

A Rain-soaked Journey across South Carolina, 1865

There are literally scores of accounts of the Union army's invasion of South Carolina and of the capture of Columbia and Charleston. There are almost as many accounts of the destruction of smaller South Carolina towns.¹ It would seem that no other eyewitness account could contribute more. This excerpt of Hubbard Kavanaugh Milward's unpublished and enlightening diary, however, describes the journey of the 18th Kentucky Infantry Regiment across rain-soaked Carolina backroads. The 18th, part of the Third Brigade and only a fragment of Sherman's great push into South Carolina in January of 1865, crossed into the state at Sister's Ferry on the Savannah River above Springfield, Georgia, and southwest of Robertville, South Carolina. Colonel Milward's regiment left the state approximately a month later on the plank-road border crossing of the Pee Dee River just south of Sneadsboro, North Carolina.

Nowhere in their travels across South Carolina did Colonel Milward and the 18th Kentucky Infantry pass through a town of any consequence, partly because of the regiment's assignment to destroy railroads but largely because of the activities of the Confederate forces.² The tiny post-office country villages through

The diary of Hubbard Kavanaugh Milward, Oct. 6, 1864 to Mar. 26, 1865, University of Kentucky Library Special Collections, Lexington, Kentucky. Only a segment of the diary appears here.

¹ When the World Ended, The Diary of Emma LeConte, edited by Earl Schenck Meiers (New York, 1957). and A Diary from Dixie, as Written by Mary Boykin Chesnut, edited by Isabella D. Martin and Myrta Lockett Avery (New York, 1929) are two excellent civilian diaries. Good military accounts are contained in the various officer reports and itineraries in The War of the Rebellion, Official Record (64 vols., Washington, D.C., 1880-1901), XLVII, Series I, Part II.

² The regiment's major responsibilities were for the destruction of Confederate supplies and transportation facilities and the harassment of Gen. P. G. T. Beauregard's widely dispersed troops. Official Record, XLVII, Series I, Part I, p. 52.

which they passed were no more than crossroads. The 18th foraged through the country, searched for stored cotton, and burned sections of the Carolina Railroad, the Newberry and Columbia line, and the Charlotte and Columbia road.³ More importantly, it frightened the natives into tight seclusion.⁴ At the crossing of Little River, a fork of the Broad River, east of Monticello in Fairfield County, the Union troops ripped the floor out of the Associate Reformed Presbyterian Ebenezer Church in order to reconstruct the bridge destroyed by Gen. P. G. T. Beauregard's flanking command. This act tugged mightily at some religiously inclined soul's conscience. He left a note apologizing for the act inscribed on the church wall.⁵

The Kentuckians bypassed Winnsboro, harrassed the country people on Jackson's Creek,⁶ and joined the main forces of Sherman's army near the present sawmill station of Adger on the Charlotte and Columbia Railroad.⁷ At the store-stop of White Oak they destroyed some track, and, believing that they would soon reach the central Union supply center near Fayetteville, North Carolina, they unloaded most of their tents, foodstuff, and other materials.⁸

Colonel Milward's diary is clear, concise, and geographically

³ "Four corps of enemy, Feb. 19, 12:45 P. M. crossed at Alston and tearing up Charlotte R. R." *Ibid.*, p. 1,222.

⁴ Julian Stevenson Bolick, *A Fairfield Sketchbook . . .* (Clinton, S.C., 1963) contains a good description of the Stevenson House (pp. 294-95), where a considerable number of civilians fled to get out of the path of the Union forces.

⁵ Col. W. M. Allen was guarding the Confederate rear, and it seems likely that it was his command which burned the Little River bridge. *Official Record*, XLVII, Series I, Part II, p. 1,226. The desecrated church had been erected in 1788. The extant note of apology reads: "To the citizens of this county—Please, excuse us for defacing your house of worship. It was absolutely necessary to effect a crossing over the creek. A Yankee."

⁶ The James Turner house on the Newberry-Winnsboro road still contains a cannonball shot into it by these scouting forces in February 1865.

