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CONTENTS

Editorial	5
Rousseau's Raid on the Montgomery and West Point Railroad, <i>by Edwin C. Bearss</i>	7
"The Money Matters" of a Confederate Soldiers, <i>by Robert Partin</i>	49
Alabama State Currency, 1861-1865, <i>by Milo B. Howard, Jr.</i>	70
A Georgia Confederate Soldier Visits Montgomery, Alabama, 1862-1863, <i>by Allen W. Jones</i>	99
Two Uncollected Civil War Poems of Alexander Beaufort Meek, <i>by Benjamin B. Williams</i>	114
Political Parties and Propaganda in Alabama in the Presidential Election of 1860, <i>by Durward Long</i>	120
Alabama Plantation to Georgia Farm, John Horry Dent and Reconstruction, <i>by Thomas A. Belser, Jr.</i>	136
A Sketch of 12 Months Service in the Mobile Rifle Co., <i>by an Unidentified Member</i>	149
Confederate Prison at Montgomery, Ala., <i>by Earl Antrim</i>	190
Original Interments at Cahaba Cemetery—Now Interred at Mareitta National Cemetery	192

EDITORIAL

This number of the *Quarterly* carries several references to the period of the Confederacy and at the same time sets out historical data applicable to the period in other respects. It will be especially interesting to the reader who is concerned with the activities of the Confederate soldier.

Editor

ROUSSEAU'S RAID ON THE MONTGOMERY
AND WEST POINT RAILROAD

.....
By
.....

Edwin C. Bearss, Research Historian

Vicksburg National Military Park

Vicksburg, Miss.

During the third week of June 1864, several scraps of information reached the Nashville headquarters of Major General Lovell H. Rousseau. (At this stage of the conflict, Rousseau was in charge of the District of Tennessee.) According to this intelligence, a powerful Union column would soon be leaving Memphis. This striking force would be charged with the mission of crushing Major General Nathan B. Forrest's hard-riding Confederate command. Rousseau realized that this might be a difficult task, since Forrest's troopers had recently cut Brigadier General Samuel D. Sturgis' bluecoated column to pieces at the battle of Brices Cross Roads.¹

Reflecting on this information, Rousseau decided that if it were true, it would afford him an excellent opportunity of carrying out a raid on the vital industrial complex centering on Selma, Alabama. Rousseau had been devoting considerable thought to this project for some time. It was apparent to Rousseau that the two Confederate cavalry commands—General Nathan B. Forrest's and Brigadier General Philip D. Roddey's—which were operating in northeast Mississippi and northwest

¹Lovell H. Rousseau, a native of Kentucky, had served in the Mexican War as a captain in the 2d Indiana infantry. In September 1861, Rousseau had been commissioned a colonel in the Federal army and placed in command of the 3d Kentucky Infantry. Rising rapidly in rank, Rousseau was made a major general on October 8, 1862. Rousseau had been placed in charge of the District of Tennessee on November 10, 1863. A Union task force, commanded by General Sturgis, had been cut to pieces by Forrest at Brices Cross Roads on June 10, 1864.

Alabama would be occupied in coping with the Federal Force scheduled to advance out of the Memphis perimeter.²

On June 18, Rousseau sent a telegram to his superior—Major General William T. Sherman. Rousseau pointed out that with a force of 3,000 troopers, he felt confident that he could reach the Selma complex. Once his men had gained possession of the vital industrial center, Rousseau estimated they would be able to destroy between fifty and one hundred million dollars worth of public property. Furthermore, Rousseau observed, his raiders, after leaving Selma, would be able to destroy a number of trestles on the Montgomery and West Point Railroad east of Montgomery. Such action, he pointed out, would sever rail connections between Meridian and Atlanta. Rousseau noted that as the first step in his master plan, he would secretly concentrate a mounted striking force near Guntersville, Alabama. The raiding force was to consist of Colonel Duff G. Thornburgh's brigade, reinforced by the 8th Indiana Cavalry.

As soon as everything was squared away, the raiders would cross the Tennessee River and strike rapidly toward Selma. After wreaking havoc on that important industrial complex, the bluecoats, to avoid being intercepted by the Rebels, would strike northeastward through Montevallo, Ashville, and Gadsden, to Ringgold, Georgia. At Ringgold, a station on the vital Western and Atlantic Railroad, the raiders would entrain on waiting cars. Rousseau's troopers would then return to their bases in the District of Tennessee.³

Sherman was "quite favorably" impressed by Rousseau's plan of operations. The red-bearded general, on the 24th,

²**The War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies**, Series I, Vol. XXXVIII, pt. IV, 530. (Cited hereafter as **O. R.**) At this time, the Union scouts had pinpointed Forrest's command at Fulton, Mississippi, and Roddey's in the neighborhood of Decatur, Alabama.

