

MOUNT AND AWAY!

Cavalry of the Army of the Potomac in June, 1863.

WHAT THEY ACCOMPLISHED

At Beverly Ford and Brandy Station, Also at Aldie, Va.

Portraits of Famous Cavalry Leaders, North and South—Milroy's Gallant Stand at Winchester and His Forced Retreat—The Criss-Crossed Shenandoah Valley Invaded Each Summer—Kilpatrick's Brave Charge at Aldie—Dashing J. E. B. Stuart and His Banjo Player.

The squadron is forming, the war bugles play to saddle, brave comrades, stout hearts for a fray.

Our captain is mounted, strike spurs and away!

In reviewing the history of the civil war, the reader is rather surprised to find how little account is made of the cavalry operations of the northern army. This is especially true of the cavalry of the east. A history has been written of the work of the western cavalry, but the full story of the horsemen of the Army of the Potomac, from the beginning of the war, has yet to be penned.

It was different with the southern army. In overhauling their records, one finds that the fullest tribute is paid to the cavalry officers and men. Their dauntlessness and hard riding, their many exploits are fully described and commented on in glowing colors. The southerners were natural horsemen. It sometimes happens that the fullest account of a cavalry fight is obtained from southern histories.

Of cavalry anecdotes, amusing and otherwise, a good store has been handed down from Confederate sources. The following, says a newspaper of the time, was a certain southern colonel's order for mounting:

"Prepare fur to git onto your creeters."

"Gd."

In the summer of 1863 there was constant fighting between the cavalry of the two great armies of the east. J. E. B. Stuart was the commander of the southern horse, Gen. Alfred Pleasonton that of the Army of the Potomac. In June and July there were fifteen different cavalry fights in sixteen days. These were aside from the battles of Beverly Ford, Aldie, Middleburg and Upperville. The engagement at Aldie was what old military officers would call a "very pretty fight."

Early in June, 1863, after the battle of Chancellorsville, Lee prepared to invade Pennsylvania. The different corps of his army were to rendezvous at Culpeper, Va., thence start north. He endeavored to remove them one or two divisions at a time, so as to elude the eyes of Gen. Hooker, in camp opposite him on the Rappahannock.

June 8, two divisions of Longstreet's corps moved to Culpeper. June 4, Ewell's corps followed. These movements, carefully guarded, were nevertheless observed in the watchful Union camp. Hooker knew that something unusual was going on, what he could not tell. June 8, he sent out Gen. Pleasonton with the cavalry, to ride in the direction of Culpeper and find out at any cost what Lee was about.

During the night of June 8, Pleasonton's cavalry, three divisions, with two brigades of infantry, rode silently to Beverly Ford and Kelly's Ford, on the Rappahannock, ready to cross to the west side of it at daybreak.

Meantime, quite unknown to each other, both the Union and Confederate cavalry leaders, Pleasonton and J. E. B. Stuart, had made movements toward each other, each on his own side of the Rappahannock. While Pleasonton was on the east side of Beverly Ford Stuart was not far away from it on the west side.

J. E. B. Stuart was one of the most popular of the southern leaders. At the beginning of the war he was only 30 years old, having been graduated from West Point not long before. He was a native of Virginia, and was allied to the old Scotch royal house of Stuart. Besides his soldierly qualities he was a great social favorite. When in camp, and his men were resting from some of their numerous raids, Gen. Stuart would take with him his colored banjo player and start out at night to visit Confederate families living anywhere within a dozen miles of his headquarters, for an evening of festivity.

Then, after a gay dance, the young general would return to his tent toward morning for a few hours' sleep. At daybreak he was up and away again, overflowing with health and animal spirits. He seemed superior to fatigue.

J. E. B. Stuart was killed in May, 1864, in an engagement fought with Gen. Custer at Yellow Tavern, not far from Richmond, Va.

The unexpected meeting of Stuart and Pleasonton, June 9, 1863, brought on the battle of

BRANDY STATION.

Stuart's force, some 10,000, was chiefly concentrated at Brandy Station, not far from Beverly Ford. Between these two named points the fighting began, at a church, St. James'. The conflict at first was between Stuart's whole force and Pleasonton's first division, commanded by Gen. Buford. There was fighting of some hours, and Buford fell back, because his rear had been attacked by Stuart.