⁷ February 19, 10:00 P.M. "Enemy advanced today to near Winnsboro." "Enemy showed intention tearing up railroad and destroying cotton." P. G. T. Beauregard to Robert E. Lee. *Ibid.*, pp. 1,222, 1,224.

⁸ February 23. "Enemy's approach to Catawba more positive. He has withdrawn from Chester road—probably move on Cheraw and Fayetteville." *Ibid.*, p. 1,249.

accurate. It gives a keen insight into three pertinent factors in the Union invasion of South Carolina. First, the weather was terrifically bad most of the time and so were the roads.⁹ It would be difficult to imagine more frustrating travel than making one's way with an infantry command over waxy clay roads in midland South Carolina in February, and, except for a possible route through a lowcountry swamp, it would be difficult to map a more unpromising line of travel for an invading army than the flanking one followed by the Kentuckians. Milward's diary reveals the frustration and futility which must have beset many soldiers on the desolate cross-country march. Second, as Colonel Milward indicates in his notes, some of the invaders revealed a real compassion for the South Carolinians. Finally, the 18th Kentucky created more consternation than threat or damage to civilians and property.¹⁰ Essentially Milward describes the conditions under which the Union army as a whole traveled through the state, though unfortunately the author looked neither right nor left to observe the countryside or its people. Milward also fails even to hint that his command was part of a larger cross-country drive in which soldiers in blue were everywhere.

The author of this diary was born November 23, 1835, in Lexington, Kentucky.¹¹ He attended Transylvania University, later read law, and served an extensive apprenticeship as a harness-maker, following the latter trade until he volunteered for service in the Union forces guarding central Kentucky.¹² Colonel Milward was one of the first Kentuckians to join the Union army, and in time he was to see service at Camp Dick Robinson, Chickamauga, Brown's Ferry, Missionary Ridge, Chattanooga, Ringgold, and in

⁹ Other diaries and reports of the period confirm Colonel Milward's opinion of the South Carolina winter weather.

¹⁰ General Beauregard reported February 20 that no one was guarding the approaches to Monticello. *Ibid.*, p. 1,237.

¹¹ Obituary, Lexington (Kentucky) *Transcript*, Apr. 20, 1892. I have drawn freely from a brief manuscript biographical sketch of Colonel Milward which is in the possession of Burton Milward, Lexington, Kentucky.

¹² Colonel Milward prepared a detailed sketch of his military services from August 1861 to July 18, 1865. The original of this is contained in a framed service record such as was generally popular with Union veterans after 1865.

the "March to the Sea," joining Sherman's eastward trek beyond Atlanta.¹³ After Milward and the 18th departed South Carolina they engaged in skirmishes across North Carolina on their way toward Raleigh. The 18th Kentucky Infantry went on to Washington, following Gen. Joe Johnston's surrender at the Bennett House, to participate in the "Grand Review."¹⁴ In July the 18th was mustered out of service.

The diarist was not a "Yankee" in either a popular or a precise meaning of the term; he was a Southern unionist devoted to the code of responsible behavior as a soldier. "Kav" Milward had begun his military career as a private and he retired with the rank of colonel. He returned to Kentucky to become successively postmaster, newspaperman, bookkeeper for a family undertaking enterprise, county coroner, and banker. He died a banker on April 19, 1892.¹⁵

Milward's account of the journey of the 18th Kentucky Infantry suggests what it was like to travel across parts of South Carolina which few or no other travelers had traversed and under the worst conditions. If South Carolinians grieved over the destruction of property by Sherman's troops, they could take solid satisfaction in the mighty force with which the Southern elements combined to frustrate the enemy with cold, rain, mud, and human misery.

Saturday Jan'y 28, 1865 Moved 10¼ A M. Camped 4½ P. M., marched twelve miles passing over portion of same road we traveled the night of Dec 7/64. Are camped near Sister's Ferry on Savannah River weather still cold.¹⁶

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Milward Sketch, p. 75.

¹⁵ Obituary.

