

Account of  
GENERAL FORREST'S LAST FIGHT  
Dr. R. D. Jackson.

At a meeting of Camp Forrest at Woodlawn, I was appointed to read a report of Genl. Forrest's last fight. I was at Selma during the coming advance on that place, and from my recollection and from historical reports, I have roughly gotten up this paper, which was never called for by the Commander of the Camp. It has not been re-written. It may be of some interest, and I therefore leave it with this paper.

I joined Genl. Forrest the day after the fight in Selma. He went to my house in Hamburg. After a short rest he went into the neighborhood of Marion Junction. I directed him to stop with my friend, Dr. Jones, while there who would give him good accommodations, which he did.

(signed) R. D. J.

*This paper was written by  
my father Robt Dandridge Jackson  
originally in his own hand writing. opened about 1960 -  
J. M. Jackson  
Birmingham*

*Fredrick Mitchell Jackson*

At your request that I should prepare an account of the last fight by Genl. Forrest for whom our Camp was named, I submit the following account gathered from history and my personal observation of Genl. Forrest's engagements around Selma for your entertainment on this occasion.

Fully 75000 soldiers were organized by the 1st of March, 1865 to invade Alabama--in Memphis, Vicksburg, Mobile, Pensacola. But it was the command of Genl. Willson on the Tennessee River that gave Genl. Forrest the greatest concern.

He clearly foresaw that the object of the enemy was the invasion of Alabama. So he moved his headquarters to West Point and concentrated his troops in that region. In the mean time, Genl. Wilson was concentrating his large force near Waterloo and Gravelly Springs on the Tennessee, and by the middle of March had completed the organization of one of the most magnificent bodies of mounted troops the world ever saw. "Enough" as Shakespeare would have it, "to fight the soul of any fearful adversary." Early in March were gathered in his camp 27,000 cavalymen, over half of whom were mounted. On the 22nd of March he started Southward to Selma. Genl. Boynten says: "They were all Veterans in excellent discipline and condition and full of enterprise and zeal." On differing roads the command started Southward in three columns with orders to rendezvous at Jasper, Walker County. From there Genl. Willson proceeded to Eliten, arriving there March 30th. Knowing full well with whom he had to deal, he prepared himself for a quick march to Selma.

Forrest was fully informed as to Willson's movements and strength. (His command consisted of escorts 64, Armstrong's brigade 1432, Adams' Brig. 1077, Stark's Brig. 1013, Hudson's battery 62--total 3648.) Willson had left his wagon train between the two forks of the Warrior River in a wild and rugged region where it could be defended by the dismounted Veterans left there for that purpose. He was now in light weight and confident of whipping Forrest on any ground and of going right on to Selma. Not being aware that Forrest had ordered Genl. Jackson to move from West Point to Centerville, he ordered Genl. Croxton to go at once to Tuscaloosa with his 2,000 men and destroy all the public buildings at that place. Croxton had not marched a day before he was practically surrounded by Forrest's Cavalry. On the afternoon of the second day he came into the road along which the rear of Jackson's division had just passed in the direction of Centerville. He determined to

