only a heavy skirmish line to cover my retreat. I was in the rear when your flag of truce was notified by the officer in charge (Captain Payne of the 4th Virginia) of my covering party. As soon as I was apprized that there was a truce I went to the front and asked leave to communicate with General R. E. Lee. General Davies, commanding the U. S. forces, "could not allow me to communicate with him" and after some little parley I withdrew. I was at no time within your lines nor did I expect to surrender my command or myself. If I understand from you that I was included in the surrender I most respectfully ask that you will first show I was surrendered before I can submit. I have not been able to see or communicate with any officer who knows the terms of General Lee's capitulation. Please state in your reply who was included. Many, I know, escaped from my Command. Many are away on detail and from other causes. Let it be understood at once and our people will know how to act and what to expect. The love of our cause, backed by the proud and brave hearts of my Command, will be sufficient apology for my declining to comply with your polite invitation until I am satisfied that General Lee included my Command--which had cut its way through your lines and was far from being in a condition to be captured. I shall follow our old flag and defend it until we are free. My men do not believe they could have been surrendered. If you will furnish me with satisfactory evidence I will submit to the powers that be; otherwise I shall not ask or expect any favors. If this paper could be sent to General Lee it would obviate many difficulties. My desire is to act in good faith, but I will take the risk until it is made clear.

Your obedient servant.

(Signed) Thomas T. Munford
 Brigadier-General Commanding
 Division

(This will be handed by Lieutenant Tosh, bearing flag of truce.)

To this note I received the following reply:

Headquarters Twenty-Fourth Army Corps,
 In the Field, Burkeville, Va., April 21

Brigadier-General Thomas T. Munford

General:

Your communication of the 17th inst. to Brigadier-General Mackenzie has been referred to me as the senior officer of the commission appointed by Lieutenant-General Grant to arrange the terms of surrender of General Lee's army. In reply I have the honor to state that by the agreement entered into by the officers appointed on each side, it is provided that "The surrender of the Army of Northern Virginia shall be construed to include all forces operating with that army on the 8th inst., excepting such bodies of Cavalry as actually made their escape previous to the surrender." The question, therefore, as to the actual escape of your Command is left to your decision.

I am, Sir, very respectfully your obedient servant,

(Signed John Gibbon
Major-General of Volunteers

P. S. A printed copy of the agreement in regard to the surrender is enclosed. J. G.

Copy of Agreement of Surrender

Appomattox Court House, Va.
April 10, 1865

Agreement entered into this day in regard to the surrender of the Army of Northern Virginia to the United States Authorities.

1st. The troops shall march by brigades and detachments to a designated point, stack their arms, deposit their flags, sabres, pistols, etc., and from thence march to their homes under charge of their officers, superintended by their respective division and corps commanders, officers retaining their side arms, and the authorized number of private horses.

2nd. All public horses and public property of all kinds to be turned over to staff officers designated by the United States authorities.

3rd. Such transportation as may be agreed upon as necessary for the transportation of the private baggage of officers will be allowed to accompany the officers, to be turned over at the end of the trip to the nearest U. S. Quartermasters, receipts being taken for the same.

4th. Couriers and mounted men of the artillery and cavalry, whose horses are their own private property, will be allowed to retain them.

5th. The surrender of the Army of Northern Virginia shall be construed to include all the forces operating with that army on the 8th inst., the date of commencement of negotiation for surrender, except such bodies of cavalry as actually made their escape previous to the surrender, and except also such pieces of artillery as were more than twenty miles from Appomattox Court House at the time of surrender on the 9th inst.