Then Gen. Gregg, commanding the second division, in turn withstood the onset of Stuart's force. The Federal divisions contained each about 3,000 men, and the first and second fought Stuart singly. Pleasonton's third division, under Gen. Duffie, did not reach Brandy Station till the afternoon. With charge and counter charge of cavalry, the two forces fought several hours. Then the Confederate infantry was seen approaching, and Pleasonton ordered a retreat to the west side of the Rappahannock again. That was the end of the battle of Brandy Station. Each side claimed the victory. Stuart captured three guns and a number of prisoners. Pleasonton claims to have impeded and crippled the Confederate cavalry so much as to change Lee's whole line of march on his invasion of the north. Being practically unsupported by infantry, Pleasonton

was obliged to retreat at the coming of the Confederate infantry.

Lee's first intention had been to invade Pennsylvania and the north by following the route east of the Blue Ridge mountains, on the side next Washington, skirting along the foot of the mountains, and holding his cavalry upon his eastern flank to protect him.

After the fight at Brandy Station he abandoned this line of march and took the westerly and more roundabout one, between the Blue Ridge and a spur of the Alleghany mountains, down the Shenandoah valley.

And now once more the hapless Shenandoah valley became the scene of a military race.

BATTLE OF WINCHESTER.

There was an obstacle to the advance of Lee down the Shenandoah valley. That was the presence of the Union general, R. H. Milroy, at Winchester, Va., with 10,000 men.

Soon after the battle of Brandy Station, Lee's left wing, under Ewell, started northward, entered the Shenandoah valley, and suddenly appeared before Milroy, at Winchester, June 13. In three days Ewell's men had marched from Culpeper, seventy miles.

Sunday, June 14, Milroy was attacked by Early's Confederate division. The firing and fighting continued till darkness. During the night the Confederate forces were distributed east, north and south, to cut off all escape from Milroy.

The Union general's ammunition was nearly exhausted, and at 1 o'clock in the morning of June 15, he made a desperate attempt to escape northward, by the Martinsburg road.

Too late, he found the Confederates formed in line of battle across his way.

Milroy's advance, under Gen. Elliott, sought to cut its way through the lines. It could not be done. Then

to turn to the right. Milroy gave orders by mistake went to the left, the rest to the right. Milroy's horse was shot under him here.

Then the divided columns endeavored to escape as best they might. Milroy himself got away, with about half his command of 10,000. The rest, including many sick and wounded, were captured and sent prisoners to Richmond. Among the spoils of war were eleven Union battle flags.

The road through the Shenandoah valley was now clear for Lee's army.

ALDIE, JUNE 17.

When Lee started on his grand expedition toward Pennsylvania, he ordered Stuart's cavalry to ride along the eastern edge of the Blue Ridge and guard the gaps from the approach of Hooker's army. The Blue Ridge was thus between Lee and his cavalry.

By looking upon the map the reader will see a short range of mountains east of and parallel with the main Blue Ridge. These are called the Bull Run and Kittectin mountains. Thus Stuart's cavalry was between the Blue Ridge and the short range to the eastward. Within the short range were several gaps or mountain passes, with roads leading through them. Aldie Gap was one of these.

The little village of Aldie is in northern Virginia, not quite forty miles northwest of Washington. June 17, 1863, Hooker's main army was at Centerville, almost midway between Aldie Gap



MAP OF ALDIE GAP.

and Washington. The main body of Union cavalry was also at Centerville. But Gen. Pleasonton himself was not far from Aldie Gap, watching it.

June 17, "Fitz Lee," as he was called, the present governor of Virginia, was sent to take possession of Aldie Gap, and hold it with a brigade of Confederate cavalry. Within easy supporting distance were two other Confederate cavalry brigades.

Pleasonton says that some kind of presentiment—he cannot explain it—moved him to pass through Aldie Gap, on that very day. He therefore marched to the Gap with Gregg's division to find it occupied by Confederate pickets. He drove them back to the main body between 2 and 3 in the afternoon of June 17.

