

SHERMANS OPERATIONS IN FAIRFIELD CO.

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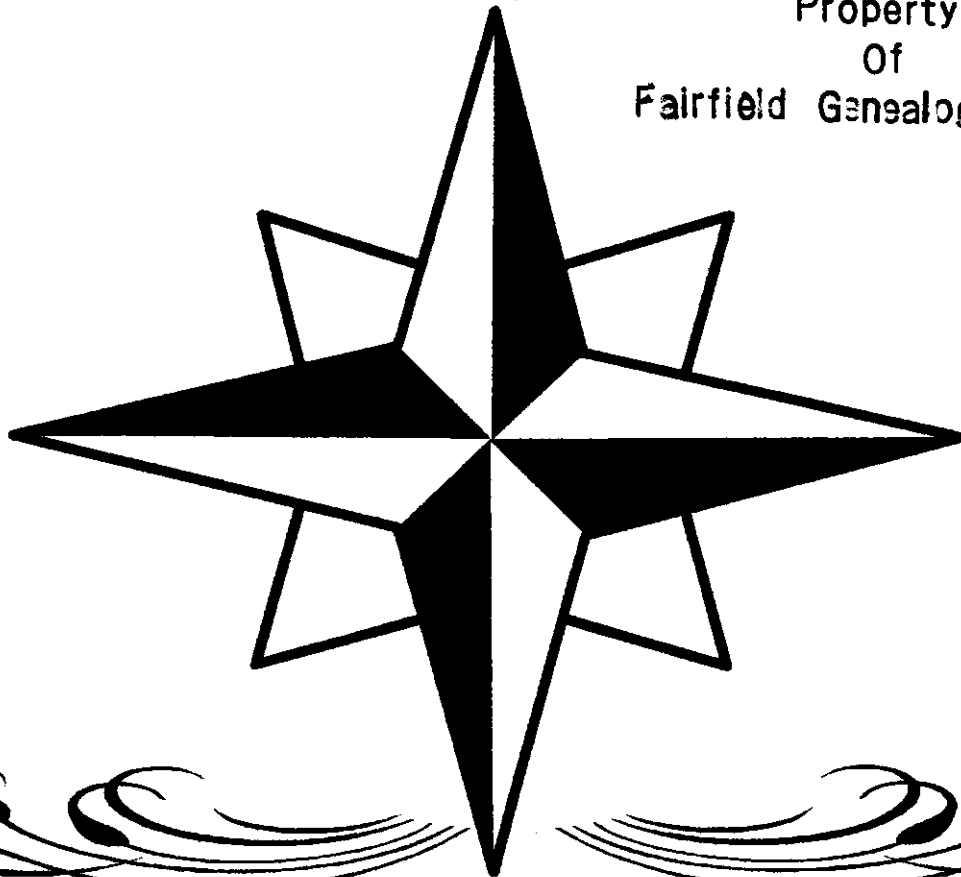
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Fairfield County

Through The Eyes Of The Yankees

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The views of Fairfield through The Yankee's Eyes.

The Diary of Sergeant Rice G. Bull, 123rd New York Volunteer Infantry.

We were called out early on Monday, February 20th, but did not get started until nearly nine o'clock. We crossed over our pontoon bridge and passed across a railroad that went up the north side of the river from Columbia. Then taking a road running north, we continued three miles to another stream called Little River. The enemy had burned all the bridges but the stream was not large or deep, so could be forded. Most of the men removed their shoes to keep them dry, and then waded. The water was only up to our knees, but was cold and, one of the boys said, very wet. After crossing we stopped for a short time to squeeze the water out of our pants and put on our shoes. We continued on for five miles over good roads and through a better country than we had been in a long time. The white people had nearly all deserted their homes and almost the only people we saw were negroes. We passed many places where houses had been burned, perhaps accidentally. Everything in the way of supplies, cotton, grain, corn, etc.... not taken for use by the army was burned. This included cotton gins, outbuildings, sheds, and storehouses; many dwellings would accidentally catch fire, especially when the owners were not there to look after them. I hardly think that our men sympathized so greatly that they wasted any strength in fire fighting for South Carolina Secessionists. We camped early after a march of only eight miles.

