

INTO THE LION'S MOUTH RODE BRAVE FORREST

On Sunday, August 21, 1864, the citizens of Memphis saw one of the most daring things which ever succeeded in military history and the annals of war scarcely record a parallel of such great success when you consider the ratio of the number of men engaged in the deed and the number affected by it.

The event was Forrest's raid into Memphis, and the objective point was the Gayoso Hotel, so recently burned. People in this day generally consider this raid as a mere dare-devil movement, but it was far more than that. No food or provender could come to the cis-Mississippi army through the Federal close patrol, and the main base of supplies for the army and people both was in the fertile prairie country of Mississippi.

This country had yielded bountiful crops of corn in 1862 and 1863, although efforts had been made to destroy it.

In 1864 General Washburn had been put in command of the entire Federal Department of Memphis. His predecessor, General Hurlbut, had commanded the department with an average of 30,000 men in it, and had been reduced to the normal command of the city of Memphis.

General James R. Chalmers for some time commanded the Confederate cavalry in Northern Mississippi, and he successfully kept Hurlbut and Washburn out of the prairie country. But when General Forrest succeeded General Chalmers the Federal forces were at once increased to 50,000 men. General Chalmers continued to serve under General Forrest and was not jealous of his commander when the latter was complimented by the Federal's considering him alone as equal to 20,000 of their forces.

Battle of Harrisburg.

The duties of General Washburn were to defend the country immediately around Memphis and his only offensive duty was to prevent the corn crop of 1864 from maturing on the Mississippi prairies. To this end he outfitted the expedition of June, 1864, with General A. J. Smith in command of 13,000 troops. He and Forrest met in Northern Mississippi during the first week in July, the 13,000 men having only 9,000 men opposed to them. For seven days and nights there was almost constant fighting, which ended at Harrisburg on July 14. This is neither the time nor place for a review of that battle, but suffice it to say that Smith got no farther south toward the corn crops.

It was following Smith back North from Harrisburg that Forrest received a most painful wound in the foot.

No sooner had Washburn received the news of Smith's heading for Memphis than he began planning for another expedition under the same field commander. This time Smith was given 10,000 infantry, 5,000 cavalry, and thirty-eight pieces of artillery, the whole force being composed of fresh men and horses selected especially for raiding purposes.

The fight at Harrisburg was in very many respects the most severe one in which Forrest's command engaged, and they had but three weeks in which to recuperate from that battle and the week's fighting which led up to it when Smith was again in their front with an eager and fresh force, when the fighting began again on August 5. Forrest had 4,500 available men with whom to oppose 13,000, but there was any place in which he could expect a re-enforcement. It was win or lose with his force, and if this force lost there was the Eastern army to get its rations?

Had His Hands Full.

The one man who entered the Confederate army as a private and became a lieutenant general now had all that he could do. Never before nor since was he so taxed and never at any other time was he forced to depend so completely upon his matchless genius.

The campaign was one succession of charges, escapes and ambushes on his part. It was fighting by day and fighting by night. He could gain half a mile of ground by night only to lose a mile by day. There was not enough rugged topography for a grand coup. The men and horses lived principally on green corn pulled in the fields where they fought, each of his soldiers having long before become his own commissary general of subsistence.

Often in the middle of the night his command would cheer from one end of the line to the other as a salutation to the arriving mythical re-enforcements; but no man more clearly than Forrest saw through the bluffs and strategies that it was only a postponement of the end and that the delay could not last until the crops should have been garnered. And to make matters worse for the uncovered Confederates, rains began soon after the campaign opened and conditions around them were physically about as they now are in the Philippine Islands.

On August 18 the army was about half-way between Abbeville and Hurricane Creek, not far north of Oxford, Miss. At noon Forrest called Generals Chalmers and Buford into council. "With 4,000 men," he said, "I can see no way of whipping 14,000. I am now going to play my last card and take the chance that the enemy will not do what he should." Then turning to Chalmers, he concluded: "If you can hold Smith in check for two days with half the command and prevent him from discovering that I have gone, I will go into Memphis."

The Raid on Memphis.

The two conferees agreed that something out of the ordinary had to be done, and at 5 o'clock that afternoon Forrest started for Memphis with 2,000 men and worn from two weeks' constant fighting in the rain, leaving Chalmers with an equal number to oppose 14,000 Federals. Nor did Chalmers fail him. He began his retreat with a bold attack on Smith at daylight. Burroughs, the "fighting parson," leading it so fast and furious that Smith never dreamed of Forrest's absence. He charged into Abbeville and then fell back slowly toward

Oxford, contesting every foot of the ground.

Great was the joy in the command when the soldiers learned that a movement on Memphis was contemplated. Of course it was not announced, but the wise ones soon saw a long movement was contemplated, and it was easy for them to surmise its destination.

It was Forrest's intention to take as few Memphians on the trip as possible, for the temptation for them to scatter through the city would be too great, but as the command headed for Paduca 5 o'clock that afternoon many a daring fellow escaped from his company to join the raiders.

