

# Lee Turns on His Pursuers

A FORTIETH ANNIVERSARY WAR STORY

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**A**FTER evacuating Richmond and Petersburg the night of April 2 and 3, 1865, Lee marched with the troops under his immediate command in the Petersburg lines westward along the railroad running to Danville, Va., the point which President Davis had selected as the new capital of the Confederacy. General John B. Gordon's corps formed the Confederate rear guard, and General R. S. Ewell's corps was the last in Lee's regular column. General Longstreet led the vanguard.

General Grant and General Meade set out from Petersburg on April 5 to follow upon Lee's heels with three army corps, the Second, Fifth and Sixth, led respectively by General Humphreys, General Griffin and General Wright. The Federal Army of the James, under command of General Ord, marched westward on a more southerly route than that followed by Lee and Grant, hoping to intercept the Confederate retreat. Meanwhile Sheridan, with the cavalry column, struck out still farther west to get between Lee and Danville.

General Gordon's men kept up a running fight with the pursuing Federals, particularly at the crossings of streams and the passes over ridges, but the march was continuous. Grant's advance moving rapidly with skirmishers and artillery. This pursuit by the Grant column lasted all day the 6th, ending at night at Sailor's creek, fourteen miles ahead, where an important action closed the heavy fighting of the campaign. The operations on the front of the line began on the morning of the 6th. General Longstreet's corps had been pushed on in advance of Lee's army and during the night of the 5th had reached Rice's Station, on the South Side railroad, between Burkeville and Farmville. This brought him in front of Ord's Army of the James at Burkeville. Fitz Lee's Confederate cavalry was close up with Longstreet's. Sheridan was in the vicinity.

General Ord, who believed that Lee was marching down the Danville road on Burkeville, sent out a detachment of two regiments of about 500 men and his headquarters cavalry, eighty strong, under Colonel Francis Washburn, to intercept Longstreet's column. Colonel Theodore B. Read of Ord's staff led the enterprise. The Confeder-

pulsed by Anderson's troops, and when joined by Merritt a second attempt was made. Ewell's troops were now coming up, and Anderson, aided by Ewell's advance, repulsed Crook and Merritt.

Anderson came to a stand at Sailor's creek, a tributary of Appomattox river in front of the Federal cavalry. His line had a general direction east and west as the armies were marching. Crook and Merritt failed in several attempts to penetrate the Confederate line. On the east Ewell was up to Anderson and was followed closely by the Sixth corps. Ewell formed on the left of Anderson. Gordon, who was closely pursued by Humphreys' Second corps, turned off to the right or north before crossing the creek. This left Anderson and Ewell to withstand the cavalry and Wright's Sixth corps. The Sixth corps opened the battle, which cost Lee 7,000 men and many good officers whom he could ill afford to lose at that stage. Among the Confederates captured were Ewell, Ker-shou and G. W. C. Lee, son of General R. E. Lee.

The Confederate corps under Gordon and Humphreys' Second Federal corps had gone too far to the right, down Sailor's creek, to take part in the battle between Anderson and the Federal cavalry and between Ewell and the Sixth corps. Humphreys' men had moved all day within sight of Gordon, maintaining the most of the way a "neck and neck" race. Encounters had been frequent, but so orderly was the Confederate retreat that a good battle front was kept up, and the Federal attacks made very little impression.

Gordon's march was kept up all night, and the troops reached Gainesville, placing the Appomattox between them and their pursuers. At Farmville the Confederates were rationed with provisions that had been sent up by rail.

After passing the Appomattox, which was accomplished during the night of the 6th at the two crossings, High Bridge and Farmville, Lee placed guards at the bridges and set out toward Appomattox Court House up the river. On the Federal side the Fifth corps moved up the Appomattox to Prince Edward Court House. Merritt's cavalry also went up the river on the south bank. Ord's army and Wright's Sixth corps moved to Farmville and found that Lee had destroyed the bridges. Crook's cavalry division moved in advance of Ord and Wright and, fording the river, moved rapidly in pursuit.