³**Ibid.**, 530-531. The Western and Atlantic Railroad served as the supply line for General Sherman's "Army Group". General Sherman's "Army Group" was closing in on the Confederate defense belt guarding the approaches to Marietta, Georgia. To reinforce his arguments on the strategic significance of Selma, Rousseau pointed out that the manufacturing establishments located at Selma were "far more extensive and important than" those at Atlanta.

prepared a memorandum for Major General George H. Thomas, Rousseau's immediate superior.

Examining Sherman's dispatch, Thomas found that he was to direct Rousseau to begin collecting a strong force of cavalry and infantry at Pulaski, Tennessee, and Athens and Decatur, Alabama. To confuse the Confederates as to what his ultimate objective was, Rousseau was instructed to let the word get around that these troops were being gathered for the purpose of guarding the Union lines of communications from Forrest. Sherman had advised Thomas that he thought it best if Rousseau did not begin his raid immediately. Sherman was of the opinion that Rousseau should wait until his "Army Group" had compelled General Joseph E. Johnston and his hard-fighting Army of Tennessee to retire to the left bank of the Chattahoochee. In the meantime, Rousseau was to strip his command for action. He was to be prepared to move at a moment's notice.

Thomas immediately relayed this information to Rousseau. He also notified Rousseau that Major General Andrew J. Smith with 9,000 infantry and 3,000 cavalry would soon leave Memphis to engage Forrest. The latest reports filtering out of north Mississippi, Thomas informed Rousseau, had pinpointed Forrest's command at Baldwyn.⁴

Evidently, Rousseau had "ants in his pants"; he wanted to get started immediately. On the 27th he wired Sherman, "I wrote you some days ago and asked to be allowed to go to Selma. I now beg leave to renew my request, and that I be allowed to go when it is understood the force of the enemy in that direction is not too large to be overcome by such force as I can prudently take from here."⁵ Continuing, Rousseau observed that if A. J. Smith could keep Forrest entertained, there was nothing that could prevent the success of his contemplated raid. Hoping to rally support for his pet scheme, Rousseau

⁴*Ibid.*, 582. General Thomas, in addition to commanding the Army of the Cumberland, was in charge of the Department of the Cumberland. The District of Tennessee was assigned to Thomas' administrative command.

⁵*Ibid.*, 624-625.

informed Sherman that Selma was garrisoned by only about 800 men, "nearly all of whom are workmen, the balance boy militia". To reinforce his plea, Rousseau informed Sherman that he was sending a special emissary to visit the "Army Group" and present his argument.⁶

Two days later (the 29th) Sherman replied to the persistent Rousseau's latest message. Glancing at the initial lines of the dispatch, Rousseau undoubtedly beamed on finding that he was authorized to "make all the preparations but do not start till we know something definite of A. J. Smith, and until I have pushed Johnston across the Chattahoochee". But in the next sentence, Sherman poured cold water on Rousseau's pet project. Instead of heading for Selma, Rousseau's raiders were to strike for Montgomery and Opelika, Alabama, and Columbus, Georgia. Sherman believed that these cities were of greater strategic significance than Selma. Since the three designated cities were transportation centers, it seems that Sherman (for the moment) was more interested in destroying Confederate communication than the factories, where the sinews of war were forged.

Rousseau was informed by Sherman that Major General Edward R. S. Canby, the commander of the Military Division of the Mississippi, had been requested to see that forage was accumulated at Pensacola, Florida. In the event that the raiders were unable to join the army before Atlanta, they were to cut their way through to the Gulf. Sherman closed his message with an admonition for Rousseau not to move until ordered.⁷

The next day (the 30th), Sherman sent another telegram to Rousseau. Sherman went into considerable detail concerning the projected raid. Rousseau was informed that as soon as the conditions precedent (the retreat of Johnston's Army across the Chattahoochee, and the fitting out of A. J. Smith's column) had been completed, 2,500 "good cavalry" would strike southward from the Tennessee Valley. Either Rousseau, or a reliable officer whom he should designate, was to be in charge

⁶Ibid., 625.

⁷Ibid., 638.

of the raiding column.

