



THE CAVALRY SKIRMISHER.

[Edwin Forbes: An Artist's Story of the Great War, 1890]

Chapter 15

The Cavalryman 1858 - 1865

The Trojans

The people of Troy, Ohio call themselves *Trojans* (an obvious reference to their warlike predecessors-in-name, the *Trojans* of ancient times). But these 1850s Trojans were not warriors, they were just industrious people trying to build a town, manufacture some goods for export, and run various farm-related businesses. All this changed for them in 1861, with the outbreak of *Civil War*. Like the ancients, these 19th century Ohio Trojans heeded the call to arms with alacrity. They were volunteers all - there was no need to draft men from Miami County, Ohio. Those who fought knew their cause and believed in it unswervingly: they were staunch *Unionists*. Most of Troy's men entered the fray, and about one man of every three who served was killed or wounded.¹ It was a bloody time.

The first Van Tuyls to settle in the town of Troy - population then about 2500 - were two farm boys from across the river in Staunton Township: Henry M. and Erastus J. Van Tuyl. They were the sons of Oliver Van Tuyl, farmer - the man who had led the Van Tuyls from Seneca County to Dayton, Ohio back in the 1820s. They both married young, and both chose life in town rather than life on the farm. Henry took up the woodworker's trade, and his younger brother Erastus apparently followed him into that line of work.² Henry presumably settled in Troy at or before his 1855 marriage, with the teenaged Erastus following as soon as he was able.

Troy was booming in the 1850s, its population having grown fivefold over the previous two decades because of its strategic position on the Miami and Erie Canal. Oliver Van Tuyl, who had moved here just at the time the canal opened, must have prospered from the more than doubling of prices for wheat, corn, and hogs that directly resulted from the canal's operation - especially since he had two teenage sons to help work the farm.³ By the 1850s, canal traffic had

¹ Wheeler, T., "Troy, The Nineteenth Century," 1970, pp. 82-102. Wheeler estimates that 270 men from Troy saw service, and that 14 were killed in action, 30 died from sickness and disease, and 40 were wounded. We estimate that perhaps 1 out of 8 residents of Troy were men of military service age. If so, about 80% of them would have served, and 31% of those serving would become casualties, a percentage which is similar to the overall Civil War casualty rate of 29% [World Almanac 1995, pg. 163]. In contrast, U.S. casualty rates in other wars were: WWI, 6.6%; WWII, 6.6%; Vietnam, 2.4%; Persian Gulf, 0.16% [World Almanac, pg. 163]

² In U.S. Pension application #762740, Henry declared that he was a cabinetmaker. Erastus' skill at cabinetmaking was remembered by his great-grandson, Bob Van Tuyl, who knew nothing of Henry. He is listed in both his death certificate and the census of 1860 as "carpenter".

³ Wheeler, pg. 42.

reached its peak, just as canals were about to be replaced by the newly-arrived railroad:⁴

From 1845 until the arrival of the railroad in 1853 were the Canal's busiest years in Troy. It was not at all unusual to see 50 or 60 farm wagons standing beside Troy's warehouses waiting to be unloaded...Packet boats [for passengers] captured the bulk of the long distance passenger trade...8 hours Dayton to Troy...20 hours Dayton to Cincinnati...After 1845 it was possible to journey from Troy by way of Toledo to New York City entirely by water in nine day's time...The first passenger train...arrived on April 28 [1853]. Troy now instead of Dayton became the terminal of the ...canal packets, and passengers transferred [from train to canal packet] here...

A prominent canal-boat skipper of the 1850s was John F. Sommerville, who served as Troy's mayor for 4 years. He also just happened to be Henry M. Van Tuyl's father-in-law.⁵ Dating back to the riverboat days, before canals were built, a common use of the waterways had been as a sales platform for local craftsmen, such as furniture-makers and cabinetmakers. These artisans would pile their work aboard a boat, stop along the way wherever they could attract customers, and hawk their wares. Perhaps it's not too hard to imagine the carpenter/cabinetmakers Henry and Erastus Van Tuyl loading their handiwork aboard John Sommerville's boat, taking a slow trip down to Cincinnati, and returning with a few dollars in their pockets.