S. Merritt,
Brevet Major-General

J. Longstreet
Lieutenant-General

J.B. Gordon
Major-General

John Gibbon
Major-General of
Volunteers

Charles Griffin,
Brevet Major-General U. S. Volunteers

W. N. Pendleton
Brigadier-General and Chief of Artillery³⁸

General Griffin's letter clearly shows that we had gotten out, and were not included in the capitulation at Appomattox. I had seen President Jefferson Davis's last appeal. President Lincoln had been assassinated; Vice President Andy Johnson was now showing his teeth; a reward was offered for the apprehension of the Governor of Virginia and for my honored father, the Secretary of the Commonwealth of Virginia; the Radical Press was howling for blood, and General Williams C. Wickham, who for two years had held his commission as Brigadier and was a member of the Confederate Congress, now proclaimed himself a full-fledged Radical, and one of those who,

On flowers reposed, with fresh garlands crowned,
Quaff immortality and joy.

We then felt "private credit was wealth; public honor security. The feather that adorns the royal bird supports its flight. Strip him of

³⁸On April 21, 1865, J. Irvin Gregg, in a letter to Gen. N. M. Curtis, asked for a strong regiment of infantry. "I do not apprehend any danger, but all Munford's men are in the neighborhood and in possession of their arms." Munford Family Papers.

his plumage and you fix him to the earth."

Times have changed. "De mortuis nihil nisi bonum."

Headquarters Munford's Cavalry Brigade
April 21st, 1865

General Orders No. 6

SOLDIERS:

I have just received a communication from the President of the Confederate States, ordering us again to the field in defense of our liberties. General Johnston, with an army constantly increasing, well appointed, and disciplined, still upholds our glorious banner. We are ordered to report to him. Our cause is not dead. Let the same stern determination to be free, which has supported you for four years of gallant struggle, still animate you, and it can never die. One disaster, however serious, cannot crush out the spirit of Virginians and make them tamely submit to their enemies, who have given us, during all these terrible years of war, so many evidences of their devilish malignity in our devastated fields, our burned homesteads, our violated daughters, and our murdered thousands. Virginians will understand that their present pretended policy of conciliation is but the cunning desire of the Yankee to lull us to sleep while they rivet the chains they have been making such gigantic efforts to forge, and which they will as surely make us wear forever if we tamely submit. We have sworn a thousand times by our eternal wrongs, by our sacred God-given rights, by the memory of our noble fathers and our glorious past, by our gallant dead who lie in every plain of our war-scarred State, by our glorious victories on many a well-fought field, that we would be free. Shall we not keep our oaths? Can we kneel down by the graves of our dead, kneel in the very blood from sons yet fresh, and kiss the rod which smote them down? Never! Never! Better die a thousand deaths. We have still power to resist. There are more men at home today belonging to the Army of Northern Virginia than were surrendered at Appomattox. Let them rally to the call of our President, and Virginia, our beloved old Commonwealth, shall yet stand triumphant and defiant, with her foot upon her tyrants prostrate, and her proud old banner, never yet sullied, with its "Sic Semper Tyrannis," streaming over her.

Soldiers of the old brigade, to you I confidently appeal. You have never been surrendered! Cutting your way out of the enemy's lines before the surrender was determined, you, together with a majority of the cavalry, are free to follow our country's flag. The eyes of your Virginia, now bleeding at every pore, turn with special interest to you. Will you desert her at her sorest need? You will never descend to such infamy. Let us renew our vows, and

swear again by our broken altars to be free or die. Let us teach our children eternal hostility to our foes. What though we perish in the fight, as surely as the God of justice reigns, the truth, the right, will triumph, and though we may not, our children will win the glorious fight, for it is not within the nature of her Southern sons to wear the chains of Yankee rule.

We have still a country, a flag, an army, a Government. Then to horse! A circular will be sent to each of your officers designating the time and place of assembly. Hold yourselves in instant readiness, and bring all true men with you from this command who will go, and let us who struck the last blow as an organized part of the Army of Northern Virginia strike the first with that victorious army which, by the blessings of our gracious God, will yet come to redeem her hallowed soil.³⁹

(Signed) Thomas T. Munford
Brigadier-General,
commanding Division

The carpetbaggers and "school marms" and the Freedmen's Bureau were being organized. To us it seemed like,

Hail, hail! and then profoundest hell,
Receive they new possession.