This striking force would be well armed. The command was to be accompanied by a sufficient number of pack mules, loaded with ammunition, salt, sugar, coffee, and flour to supply the basic needs of the troopers. Forage, meat, and corn meal were to be obtained from the farms and plantations which lay along the line of march.

A section of artillery armed with two 3-inch Rodman rifles would accompany the expedition. In case it became necessary to abandon the field pieces, the officer in charge of the column would see that the wheels were cut up, the carriages burned, and the trunnions broken off and wedged in the muzzles.

After leaving Decatur, the expedition would make for Blountsville, crossing the Coosa River at Ten Islands Ford. Having passed the Coosa, the bluecoats would make for either Talladega or Oxford. From either of these points, they were to head for the nearest ford or bridge over the Tallapoosa. After the Tallapoosa had been crossed, the Yankees would drive rapidly southward. They were to strike the Montgomery and West Point Railroad between Tuskegee and Opelika, "breaking up the road and twisting" the rails. If the raiders encountered no serious opposition in wreaking havoc on the railroad, they were to threaten Columbus. After feigning an attack on Columbus, the column was to march up the west bank of the Chattahoochee, and rendezvous with Sherman's "Army Group" before Atlanta.

Rousseau was cautioned to avoid all contact with Rebel infantry. In addition he was not to make any rash attacks on fortified positions. Rousseau was to bear in mind that, if need be, the raiders could make for Pensacola, Rome, or Etowah. All of these were occupied by Federal forces. In an effort to sooth Rousseau's ruffled feelings, Sherman pointed out, "Selma though important, is more easily defended than the route I have named."⁸

⁸Ibid., 648.

Sherman, on July 2, decided to give his subordinate the green light. A message was sent to Nashville, informing Rousseau, "Now is the time for the raid to Opelika." Sherman also requested Rousseau to notify him whether he or one of his subordinates would command the raiding force. In closing, Sherman commented, "Forrest is in Mississippi, and Roddey has also gone there. All other rebel cavalry is here."⁹

The next day, Rousseau replied to his superior's communication. He informed Sherman that he would command the expedition. During his absence, Rousseau announced, Brigadier General Robert S. Granger would be in charge of the District of Tennessee. Rousseau concluded his telegram, "A little preparation will be required. I will announce to you when I am ready to go."¹⁰

By the 6th, Sherman was apparently becoming disenchanted with Rousseau. During the day, he sent two telegrams to Nashville. In the first, he inquired tersely, "Has that expedition started?"

Sherman's second message dealt with the reasons that the present moment was most propitious for the success of the raid. Sherman pointed out that A. J. Smith had left Memphis with a sufficient force to keep Forrest fully occupied. Furthermore, Sherman commented, the Union raiding parties operating near Mobile and out of Baton Rouge and Vicksburg should be able to keep any other Confederate forces operating in the Mississippi and Alabama theater of operations pinned down. Sherman closed his dispatch with the observation, "If managed with secrecy and rapidity the expedition cannot fail of success and

⁹O. R., Series I, Vol. XXXVIII, pt. V, 19. Evidently, the Federal intelligence service was operating most efficiently. On June 18, Roddey had been directed by Lieutenant General Stephen D. Lee to concentrate his command, except for 350 men belonging to the brigade led by Colonel Josiah Patterson, at Corinth, Mississippi. O. R., Series I, Vol. XXJIX, pt. II, 655.

¹⁰O. R., Series I, Vol. XXXVIII, pt. V, 41.

