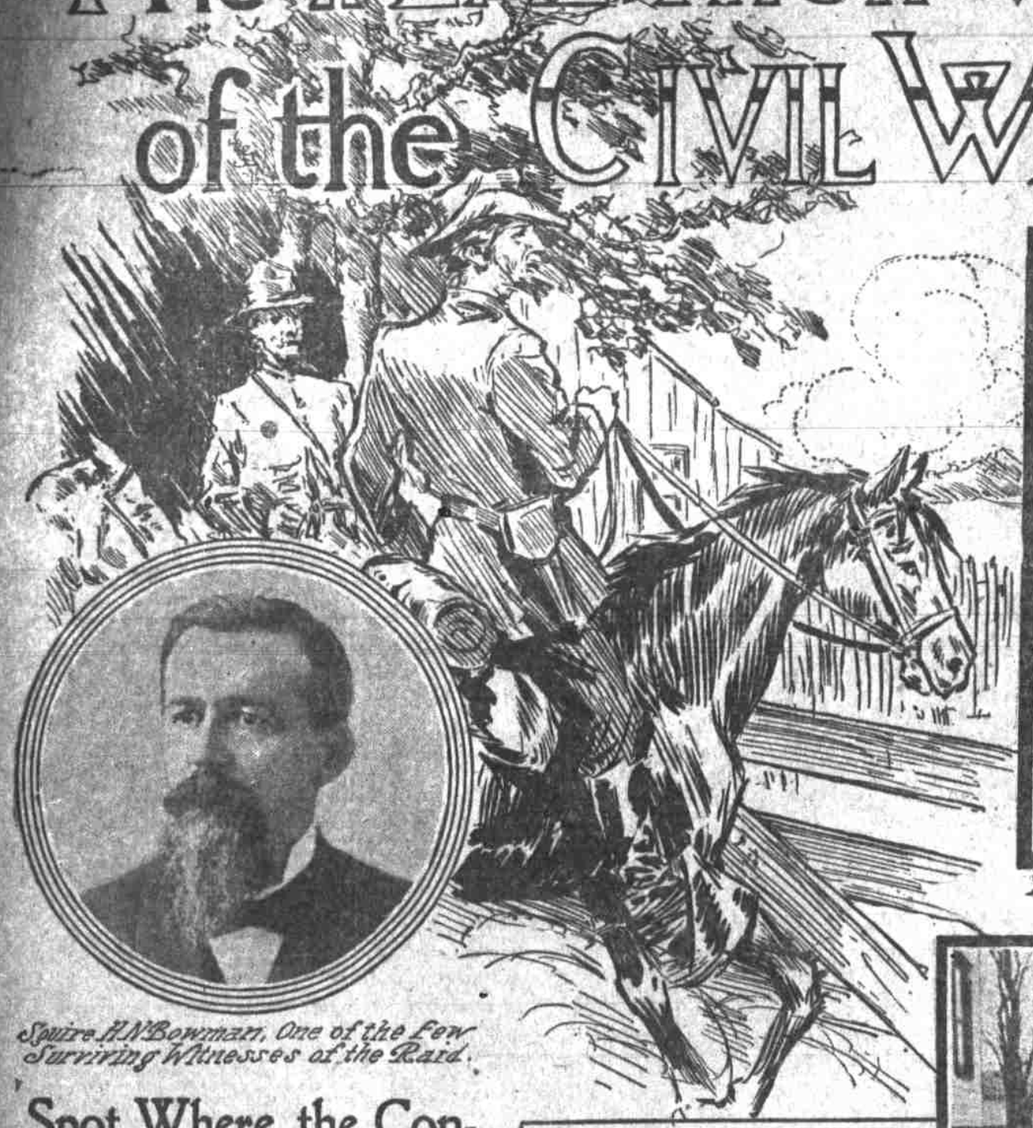
The Real High Water Mark of the Civil War



Squire H. N. Bowman, One of the Few Surviving Witnesses of the Raid.

Spot Where the Confederate Wave Threw Its Highest Spray

By Robert B. Vale

WHEN during the summer of '63 there rolled up from the Southland a great wave of gray, which broke on the ridges of Gettysburg, it hurled far ahead flying clouds of spray. And where this spray fell on Pennsylvania soil, almost within sight of the dome on the Capitol at Harrisburg, marks the farthest north reached by Confederate soldiers in the Civil War.

An old red brick dwelling house at Camp Hill, on the broad white highway which runs its course from Philadelphia to Pittsburg, is the only monument which serves to indicate the spot where, forty-five years ago, a Virginia cavalryman, seated on his tired mount, gazed a few moments across the hills which line the Susquehanna, and then, wheeling, turned his face toward the South, toward Gettysburg.