¹⁶ Colonel Milward's diary tends to obscure the fact that the 18th Kentucky Infantry moved in the middle of a large army. Sherman's forces were lined up to await turns at crossing the Savannah. Troops were headed to both Charleston and Columbia from this point. The drama is well described in the *Official Record*, XLVII, Series I, Part II, pp. 1,100-250. On Jan. 8, 1865, the 18th had arrived at Springfield, Georgia, and awaited its turn to cross the

Sunday Feby 5/65. Since last entry we have remained in same camp during which time I have Commanded Brig[ade]. Col Estes gone to Savannah. The Lt Cols C[om]m[an]d[in]g Reb[simen]ts in 14th A C have petitioned War Dept to change G. O. 182 1863 and allow them to be mustered as Col^s, Benl^s Baird, Morgan, Casline Div[ision] Commanders & Davis comm[an]d[in]g Corps approving.¹⁷ Moved from camp at 10 A M and set foot on South Carolina soil at 12 M[eridian] and then passed over about 2 miles of the worst corduroy roads I have ever seen and camped 4 P. M. made 4 miles—the weather continues cold.

Monday Feby 6, 1865 Laid in camp all day. Col Estes reported and took command of Brig[ade]—warmest day have had of late. Tuesday Feby 7, 1865 Moved 7 A M marched about one mile and entered a swamp if the road on the 5th was bad this was much worse and the rain was falling heavily most of the day. The swamp was three miles long and we did not get through it until nearly dark. At 6 P M passed the remains of Robertsonville¹⁸ of which not a house is standing. Camped 7½ P M made 9 miles to-day the terms of several Non Veterans¹⁹ expires. Very cold day for this latitude.

Wednesday Feby 8, 1865

Moved 7 A M; preparatory to moving several Comp[an]y Com[man]d[e]rs to tell me the Non Vets were laying down their guns and refused to serve longer. I had them all in line and after warning them their action was mutiny gave them a chance to do duty or refuse; six, viz; Se[r]g[eant] Penders Co[mpany] C Private Reynolds, Koolard, Ritchey, Day Co[mpany] N, Rice Co[mpany] I refused and were at once put under guard—marched 15 miles and camped about dark—I sent for the mutineers and to permit them to return to duty if they would—the reason for all this the

Savannah at Sister's Ferry, a place up the Savannah River about twenty-five miles northwest of Savannah. The 18th's assignment was to harass roads, railroads, and Confederate supply centers.

¹⁷ The Kentucky command had just "veteranized," or signed up for another indefinite term of service.

¹⁸ This was Robertville, about twenty miles north of Springfield, Georgia.

¹⁹ The term "Non Veteran" refers to men who did not wish to enlist for further service.

absence of papers renders it unpopular to muster-out the men—passed Brighton²⁰ in the forenoon, another cold day.

Thursday Feb 9 1865

Moved 7 A M. The mutineers have given up and that question is settled—marched 18 miles on road to Barnwell and camped at dark, from this river to the point I have seen but 3 or 4 houses standing, barns, stables, dwelling houses fences, everything save negro quarters & churches are mercilessly destroyed. I dont like it. A little warmer than yesterday.

Friday Feby 10, 1865

Moved by A M, marched 20 miles and at 6¼ P M camped near Barnwell. The weather a little warmer but overcoat yet comfortable. Today more houses were spared and I think the vindictiveness of the troops is abating. A portion of Barnwell was burned last Monday by our Cavalry. It must have been a very pretty town and of considerable size. Here the 14th A C concentrates. The 20th also is at Blackwell²¹ 10 miles distant. We crossed Combahee river during the day.

Saturday Feby 11, 1865

Moved 12½ P M marched ten miles and camped 6 P M two miles from Williston²² and came distance from "White Pond" crossed Turkey creek at Barnwell one square of which was burned this morning, burning and devastating continues. Subsistence is plentiful.