will accomplish much good."¹¹

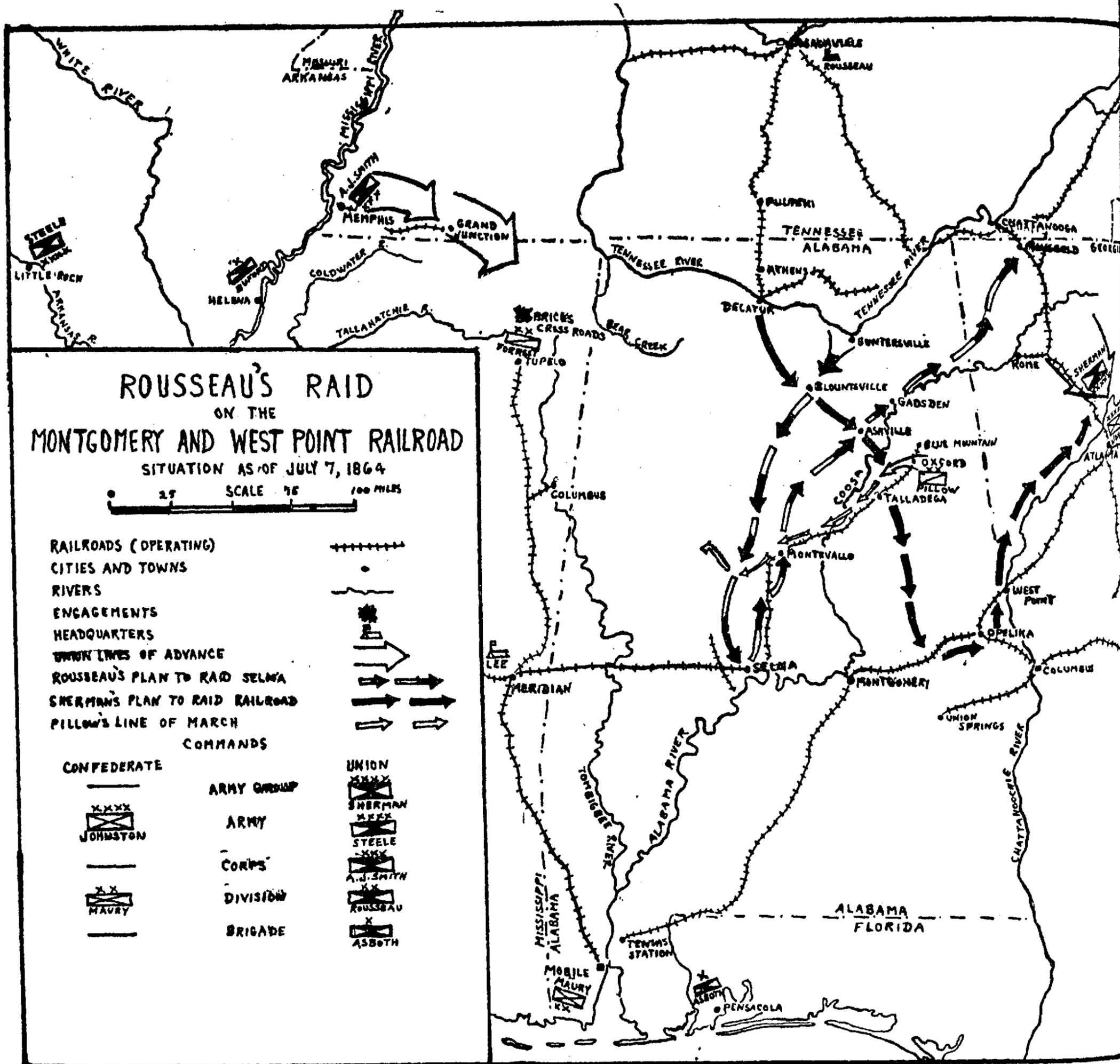
Faced with the manifold risks that were inherent in a dash deep into the Confederate "Heartland", Rousseau wanted to take with him officers and men whom he knew "to be of tried courage and efficiency". Consequently, he selected the best men from the 8th Indiana, the 5th Iowa, the 2d Kentucky, the 9th Ohio, and the 4th Tennessee (Union) Cavalry Regiments to constitute his raiding force. At the moment, most of the troopers (except those drawn from the 4th Tennessee) were dismounted. Rousseau therefore encountered considerable difficulty in outfitting his command with suitable mounts. In the end, the general was forced to requisition horses from other units which were not slated to participate in the raid.

In accordance with Sherman's suggestion that a section of rifled artillery accompany the expedition, Rousseau determined to take along a section of 10-pounder Parrot rifles. These two field pieces were manned by the cannoneers of the 1st Battery, Michigan Light Artillery.

For administrative purposes, as well as ease of handling, Rousseau divided his raiding force into two brigades. Colonel Thomas J. Harrison of the 8th Indiana was placed in command of the 1st Brigade. Harrison's unit consisted of his own regiment and the 2d Kentucky. The leader of the 9th Ohio—Colonel William D. Hamilton—assumed command of the 2d Brigade. The remainder of the units assigned to the raiding force comprised Hamilton's brigade.

Before the expedition left Decatur, it became apparent to Rousseau that a shortage of officers in the 5th Ohio made it imperative that Colonel Hamilton give his undivided attention to his own regiment. Rousseau accordingly placed Lieutenant Colonel Matthewson T. Patrick of the 5th Iowa in charge of the

¹¹*Ibid*, 71. Major General Henry W. Slocum was in command of a powerful task force that was, at this moment, advancing eastward out of the Vicksburg perimeter toward Jackson, Mississippi. A cavalry force led by Lieutenant Colonel Thomas Logan was harassing the Confederates in the Baton Rouge area at this time. It appears that Sherman's report of Federal activities directed against Mobile was premature.