Tuesday, February 21st, our Regiment was again with the Corps rear guard and so did not get started until ten o'clock.; but this was early for that service. We took the road leading to Winnsboro, about ten miles away, and reached there at three in the afternoon. This was quite a large town, a business center for that part of the state. It was filled with all kinds of supplies. There were great quantities of cotton in storehouses and many bales around the railroad depot. Every building holding supplies and the depot were burned. I can hardly describe the appearance of Winnsboro when we left; it was deplorable. All the stores were completely gutted and many private houses were badly dealt with. The town had first been occupied by some of our western troops who did not seem to have any scruples or make any exceptions in their work of destruction. We made a halt in the town for a half hour but were not allowed to break ranks. We then camped two miles beyond town. For the last two days our foragers had brought in great quantities of food, much more than we could use. Unfortunately we could not carry any extra

food for use during lean times for our equipment loaded us to the limit of our strength.

Wednesday, February 22nd. The duty of guarding the trains was not much relished and, had we had any option in the matter, would have never chosen the job. It was not especially dangerous but disliked because of the hard hours of work that usually lasted into the night. Before the guard could move, the day was half spent and we had rather work days than nights. As the guard went to the front the next day it often happened they had no rest, as was the case with us this time. Our Regiment was rear guard for not only our own train (300 wagons) but, in addition, for two hundred and fifty cavalry wagons that were now with us. Although the column started on time, it was noon before we were underway and then the advance was slow as the road was badly cut up. It was three the next morning when we came to a halt, three miles behind our troops that had camped on the west bank of the Catawba River. We had made thirteen miles and it had taken us fifteen hours. It was four in the morning before we could spread our blankets for an hour or two of rest before starting the next day's march.

Thursday, February 23rd. At night, a pontoon bridge was laid across the river not far from where we had camped. The river was not large but the rains had made it's banks full. The country here was rocky, and hilly, and the river different than others we had crossed as it ran through a narrow valley with high hills on each side. A road had to be made to and from the bridge that morning so it was late when the troops commenced to go over. At noon it started to rain and the trouble came. The trains had just started crossing and as soon as the wagons had reached the clay hill on the east side of the river they could get no farther. The mules would slip and slide and fall in the clay road. The column had to be halted two miles beyond the river until the trains could be brought up. A very large detail was made to go and help the teams. From the river to the top of the hill the road was corduroyed and the men went to work helping the mules pull the wagons up the hill. The effort was slow and exhausting, but at last it was done. The men were a mass of mud when they finished the job. General Sherman was there dismounted, giving orders and directions to help hasten the work. As we had been with the train the day before and most of the night, we escaped the detail. We moved on and went into camp two miles from the river. P213-215

The Diary of Brevet Major George Ward Nichols-General Sherman's Aid.

Winnsboro, February 21st.-This place is northwest of the Rebel Capital, and the 17th Corps, which first reached it, has made the march from Columbia in two days, thoroughly destroying the track of the South Carolina Railroad as it moved. We have made wrecks of various lines of Rebel communications since the beginning of these campaigns, but in this instance the destruction has been more complete than usual. The rails used on the railroad to Charlotte are of different kinds, but chiefly strap iron, which has been easily twisted into kinks, bows, and corkscrews, by the aid of the ties and telegraph poles found along the way. The rebels are quite sure, by this time, that at least one object of our campaign is the destruction of this remaining artery connecting the East and West. In any event, they are not likely to be traveled, for the guage of this line from this point to Charlotte is narrower by four inches than the line which continues on to Danville and then to Richmond; so that, whether or not we go to Charlotte, the material and running stock are useless.

While the 17th Corps have approached this place by the direct road from Cola., the left wing has made a detour, entering from the Broad River Road. The principle object of this diverging march is the desire to cover as much ground as possible for purposes of forage and supplies.

The 20th Corps arrived early this morning, just in time to prevent the spread of conflagration which, starting in the central part of the city, threatened to destroy everything in its path. Several regiments were engaged in this work, and especial efforts were successfully made to save the house of a brother of Governor Aiken. As it was, only a few buildings were burned, to the unbounded gratitude of the thousands of inhabitants, many of whom were refugees from Vicksburg, Nashville, Atlanta, Savannah, Charleston, and, later Columbia. I am thus particular in mentioning the names of these places, for, as Mrs. Aiken told me, "they never expected a Yankee army would come here." Driven from one place to another, they sought this secluded, distant region of South Carolina for quiet and repose; but General Sherman, like an avenging Nemesis, has followed in their path, until they say, "We will go no farther; we submit."