Henry had married Mary Frances Sommerville of Troy in 1855, when he was about 19 and she 18. One year after marrying, they had become parents. Henry's younger brother, Erastus Jefferson Van Tuyl was probably casting his eye about for a likely girl every chance he got. His opportunity arrived by 1858, probably while he was cruising the Canal down toward Cincinnati selling his work. Erastus somehow set eyes on Sallie Roosa, a young girl of about 16 at the time they met. Sallie - unknown to either herself or to Erastus - had family roots nearly identical to those of her husband-to-be. Her family had come to New Netherland in 1660 - 3 years before the Van Tuyls, and they had come from *exactly the same area, and on exactly the same ship!*⁶ The *Roosa* family had come to Sycamore Township, Hamilton County, Ohio, in 1795, and helped found the town of Montgomery, which they named after their home village in Orange County, NY.⁷ Sallie Roosa was the daughter of William Roosa, who had married the girl-next-

⁴ Wheeler, pp. 66, 67, 70.

⁵ Wheeler, pg. 66. See also: *American Van Tuyl Genealogy*.

⁶ *De Bonte Koe*, it will be remembered, was the ship. It arrived in Nieuw Amsterdam on 15 April, 1660, under Captain Pieter Lucasz. Aboard was *Albert Heymans* [Roosa] *from Gelderland, wife and eight children...* [Holland Society Yearbook, 1902, pg. 14]. It appears that this Albert was the husband of one Wilhelmina [Wintje] Ariens De Jongh, sister of the Burgomaster of Herwijnen, the village just west of Hellouw [where Jan Otten van Tuyl killed Wouter Mertens]. ["Pawling Family Genealogy," FHL microfilm #1306072, Item 2]. If we have the connection right, Albert Heymans Roosa was apparently from a family originating south of the Waal, across the river from Herwijnen, in the *Land van Altena*, just west of the Bommelerwaard [Van Alphen, E., "Het Geslacht Rosa, Andel - Herwijnen - (Amerika U.S.A.)," in *Gens Nostra*, January, 1965, pp. 22-25.]. Note: the present authors have not fully researched this connection, but it seems to be credible.

⁷ Ford, H. and Ford, K., "History of Hamilton County Ohio," 1881, pg. 391.

door, Ann Patton.⁸ The little community where she lived was just a few miles from the Miami & Erie Canal, and the people there were tight-knit and closely related to one another, so Sallie was probably more than happy to hook up with an out-of-town boy.⁹ Erastus, it would seem, came along at the right time. The young couple went off to see Reverend W. B. Jackson. She lied about her age (claimed she was 18, though actually she was 16), and they emerged *man and wife* in August of 1858.¹⁰ By 1860, Erastus and Sallie were living in Troy, where he was working as a carpenter. Young Mr. and Mrs. Van Tuyl had been joined by her sister Rachel Roosa, 15, and by a 5 year old girl named Emma Bennett, probably the orphaned daughter of Erastus' sister Lettie.¹¹ Soon, however, circumstances would disrupt their cozy little domestic scene.

Off to War

Civil War erupted on 12 April, 1861, with the firing of Confederate guns on Fort Sumter, South Carolina. By 20 April, only days after learning of the situation, 40 year old John Drury was commissioned Captain in Troy, Ohio, and in just 2 days had enlisted 32 other officers and men - most of them in their 20s - to be among the first volunteers to fight for the Union. They were Company "H" of the Ohio Volunteer Infantry, and their ranks included 22-year-old Erastus Jefferson Van Tuyl of Troy, a young man in good health, apparently spoiling for a fight.¹² War fever was sweeping the land as the magnitude of the crisis became clear: there would be no settlement of differences, it would be North-vs-South to the death. Before it ended, nearly half a million men from both sides would die from wounds or disease.¹³ Erastus joined some 200 of his fellow Trojans, each of which was presented a copy of the New Testament by members of the *Troy Female Bible Society* as they headed off to Camp Jackson for their mustering-in.¹⁴