2d Brigade. Between them, the shortage of horses and the administrative difficulties kept Rousseau from concentrating his command in the Decatur staging area before the evening of July 9.¹²

While Rousseau was exerting himself to get the expedition organized and under way, he was disturbed to receive Sherman's two telegrams of the 6th inquiring if the raid had started. From Nashville, on the 7th, Rousseau replied to his superior's message. Rousseau felt called upon to defend his conduct. He notified Sherman of his difficulties in organizing an efficient striking force. Rousseau closed his dispatch on a confident note. He advised "Uncle Billy" that he would proceed to Decatur on the 8th. His raiders would move out of the advance base at daybreak on the following morning.

Rousseau's communication was in Sherman's hands by nightfall. Replying immediately, Sherman pointed out that he had no fresh instructions or information to convey, but he expected Rousseau "to leave Decatur on the 9th".¹⁴ Sherman observed that, according to the latest reports reaching his headquarters, Roddey's brigade had returned to the Muscle Shoals area. If these were true, Rousseau could send a small infantry command to Waterloo. This force would keep Roddey occupied by threatening to cross the Tennessee River and burn the bridge across Big Bear Creek. The destruction of this bridge, Sherman commented, would sever Roddey's direct line of communications with Iuka.¹⁵

¹²O. R., Series I, Vol. XXXVIII, pt. II, 904-905. Preparatory to his departure from Decatur, Rousseau appointed the following officers to his staff: Captain Alfred Matthias (the 5th Iowa), provost marshal, Lieutenant John Frey (the 9th Ohio), and Lieutenant Charles A. B. Langdon (the 5th Iowa), quartermaster and assistant quartermaster, Doctor Luther D. Waterman (the 8th Indiana) chief surgeon, Captain Thomas C. Williams (the 19th U. S. Infantry) assistant adjutant general, Captain Edward Ruger (the 13th Wisconsin Infantry) chief topographical engineer, and Captain Thomas A. Elkin (the 5th Kentucky Cavalry) aide-de-camp.

¹³O. R., Series I, Vol. XXXVIII, pt. V, 81.

¹⁴Ibid., 82.

¹⁵Ibid. Actually, the report that Roddey had returned to the Tennessee Valley was untrue. The Confederate force reported to be at Tuscumbia was actually Colonel Patterson's small command. Rousseau, realizing that this force was too small to interfere with his expedition, decided against sending a force of infantry to Waterloo.

Again, Sherman took it upon himself to warn Rousseau that, while he could spread rumors that he was going to Selma, he was not to go there under any circumstances. Sherman again emphasized the point that the Montgomery and West Point Railroad was the only direct rail link connecting the railroads of Mississippi and Alabama. Its destruction was mandatory. After outlining the steps being taken by A. J. Smith, Canby and himself to keep the Confederate forces in Georgia, Mississippi, and Alabama occupied, Sherman went into detail on the techniques he wished Rousseau to employ in wrecking the railroad.¹⁶

As soon as he had accomplished his mission, Rousseau would attempt to return to Decatur. If pursued, he would make for either Rome, Kingston, or Allatoona.

Sherman also had some pertinent advice for his subordinate. Rousseau was not to take any wagons. He was to carry his excess gear on pack horses. The column was to travel early and late, resting during the heat of the day and in the middle of the night. Rousseau was admonished to spare his horses during the first week on the road, thus keeping the mounts in good shape for the return trip.

Sherman notified Rousseau that the reports filtering into his GHQ indicated that Brigadier General Gideon J. Pillow led the only Rebel force operating in the area into which Rousseau would be advancing. According to Sherman's informants, Pillow was operating east of the Coosa River.¹⁷

Actually, the Union information pinpointing Pillow's command east of the Coosa River was outdated. June 29 found General Pillow's mounted division camped at Oxford. During the day, Pillow received a message from his superior, Lieutenant General Stephen D. Lee, the commander of the Department of Alabama, Mississippi, and East Louisiana. Lee directed Pillow

¹⁶*Ibid.* Upon reaching the railroad, Rousseau would see that the ties were placed in piles and burned; the rails would be heated until they were red hot in the middle. The troopers would then take hold of the ends and give them a twist.