A few friends were getting ready to go South when we learned that General Joe Johnston was negotiating to surrender his army.

The following letter will close this long spun-out story and it explains itself. The First Maryland Cavalry had gotten my circular order and was yet an organized armed command in the Valley of Virginia, and they sent Captain [George M.] Emack to inform me that they were on their way to join me.

Let me say here that this letter was written just exactly as I saw things that day. I never expected to see or hear of that letter again, but it has turned up, and Colonel Dorsey sent me a copy, which shows what

³⁹ Tayloe Family Papers, UVa. The printed version of this circular is in O. R., XLVI, Pt. 3, 1395.

I then believed that this command had struck the last blow at Appomattox.

On the 27th of April, while at Cloverdale, Botetourt County, Virginia, I learned that the First Maryland Cavalry was coming up to join me, and this is my last official act as a Confederate officer. The next day I started to Lynchburg, where I received my parole.

Headquarters Lee's Cavalry Division
April 28, 1865. Cloverdale,
Botetourt County, Virginia

Colonel Gus Dorsey:
Maryland Battalion

Colonel: I came to this point today to meet Colonel Cary Breckinridge, and have just heard through Captain Emack that your gallant band was advancing up the Valley in response to my call. I am deeply pained to say that our army in North Carolina cannot be reached. I am fully convinced that it has capitulated or will be unable to get away. 'Tis sad indeed to think of our condition, shrouded in so gloomy a future. Well may we say:

So sleeps the pride of former days,
So glory's thrill is o'er;
And hearts that once beat high for praise
Now feel that pulse no more.

We have nothing now to do but to abide our time and be ready to strike, unless they sell us to the Dutch. You must tell your noble boys, who have so long and nobly upheld our banner, to make Virginia their home, until an opportunity offers for us to strike again. I believe the battle is yet to be fought, for we can never submit to Yankee rule,

For every drop of blood you shed,
We will raise a mound of dead.

My hope is that the Yankees will oppress us so heavily that the people will soon rise again. You have my best wishes for yourself and your command. You will not be forgotten. The fame you have won will be guarded by Virginia with all the pride she feels in her own sons; and the ties which have bound us together Memory will preserve. You who struck the first blow in Baltimore, and the last in Virginia, have done all that could be asked of you. Had the rest of our officers and men adhered to our cause with the same devotion,

today we would have been free. I have ordered the old brigade to return to their homes. It behooves me now to separate with the warmest good wishes for your welfare and a hearty God bless you all, I bid you farewell.

(Signed) Thomas T. Munford

CHAPTER V

MUNFORD: THE RETIRED CAVALRYMAN

The war left its scar on Thomas Taylor Munford--mentally more than physically. All he had dreamed of, worked for and subscribed to--his wife and young family, his contented life at Glen Alpine, his profession, his idealized Virginia and his sacred Confederacy--all were gone; and the wounds were as deep as from battle. The smoke from the ashes of the past now clouded his future. It was a sad figure of a man who wrote his sister in May, 1865:

I feel more degraded and blue than I supposed that I would ever feel as a Virginian. Yesterday I was paroled and while I had been certain that "Othello's vocation was gone," I feel now that we have lost all, not excepting our honor. Had I the means to carry me, I would "speed away" to more congenial climes. Home, once so bright and happy to me, is now almost a purgatory; changed in every way. I feel no interest in the place, the house or anything on it. [sic]. The negroes with very few exceptions have gone and I am only reminded of the sad changes by the neglected look of everything. I have George with me. . . . Pa is cheerful and very well, but none of them and I might well say no one else knows how heavily my heart throbs now. If I can make any exchange after a while, will try my fortune in some other country. . . .