For supper for man and beast there was only a tightening of belt and cinch, and the 2,000 men and horses, physically exhausted, were only able to make the trip on account of the spirit of the leader and the spirit of the men. It was forty miles to Paduca, and that was the first stop made. Here the horses rested from 7 o'clock until 10 o'clock on the morning of August 19. The twenty-three miles to Senatobia were covered that day and the night spent in Senatobia.

Early on the morning of August 20 the march toward Hernando was resumed. All of the trip up to that time had been made in mud almost to the knee, but the few pieces of artillery had kept up with the pace.

An Improvised Bridge.

Now the rub came. First the Hickahala was reported as out of its banks from the flood and all bridges gone. But the military genius of the war could not stop for that. Men best mounted were deployed right and left to tear up gin floors, others to cut down telegraph poles and still others to secure the longest grapevines that could be secured in the bottoms. All were to converge at the point where Forrest was to cross. In less than two hours from the time the head of the column reached the Hickahala these materials had been formed into a bridge, half pontoon style, held in place by the vines made fast to trees above and the entire column, including artillery, had crossed safely over a raging torrent sixty feet wide.

Coldwater was a larger stream and much wider, but it took only three hours for the construction of a similar bridge there and for crossing safely over it.

There was only a brief stop at Hernando, 23 miles south of Memphis, and by 3 o'clock on the morning of Sunday, August 21, the command was close on the outpost pickets of Memphis.

In the short halt there the plan of attack was announced. It was brief. The strictest of silence was to be maintained until the enemy should fire. Captain William H. Forrest was to look after the first pickets, and when the rush came Jesse Forrest was to go after Washburn on Union street, near DeSoto street, while Colonel Logwood was to surround the Gayoso Hotel in the hope of stopping Hurlbut. Challenged by the pickets, Captain Forrest replied that his command consisted of an Iowa and Missouri regiment, which were known to be with Smith. Told to advance one at a time, the captain saw that he could not quietly bag the pickets, so he opened fire.

Charged Into the City.

Gass, Forrest's bugler, sounded the charge, but now saw those close to him heard it. The first shot was a signal for a pair of spurs to dig into each faded steel and for every human throat to begin the "rebel yell." The lion had crept as close as he could upon his game and now he sprang forward with the roar at which all the forest trembles.

Down Mississippi avenue came the column, striking no serious opposition until the vicinity of the old State Female College was reached. Here a considerable body of Federals were camped, but there was no time for the first of them even to dress, unless less form for action. This was just before day, and in the preceding fifty-eight hours Forrest had traveled more than 100 miles in a low country flooded for ten days.

General Forrest remained in the vicinity of the college, personally directing the fighting there. The enemy made several attempts to rally, but he was upon them too quickly for any considerable force to get together. They made an attempt to operate from the college building as a base, but a few cannon shot at that emptied it as completely and almost as quickly as an inverted pail of water.

Jesse Forrest had gotten to the Union street general headquarters just a moment after Washburn had fled in his robe de nuit for Fort Pickering.

Colonel Logwood was equally unsuccessful as far as concerned General Hurlbut, for that convivial officer had spent Saturday night with a friend in South Memphis instead of at the Gayoso Hotel. A file of soldiers on each side of the hotel told the occupants that a single shot from a door or window would be a signal for firing the building, and there was peace.

In those days there was a grand stairway just in front of the main western entrance to the building. It was up and then down this that Captain "Bill" Forrest rode his horse, obedient for once to the general's instructions to "let no man dismount."

He Took Long Chances.

To state that there was consternation in the city does not express half of what those here at the time felt. The coming of the matchless Forrest to his own home, the charging of the pursuers boldly into the very focus of the residents of Memphis as to their unwelcome guests, as to their few shots were heard, Memphians awoke and turned over for a second summer Sunday morning's nap. But it was heard the welcome yell, while the few cannon shots at the college, the rattle of musketry, and the racing of 2,000 horses as they thundered through the streets told them that some friend had

come into Memphis, and who would or could do such a thing but Forrest?

The records do not show the exact number of troops in Memphis at that time, but Washburn had 60,000 in his department, hence it is safe to state that Memphis contained at least ten Federals to every one of Forrest's men. He had no idea of holding the town, but wanted to scare Washburn so badly that he would call in all outside troops, including Smith's force, to protect the city from other raids. He took the chance that Washburn would not do, under such circumstances, what he ought to do. If Forrest with 4,000 men could not hold Smith in check, how could Chalmers do it with half that force? When Forrest came into Memphis, did not Washburn know that Smith was opposed by as few less men as Forrest brought into Memphis? Knowing this, why should not Smith be ordered to push faster into the corn country?

All of these questions now seem easy to answer, but so great was the terror of Forrest's name and so much greater was the terror of his presence that Washburn did as Forrest calculated—that is, he did not do what he ought to do. Forrest was in Smith's rear. It did not seem to occur to the enemy that Smith was also in Forrest's rear.

When the two detachments sent into the heart of the city failed to capture Washburn and Hurlbut, they turned their attention to lesser lights and practical affairs. In the Gayoso Hotel there were many officers stopping. Many of these were made prisoners and prisoners were also picked up in large bunches in other parts of the city. The roll of captured footed up 600. The men had worn out many of the mules on the raid and Memphis afforded an opportunity for 400 or more fresh Federal cavalry horses to be secured.