Sunday Feby 12, 1865

Moved A M and at 2½ P. M. stopped for dinner having marched 15 miles after dinner 3rd Brig[ade] destroyed a mile of RR—Augusta and Charleston.²³ Then marched 2 miles and camped 6½

P M. The march today has been through a country chiefly inhabited by the poorer class, subsistence & forage scarce. We struck the RR at a point 26 miles from Augusta and 112 miles from Charleston; until tonight the cry has been "On to Augusta" now we turn toward Charleston. We are about 8 miles from Williston and will march in that direction tomorrow—from the reports we hear Kilpatrick has had some hard fighting and was glad to quit—Thank Heaven it is a little warmer today. distance made 17 miles

Monday Feby 13/65

The day commenced with RR burning, one mile was burned the work beginning 6½ A M after which we marched ten miles and camped at 3 P M we are on the banks of Edisto River.²⁴ The weather still quite cold.

Tuesday Feby 14, 1865

Another cold day. dark leaden clouds in the sky and after 2 P M a cold heavy rain at this 9 P M the trees are covered with sleet. Moved 6¾ P M at 7 crossed Edisto river. at 11 passed Deans swamp and mills at 2½ stopped for dinner on the banks of the North Edisto river having made 16 miles, at 4½ crossed the river and camped ¾ mile beyond we are 25 or 30 miles from Columbia—St Valentines day—17 miles.

Wednesday Feby 15/65

Moved 11 A M in rear of everything, another cloudy morning but no rain. After marching 7 or 8 miles on Columbia road turned into road to Lexington C H²⁵ 5½ P M halted to allow trains to pass over Congaree creek at 9 moved and at 11 crossed the creek and camped. Made 12 miles, the weather is a little w[a]rmer and the sky again clear.

Thursday Feby 16, 1865

Moved 7 A M marched 5 miles to Red Bank Creek by 9 where halted until 11½ then made 4 miles crossing "12 mile run" creek and passing through Lexington C H at 2 P M, at which place

²⁴ This was a link in the original Charleston and Hamburg Railroad and was a vital supply line to Charleston. Here Colonel Milward's command began its initial task of disrupting Confederate communications.

²⁵ This point was in the neighborhood of modern Swansea, where present-day highways 321 and 6 cross.

²⁰ A tiny village in upper "Old" Beaufort County, about forty miles south of Barnwell. The 18th Kentucky by this time was following the road north from Robertville and between the Savannah River and the Coosawhatchee. The precise location of Brighton is not indicated on contemporary maps. Thomas Cowperthwaite, *A New Map of South Carolina* (Philadelphia, 1850).

²¹ Blackwell, on Rosemary Creek in northwestern Barnwell County. Ibid.

²² Williston is at the conjunction of present-day South Carolina highways 78 and 39.

²³ By Feb. 10, 1865, the Union command reported the Confederates were desperate at Charleston and Columbia. *Official Record*, XLVII, Series I, Part II, p. 1,209.

halted until 4 then made 5 miles more and camped on 12 mile run creek at 7½ P M. We are on road to Columbia. The weather is quite pleasant, days march 14 miles, halts caused by train in front. Friday Feby 17, 1865

Pleasant day but horribly windy. Moved 7 A M. Owing to bad roads did not cross Saluda river 2½²⁶ miles off until 10½ A M camped 4½ P M having marched 15 miles.

Saturday Feby 18/65

Moved 1 P M and after many halts went into camp one mile from Broad river having marched but 4 miles. Columbia was taken yesterday by 19th A C with but little resistance.²⁷

Sunday Feby 19/65

Moved 9 ¾ A M and at 10 ¾ crossed Broad river 7 miles below Alston, 4²⁸ miles above Littleton & 22 miles from Columbia. The crossing was made at Freshley's Mills on pontoons. Reached Alston 4½ P M, brigade destroyed one mile of RR and then marched three miles to camp. Camped 7½ P M. Made 12 miles.

Monday Feby 20/65

Moved 6½ A M marched 6 miles and formed line of battle near house of Adam Johnson. Afterward moved forward one mile and went into camp at 11 A M two miles from Monticello²⁹ the greater portion of which town is burned. Made 7 miles.