We found here an untamed, impertinent fellow, who practices preaching for a living, one Lord, who formerly presided over an Episcopal church in the West. This individual, whose life and property had been preserved from the flames by our soldiers, took occasion to insult one of our officers by the utterance of the most treasonable sentiments. He richly deserved to be placed in the prisoners' gang

and marched along. The intercession of Mrs. Aiken, and his own insignificance, saved him the humiliation.

As I am writing, I hear exquisite music of the band of the 33rd Massachusetts regiment, who are serenading one of the general officers. This is the best band of the army, and the favorite of all of us. It is playing operatic and national airs. There was a time when Massachusetts men were not permitted in this chivalric state. The wretches who insulted Judge Hoar and his daughter have not, in this instance, been consulted in this matter. Those soul-stirring anthems of "John Brown" and "Rally Round the Flag" are now familiar airs here, and when our troops marched into Columbia the other day, the bands began and ended with "Hail Columbia".

The region through which the army has lately marched is very barren. While quite not so sandy as the country below the Congaree, it is yet sterile in the extreme. Supplies are not found sufficient to furnish the army with its needs. We are promised richer fields and more fruitful harvests in a few days. The 15th Corps, which is upon our extreme right, has a better time. Kilpatrick's Cavalry hangs upon our extreme left, occasionally dashing off at some exposed points, to the confusion of the enemy, who continue to be at a loss to divine our intention.

The woods and fields in this vicinity are filled with rabbits, whose presence has been the cause of some excitement and a good deal of fun. After marching the prescribed distance for the day, one division after another will go into camp in the forests, the fields, the hillsides, and if it is a corps detached from the main body of the army, they will extend eight miles, more or less, along the road. Last night, while quietly smoking after supper, we heard at a long distance the shouts of soldiers. As the sounds came nearer, we could distinguish the words, "Catch him, catch him; stop that rabbit," etc... Soon poor rabbit came flying down the road, pursued by a throng of men, while the shouts were caught up and redoubled as it passed along. No one seemed disposed to injure the frightened animal, but everyone enjoyed the fun of the chase. Probably that rabbit has become one of the pets which the soldiers love to attach to themselves in their long campaigns.

On the Banks of The Catawba, Rocky Mount Ferry, February 23rd.-Our great leader has just made one of those sudden moves in the grand strategy of the campaign which must be so inexplicable to the enemy, and is not together clear to his own army. Day before yesterday the whole army was marching north up the peninsula formed by the Broad and Catawba, or, as it is called lower down, the

Wateree River. It seemed as if we were making for Charlotte and Danville. Accordingly Beauregard withdrew his forces from our flanks, with the intention of contesting our advance into the hill country. But such was not the purpose of General Sherman. No doubt the Rebel general can find many strong positions between this and Charlotte where he could delay our columns a little while, but he can not any such lines of defense as those made by the rivers which are in our path to the sea, for the sea we must reach before many days. There is a limit in these invasions beyond which an army can not go.

Yesterday morning Kilpatrick was sent to the extreme front with orders to occupy Chester, while the 14th Corps marched within supporting distance in his rear, destroying the railroad on its way. While the direction given to this column would seem to have been in confirmation of Beauregard's judgment, the 20th, 17th, and 15th Corps, who for days and weeks had watched the sun rising over their right shoulder as the early morning found them in the column of march, now meets its glorious rays face to face. The army is making a grand right wheel, and we are heading directly for the ocean.

Yesterday the 20th Corps made a march of twenty miles over a succession of horrible hills. For an army which for so long a time has transversed level roads, where the feet pressed gently in the yielding sand, mounting steep hills, descending into valleys upon hard clayey soil, is a change which results in stiffened muscles and sore feet. But we are all more than repaid for the fatigue and late supper by having altogether outwitted the Rebels. Before four o'clock in the afternoon two regiments waded or swam across the stream, which, although three hundred feet wide, is shallow, and the Rebel cavalry, who dashed up to the ferry in the common belief that they could offer an opposition which would delay our passage several hours, were met with a decided demonstration in the way of loyal lead flying about their ears, which which was neither anticipated or especially entertaining, our skirmishers informing them, in jocose shouts, that it was only in in celebration of the anniversary of the Father of our common country.

