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The War Fifty Years Ago

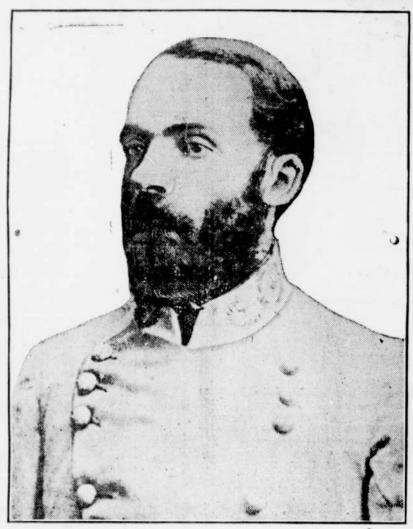
Confederate Attack at Fort Donelson, Tenn .--- Bold Attempt to Recover Ground Captured by Grant In February, 1862---Cavalry Under General Wheeler and General Forrest Surround the Garrison --- Gallant Defense by Troops Under General A. C. Harding. Demands to Surrender Refused --- Hints of "No Quarter" --- The Assailants Driven Off With Heavy Loss---Grant's Dilemma at Vicksburg.

By Captain GEO. L. KILMER, Late U. 5. V. trenches, but Harding safely withdrew Tennessee.

at the beginning of February, 1863, the and spikes until overpowered. recovery of Donelson might reverse U. S. Grant was tied up with his Vicks- ranks. Forrest's horse was shot and

HEN the first anniversary of his men and guns to a shorter line. Grant's capture of Fort Don- To prevent the removal of the guns elson, Feb. 16, 1862, drew the Confederates aimed at the horses near General Joseph Wheel- and shot down all but the wheel team er and General N. B. Forrest set out of one piece. After seeing the other at the head of their cavalry bands to guns safe the cannoneers returned in retake that valuable stronghold. The the face of Wharton's onrushing line Confederates had never recovered to recover the one in danger. Cutting from the chagrin caused throughout loose the four dead animals, the driver the south by the loss of the key to mounted, but the off horse was instantly shot, leaving the gun helpless. As the campaign stood in the west The cannoneers fought with rammers

Meanwhile the Illinois men poured a the whole military situation. General biting rifle fire upon the charging



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GENERAL JOE WHEELER, C. S. A., LEADER OF THE CAVALRY ATTACK AT FORT DONELSON.

General W. S. Rosecrans, the Federal leader killed, the troopers turned and commander in Tennessee, had his fled. match in General Braxton Bragg. whose army wintered withing striking ing's men again occupied the old lines. distance of Nashville. Nashville was A thirty-two pounder siege gun was the base of Rosecrans' army, and its

fate would follow that of Donelson. Fort Donelson guarded the Cumberoriginally been built by the Confeder- Colonel McNair of Forrest's staff and eral army base, the post was strength- guns. ened in order to protect the channel for supply ships going up to Nashville. The garrison consisted of the Eightythird Illinois infantry, Flood's Illinois battery and Captain von Minden's company of the Fifth Iowa cavalry, about 800 men.

Demand For Surrender.

During the forenoon of Feb. 3 a citizen brought word to Colonel A. C. Harding, commandant of the post, that the Confederates were coming. Harding prepared to fight. The position was surrounded by a ridge, which he crowned with four rifled guns and placed his men at the weakest points on his line of defense. The guns could sweep the outside of the breastworks. and he relied chiefly upon their execution to repulse a charge. At 1:30 p. m a flag of truce came to the lines with the following ringing summons to sur

To the Commanding Officer at Fort Don-

Having invested Fort Donelson with a force sufficient to take it and desiring to prevent the effusion of blood, we have the bonor to demand an immediate and un-conditional surrender of the fort with all the forces, stores, etc. If you surrender you will be treated as prisoners of war; if not, you must abide the consequences.

JOSEPH WHEELER,
Chief Commander.
N. B. FORREST,
manding Cavalry Division.
JOHN A. WHARTON. Commanding Cavalry Division.

The reply was couched in fewer words, but left no doubt as to the

spirit of the writer. It read: I decline to surrender the forces under or the post without an effort to defend them.

A. C. HARDING, Forrest had with him 800 men, and first rush Forrest carried the outer opening of the attack.

burg projects on the Mississippi, and fell with his rider. Supposing their

With the repulse of Forrest, Hardbrought to bear upon the threatened point and double shotted with canister, Forrest's men rushed forward, to be land river below Nashville and had met with the canister at ten paces. ates to bar the river against Federal several other officers, together with warships. After Grant captured it and scores of men, fell. Harding had Nashville fell with it, to become a Fed- massed 300 men on the ridge near the

Forrest Sounds the Retreat.

Against this new line Forrest rode with a dozen men of his escort to within thirty paces. But his brigade had been wiped out. A second time his horse was shot under him, and the sturdy fighter, who all along had opposed the attack, reluctantly sounded the retreat.