While Confederate troops threatened Washington, DC, engendering panic among the Federal politicians, General George B. McClellan was scoring some points for the Union cause in north-west Virginia. This country beyond the mountains was then populated with people who, in the

⁸ Warren Co., OH marriage license #5422, 1840. Per the 1850 census, the Pattons were next door neighbors of the Roosas. Why the couple was married in adjacent Warren County is unclear.

⁹ 1850 U.S. Census for Sycamore Township, Hamilton Co., OH, pg. 161. Ford and Ford [pg. 391] point out that Montgomery was settled by 3 Felter brothers and 3 Felter sisters, one of whom was married to Jacob Roosa, who emigrated from New York with the group. The Pattons were from Pennsylvania [per Census].

¹⁰ Hamilton County Marriages for 1858, pg. 344 [FHL film 0344473]. "E. J. Rantyle" and "Sally Rossa" married by W. B. Jackson, Minister of the Gospel on 28 August, 1858.

¹¹ U. S. Census for Miami County

¹² *Roster of Ohio Soldiers in the Civil War*, vol. I, pg. 251.

¹³ *World Almanac* 1995, pg. 163.

¹⁴ Wheeler, pg. 83.

main, did not want to secede from the Union.¹⁵ By July, McClellan had scored several victories there, with light casualties, and the 11th Ohio Volunteers headed out to join the fight. They were part of the *Kanawha Expedition*, along with four other regiments, some artillery and a few cavalry.¹⁶ Their mission was to cross the Ohio River into Virginia, proceed up the valley of the Kanawha River while driving the rebels out, and - after reaching the river's headwaters - to join with General Rosecrans' operations in northeastern Virginia. Most of the Ohio men - in fact, most northerners - were probably expecting to make quick work of the rebels. But they had underestimated the quality of Southern military leadership such as that of Thomas J. Jackson, who stood firm with his green troops at Manassas, Virginia (he was thereafter called *Stonewall* Jackson). Jackson's stand precipitated the victory which sent Federal troops scurrying back to Washington in disarray after the 21 July *Battle of Bull Run*.¹⁷ The 11th Ohio was at that time working its way slowly up the Kanawha, still untested in battle, and probably ignorant of the enormous setback their cause suffered at Manassas. By August 12th, the Ohioans had penetrated some 100 miles up the Kanawha to the foot of Sewell Mountain, in an area with such picturesque names as *Gauley Bridge*, *Devil's Elbow*, and *Hawk's Nest*. Company "H", under their Lieutenant Jerome Weller, tried unsuccessfully to flush out the elusive rebels, but without success.¹⁸ Erastus and his comrades continued their pursuit of the enemy, who were conducting a campaign of ambush-and-run, up until August 19th, when they took their first fatality near Hawk's Nest. On August 25th:¹⁹

...we were attacked by the rebels, in their usual bushwhacking style, and Charles Allen, of company A, was killed. Tired of this style of fighting, Col. Frizell ordered a charge, when the rebels retreated pell mell, strewing the road with guns, pistols, knives, and everything that would onencumber [sic] their flight.

The Eleventh was giving the rebels grief, but they continued to take harassment from the enemy, and skirmishes, rather than battles, became the daily fare. Years later, Lt. Weller would recall:²⁰

...that while on a scout with a squad of men under [my] command on or about the first of September 1861 near what is known as the "Hawk's Nest" Va while skirmishing with the enemy in attempting to climb the side of the mountain he [Erastus J. Van Tuyl] slipped and fell striking his full weight on the sharp edge of a stone the stone coming in contact with the lower part of his belly on the left side causing very serious lingual hernia on the left side he was so badly injured at the time he was obliged to return to camp.