¹⁷*Ibid.*

to move his command (except 300 men who would be left at Blue Mountain) by easy stages to Montevallo.¹⁸

Before leaving Oxford on the 1st, Pillow summoned Lieutenant Colonel Henry J. Livingston to his headquarters. (Livingston's Alabama Cavalry Regiment was an organic part of the brigade led by Brigadier General James H. Clanton. At this time, however, Livingston's regiment was under temporary assignment to Pillow's division.) Pillow told Livingston that his regiment was to move from Oxford to Blue Mountain. Upon reaching Blue Mountain, Livingston would establish a line of outposts connecting that point with Cave Springs, Georgia. The troopers manning these posts would keep a sharp watch for any Union raiding force striking for the Alabama and Tennessee Rivers Railroad and the iron works in the Blue Mountain area. If a Federal striking force were sighted, Pillow told Livingston, he was to relay the news to General Lee immediately.¹⁹

At Montevallo, where he arrived on the 6th, Pillow found orders awaiting him. General Lee wanted Pillow to hasten to northeast Mississippi and report to General Forrest. At this time Forrest needed all the reinforcements he could get to cope with A. J. Smith's powerful column.

¹⁸**O. R.**, Series I, Vol. XXXIX, pt. II, 673. At this time, Pillow's command consisted of two brigades—one led by Colonel Charles G. Armistead, the other by Colonel James J. Neely. Armistead's brigade included: the 8th Alabama Cavalry Regiment, Lewis' Alabama Cavalry Battalion, and the 12th Mississippi Cavalry Regiment. The following units constituted Neely's Brigade: the 12th, 14th and 15th Tennessee Cavalry Regiments. General Lee, on June 1, had placed Pillow in charge of a specially constituted force. Pillow's mission was to defend the iron foundries and coal mines in northeast Alabama. There were two Alabama cavalry regiments bearing the designation of the 8th. One was commanded by Colonel Charles P. Ball, the other by Colonel Livingston. In this narrative, the latter unit will be referred to as Colonel Livingston's Regiment.

¹⁹**Ibid.**, 681. The brigade commanded by General Clanton consisted of the 6th Alabama Cavalry, Livingston's Alabama Cavalry Regiment, and Clanton's Alabama Battery. At this time, only Livingston's regiment and Clanton's battery were operating in northeast Alabama. The 6th Alabama Cavalry was on detached service with the Army of Tennessee.

Before Pillow could issue marching orders to his command, he was approached by Colonel Charles P. Ball. (The colonel had assumed temporary command of Colonel Charles G. Armistead's brigade, when the colonel had been wounded in the attack on La Fayette, Georgia, on June 24.) Ball informed Pillow that his men's horses were badly used up. Before his brigade could continue, Ball felt it would be necessary to re-shoe the horses. Consequently, Pillow was compelled to inform Lee that it would be 48 hours before "operation horseshoe" could be completed, and Ball's brigade again hit the road. Pillow, however, promised Lee that he would start Colonel James J. Neely's brigade for Mississippi at daybreak.²⁰

Thus, by the morning of the 8th, the rear echelon of Pillow's command was riding out of Montevallo, en route to Forrest's support. This was 24 hours before Rousseau's raiders were scheduled to depart from Decatur.²¹

Following Pillow's departure from Oxford, a serious dispute broke out between the commanders of the Confederate units operating in northeast Alabama. A mounted bluecoated patrol out of Rome dashed into Cave Springs on July 7 and captured several wagons belonging to the Confederate government. Reaching Blue Mountain, the courier carrying the news of the foray apparently failed to report to Captain George Goldthwaite, the post commandant. Since Goldthwaite was the officer designated by Generals Lee and Pillow to relay news of Union activities in this area to department GHQ, the captain was disturbed about the failure to apprise him of the Cave Springs raid.

An irate captain immediately approached Lieutenant Colonel John L. Chandler, who was commanding Livingston's

²⁰*Ibid.*, 689-690. Pillow, plagued by the lack of a supply train, was forced to see that the gear belonging to Ball's brigade was sent to Mississippi by rail.

²¹Neely's troopers proceeded to Columbus, Mississippi, where they were dismounted and transported to Tupelo by rail. Neely's command arrived at Tupelo on the morning of the 10th, in plenty of time to participate in the pending battle. Ball's brigade, however, lagged far behind. Before reaching the railhead at Columbus, news of A. J. Smith's retreat had reached Colonel Ball. At the same time, orders were received for the brigade to return to Montevallo.