Retired in Good Order.

It was about 11 o'clock in the forenoon when Forrest began retiring from the city. This was nearly eight hours after the first alarm, and it had taken that long for the Federals to organize enough of their forces to make his long stay dangerous.

Logwood and Colonel Forrest joined their forces on DeSoto street and proceeded to the vicinity of the college. It was now a constant fusillade from windows, houses, trees and fences, but the Confederates kept the sharpshooters so busy that the loss to the raiders was insignificant.

Shortly before the men who had come into the city proper rejoined Forrest in the southern suburb there occurred an affair which showed his daring, and for their action on this occasion his men have been much criticized.

On a hill some distance from Forrest Colonel Starr rode out in front of his Federal cavalry commander, and, facing Forrest, waved his sword over his head. It was a challenge for a single-handed mounted sword duel to the commanding officer of the Confederate force. Forrest accepted it promptly and rode along at a trot. Starr did the same. He was reputed to be an excellent swordsman, and Forrest's fame in that line is known to all. The duel promised to be a most interesting one, but when the principals had gotten quite close together, each increasing his speed, a few shots were heard from the Confederate direction, and Starr fell dead from his saddle.

Forrest was furious at what he considered treachery. Dashing back to his command, he demanded the names of the men who had fired that he might give them summary punishment. He was informed that the shots were fired because Starr's force was seen to be moving so as to completely envelop the duelists, a fact which he had not noticed, but this did not satisfy him. Some one must have suffered, but at this juncture a sharp rattle of small arms toward town told the general that his men were in trouble, and in the rush to extricate them he forgot about the Starr incident.

Made Terms With Them.

Forrest was but a few miles south of the city when he found a suitable ambushade at the crossing of a creek. Here he halted, arranged his forces so as to protect themselves, their 600 prisoners and horses from danger of a successful attack, and sent a flag of truce to General Washburn. The messenger said to the commander at Memphis that General Forrest had these prisoners without means of feeding them, and that many were without shoes or proper clothing. Inasmuch as they belonged to Washburn's command he should, for humanity's sake, provide food and clothing for them, and General Forrest would wait there for the stores. After much parleying they were sent.

A reading of the official records of the war, as now being published, in serial numbers 77 and 78, vol. 38, part v., shows some very interesting correspondence. Washburn reported to General Howard that he had Forrest just exactly where he had for a long time wanted to get him. In fact, to read the telegram one would think that Washburn instead of Forrest had planned the trip to Memphis. Washburn was delighted that Forrest had come, for the coming had so exhausted Forrest's men and mounts that there was no possibility of his escape. The capture of Forrest in person and his whole force was but a matter of a few hours. Smith was to cross from Oxford and be the lower millstone upon which the Confederates would be ground by the upper millstone to go out from Memphis.

Smith had botten into Oxford on the day that Forrest had gotten into Memphis. In other words, opposed by one-seventh as many men as he commanded, he had traveled one-tenth of the distance traveled by Forrest in the same time and opposed by a force of more than ten times the size of his command.

Success of the Raid.

A short time before his death General Chalmers told of Smith's entrance into Oxford. In the town was a former Confederate soldier disabled by wounds from further service. Smith met him at the courthouse and asked where Forrest was. When the Confederate replied that he was in Memphis, Smith thought he was trying to deceive him. Smith said he had been fighting Forrest's whole force for two

days and nights, and was about to arrest the Confederate, when up rode a courier covered with mud and much excited.

When Forrest started on the raid he had the wires connecting Smith with the Memphis and Charleston Railroad broken down. The courier brought dispatches across this gap in the wires confirming what the Confederate had told Smith, and the Federal forces began a hasty trip north, with Chalmers harassing their rear as much as possible.

Forrest's last card had won. Washburn, in his later reports to Howard, attempted to lay all the blame for Forrest's escape on Smith, but was still satisfied of the fact that the Confederate command was so broken down from the trip that it was incapable of further active operations during the remainder of the season. How easily he was satisfied and how well he prophesied, let the Middle Tennessee rider witness.

Forrest left Memphis on August 21, 1864. Three days later he had extricated his men from all danger of the enemy and he gave them the signal to quit from the elements and hunger—that is, they were scattered for forage and rest.

On September 1 they were again in the saddle, and in the middle of the month he left Corinth, Miss., for the Tennessee river, crossing at the shoals on the 10th with 4,500 men, each having one blanket, one change of clothing, four days' rations and 100 rounds of ammunition. On October 9 he recrossed the river, after having in twenty-three days traveled 500 miles, captured 900 horses and mules, 3,000 stands of arms, with ordnance, commissary, quartermaster and medical stores, destroyed 100 miles of railroad track, large railroad bridges, 100 wagon-fifty freight cars, two engines, a block house, 5,000 cords of wood, a government mill, with thousands of feet of lumber, having secured 1,000 new recruits, bringing back 700 stragglers from Wheeler's army, and all at a loss of 300 men and one officer.

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