Tuesday Feby 21, 1865

Moved 6¼ A M, after many halts. Crossed Little river 2½ miles off at Ebenezer Church³⁰ at 9 A M at 1½ P M took dinner in sight

²⁶ This point was just south of Lake Murray. Beauregard reported to General Lee on February 16 that the enemy was apparently moving up toward the Saluda River. "Our forces," he said, "occupy the south bank of the stream." *Ibid.*, p. 1,202.

²⁷ Columbia was being shelled by 2:30 P.M. on February 16. The Confederates had 20,000 infantrymen in position, but the artillery was demoralized. The Union forces, General Lee was informed, were well organized and flushed with success. *Ibid.*

²⁸ The enemy had crossed the Saluda and were marching up the Broad River by February 17. Beauregard reported there was nothing to prevent its crossing the Broad. *Ibid.*, p. 1,207. On February 19, four corps of the enemy had crossed at Alston and were tearing up the railroad tracks. *Ibid.*, p. 1,222.

²⁹ Beauregard reported that nobody was guarding the Monticello approach to Winnsboro. *Ibid.*, p. 1,248; Bolick, *Fairfield Sketchbook*.

³⁰ Bolick, *Fairfield Sketchbook*. Gen. William M. Allen reported to General Beauregard that the enemy was on the road between Monticello and

of Winnsboro having made 14 miles. marched 4 miles to camp which distance made 18 miles. All camped on road to Charlotte N. C. 3 miles from Winnsboro.

Wednesday Feby 22/64 [sic]

Anniversary of Washington's [s] birthday. Moved 7 A M after marching 9 miles halted to destroy RR. 3rd Brig[ade]—1 mile— took dinner marched 2 miles and waited for another mile of RR, then marched 4 miles and camped at 6 P M. Left Charlotte road at White Oak P O³¹ at 9 A M and took Chester C H road. Left that road and took road leading to Catawba river³² 5 P M. Whole distance marched 15 miles. We have orders of date 20th saying it will take 30 days to reach base and threw out 9 days rations of sugar & coffee on hand; wall tents except 1 to brig[ade] h[ead] q[uar]ters & upward to be abandoned. provender and forage put in the wagons in this place.

Thursday Feby 23/64 [sic]

Moved 6 ¾ A M marched 15 miles and camped 4½ P M 3 miles from Catawba river.³³ Indications of rain all day and before dark a cold drizzler set in. As per orders wall tents are non est this is bad.

Saturday Feby 24/64 [sic]

In camp all day still raining with thunder and lightning

Sunday Feb 26, 1865

Moved 10½ A M marched one mile and camped sky cleared up

Winnsboro on February 19 at 9:50 A.M. *Official Record*, XLVII, Series I, Part II, p. 1,226.

³¹ The 18th marched over a muddy country road which crossed Jackson Creek to the Newberry-Winnsboro road. On the east side of the road it fired a cannonball into the James Turner house which is still lodged in that structure. From the Turner house the 18th continued on a backcountry crossroad to the Charlotte Railroad at a point where the modern sawmill village of Adger is located.

³² On February 22, General Beauregard reported Confederates offering no resistance on the Catawba. He also explained that there were so many roads from the Charlotte railway that it was nearly impossible to block them. The next day he reported the enemy's approach to the Catawba as being more positive. Its probable objectives were Cheraw and Fayetteville. *Ibid.*, pp. 1,248-49.

³³ The 18th Kentucky followed one of the primitive farm roads down to the Catawba and crossed the river above Great Falls either at the mouth of Wateree Creek or Kingsbury Ferry, perhaps at the latter place.

Adger?

Rd 38

Bolick H.S.?

today, sun quite warm, something wrong with pontoon bridge over Catawba.³⁴

Monday Feby 27/65

In camp all day after dark commenced raining—high water has swept away 10 boats & 150 feet of the bridge over Catawba river. Gen Sherman (tis reported)—has ordered trains burned & artillery spiked and men crossed in boats however they are working hard on the bridge.

Tuesday Feb 28/65

Moved 3½ A M marched 1½ miles crossed the river on bridges and until 4 P M worked roads and helped wagons up the hill such roads I never saw and the hill is very steep. After 4 P M marched 2 miles & camped still raining. Distance made 3½ miles.