push on to Tuscaloosa. Posting two companies as a vedette, he had proceeded but a few miles when the vedette was fiercely attacked. Capt. Parish in command was wounded and his entire command captured. Had Croxten known that by mere good luck he had come in between the rear of Jackson's command and his artillery, he could have captured all of Jackson's artillery easily. Jackson was for the time ignorant of his presence and when he, Jackson, retraced his steps to strike him he changed his course from Tuscaloosa and ran away so rapidly. Jackson stopped the pursuit and sent word to the commander at Tuscaloosa to be on the lookout for Croxten, and pushed on towards Centerville. This performance with Croxten delayed Jackson in his march for several hours, enabling Genl. Willson to destroy the Centerville bridge. Had it not been for the delay with Croxten he could have whipped McCook who had been sent there to destroy the bridge, attacked the rear flank of Long and Upton as Forrest had planned, and possibly have held Willson in check long enough to give Chalmers time to reach Plantersville. Genl. Forrest had taken every precaution to concentrate his command and throw his full force between the Union Column and Selma. His plan of attack on Willson at this time was one of his most brilliant conceptions. It failed only because of the capture of two most important dispatches by the enemy, to Jackson. From these dispatches Willson learned that Forrest with a small force of his command was in his immediate front and that Jackson with his strong force was encamped the night before three miles from Scottsville, and also that Chalmers was at Marion and had been ordered to cross Cahaba River and hasten to join Forrest north of Selma. On the evening of the 31st of March having sent these dispatches, which were captured, to Jackson, Forrest also sent a courier to Chalmers to hurry to Ebenezer Church in the neighborhood of Plantersville where he would join him in front of the advancing foe. Nothing more brilliant could have been conceived in the plan mapped out for the destruction of Willson. He at the head of Crossland's brigade, Rody's division, a detail of 200 men from Armstrong's brigade and the State troops under Dan Adams in front of Willson's advance, would offer resistance at every available position from Randolph to Selma. Jackson, unknown to Willson was to follow in the rear of the Union Column. As soon as Chalmers should come up with his forces Forrest would choose his position for a fight, and while engaging the enemy's front, Jackson was to assail him in the rear and flanks. Had the dispatches not been captured and the Forrest plan been fulfilled, one of the greatest cavalry battles in the World's history would have been

fought on this ground. On the afternoon of March 31st while Crossland, Dan Adams and Rody were being driven Southward by Upton, Forrest arrived on the ground and was moving from Centerville towards Montevallo with his staff, the escort company of 70 men and 200 of Armstrong's Command. He came into a road over which the Confederates were retreating and along which the Federals were moving. Having approached to within less than one hundred yards of the Federals who were in considerable disorder, Forrest ordered his men to draw their six shooters, and boldly at the head of his escort ordered his men in columns of four to charge directly into the road. This threw the Federal cavalry into much confusion and drove them from the scene. Having captured a number of prisoners he learned from them that Willson was between him and Selma. With this information he left the main road and after a swift ride of ten or twelve miles, he passed around the Federal Column and reached his command about ten o'clock that night in the vicinity of Randolph and in the path of the enemy.

As the divisions of Upton and Long advanced towards Selma on the morning of April 1st, they encountered small detachments of Confederates and drove them back with slight effort until they reached Ebenezer Church several miles north of Plantersville. Here Forrest read a message from Chalmers stating that on account of obstacles in his way he could not reach Plantersville that day. Forrest was furious with rage on receiving this dispatch. He sent another urgent message to Chalmers saying that Willson was pressing him hard with an overwhelming force and that he would admit of no excuse in not uniting with him on that day at Plantersville, or between that place and Selma. (Some people censured Chalmers for his slow movements.) Forrest says that Chalmers did not move with the swiftness and alacrity that the emergency demanded.

Forrest, realizing his desperate situation and the necessity of holding the enemy in check until Chalmers could reach Plantersville, selected a strong position at the crossing of Bayless Creek and placed his command in the best possible position. Forrest with his escort and 200 of Armstrong's men took a position commanding the ford. To his left was Crossland's 300 Kentuckians, while on his right was placed a detachment of State troops under Adams. His entire force did not number 2,000. To assail this force Willson had Upton's division 3900, Long's division 5127 and two full batteries of artillery. At 4 o'clock the Federals appeared. Pushing them forward Willson and Long ordered a rash sabre charge. As soon as Forrest

saw these gallant troopers riding down upon him with sabres in the air he placed himself in line with his escort and Crossland's Kentuckians, and ordered them to reserve their fire until the enemy had arrived to within 100 yards of them. They were then to draw their revolvers and with one in each hand to ride in among them and use their weapons at close quarters. A horse of one of the front platoons ran away with his rider, rushed thru the Confederates and struck the wheels of one of the guns with such force as to break it off, and the soldier falling to the ground was slain with the ramrod of the gunner. As the main body of the charging column swept into the Confederate line, Forrest with his command rode into them and the desperate character of the encounter can be better imagined than described. It was one of the most terrific hand to hand conflicts which occurred during the war between cavalry soldiers. Lieutenant Conan says : "I saw Genl. Forrest surrounded by six Federals at one time and all slashing at him. One of them struck one of his pistols and knocked it from his hand. Private Phill Dodd spurred his horse to the General's rescue and shot the Federal soldier who was so near him, thus enabling Forrest to draw his other pistol with which he shot another of the group who was still persistent in his attack upon our Commander." Forrest and Boon were both wounded. Altho they rode thru and over us, those that survived were beaten back and we did not leave the field until we saw the main column advancing.