Wharton's attack was not less desperate than that of Forrest, but owing to the formation of the ground and the lines in that quarter the defenders kept the assallants at a distance. After the loss of the gun Colonel Harding sent two more pieces into action against Wharton. His infantry in their rifle pits withstood the assaults of enemies outnumbering them ten to one. During the heat of Wharton's attack Colonel Harding stripped the line around the siege gun where Forrest had been checked with fearful carnage of its defenders and sent them to the points of danger. That was Forrest's opportunity, but his brigade was out of the fight for good.

So rapid had been the firing of the Federal infantry that their ammunition was nearly exhausted. The only reserve supply at the post was in a section that had been cut off by the charging Confederates from the main part of the garrison around the siege gun and near Colonel Harding's headquarters. Three out of nine of the Illiois companies were in rifle pits near the ammunition. Adjoining these were some rifle pits which had been abandoned early in the fight.

Second Demand to Surrender.

Just at sundown the Illinoisans at headquarters arose from their pits with a yell and started at double quick Wharton's force numbered 2,000 sa- for their ammunition. The Confederbers. Both columns attacked simul- ates who lay in the pathway ran from taneously. Three Confederate batter- the field without an attempt at resisties rained shots upon the Federals ance, and when darkness fell the garriraking the line lengthwise. In his son held the same works as at the

Soon after dark Wneeler again summoned Colonel Harding to surrender. saying that he had not yet put half his force isto action and would renew the attack. Again Harding spurned the idea of yielding.

But the danger was not over. Forrest had penetrated within short canister range of the siege gun in his boldest charge, and the advance line of the enemy lay within 100 yards of the main rifle plts. The guns were short of friction primers, and the siege piece, being too heavy to remove, was spiked and abandoned,

A council was held in the Confederate bivounc which decided to suspend the attack. Later, word reached Wheeler that a fleet of transports was coming up the river loaded with Federal troops and convoyed by six gunboats which, toward the end of the fight, had aided the Federals. Warned by this and the stubbornness of the defense, he ordered a general retreat. Colonel Harding's loss in battle was sixty-four killed and wounded, a trifle in comparison with that of the Confederates. Wharton's command lost eighty-five killed and wounded and Forrest's over 200.

Grant's Plight at Vicksburg.

The rainy midwinter fifty years ago overtook Grant's army in the low bottom lands of the Mississippi, the roads of which were submerged in places to such an extent as to prevent all movements over them. Vicksburg, in front, was unassailable by direct attack, and the problem was to turn its flank by means of canals, creeks and bayous.

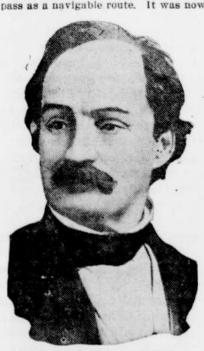
By the Vicksburg canal and the Lake Providence route it was intended to turn the enemy's left flank; by the Yazoo pass route and a route subsequently attempted through Steele's bayou, both north and northeast of Vicksburg, it was intended to turn his right flank. The efforts of the Federal army and navy throughout the month of February were directed with unremitting and assiduous labor to these flanking projects over water.

The work on the canal across the peninsula opposite Vicksburg was prosecuted mainly by Sherman's corps. Dredge boats were brought to assist the labors of the troops, and it was planned to excavate a waterway sixty feet wide and nine deep. The excavation was nearly completed when the river rose suddenly, broke down the barrier at the upper end and flooded the whole peninsula, driving the troops on to the levee to escape drowning.

The direction of the canal was such, however, that this body of water simply flooded its banks, but produced no scour through it. After this, work was continued for about two weeks by the dredge boats, but the Confederate shore batteries soon got the range of the latter so accurately that they were driven off, and work on the canal was then abandoned.

Opening Yazoo Pass.

The Yazoo pass project was the most favorable of all and for a time gave promise of definite results. Nearly opposite Helena, Ark., the distance from the Mississippi river to the Coldwater is only ten miles in a straight line, and along this line runs a winding bayou called the Yazoo pass. The Coldwater, Tallahatchle and Yazoo rivers are all navigable for light draft boats, and through this pass in former times was the direct route of navigation from Memphis to Yazoo city. The bottom lands being, however, lower than the surface of the Mississippi in high water, some years prior to the war a substantial levee nearly a hundred feet thick and eighteen feet high had been built across the Yazoo pass in order to reclaim the overflowed land This levee destroyed the use of this



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GENERAL A. C. HARDING, U. S. A., COM-MANDANT AT THE DEFENSE OF PORT DONELSON.

desired to restore it, and the problem was simply to cut the levee and allow the water to resume its former course. Colonel J. H. Wilson of Grant's staff accomplished this on Feb. 3, and the water immediately rushed through in a torrest.

On the 7th the current had so far subsided that a gunboat was able to enter the pass, when it was discovered that although the channel was deep enough it was greatly obstructed by overhanging trees, large numbers of which had been felled by the Confederates within the last few days. The pass as well as the Coldwater ran through a dense forest, and it had required but a few minutes' labor to cut down trees, forming obstructions which could not be removed in several days. Additional troops were at once brought over from Helena and set to work removing these obstructions.

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