¹⁵ Pursuant to Union military successes in the area, the western part of Virginia was cleaved off from the mother state and admitted to the Union in 1863 as the State of *West Virginia*.

¹⁶ "A History of the Eleventh Regiment (Ohio Volunteer Infantry) Compiled from the Official Records by Horton & Teverbaugh, Members of the Regiment," 1866, Dayton, Ohio, pg. 28 ff.

¹⁷ *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 15th Edition, vol. 29, pg. 231.

¹⁸ "History of the Eleventh...", pg. 38.

¹⁹ "History of the Eleventh...", pg. 42.

²⁰ U.S. Pension file SC134-031, National Archives. Actually, Weller was probably sent a letter by Van Tuyl's attorney outlining the details of the event for Weller to ratify. The injury was, however, quite real, and did affect E.J. Van Tuyl throughout his life.

The bellicose Erastus J. Van Tuyl now came face-to-face with the inglorious - and, as it turned out, often fatal - part of 19th century warfare: the field hospital. As he lay in pain there in camp, the real killer nearly got him: he contracted Typhoid Fever. What with the severe hernia, the fever, and attendant dysentery, Erastus Van Tuyl was no longer of any use to his regiment. He was sent to the rear, returning eventually to Troy, and was officially discharged as being "unfit for military duty" the following July.²¹

Life on the Home Front

She had probably had her misgivings about sending him off to fight, but, like most women in time of war, Sallie Van Tuyl would have bowed to the inevitable and hoped for the best. At least he wasn't dead - there was that consolation. But the vigorous young buck who had left Troy just a few months before was no more. Erastus J. Van Tuyl was sick and emaciated. He was walking around as best he could with his intestines hanging out, lacking a bloody wound to mark his courageous mishap, probably frustrated and humiliated by the whole business.

Troy had fared little better, it would seem:²²

More than 90 per cent of the boys and girls of school age in these years did not graduate from high school...most dropped out before entering high school....The Troy Times editorialized: "Our peaceful citizens have long been disturbed and even insulted, both by day and by night...rowdies have ...made hideous the night with their yells, curses, and vulgar songs..."

By 1864, the situation had further deteriorated, probably due to the absence of men in the town:²³

That...summer there were many complaints about the rowdy boys who hung around the railroad depot swearing, cursing, and using obscene language. Some rowdy boys even concealed weapons which they fired frequently, both day and night...[The citizens] decided to hire a lawyer [constable] to apprehend and prosecute these lawless individuals.

Juvenile delinquency was not Troy's only problem: there was also the matter of feeding the warriors' families:²⁴

Even if a soldier sent home his entire monthly pay of \$13, a family could not live on that amount, so in June, 1861, a county tax of one-half mill per dollar of tax valuation was added to regular taxes....In July 1861, an average of \$8 a month was being received by 51 Miami County families...In June, 1864, families receiving \$3 a month numbered 745. At the end of the war, 593 families were receiving \$4 a month.

²¹ E.J. Van Tuyl' *Certificate of Discharge* [National Archives - pension file]. *Typhoid Fever* is an infectious, often-fatal, warm-climate disease caused by the bacterium *Salmonella Typhi*, usually contracted through food or drink [Carter, J. "Disease in the 19th Century..," in *National Genealogical Quarterly*, Dec., 1988, pg. 300.]

²² Wheeler, pp. 92, 93.

²³ Wheeler, pp. 92-93.

²⁴ Wheeler, pp. 86-87.

Juvenile crime and public assistance, it seems, are not 20th-century inventions.

During that bleak December of 1861, while Erastus recuperated, his mother Mary died. Brother Henry and his family were apparently then living on the family farm with Erastus' father, Oliver, helping to run the farm.²⁵ Somehow or other, Erastus got some money - he may have borrowed it from the family - and he bought, for \$150, a house in the town of Troy, at the corner of Drury Lane and Cherry St.²⁶ The young Van Tuyl couple at least had a home to call their own.