Regiment during the commanding officer's absence. Gaining admittance to Chandler's headquarters, Goldthwaite protested what he considered a gross disobedience of orders.

As soon as he had received Goldthwaite's protest, Colonel Chandler forwarded it to Lieutenant Colonel Washington T. Lary of the 6th Alabama Cavalry. (During the days immediately following Pillow's departure for Montevallo, the 6th Alabama had been reassigned to Clanton's brigade and transferred from the Atlanta area to Blue Mountain. Since General Clanton was on leave, Colonel Lary was serving as acting brigade commander at this time.)

When advised of Goldthwaite's protest, Lary drafted a memorandum. He informed the captain, "As this brigade (Clanton's) is not reporting either to Generals Lee or Pillow, the lieutenant-colonel commanding respectfully declines reporting his information to Captain G. unless he deems it necessary for him to be informed and the lieutenant-colonel will judge of the necessity."²²

If General Lee, who was exerting himself to the limit to cope with the strong Union forces threatening his department from Memphis, Vicksburg, and New Orleans, made any reply to this challenge to his authority on Colonel Lary's part, it does not appear in the *Official Records*.

At the time that Rousseau was completing his preparations for his dash on the Montgomery and West Point Railroad, the organized Confederate forces in northeast Alabama had been reduced to the barest minimum—the under strength brigade commanded by General Clanton. To make matters worse, Colonel Lary (the acting brigade commander) in his dispute with Goldthwaite had advanced the point that the brigade was not subject to Lee's orders. A situation such as this would undoubtedly provide a climate favorable to the success of Rousseau's undertaking.

Rousseau's inability to concentrate his entire command at Decatur on the evening of July 8 left him with only one alterna-

²²*Ibid.*, 691-692.

tive. He was compelled to postpone the hour of departure. New orders were drafted, directing the men to be ready to march at daybreak on the 10th. In fact, Federal staff work was so poorly coordinated that it was the 9th before the crack 8th Indiana Cavalry marched from their camp to the Nashville depot. There the troopers entrained on the waiting cars of the Central Alabama Railroad which carried them to Decatur.

On the night of the 9th, confusion reigned in the Union camps, in and around Decatur. The Federal officers sought desperately to complete last-minute preparations. There was little rest for the men. It was found necessary to requisition the horses and saddles of the 2d Tennessee Cavalry (Union), which was slated to remain at Decatur, to round out the equipment of the 8th Indiana. To facilitate their transfer from Nashville to the forward staging area, the Indianians had left their mounts and saddles behind.²³

As daybreak approached, the officer in charge of the pack train informed Rousseau that his animals were not ready to move. Rousseau had only one recourse. Once again, he was forced to reschedule the hour of departure.

About noon, the general finally received the welcomed tidings that the pack train was ready to move. At this, Rousseau proceeded to alert his two brigade commanders to have their troopers reach to mount at a moment's notice. At 1 p.m., Rousseau had his bugler sound "Boots and Saddles". The 2,500 hard-riding troopers swung into their saddles. Next, the general gave the command to "move out!" The long blue column rode out of Decatur, taking the Somerville road. Since the cavalrymen were traveling light (Except for arms, ammunitions, rations, and gum blankets, all camp and garrison equipment had been left behind.), and there was plenty of excitement and adventure in the offing, spirits were high.²⁴

A short distance southeast of Decatur, the road which the column was following left the Tennessee Valley and climbed up into the hills. This made the march all the more pleasant.

²³O. R., Series I, Vol. XXXVIII, pt. II, 878, 905.

²⁴Ibid.

Nightfall on July 10 found the raiders camped at Somerville, 17 miles southeast of Decatur.

The next day, the raiders hit the road just as dawn was breaking. Heading southward from Somerville, the Federals crossed Sand Mountain, passed through the mountain village of Mt. Alvis, and halted for the night in Brown's Valley, near Blountsville. On the 12th, the raiders, after fording the Locust Fork of the Black Warrior, negotiated rugged Straight Mountain. Nightfall found the troopers bivouacked five miles northwest of Ashville.

Before retiring, General Rousseau summoned Major Meshack Stephens (the commander of the 4th Tennessee) and his aide-de-camp, Captain Thomas A. Elkin, to his command post. The general told the two officers that he had learned from some of the inhabitants that there was a large supply of forage stored at Ashville. He was afraid that if the Confederate authorities learned of the Union advance, they would put the torch to the forage. To prevent the application of a scorched earth policy, Rousseau thought it would be wise for the 4th Tennessee to surprise and occupy the town during the night.