To the left of this house is a lane—Limekiln lane, they call it in Camp Hill—and this is another striking landmark, for on the afternoon of Sunday, June 28, 1863, there was drawn up in the sunken road the most advanced fighting line of the Forlorn Hope.

IT'S A LONG time since those days—nearly half a century. Not many of the men and women who had reached the adult age and lived in southern Pennsylvania as the curtain unfolded on the field of Gettysburg are still alive. The boys and girls who dug their barefoot toes into the creamy dust of the limestone roads as the Confederate columns swept by are old men and women. Camp Hill in history is forgotten.

As good old Squire H. N. Bowman says: "How in the name of all creation the government and the patriotic societies of the land have neglected to appropriately mark the high-water spot of the Civil War beats me!"

But it is unmarked, not a mound or a stone on this historic ground.

Camp Hill, Pa., is a pretty little town, the first but one that you meet in the broad valley which winds hundreds of miles from the Susquehanna to Chattanooga, Tenn. Not a mile of this valley, which is known in its different sections as the Cumberland, Shenandoah and Valley of Virginia, but has been trod by the armies of the Blue and Gray.

Great battles were fought in the valley—Winchester, Antietam, South Mountain. Across the Potomac river, in Virginia, towns were destroyed, farms laid waste and buildings razed. To the north, Chambersburg was burned and Carlisle shelled.

It has been said that when Lee made his invasion his objective point was Philadelphia. Certainly he planned to capture Harrisburg.

LEE KNEW THE LAND WELL

Robert E. Lee knew the valley well. As a young cavalry officer he had been a visitor at the barracks in Carlisle, and he was familiar with the picturesque mountains that lie to the north and to the south.

There was no inkling in the North that the Confederates intended to make the daring dash until June 13, when General Ewell's corps attacked General Milroy and the Union forces at Winchester, Va.

In less than two hours the Federal detachment was torn to pieces and in flight. The valley to the north was clear, save for fleeing Union soldiers.

It was then that General Lee ordered Ewell to sweep up this broad and fertile land and capture the capital of the Keystone State.

Jubal Early led the advance. With him was General Jenkins, cavalry commander, and it was Jenkins' command that reached the high-water mark.

The summer was one of the most beautiful in years. It was haymaking time, the season of the year when the locust blossoms perfumed the air, when the red and black cherries hung in gemlike clusters from overloaded trees.

Coming from a land that for two years had been desolated, the well-tilled fields, the waving grain, the huge, well-filled barns and the sleek cattle of the Northland stirred the Confederates with strange emotions.

One North Carolina officer talked with several farmers in the valley. He was frank. "My God!" he said, "we cannot whip you! All the South is already a desert place and up here your resources have not been touched! It's hopeless!"

There was nothing to stop Lee's army. Back in Washington President Lincoln heard that Early had already reached Shippensburg and that Fitzhugh Lee had dashed across York and Adams counties and reached the Susquehanna at Wrightsville.

Toll Gate House at Camp Hill, Pa. High Water Mark of the Civil War.

Ruins of Fort Couch, Opposite Harrisburg.

In This Lane the Farthest North Confederate Fighting Line Stood.

House Struck by a Confederate Shell.

The "Farthest North" Spot Where a Soldier in Grey Was Wounded and Captured.

Meade's army was just entering Pennsylvania. All the Cumberland valley was jammed with the enemy. Several thousand troops, mostly New York militia, were concentrated on the western bank of the Susquehanna, across from Harrisburg, and they were augmented by 10,000 volunteers from the invaded state.

Night and day they worked, building intrenchments on the crest of the heights. These mounds of earth are standing today and are known as Fort Washington and Fort Couch.

Military men knew that neither the undrilled troops commanded by General Baldy Smith nor the hill of loam could stop Lee if an attack were made.

Regiment after regiment of fleeing Union soldiers came into Harrisburg. They told of the thundering horde at their heels. So swiftly did Early move that his advance was almost constantly engaged with the rear of the enemy from Hagerstown to Mechanicsburg. Hundreds of Union prisoners, weak from lack of food and exhausted by flight, were picked up along the roads.

There was panic. Farmers abandoned their homes and, gathering together their families, their valuables, their cattle and their horses, joined in the mad rush to escape across the Susquehanna. The roads were packed with a weird jumble of soldiers, cows, chickens and wild-eyed men, women and children, rumbling wagon trains, and ambulances filled with sick and wounded men.