As he recovered during 1862, Erastus was probably able to get some light carpentry work. After all, so many of Troy's men were off to war that his skills must certainly have been in high demand. But the Union Cause continued to suffer, partly due to Lincoln's meddling in military affairs, and partly because the Union was out-generated by the Confederacy. Stonewall Jackson was not the only southern leader to command almost fanatical loyalty from his troops in 1862: the rebels had a new leader, the fabled Robert E. Lee, now in field command of the Army of Northern Virginia. In contrast, the Union had a reluctant-to-fight Democrat, George McClellan, and a hapless Kentuckian, John Pope. Pope was thrashed at Manassas, Virginia in August of 1862 by Lee and Jackson, at the *Second Battle of Bull Run*. Things were looking grim for Lincoln, who couldn't seem to get a winning army into the field. He reacted by sacking Pope, and upping the call for men - draftees if necessary - to replace the tens of thousands already fallen. Ohio had its quota to fill, and men still anxious to fight. They would be needed.

The Cavalry

The American Civil War was dominated, tactically, by the entrenched soldier with his rifle. He could hold off three attackers, and was virtually impossible to dislodge by frontal assault. Cavalry charges - the military mainstay for thousands of years - were rendered obsolete, or, at best, suicidal. Ironically though, it was this rock-solid defensive capability that allowed Robert E. Lee to divide his army in the face of a superior enemy, and maneuver cleverly to win the day. And for maneuverability, you couldn't beat cavalry.²⁷ Cavalry was also indispensable for all sorts of activities in this far-flung war, where mobility and hit-and-run tactics were often as important as the major battles. In this, the Southerners had all the advantage, because they had most of the cavalry.²⁸ Drawing more from rural volunteers than from city dwellers, the Rebels fell quite naturally into the war-on-horseback, and this cost the Union dearly, not least in the terror it inspired among the populace. Newspapers printed glamorized reports of daring raids by such Southern cavalymen as J.E.B. Stuart and Nathan Bedford Forrest, whose motto was: "*Get*

²⁵ U.S. Census for Staunton Township, Miami County, OH, 1860, dwelling #1011, pg. 80 [?].

²⁶ Miami County Deeds, Book . Also: "Detail Map of the City of Troy.." Library of Congress map collections. The deed gives lot number [295], the map shows the lot's location.

²⁷ *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 15th Edition, vol. 29, pg. 667. Lee, of course, grossly misused his cavalry at Gettysburg in 1863, sending Pickett's charge against a superior defensive force, at great cost.

²⁸ Mason, F., "The Twelfth Ohio Cavalry...in the War Of The Rebellion," Cleveland, 1871, pg. 9.

there first with the most men."²⁹ The cavalry could strike effectively at lines of communication and supply - especially telegraphs and railroads - and could deliver men to key positions quickly, as well as harass slow-moving infantry and key supply depots. These horsemen were greatly feared.

Among the most fearsome of the Southern cavalymen were *Morgan's Raiders*, a guerrilla force that penetrated in July of 1863 into Indiana and Ohio (theirs would be the farthest-north Confederate incursion of the war). Morgan had been captured and incarcerated in the Ohio State Penitentiary, but he escaped, and by spring 1864 was at it again, this time raiding Kentucky and Tennessee.³⁰ Probably at least partially in reaction to Morgan's raids, the State of Ohio decided in August, 1863 to raise a cavalry force for protection of the State. By the time this 12th Regiment, Ohio Volunteer Cavalry [12th O.V.C.] was fully recruited in late fall, it counted some 1500 officers and men, including an 18-piece regimental band. By February, 1864 they had been furnished with cavalry uniforms, sabres, pistols, and Spencer carbines, mounted on "...the best outfit of horses ever given to a regiment in Ohio," (including "snow white" steeds for the regimental band). They were thoroughly drilled and ready for service.³¹ Their ranks and officer corps included:³²

...a large proportion of the earliest volunteers of the war, men who in 1861 had enlisted...and having been discharged by reasons of wounds, disability, or expiration of terms of enlistment, now found themselves able again to enter the service...