Wednesday March 1, 1865

Moved 6¼ A M marched 13 miles crossing "Hanging Rock Creek"³⁵ 5 P M and camped 5½ P M near it. Still it rains and Oh! such roads.

Thursday March 2, 1865

Moved 6¼ A M still raining crossed Little Lynches³⁶ creek 12 M[eridian] branches of Flat creek³⁷ 4½ P M and camped near it 5 P M made 19 miles roads awful.

Friday Mch 3, 1865

Moved 10 A M 3rd Brig[ade] in rear of Div[ision], The Brig[ade] was "strung out" alongside 150 wagons to help them through the mud. I passed through Taxahaw³⁸ or "Hickory Head" 11½ A M crossed Big Linches Creek³⁹ 1½ P M and camped 8 P M on bank of Mill creek. Made 17 miles. We are on road from Lancaster

³⁴ One of Colonel Milward's principal assignments was rebuilding bridges. Ibid., Part I, pp. 570-71.

³⁵ Hanging Rock Creek is just east of the Catawba River in Kershaw County. Cowperthwaite, *A New Map*.

³⁶ Lynch's Creek was well known to travelers in South Carolina. All those coming across the North Carolina border crossed it at some point on their journeys.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ This was an isolated country post-office village southwest of Sneadsboro, northwest of Kershaw, and almost south of Chesterfield.

³⁹ Big Lynch's Creek was a famous travelers' landmark; as in the case of "Little Lynch" it was often noted in travelers' accounts.

to Chesterfield after dinner today the sky became clear rain in the morning.

Saturday Mch 4, 1865

Moved 6¼ A M & crossed Mill Creek. Raining again. Crossed Thompson's⁴⁰ creek 1¼ P M and state line of N & S Carolina 2¾ P M and camped 6 P M having made 17 miles, rain all this morning and roads too bad to describe—Inauguration day.

Sunday Mch 5/65

Moved 8 A M made but 8 miles and camped 12½ P M on Great Pee Dee river we are again in S. C. about one mile from state line and 2 miles south of Sneadsboro.⁴¹ Cheraw has been taken, clear day.

Monday Mch 6, 1865

In camp all day, clear day. We have many reports such as evacuation of Charleston and Wilmington an[d] capture of Mobile, 5 days to base &c.⁴²

Tuesday Mch 7/65

Moved out of camp 12 M[eridian], did not cross the river until

⁴⁰ Mar. 3, 1865, 3:00 P.M. "The enemy changed position yesterday. Advanced on Chesterfield Courthouse and crossed Thompson's Creek above that point late in afternoon. I am evacuating Cheraw and shall move to Rockingham; where I hope to receive your instructions. General Butler thinks army of Sherman is moving on this place [Fayetteville] or on Rockingham." W. J. Hardee to Gen. Joe Johnston, *Official Record*, XLVII, Series I, Part II, pp. 1,316-17.

⁴¹ Mar. 2, 1865. "The movement of Sherman indicates with certainty an advance on Cheraw: thence he will doubtless move forward upon Fayetteville." Hardee to Wade Hampton, *ibid.*, p. 1,315. Joe Wheeler informed his superiors that loyal Confederates had given him instructions on how to cross the Peedee above Sneadsboro at Grass Island and other places. *Ibid.*, p. 1,327.

⁴² It was now concluded by the Confederate command that Sherman's forces were headed for Fayetteville and Raleigh. This too was Milward's destination with the 18th Kentucky. *Ibid.*, p. 1,332. The *Official Record* (*ibid.*, pp. 1,078-114) gives in detail the itinerary of Sherman's troops. There is a clear description of the 18th Kentucky's movements (*ibid.*, Part I, p. 142, Jan. 29 to Mar. 7, 1865). At Goldsborough, North Carolina, the colonel wrote a cryptic report of his activities and duties. "I moved my command," he said, "from Savannah, Ga. on morning of January 20, 1865, from which time to the ending of the campaign at this place the command has participated in all road and bridge building, railroad destroying, marches, dangers, and fatigues of the Brigade." *Ibid.*, pp. 570-71.