It was on Saturday evening, June 27, that Governor Curtin, at Harrisburg, telegraphed President Lincoln that the Confederates had reached Carlisle and Harrisburg would fall on Monday. No sign of Meade, who was to check the invasion.

Sunday morning Jenkins led his tired but jubilant cavalry up to Oyster's Point. This Confederate leader carried with him two pieces of artillery, and he posted these on a little mound about half a mile from Camp Hill.

He could see the hills to the south covered with a vast holiday crowd that came out to witness the advance of the Southern armies. Due ahead were the heights manned by the small Union force. All along the road were scattered Union sharpshooters, and now and then they took pop shots at the dusty gray enemy.

A short distance up the Trindle Spring road from the Point a Confederate soldier was hit in the leg and his horse carried him toward the Union lines. The young Southerner toppled off his mount into the dust, and to him is given the honor of the "High Water" prisoner of the war. Who he was is not known today, but he was well cared for and was treated by the surgeons at Harrisburg.

Across the road where now stands the old red house there stood in '63 a tollgate. One or two of Jenkins' cavalry rode up to the barrier until their horses noses rested on the other side. Not one soldier passed the gate.

Meantime, the intermittent cracking of rifles kept up. Afternoon came. The Confederate line took its place in Limekiln lane. The artillery to the rear began shelling the country in front. Several buildings were struck and the Union skirmishers retreated into the intrenchments.

Far down the valley the clouds of dust told of the never-stopping infantry. The preliminaries were through with, the attack on Harrisburg was about to begin on the coming of the morrow. Once the capital of the state fell and railroads destroyed, Lee could place his forces on the southern slopes of the mountain, face Meade and give battle.

Then one of the strange things which sometimes settles the fate of nations took place. A small force of Lee's army, just outside of Gettysburg, got into a skirmish with some Union troops. Meade, who had just succeeded to command, had arrived.

More troops came up and the fighting grew. Lee saw that he must have it out right there. He was then in Chambersburg. He ordered all the divisions to leave the Cumberland valley; he drew Fitzhugh Lee and Jenkins away from the shores of the Susquehanna; he himself started across the mountains to Gettysburg and to crushing defeat.

That Sunday night the glare of fire down the river told that Fitzhugh Lee had fired the bridge to Columbia; Federal troops advancing from Harrisburg saw Jenkins' cavalry retiring on Gettysburg. These Union troops came up with Jenkins near Sporting Hill, a short way from Camp Hill, and there was a small engagement. But Jenkins did not hurry, and some of his rear guard remained in the vicinity of Camp Hill for a day or two, holding back the Federal forces.

ACTS OF DARING

During those few exciting days not one, but scores of acts of daring were performed by the people of the Cumberland valley. So swift was the march of Lee that the authorities in Washington did not understand the maneuver. Everybody in the North was stunned. Information was needed, the whereabouts of the Confederates, the numbers of the forces—all these facts were vital.

Spies volunteered their services. Two men, William Coffey and Samuel McKinney, disguised as farmers, penetrated the Confederate line. They learned much, and then turned toward Harrisburg and the Union lines. Walking along until a clump of shrubbery concealed them, the spies made a dash for the mountains.

Some of Ewell's men saw them running, and opened fire. The men kept on. Then, in front of them, soldiers crossed the road, and the spies were prisoners. They were taken to General Ewell's headquarters, nooses were slipped over their necks and they were being elevated, when Ewell directed their lives to be spared.

Charles Flemming was sent into the Confederate lines as a spy. It was mighty easy for him to get the facts, but most unusually hard to get away with them. Down near Oyster's Point he tried to make a run through the fields. A watchful cavalryman overtook him, and Flemming was kept a prisoner until the battle at Gettysburg opened.

Then there was Harry Smith. He had come back to his old home at Camp Hill, wounded. He still wore his blue uniform, and it was a foolish thing for him to try to act as spy thus attired. He was caught, and had he not summoned all the people in the neighborhood to testify to his discharge and that he was a native of the place, he would have been hanged.

Camp Hill today does not look as it did when it was held by the Confederate forces. But few of the old buildings in which the troops quartered, where they dined on substantial Pennsylvania fare, where the officers played the pianos of absent women and held dances in the parlors, are still standing.

It is now a suburb of Harrisburg. The tollgate house is unchanged, the fortifications are there, but soon will be torn down to make room for houses; the lane, Limekiln lane, is as it was two score and five years back.

The high-water mark of a war in which more than 1,000,000 men died is unknown save for the traditions of the village, the memories of the old folks and the musty documents in the archives of the Cumberland County Historical Society.