Colonel Gregg, whose brigade was leading Crook's column, soon met the enemy and became heavily engaged. Heth's Confederate infantry formed on his front, and Fitz Lee, with Rosser and Munford, attacked him front and flank, driving back the brigade. Gregg and a number of his men were captured. Crook was now ordered out westward along the Lynchburg railroad toward Appomattox. Sheridan's men had not yet crossed the river. Humphreys' corps started forward in pursuit of Gordon at daylight on the 7th and reached High Bridge just as the enemy was giving the last stroke to the work of destruction. The railroad bridge, crossing a wide marsh on piers sixty feet high, was on fire, and a redoubt that served as a bridge head for the wagon bridge was being destroyed by explosives. The division of General Barlow led the Second corps, and its energetic commander sent a force at double quick and drove off the Confederates at the wagon bridge.

General Humphreys, who was on the ground, and Colonel T. L. Livermore of his staff led a party of men to the burning railroad bridge to save it from destruction. As soon as Barlow's men attacked the Confederates at the wagon bridge the latter were re-enforced, and on being driven off at this point they rallied at the railroad bridge and attempted to defeat Colonel Livermore's men. A sharp skirmish ensued, the Confederates being underneath on the ground, while the Federals were above, putting out the fires. The structure was saved with the exception of four spans on the northern or Confederate side. Barlow's men now dashed across the wagon bridge and drove off all opposition and hastened toward Farmville. General Humphreys, with the divisions of Nelson A. Miles and De Trobriand, moved along the roads toward Appomattox Court House.

Lee's retreat was delayed the whole of the 7th of April by the activity of Humphreys, who harassed the Confederates along the Appomattox route westward. Under cover of night Lee set out on his last march, reaching Appomattox Court House about 5 o'clock on the evening of the 8th of April. Suddenly a dash of Federal cavalry from the south gave warning that the foe was across his front. The new force was Merritt's cavalry, which the detention of Lee at the Appomattox crossings on the 7th had enabled to execute a flank march. Crook's Federal cavalry was in the vicinity, and before the morning of the 9th Ord's column and the Fifth Federal corps arrived. Humphreys was close upon the Confederate rear guard, consisting that day of Longstreet's corps, General Gordon leading the vanguard. Lee was beset on all sides. Sheridan stood across his front on the west, the three Federal corps under Ord, Griffin and Wright were strung out south of him along the railroad, and Humphreys was closing in on the east. That was the military situation the morning of the historic 9th of April, 1865.

GEORGE L. KILMER.



BARLOW'S MEN CROSSING APPOMATTOX BRIDGE.

ates were the command of General T. L. Rosser and numbered about 1,500. When Rosser saw Read's column moving around Longstreet's flank he started in pursuit and overtook it about midway between Rice's Station and Farmville, some distance west of the railroad. Read had posted his infantry along the edge of an oak forest. Rosser sent a dismounted column led by General Munford against Read's front and a column in saddle, led by General Dearing, to make a flank attack. General Washburn then led out the eighty cavalrymen and charged Dearing and engaged him in a hand to hand fight. According to Rosser, all of the Federal troopers were killed, wounded or captured. Rosser charged upon the infantry and drove them through the woods, killing Read in the fight. The infantry then raised the white flag. Read had failed to destroy the bridges, but his stubborn action had alarmed the Confederates, and no forward movement had been made by Longstreet. Rosser returned to Rice's Station and found the men of Ord confronting Longstreet.

Lee made a change of programme by which his army was to avoid Burkeville and cross the Appomattox at High Bridge and Farmville. This drew the corps of Anderson, Ewell and Gordon in the same direction. On the morning of this same day Sheridan had directed General Crook, who commanded the cavalry of the Army of the Potomac, to move to Deatonville, and ordered General Merritt to follow with the Shenandoah cavalry corps. Crook found the Confederates passing westward through Deatonville and attempted to seize one of their trains. He was re-

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