The Catawba, which becomes the Wateree River where the creek of that name enters the principle stream, does not abound with bridges, and we are to cross the 20th and 14th Corps and Kilpatrick's cavalry at this place, while General Howard, with the 17th, and 15th Corps, has laid a pontoon at Peay's Ferry, eight miles below us. The 20th Corps is very proud of its work yesterday, and with good reason. After making the toilsome march described above the men laid this

pontoon, and before daybreak of this morning had passed over a division of its troops and trains. The task is all the more difficult because the road is not much used, and near the banks of the stream it is extremely precipitous, filled with huge boulders of granite rock and cut up with steep gullies. The repairing of this road required more time than building the pontoon bridge.

In the early days of this campaign, when studying over the maps and speculating upon the objective points, the directions and roads we might transverse, we saw that, wherever we went, there were natural obstructions in our way far exceeding those of the Georgia campaign, to say nothing of the possible transfer of Lee's army to the interior, which would have necessitated a change, perhaps, in General Sherman's plan, so far as the final objective is concerned. Indeed, I have reason to believe that the evacuation of Virginia by the Rebels was a contingency included in General Sherman's calculations. He repeated last evening what I heard him say at Savannah and during the march hither: "If Lee is a soldier of genius, he will seek to transfer his army from Richmond to Raleigh or Columbia; if he is a man simply of detail, he will remain where he is, and his speedy defeat is sure. But I have little fear that he will be able to move; Grant will hold him as in a vice of iron."

Late last night we received what seems to be confirmatory news of the rumors among the citizens, both of Columbia and Winnsboro, that Charleston has been evacuated. Several negroes have come in our lines, who assert that they accompanied the Rebel soldiers when they left the city, and that they heard positively that the Yankees had entered the next day.

In spite of the mud and a terrific hill on the east side of the river, a portion of the 14th Corps have crossed the stream, and are in camp in the pine woods and the hill-sides. While the storm is likely to delay us a day or more, it has its advantages in raising the rivers and preventing the crossing of the rebel army, who have thrown themselves across what they supposed to be our path in the direction of Chester, and so on to Charlotte. Their troops cannot cross the stream without ascending the stream some sixty miles, which will give us uninterrupted opportunity to complete our crossing.

Within the last week the Rebel cavalry have committed atrocities upon our foragers which make the horrors of a battlefield tender mercies in comparison. In one instance a courier was found hanged on the roadside, with a paper attached to his person bearing the words, "Death to all foragers." In another instance three

men were found shot, with a similar note upon their persons. Yesterday, our cavalry, in the direction of Chester, found in a ravine twenty-one of our infantry soldiers lying dead, with their throats cut, but with no notice given as a reason for the frightful murders. All of us understand that the reason assigned for these butcheries is a cruel farce, and that anyone of us will meet the same fate if we fall into their bloody hands. There is but one course to be taken in this matter-retaliation, and that fourfold. General Sherman has given General Kirpatrick orders to hang and shoot prisoners who fall into his hands to any extent he considers necessary. Shame on Beauragard, Hampton, and Butler! Has the blood of their fathers become so corrupted that the sons are cowardly assassins? If this murderous game is continued by these fiends, they will bitterly rue the day it was begun.

Catawba River, February 25th.-The left wing has made little progress since my last writing. Heavy rains have fallen, and the least movement of the trains cuts deep into the yielding mud until the roads become impassable. One division of the fourteenth corps is across the river, and a portion of another. The road is covered with three feet of mud, with here and there a hole. When a wagon settles in one of these cavities it takes a final rest, for no effort of man or beast can extricate it from the tenacious grip of the mud. Thus the 14th Corps delays the movement of the left wing; not seriously, however, for until we have brighter skies, from five to ten miles a day is the limit of progress. General Sherman has issued an order to destroy two hundred superfluous wagons, now on the west side of the river, if they cannot be brought over by tomorrow. These troops crossed over on February 28th. P174-183