Is Cruelty Practiced in the Army?

Some Are Made to Saw Wood.

Digging and Refilling Hole.

Grooming Horses for Three Hours.

HOW would you like to be fed on bread and water, only, for ten days?

Or how would you like to stand on your feet, your hand upraised, for two or three hours, not being permitted to move, talk, or make a motion of any sort?

Perhaps you would like to curry horses for three and four hours without cessation.

Or how would a task of sawing wood until you fell over from exhaustion strike you?

These are among the punishments inflicted in the regular army for violation of regulations, according to the statements of men who have been in service. Some of these punishments almost rank with Chinese tortures and the cruelties of medieval times.

ARMY life is not without its hardships, even for the exemplary soldier. For the soldier inclined to "kick over the traces," in the parlance of the camp, there is frequently a series of bitter experiences. Indeed, a person who has never served in the army would be surprised at what might seem too cruel punishments inflicted on men within the ranks.

Among the more severe punishments given for various offenses are standing at attention for periods of two and three hours, grooming horses for several hours, washing dishes for several days, or condemned to the "awkward squad" and compelled to drill for one or two hours a day.

"A person who has not served in the regular army cannot conceive the punishments often prescribed," declared a man who had been an enlisted soldier for a number of years.

"Of course, most soldiers who are punished have committed some offense. But one cannot help feeling that many officers like to rub it in, and that the punishments often parallel the heartless army cruelties which have raised such a furore in Germany.

"Possibly one of the most wearisome punishments is to stand at attention for several hours. When a soldier will not give the proper salute to a superior, this is the usual sentence. While a sentry passes by with a gun in hand, the other fellow must stand at attention. They will not let him change position, move or talk. I have seen men stand during the hot days of summer until they fell over from exhaustion.

"In the guardhouse poor food is usually given. But [illegible] living on bread and water for five to ten days! One nearly dies of the monotony of this food. One actually suffers. The soldier gets hungry and the bread fails to satisfy his hunger. He smells the food in the mess tent. And—well you can imagine how he feels.

"Sawing wood is hardly any worse than this. In fact, if one saws wood he is usually given real food. But those in authority do work the poor rascals, all right. In the morning they are led from the guardhouse and put on the wood. They usually work from 8 in the morning until 6 in the evening.

"Every evening after the men have groomed their horses, the officer comes along and rubs his hands over the horse's coat to see whether it is clean or not.

"One night I was on sentry duty. A chap near me had just finished currying his horse. The officer came by, passed his hand over the horse and grunted, 'Now you can groom that horse until I come back.' It was a common thing; in fact, the usual punishment.

"The fellow began grooming the horse, and he groomed it for three hours before the officer came back. How does the horse like it? I don't know.

"This happened repeatedly. Of course, it may be said that a soldier should keep his horse clean. But it seems pretty hard on the man when he is compelled to rub a horse's back several hours. To say nothing of the horse.

"A soldier's life isn't a snap. It isn't any wonder that some of the most careful men at times enter guard mount with dirty equipment. I have seen some of the best men do it.

NO MERCY SHOWN

"The soldier starts out for guard mount at 9 o'clock. The adjutant comes along and sees that his gun is dirty. The soldier is put in the guardhouse. Sometimes he gets a pretty long term. A severe sentence, isn't it? After the eighth conviction he may be court-martialed.

"If a soldier misses the 11 o'clock roll call at night he is likely to be tried and to get a 'month and a month.' This means a month in the guardhouse and a deduction of pay. If the non-commissioned officer should take pity on him and not report the absence, and this is discovered, he is liable to be deprived of his stripes. This is all routine punishment.

"But tasks are assigned men which are not only useless but torturing. I have seen a soldier sentenced to dig a hole in the ground six feet deep and six by four feet square. When it was dug, he was commanded to fill it up again, and when it was filled he was commanded to dig it again. Such things sound incredible, but they are too common.

"Sometimes a soldier may not drill properly. He may be tired out, or again, may be new. If the officer is not in a particularly good humor, he will most likely assign the man to what is called the 'awkward squad.' Then he is compelled to go through the drills for one or two hours. One can imagine nothing more tiresome than the continuous handling of a gun for such a length of time.

"Of course, order must be preserved in the army. There must be punishments—punishments often severe. But any man of common sense and human sympathy who has been in the service cannot but feel that punishments in a great percentage of the cases might be more humane.

"Some officers forget that soldiers, even if they are careless or disobey orders, are human, and punishments which exhaust the strength only arouse antagonism and ill will. Mercy is a mother of patriotism."