On a hill west of the village of Aldie, Gen. "Fitz" Lee was waiting for the Union cavalry. Near Aldie Gap were two roads leading to Ashby's Gap and Snicker's Gap in the Blue Ridge. Both of these the Confederates sought to guard.

Immediately the two armies met the battle began. It began desperately and raged furiously until after dark. The Confederates had the advantage of position that was to be derived from a ditch and a line of haystacks. After a bloody fight of three hours the Federal line was broken and driven back. Then the day was saved to the Union cause by the gallantry of Brig. Gen. Hugh Judson Kilpatrick. The Union line wavered, stopped and fell back. Suddenly Kilpatrick put himself in person at the head of the First Maine cavalry and ordered them to charge the Confederate line on the Ashby Gap road. This they did brilliantly and successfully.

The Confederates in turn fell back and Kilpatrick's men captured four guns. Several spirited charges made about the same time by the Federal (Harris) light cavalry completed the work, and the day was won for Pleasonton. The Confederates say that about this time they received orders from J. E. B. Stuart to fall back to Middleburg, which orders they obeyed.

While Gregg's division was thus getting possession of Aldie Gap, a battle was taking place also at Middleburg, not far away. Col. Duffie, of Pleasonton's force, took possession of that town, only to be attacked by Stuart's men and forced to retreat. Next day, June 18, Pleasonton came on with all his force. There was fighting again, and for several days afterward. The result of these various cavalry fights was that the Confederates were driven out of Loudoun county, Va. The cavalry retreated back into the Blue Ridge mountains.

The possession of Aldie Gap and the Bull Run mountains by the Union cavalry was a very important advantage to Gen. Hooker. It pressed Lee's army to the westward in his invasion of Pennsylvania and made his route longer and more difficult, and insured the safety of Washington in that direction.

During these cavalry fights east of the Blue Ridge Gen. Kilpatrick especially distinguished himself. He was a native of New Jersey, and was in the flower of his youth at the outbreak of the war, having been graduated from West Point in 1861. He was appointed to the artillery arm of the service at first, but soon found more congenial occupation for his gallant, dashing spirit in the cavalry. He was promoted rapidly. At Gettysburg he commanded a division. In 1862, at the age of 30, he was promoted to major general of volunteers. The year after the war closed he resigned from the regular army. In 1875 he went as minister to Chile, remaining there until 1879. In 1881 this gallant officer and accomplished gentleman died.



GEN. KILPATRICK.