Just as this fight was commencing Upton's division advanced upon the flank of the Confederates. Striking the militia, these without offering much resistance ran from the field in much disorder, compelling the entire Confederate line to retreat, losing three guns and 200 prisoners. A desperate running fight was continued to Plantersville. Forrest was sorely pressed, but Conan and the escort and the rear guard gathered around him determined to sacrifice themselves to the last man rather than permit their General to be killed, and kept off his pursuers until he was safe. The fighting through the day had been constant over twenty-four miles since morning. Confederates camped at Plantersville and Federals in front of the place 24 miles from Selma. At daylight the next morning the Federals advanced towards Selma, Long's division in front, closely followed by Upton. Long was directed to cross over to the Summerfield road as he approached the City of Selma and to develop the Confederate line as soon as he could arrive in front of the works. Without much opposition the Union forces were in sight of Selma and in line of battle about 4 o'clock P.M.

Forrest had arrived in Selma early on the morning of the 2nd and immediately reported to Genl. Taylor who was the departmental Commander over him, and received his final instructions from this officer, who as the place was being invested, escaped by train towards Demopolis. Genl. Taylor said of Forrest: "He appeared, horse and rider, covered with blood and announced the enemy at his heels, and that I must move at once to escape capture. I felt anxious for him, but he said he was unhurt and would cut his way through as most of his men had done. My engine started towards Meridian, and barely escaped." Being thus left in complete command of all the forces at Selma, Forrest bent all his energies to make the best possible defence of the City. It was fortified with a single line of works. The most intense excitement prevailed among all classes. Everyone who could had fled to the country. Relying chiefly on Armstrong's brigade, which numbered 1432 men, he placed to hold the left of the Confederate position Rody's men on the right and the militia in the centre. Rearward of these was Forrest with his escort and the Kentuckians.

In order to be safe from any advance of Chalmers, yet absent from Forrest, Long posted a regiment in his rear to protect his led horses and pack train and formed the rest of his division, 4500 strong, across the Summerfield road and behind a low ridge, concealed from the view of the Confederates. As long was advancing to the attack he was informed that Chalmers was in his rear. Seeing that if he halted at this junction the assault on our marks might fail, he in person led a desperate charge of his troops upon Armstrong's position. With courage and stubbornness Armstrong stood his ground. Genl. Baynton in his life of Genl. Thomas says, that in less time than it takes to tell it over 300 of Long's men were killed and wounded. Long himself was stricken down together with two of his brigade commanders and four Colonds. At the same time Upton moved upon that part of the line guarded by the militia. These troops again fled, leaving a gap through which the Union soldiers swarmed. Forrest seeing these troops giving away, rushed into the break of his line and endeavored to stem the tide until Rody could be moved over to Armstrong's support. But in over-whelming force he was driven back before a new alignment could be formed, forcing Armstrong and Rody to withdraw their troops to a second line. Here again resistance was made until Willson's forces had over-lapped them in both flank and rear. Seeing further resistance hopeless, Forrest ordered his dismounted men to secure their horses and escape as best they could. Armstrong still holding his

men together and conspicuous for his personal daring and cool head, covered the stampede into and through the City, and was by all odds the hero of the day. Forrest with his escort and a number of men from various detachments who rallied around him, escaped over the Burnsville road, not, however, without a collision with the enemy over the same road upon which Willson's troops had advanced. He was again compelled to fight his way through, and it was here that his last personal encounter of the war took place, in which he slew a Federal cavalryman, who with rashness had endeavored to cut him down. This was the 30th enemy that the personal prowess of Genl. Forrest had placed hors de combat in a hand to hand encounter since his first engagement at Sacramento in 1861. He closed his fighting career at Selma, having had twenty-nine horses shot under him during the War.