One veteran who heeded the call was none other than Erastus Jefferson Van Tuyl, complete with abdominal truss to control his hernia. He enlisted on the 17th of October, 1863, for a term of three years, at the rank of sergeant, ready to mount up and go kill some Rebs.³³

The 12th Ohio Cavalry Invades Kentucky

Erastus J. Van Tuyl must have thrown himself into his new military career with enthusiasm. It could not have been any fun hanging around Troy while reports of his former comrades' military exploits came filtering in. He still had plenty of fight left in him, and the 100 dollar enlistment bonus must have looked like a pretty good deal, too.³⁴ After joining up, he headed off to Camp Cleveland, Ohio for mustering-in and training. He must have distinguished himself there during

²⁹ *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 15th Edition, vol. 4, pg. 886. Forrest was also known for his hatred of Negroes. After the war, he founded the *Ku Klux Klan*.

³⁰ *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 15th Edition, vol. 8, pg. 320.

³¹ Mason, F., "The Twelfth Ohio Cavalry...in the War Of The Rebellion," Cleveland, 1871, pp. 9-12.

³² Mason, pg. 12.

³³ *Roster of Ohio Troops*, vol. 11, pg. 612. He joined Squadron "K", which consisted of some 130 men.

³⁴ Mason, pg. 11. By the end of the war, Ohio was paying \$500 to induce enlistment [Wheeler, pg. 85]. If Erastus and his fellows had been motivated by money alone, they would have been better off to wait a few months before signing up!



"FORWARD!"

Armed with 7-shot Spencer Carbines and cavalry sabres, the 12th Ohio Volunteer Cavalry was a hard-charging outfit. In the dead of winter, 1864, they charged 33 miles with drawn sabres, killing or wounding some 150 Confederates on foot, on horse and in their tents, and capturing 8 cannon and 300 men...all without firing a shot! [Edwin Forbes: *An Artist's Story of the Great War*, 1890]

A Crisis in Camp

Notwithstanding the proclamation of emancipation was then in full force, and notwithstanding the spirit of the government was wholly in favor of protecting the negro against his recent master, yet Kentucky, not being formally included among the States in rebellion, had not yet lost her right to her slaves. It was accordingly ordered, by General Burbridge, that all negroes found in camp should be returned to the City Provost Marshal, and by him restored to their owners... A number of fugitive negroes came into the camp of the Twelfth, during the stay in Lexington, but no extraordinary zeal was manifested by officers or men to secure their arrest... Finally, there came into camp one night, a bright, active little contraband...he told the story of his escape to the kind-hearted men of the Twelfth, and was at once treated to a nest in a shelter tent under a pile of blankets. The next morning there appeared on the scene the master, handcuffs in hand and a Provost Marshal at his heels. His rage was of that blind, desperate and reckless species which only the plantation-bred Southerner, aggravated by an obdurate "nigger," can evince... The planter and the Marshal set out on a tour of inspection through the camp, diligently seeking among the blankets, and finally unearthed the treasure, who instantly popped out of his warm nest and into another tent, and from this into a half-a-dozen more, moving so rapidly, meanwhile, that the plethoric and wheezing master seemed about as likely to catch him as a mad bull might be to catch a hornet. Finally, the boy got a sufficient start of his pursuers and slipped into some concealment which proved conclusive - he could no longer be found. The master and the Provost now went off in high dudgeon to the Camp of the Thirteenth Kentucky Infantry, which lay near by... The escape of the slave had been more than the Kentucky spirit could brook, and, at the request of the Provost Marshal, Colonel Hanson at once ordered his regiment under arms, and into line, facing the camp of the Twelfth Ohio. With great pomp and solemnity the Kentuckians were ordered to load by detail, and each soldier rammed home a bullet to be fired, if need were, in defence of a code which was dearer to the South than freedom itself.