In accordance with Rousseau's wishes, Major Stephens and Captain Elkin turned out the Tennesseans. Moving forward under the cover of darkness, the bluecoated troopers surprised the sleeping town. With the advent of daylight, the two officers were delighted to discover that, in addition to a large supply of corn, they had captured a considerable quantity of commissary stores. When Rousseau, accompanied by the rest of his column, entered Ashville on the morning of the 13th, he called for Lieutenant John Frey, his chief quartermaster. Frey was given the task of seeing that the forage and commissary stores were divided and issued to the command.²⁵

Considerable time was wasted while the men were drawing rations and feeding their horses. The afternoon was well along before the bluecoats evacuated Ashville. As the Yankees pushed on toward the Coosa, they had their first contact with a hostile force since leaving Decatur. Learning of the raiders' approach,

²⁵*Ibid.*, 905.

a party of Confederate irregulars took cover in the underbrush which flanked the road. The partisans held their fire until all the column, except the rear guard, had passed. (At this time, the troopers of the 5th Iowa were bringing up the rear.) Suddenly, the guerrillas opened fire, knocking two of the Iowans' officers out of their saddles. One of the officers was killed, the other wounded. Fanning out on either side of the road, the grim Iowans made a determined effort to flush the unseen foe. The partisans, however, melted away into the woods and escaped.²⁸

At dusk, the raiders reached the Coosa River at Greensport. Here, the Federals were overjoyed to discover that a ferryboat was moored to the opposite bank. Rousseau called for volunteers. These men were to cross the river and secure the boat. The general's call was eagerly responded to. The ubiquitous Captain Elkin was placed in charge of the volunteers. Plunging into the water, the men swam across the river and secured the ferry.

Having heard rumors that a small Rebel force was operating east of the Coosa, Rousseau decided to throw a 200-man detachment across the river that very evening. This detachment would be charged with the mission of establishing a bridgehead covering the Greensport crossing and the ford at Ten Islands, which was four miles downstream. It was apparent to Rousseau that, with the darkness rapidly falling, it would be impossible for him to cross his entire command on the night of the 13th.

A detachment composed of picked men from the 8th Indiana led by Major Thomas Graham crossed the Coosa without difficulty. To support the Hoosiers in case the Confederates made a night attack on the bridgehead, Rousseau sent the Michiganders with their section of 10-pounder Parrotts across the river. Satisfied that the force holding the bridgehead was strong enough to deal with any eventuality, Rousseau permitted the rest of his command to bivouac for the night.

²⁸*Ibid.* Captain William Curl was the officer killed; Captain Jeremiah C. Wilcox was the one wounded.

Before retiring, the general had his brigade and regimental commanders make a thorough inspection of their units. The officers were directed to winnow out any men or horses that looked as if they would be unable to keep up with the expedition as it drove deeper into the heart of Alabama. In all, about 300 horses and 200 men were found who gave evidence of being unable to maintain the rapid pace which Rousseau knew was necessary to insure the success of the raid. The casuals were detached. With the broken-down horses, they proceeded by easy marches to Guntersville. After crossing the Tennessee River at that point, they succeeded in reaching the Federal lines without incident.²⁷

Evidently, news of the bluecoats' advance traveled slowly. It was the evening of July 13—24 hours after the event—before General Clanton received the intelligence that the foe had occupied Ashville. (General Clanton had just returned to duty and resumed command of his brigade.) Upon receipt of this information, Clanton, hoping to ascertain in what direction the Yankees were moving, issued marching orders to his command.

By 10:30 p.m., the troopers of the 6th Alabama and Livingston's Regiment had squared away their gear, drawn their rations and ammunition, and departed from Blue Mountain. Clanton believed that, after leaving Ashville, the raiders would make for the nearest crossing of the Coosa. He struck out at a fast pace for the Greensport ferry. Reaching the vicinity of the ferry about 1 a.m., Clanton was told by the inhabitants that the Federals were crossing the river.

After leaving instructions for his subordinates to have their troopers ready to attack the Union bridgehead at day-break, Clanton sent a message to Major William T. Walthall, the Confederate commander at Talladega. Besides advising the major of his plans, Clanton urged him to rush all the troops that could be raised in the Talladega area to Blue Mountain. Walthall's soldiers would be used to assist Clanton's cavalry in checking the Unionists' advance.

²⁷Ibid.