The Yankees have sent after me three times and I knew the negroes would betray me or I never would have gone down voluntarily. . . . They kept me until after sundown and then gave me a parole. My staff was with me and we did not disgrace our cause, tho' I felt more humiliated than I ever wish to be again.¹

Munford returned to what he knew best, to the only constant thing in his immediate, unstable world: farming. Through his second marriage

¹Thomas Taylor Munford to Sallie R. Munford, May 21, 1865, Munford Papers, V. M. I.

to Emma Tayloe, cousin to his first wife and daughter of the wealthy "Mt. Airy" Tayloes, Munford received an Alabama cotton plantation called Oakland.²

Although Glen Alpine haunted his memory, it was not until 1873 that Munford relinquished his hold on the place by exchanging it for an antebellum mansion in Lynchburg, Va. Thenceforth, Oakland served as his winter home and the Lynchburg house was his summer residence.³

At different times, Munford drifted away from farming to pursue other interests. In Lynchburg, he organized the Lynchburg Iron Works, which he later consolidated with the Lynchburg Iron, Steel and Mining Company. With former cavalry general Wade Hampton, he organized the Metallic Cotton Baling Company of Virginia and also became involved in an enterprise that attempted to relocate settlers from the northwest to Alabama. None of these ventures proved successful, lucrative or enduring. In fact, financial difficulties plagued Munford throughout the 1880's.⁴

As early as 1871, Munford had considered writing a history of his regiment. He did not begin in earnest until the next decade. He utilized several published works, notably the first volumes of the Official Records and the Southern Historical Society Papers, as well as letters from comrades and the reminiscences of Pickett, Sheridan,

²"Munford Family Bible," 7; biographical sketch, Duke University.

³Noell, "Lynchburg's Confederate Generals," 30.

⁴Ibid.; biographical sketch, Duke University.

Chamberlain and other Civil War leaders. Yet it probably was not until certain events of the 1880's--the Warren Court of Inquiry, the publishing of the Official Records and Rosser's letter to the Philadelphia Weekly Times--that the history began to take shape as his Five Forks-Appomattox narrative. By then, the controversies with Fitz Lee and Rosser were boiling.

The publishing of the Official Records revealed certain interesting facts. After the war, Fitz Lee had requested a written report from Munford of Five Forks and the last days of the war. When Fitz Lee's report appeared in the Official Records, Munford's account was missing. Fitz Lee was similarly careless with Munford's report of the battle of Chancellorsville.⁵ The testimony disclosed through the Warren trial, however, probably did the most to disillusion Munford. He discovered what really had happened to his commanding officers at Five Forks. His feelings about Fitz Lee understandably hardened when he learned about the "shad bake" and who had been involved. Munford would often relive the tragedy of that battle in his mind. The realization that his commanding officers had ignored their responsibilities and left him paralyzed in the face of the enemy would forever haunt him.

⁵Thomas Taylor Munford to G. Gilham, Aug. 30, 1905, Gilham Family Papers, UVa. Munford wrote, "Genl. Fitz Lee could not write of a battle which he did not see. . . . Fitz Lee wrote me a letter immediately after the war telling me that Genl. R. E. Lee had asked for a report from him of the operations of the cavalry from 30th March to the surrender and that he would incorporate my report in his to Genl. R. E. Lee. I took great pains and complied in every particular as far as I could. But my report never appeared . . ." See also Thomas Taylor Munford to John W. Daniel, Oct. 2, 1905, and Mar. 22, 1907, Munford Family Papers.

The controversy with Rosser was much more deepseated and hostile. It had its roots in 1863 when Rosser, a younger officer and a West Pointer, was promoted over Munford. In 1884, Rosser submitted his account of cavalry operations to the Philadelphia Weekly Times. Munford felt compelled to reply and later stated that his answer "made Rosser so indignant [that] to ease himself he sent me a challenge to 'relieve my wrath.' It tickled me to see what a fool he was, and amazed me because instead of answering it in a ___ manly way in the paper, he sent a challenge to me through another medium--whom [sic] neither the cause nor the facts had appeared."⁶

Rosser viciously made the feud public by challenging Munford's claim to the rank of General.

