

BATTLE MONROE CROSS ROADS

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The following account of a Civil War battle which took place on the Fort Bragg Military Reservation at a place now known as Battlefield Farm. The fight took place on Mar. 10, 1865, and was a pitched battle in which five or six thousand troops took part. This battle is hardly mentioned in history, and even the people living in the vicinity have only vague and erroneous ideas as to what actually took place. The engagement was not merely a skirmish as is now popularly supposed, but was a real fight, which, insofar as numbers engaged and fierceness of encounter are concerned, deserves to rank with Bunker Hill, Chapultepec or Resaca de la Palma.

The battle is officially known as the Battle of Monroe's Cross Roads, but for various reasons has been called the Battle of Longstreet, of Fayetteville, of Green Springs, of White Lake, and has even been described as having occurred in South Carolina or in Georgia. Every available bit of evidence has been impartially examined, and the following is believed to represent the best existing history of the battle.

In March, 1865, General Sherman's Federal army arrived from its march through South Carolina. A division of three cavalry brigades and one provisional dismounted brigade, all under Major-General Judson Kilpatrick, was on the left flank of the advance, and arrived at Solemn Grove early on the afternoon of Thursday, March 9th. Solemn Grove was a country postoffice which stood on the Morganton road just west of the present reservation boundary. While halted at that point Kilpatrick learned that the Confederate cavalry under Lieutenant General Wade Hampton was approaching from the northwest. Hampton had united the forces of Butler and Wheeler and was hastening east in rear of Hardee's infantry towards the Confederate rendezvous at Fayetteville. Kilpatrick determined to intercept Hampton. He sent his 3rd Brigade under Colonel Spencer ahead on the Morganton road, with orders to camp at Monroe's, near where the Yadkin and Morganton roads intersected at that time. With Spencer was the Dismounted Brigade and two pieces of field artillery, commanded by Lieutenant Ebenezer W. Stetson, 10th Wisconsin Battery.

Kilpatrick's Second Brigade left Solemn Grove two hours later, intending to join the Third Brigade at Monroe's. Orders were sent to the First Brigade, which was still far to the rear, to diverge off the southeast on a road leading to Sandy Grove Church. This was to prevent the Confederates from slipping thru the lines by one of the other parallel roads. General Kilpatrick began the march with the Second Brigade, but in the fore part of the evening rode ahead with his escort and staff to join Colonel Spencer. When near Johnson Mountain he unexpectedly encountered a Confederate division which was halted along a side road. Kilpatrick escaped with his staff, but the escort was captured.

The Third Brigade continued its march in a dismal rain, and arrived at the camp site at nine p. m. The dismounted men went into camp parallel to the Morganton road and in front of the Monroe House. The Third Brigade camped in a field further down the ridge, just north of Green Springs. Headquarters was established in the farm house, and the wagons and artillery were parked in the yard near the house.

An outpost of forty men was sent back up the road, but before any of the pickets had been posted, and while still but a few hundred yards from the camp, the entire detachment was captured by the Confederates. What had happened was this: The Confederates, marching east of the Yadkin road, had arrived behind the Third Brigade (but ahead of the Second Brigade. The officer in command of the Federal outpost, having no idea that the Confederates had arrived, suspected nothing when he was halted by General Butler, who was at the head of the Confederate column. Thus the entire outpost, upon which the security of Kilpatrick's camp depended, was captured without the firing of a shot. Parties sent out during the night to inspect the videttes were also silently captured by members of Shannon's Scouts.

The Confederates halted to close up their column and make a reconnaissance of the Union position. Kilpatrick's Second Brigade encountered the rear of this bivouac, and not having a clear idea of the country, turned back to circle around the Confederates by a southerly route. This command was soon annulled. The Confederates were soon enmeshed in Juniper Creek and failed to reach the Monroe farm in time to participate in the battle. The First Brigade also failed to come up; thus Kilpatrick was, all unsuspecting, cut off by the very force which he was trying to surround, and had with him but a third of his division.

The Confederates spent the night in close observation of the Federal bivouac. At dawn on the tenth, in pursuance to orders from General Hampton, General Wheeler took command of his own and Butler's cavalry and charged into the camp. His Alabamians were on the left. Butler in the center, then the Tennessee brigade, and finally the Texans on the extreme Confederate right. Part of the Texans bogged down in the swamps in Nicholson creek, and did not extricate themselves in time to be of any service to the Confederates during the initial assault.

The Federals were completely surprised; they awoke to find the Confederates in force in every part of their camp. Those who were able fled to the shelter of the swamp. The still morning air was filled with mists exhaled from the rain-soaked ground. The first charge passed up the farm house, so that Kilpatrick, who had just stepped to the door to oversee the feeding of his horse, when the Confederate yell sounded, fled unrecognized and made his way on foot to the swamp. He and most of his men were in their underwear, and were half naked. Having gained the shelter of the swamp the Federals reformed and directed a hot fire back at the Confederates, who, thinking the day won, had commenced to plunder the camp.

Many hand-to-hand fights, pistol and saber duels, and other feats of individual bravery were performed on both sides during the hurly-burly of the fight which ensued. The Federals lost two or three hundred prisoners and a large number of animals at the first onset, but they recovered rapidly and advanced in a determined effort to retake what they had so suddenly lost. They were greatly outnumbered, and would probably have been annihilated had it not been for an accident which occurred after about thirty minutes had elapsed. Lieutenant Stetson, commanding the ar-

illery, crept stealthily up to where the Confederates were attempting to harness the plunging teams to drag away the captured guns. Unnoticed and alone Stetson unlimbered one of his guns and fired a charge of grape into the mass of Confederates about the farm house, at a range of only twenty yards. The Confederates fell back in confusion and the Federals greatly encouraged, rushed forward to form a line in defense of the guns. For an hour and a half the battle raged about the spot, but the guns and headquarters remained in the vicinity, having made a forced march up from the Plank Road to the relief of the calvary. The Confederates, realizing that Union re-inforcements would shortly arrive, withdrew, and marched on into Fayetteville, where they arrived the same evening. Kilpatrick remained on the battlefield until three p. m. and then united his division at Little Rockfish, on the Chicken Road. A number of his wounded died at that place, and the graves of four of them have been marked. The total number of dead is not known, but there are thirty-nine Federal graves in the battlefield itself, with four more near the bivouac of Little Rockfish. The majority of the dead are buried where the fighting was the heaviest, near the site of Lieutenant Stetson's exploit. This is several hundred yards north of Green Springs. The remains of the old farm house are visible, and the trace of the old Morganton Road may also be seen just north of the farm yard. Most of the Confederate dead were later removed. Thirty odd are at Long Street Church and thirty more in Cross Creek Cemetery in Fayetteville. The only graves marked with the names of the dead are the graves of Sergeant Schwartz, a Federal Artillery Chief of Section, and Private Maleaugan, C. S. A. Sergeant Schwartz is buried on the Chicken Road near Little Rockfish, and Private Maleaugan is buried at the lower tip of Cemetery Ridge, on the Yadkin Road.

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