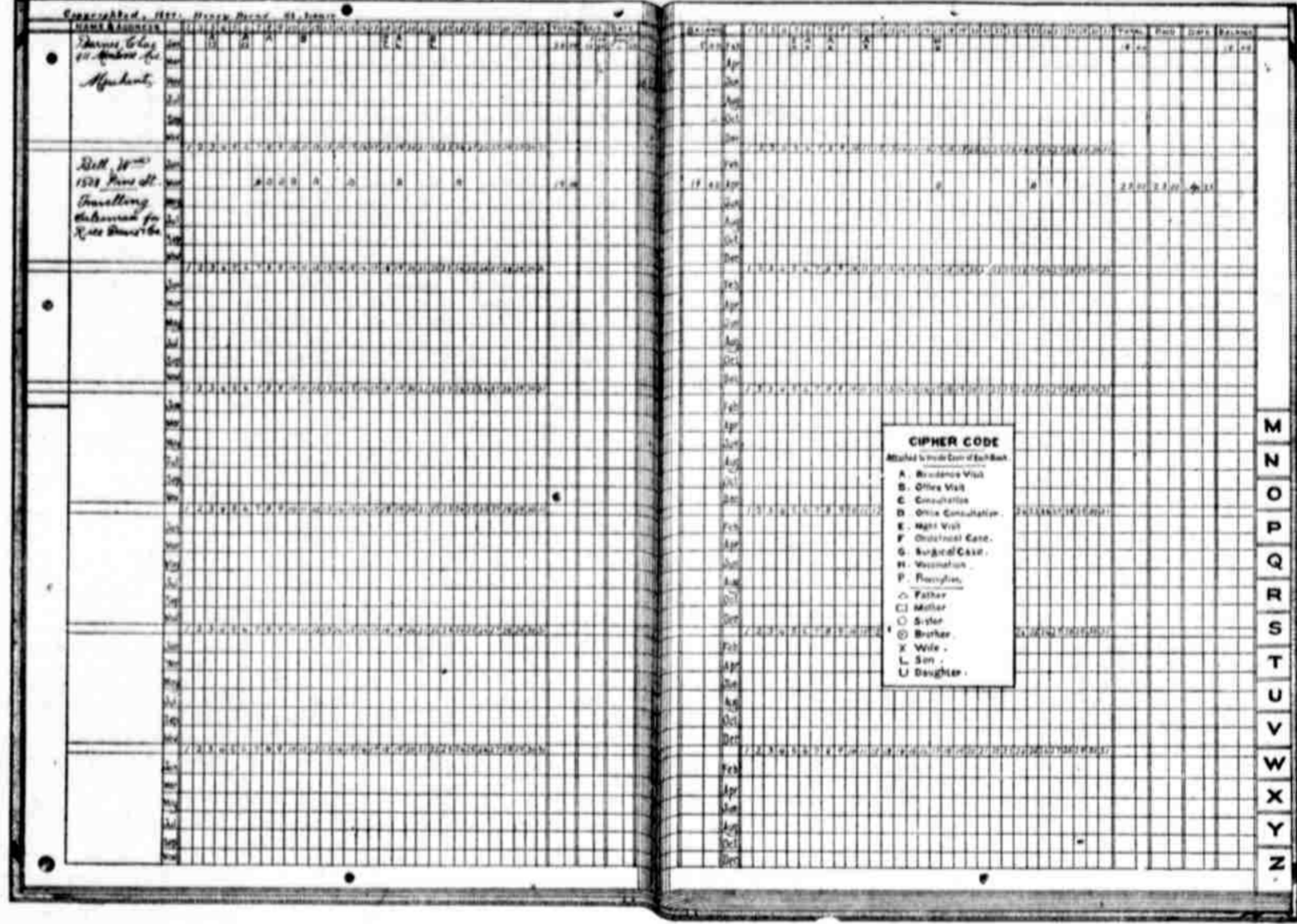
GEN. PLEASONTON.



J. E. B. STUART.

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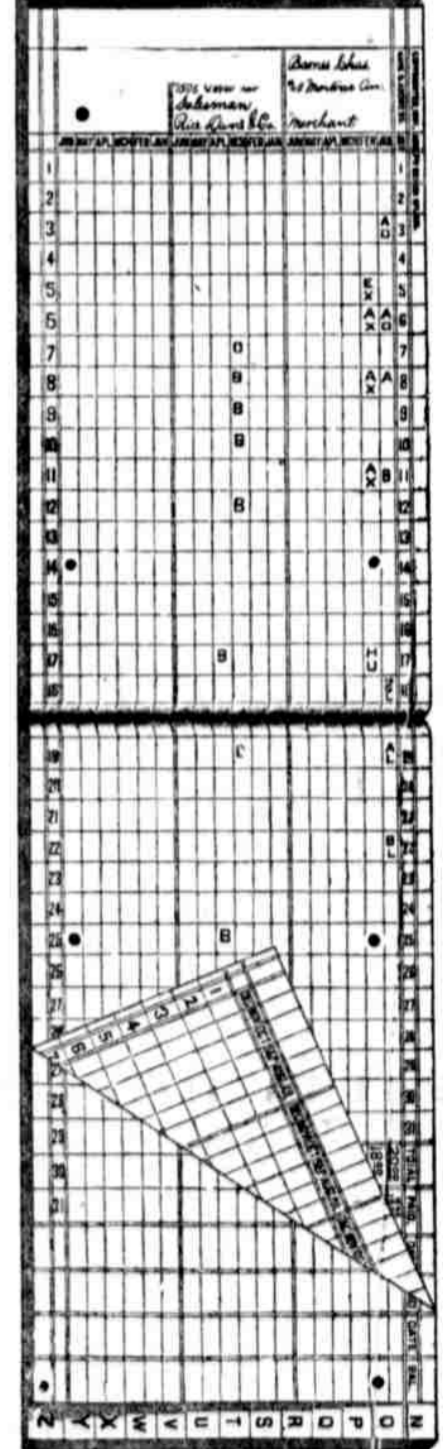
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