I commanded my own division and most of the time during the retreat from Petersburg to Appomattox Gen. Fitz Lee's, as well, and with those two divisions won the fight at High Bridge April 6, and in the fight, early on the morning of the 9th, with those two divisions, drove the enemy's cavalry from the Lynchburg Road and escaped surrender, and I am in position to state positively that T. T. Munford served under me as Colonel, and was never commissioned as brigadier general, and, as he began the war as lieutenant colonel, it seemed hard that he was not allowed to rise more than one step in a long and hard fought war.⁷

In another newspaper article, Rosser accused Munford of "parading under a borrowed uniform," and added: "Munford was an old colonel when I was transferred to the cavalry. He had served with Jackson, Stuart, and Lee, and if they had not promoted him, I don't see why he should

⁶Thomas Taylor Munford to John W. Daniel, July 20, 1905, Munford Family Papers.

⁷Unidentified newspaper article, Munford Family Papers.

have blamed me for his not having received a commission." Rosser even refused to attend a banquet in Charlottesville, Va., because Munford was going to be there.⁸

Several Munford supporters came to his defense following Rosser's biting remarks. A former newspaperman from Minnesota congratulated Munford for setting the record straight in an article disputing Rosser's claims. "Many people in this far off region who have known Gen. Rosser for a number of years, and listened to his war stories . . . will be delighted that one apparently so competent as yourself has plucked some of his plumes. . . . Reams of paper would hardly suffice to give an epitome of his war stories of all sorts."⁹

Henry B. McClellan wrote Munford that "Rosser has, I expect, killed himself in the estimation of all the old cavalrymen outside of his brigade. Stuart made him what he was, and he cannot even spare his memory."¹⁰ McClellan also defended Munford in a letter to Frank Dorsey which was later published in a newspaper article.

In reading my book--the Campaigns of Stuart's Cavalry--you doubtless discovered that I hold in high esteem both the character of Gen. Thomas T. Munford and the services he rendered during the

⁸Unidentified newspaper article, Munford Family Papers.

⁹Louis E. Fisher to Thomas Taylor Munford, May 17, 1884, Munford Family Papers. Fisher also related an amusing incident about Rosser. "The Beverly expedition . . . elicits a 'stock' story, which you may have heard. . . . Briefly, a stampeded union officer rushed into the house of a lady, reached a chamber and took refuge under a bed. Rosser afterwards found himself in the same chamber and on the bed with a lady. After the war the man under the bed met Rosser and made Rosser indignant with laughter, until he said, 'I was under the bed,' etc."

¹⁰H. B. McClellan to Thomas Taylor Munford, Aug. 7, 1884, Munford Family Papers. McClellan added: "I have in my possession the autograph correspondence between himself and Stuart, in which Stuart forced from him the pledge to abstain from intoxicating liquors."

war between the states. I am proud to number General Munford among my personal friends. The fact that he served so long without a word of complaint at the failure to recognize his claims to promotion is one of the strongest proofs of the purity and nobility of his character.¹¹

These controversies with Fitz Lee and Rosser compelled Munford to tell his side of the story in the Five Forks-Appomattox narrative.

"That great 'shad dinner' has turned my comrades against me," he wrote, "and I have to stand with folded arms--and let them tell it their way. --By and by when they get through with their say, I will put them in shape and say my say."¹²

Munford felt that it was as much his duty to present his case as it had been his duty to fight for the South. "Confederate soldiers have nothing but the story of the Civil War to guard," he stated.

"That story belongs to them. They made it, though much of it is yet hid under a measure."¹³

In 1905, he announced proudly: "My paper . . . has been expanding until I shall be compelled to put it in book form . . . I have put the Battle of Five Forks in a better light than it has ever been shown . . ." But then he hesitated. Perhaps the bitter years of controversy made him tired of fighting; perhaps he did not want to be as hurtful to others as they had been to him; or perhaps he realized simply that the

¹¹Unidentified newspaper article, 1904, Munford Family Papers.

¹²Thomas Taylor Munford to John W. Daniel, Dec. 5, 1904, Munford Family Papers.

¹³Thomas Taylor Munford to R. E. Coward, July 27, 1980, Munford Family Papers. Coward served in the 7th Georgia Infantry.

war was over. Whatever the reason, Munford's finished work went unpublished. It was not that he was unhappy with the narrative, for he once wrote: "I believe I have worked out a truthful story of the battle of Five Forks. It will make every true Confederate soldier who served in the Army of Northern Virginia realize that someone failed in duty."

The problem in publishing the narrative was that the need had evaporated, the youthful, crusading fire had turned to embers. "I am not after anybody now," he stated; and yet he could not abandon his effort. "I am too old for controversy," he wrote, "but I was there. Most of my comrades have had their say . . . I believe I am amongst the last who held a post on our side and I am going to tell my story as I expect to meet some of them before God . . . and will not be ashamed to meet them."¹⁴

Munford sent the work to several acquaintances for criticism. Those friends urged him to publish it only after he had deleted the personal references that would raise more controversy. Munford, who had labored for so long to set the record straight, refused to change one word for the sake of publication.

I have with great care prepared a paper on Fitz Lee's Division of Cavalry from Five Forks to the end of the chapter. I have not published it because having submitted it to two or three friends for revision they have advised radical changes which are inconsistent with my judgment and the facts, and I prefer to leave it in soak to deviate from a line I had marked for myself . . .

¹⁴Thomas Taylor Munford to

I do not desire at this time to publish my paper. If I should die before it is done, my executor will do it. . . . Fitz Lee and Pickett are dead. I am liable to be charged with attacking officers who could not answer for themselves.

Later, Munford observed:

My relations with Gen. Fitz Lee have been considerably strained, and his sudden death left me in a position which might appear as others have done and written what they did not do, during Gen. Lee's lifetime; that is to say, several parties have made statements as to what Gen. Lee told them (after he was dead but they did not mention it during his lifetime). . . . I am personally and agreeably acquainted with the widow of the late Gen. Lee and Mrs. Pickett too, would feel that I was attacking their dead husbands. I was compiling my paper when Genl. Fitz Lee . . . died but he knew I was working on it for I had myself personally informed him. . . . I never shirked my duty or responsibility when these things went on but now that my days are beyond the ordinary lot of men, being near 78 years of age, there is no necessity for crowding the docket with data . . .¹⁵

By the early 1900's, Munford concluded that the war was a thing of the past. While he most likely wanted to see his manuscript published, he realized that only after his death would the narrative find its proper place in history.

Munford's manuscript, rough and sentimental, with an inclination towards the romantic, lacked the authority of a first-hand diary. It also wore the influence of hindsight. Still, the monograph derived its strength from the sources utilized and even more from the fact that Munford was very much an active participant of the battle itself, unlike Pickett, Fitz Lee and Rosser. It vividly and authoritatively delineated the confusion, the failure of and complete lack of coordination, and the abominable lack of concern that led to the Confederate defeat.

¹⁵Thomas Taylor Munford to R. E. Coward, July 27, 1908, and Nov. 12, 1908, Munford Family Papers.

Munford's decision to withhold publication was impressive. Instead of trying to bring glory to himself, his primary consideration was of those who would be hurt by his paper. Munford's incessant search for the truth, bridled by his compassion and concern for others, indicated the remarkable character of the man.

While the controversies with Fitz Lee and Rosser shadowed Munford's life after the war, he seemed nevertheless to enjoy his two worlds at Oakland and at Lynchburg. He led an active life with farming and business interests. A third interest involved military ties. He joined the Association of the Army of Northern Virginia and was elected first vice president. He served on the Board of Visitors at the Virginia Military Institute. He maintained correspondence with old comrades and wrote numerous articles for the Southern Historical Society. He attended Confederate reunions; he was at the first Gettysburg reunion in 1886 and at the 50th reunion in 1913. During the latter, he was elected an honorary member of the 6th New York Cavalry. Munford also campaigned to have a monument erected in Lynchburg on the spot where his command was mustered into service and disbanded four years later. In the fall of 1913, this dream became reality. Then, at the ripe old age of 80, Munford, still a cavalryman at heart, participated as a guide on a ten-day horseback ride over the old battlefields of Manassas, Chancellorsville and the Wilderness.¹⁶

After Emma Munford died in 1910, Munford spend his remaining years at Oakland. There he died on February 27, 1918. He was brought back to

¹⁶Biographical sketch, Duke University; The Cadet, Nov. 8, 1913, V. M. I.

Lynchburg for burial in Spring Hill Cemetary.¹⁷ At his death, the newspapers noted the passing of one of the last surviving brigadier generals of the Confederacy. It was ironic that the rank which had so eluded him in life would be so easily bestowed on him in death.

Some people were meant to leave an indelible mark on history. Thomas Taylor Munford was not one of them. It was not that he lacked color or charisma. As an officer and leader, Munford was brave, popular and as gallant a cavalryman as was ever described by the word. The qualities he nurtured as a man--compassion, sincerity, confidence, intelligence, courage and even stubbornness--served him well as a soldier. He enjoyed his life as a cavalryman and his role as a commander. It was what every good Southern gentleman had been trained for: leadership. Yet his command bore no illusions of immortality--of dashing red capes and white stallions. Too many Turner Ashbys had come and gone before him. He was not of the reckless breed of Ashby or Stuart or Mosby. His was a realistic leadership. While his writings glorified war, he recognized all too clearly war's many dimensions. It is not always the realist who wears history's laurels.

Munford's name is not ranked in the category of Stuart or Ashby. He proved himself a good commander and he was a brave and dashing cavalryman. Yet he has been relegated to a secondary position in the records of the Civil War. Because of the doubt surrounding his rank, his contributions to the war are often underplayed or overlooked. More important than his merit as an officer, however, Munford's plight

¹⁷Noell, "Lynchburg's Confederate Generals," 31; unidentified newspaper article, Munford Papers, V. M. I.

symbolized that of every common man in 1861 who unceremoniously dropped whatever he was doing at the call for arms and went to war, who gave everything that was asked of him, and who in 1865 laid down his arms and returned home to pick up his life where he had let it fall. Munford undertook his wartime responsibilities with the knowledge that he probably would never receive a hero's recognition. The shadows of history are just now beginning to lift, and Thomas Taylor Munford is taking his deserved place in the sun.

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COLONEL THOMAS T. MUNFORD AND THE LAST CAVALRY
OPERATIONS OF THE CIVIL WAR IN VIRGINIA

by

Anne Trice Thompson Akers

(ABSTRACT)

Thomas Taylor Munford served as a Colonel with the Second Virginia Cavalry during the Civil War. A graduate of Virginia Military Institute and a veteran of First and Second Manassas, Sharpsburg, Gettysburg and Five Forks, Munford lacked only the official approval of the Confederate Congress to receive his commission as a Brigadier General. The war ended before the Congress could grant his rank.

Munford's account of the battle of Five Forks and the last cavalry operations of the Civil War in Virginia is a vivid and pathetic description of the final days of the Confederacy. Its importance and historical value result from the fact that it is a substantial narrative of Five Forks by an officer who actually participated in the battle. It delineates the failure of leadership that plagued the Confederate military the last two years of the war and attributed to the demise of the Confederacy. It is also an important record of the activities of the Confederate Cavalry in the last days of the Civil War.