Major Herrick, commanding the battalion most directly threatened by this demonstration, suppressed the spontaneous movement of his men toward resenting this menace, and ordered every soldier to his tent. Thither they all went, but each man dropped seven cartridges into his carbine, took off his overcoat and awaited results. For a few moments a collision seemed imminent, for had the Thirteenth Kentucky so far forgotten its duty as to fire into our camp, there is no saying what might have happened. But discretion prevailed, the more prudent Kentuckians began to straggle towards their tents, their line melted away, and the planter went off without his "nigger."

Excerpt From: Mason, F., "The Twelfth Ohio Cavalry...in the War Of The Rebellion," Cleveland, 1871, pp. 21 - 22. President Lincoln's *Emancipation Proclamation* was legally applicable only to those states in rebellion - and those states were outside the sphere of his enforcement. Slave states such as Kentucky - which were not in rebellion, but were in sympathy with the Southern cause - were exempt. Hence the dilemma facing the commanders of the Twelfth Ohio Cavalry.

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training, because he was promoted to 1st Sergeant on 4 November, and to 2nd Lieutenant on 4 January, before the outfit had even been equipped.³⁵ The 12th O.V.C. navigated the Ohio River from Cincinnati to Louisville on April 7th, and by April 10th had marched to Lexington, KY, still displaying the spit-and-polish of the parade ground soldiers they were. They were assigned to General Burbridge, who ordered them east, toward Saltville, in south-western Virginia, where they were to destroy the Confederacy's only salt works - the salt being critical to the preservation of meat for field rations. They were to rendezvous at Mt. Sterling, KY, with other units under Burbridge, then head through the Cumberland Mountains to Saltville. They had marched through miserably rainy conditions and were poised for the final thrust into Saltville when word came that Confederate raider John Morgan had crossed into Kentucky behind them, and would soon be causing all kinds of mischief, possibly even threatening Ohio again.

Without an hour's delay, the column faced about and took the backward path for Kentucky at a trot, which brought it, before nightfall to its old camping ground on the Big Sandy. A dismal, dreary rain was falling, the stream was rising rapidly, and it was deemed necessary to push on to Prestonburg that night, lest the river, before morning, should become impassable...The crossing of Laurel Mountain on that stormy night, was one of the darkest passages in the whole experience of the regiment. The path was, at best, a wretched one - steep, uneven, and dangerous. On one side rose the mountain, rugged and precipitous; on the other yawned an abyss whose depth could only be guessed from the roar of the torrent that poured along the bottom of the gulch. A single misstep would whelm the erring horse, and his rider, in a fate compared with which death on the battle-field would be a luxury. The night was so dark that men and horses walked blindly against cliffs and trees, and it was only by the greatest care and the most marvelous good fortune that the casualties were so few.³⁶

Morgan was well-equipped, and he was marching into a border state where many of the inhabitants were Confederate sympathizers who would give him aid and comfort, though not openly. Morgan had to be stopped, or who knows what would have become of Kentucky? After a punishing second night of forced march, the Federal column "more dead than alive" reached McCormick's Gap, where:³⁷

...it was learned that Morgan had reached Mount Sterling on the morning of that day, defeated the slight garrison, captured the town, with our camps and hospitals, and was then resting after his first victory. Mount Sterling was 35 miles away and it must be reached by dawn...The bugles again sounded the advance, and the weary trot, trot, trot was resumed...Men fell asleep in their saddles, and, in some cases, were only awakened by a douche into the mud and water of the road.

The brigade reached Mt. Sterling at dawn, where:³⁸

.....the Twelfth Ohio gladly accepted the costly honor of leading the advance...firing rapidly with carbine and pistol, the first battalion...drove the rebels through their camp, and back from the road, a distance of fifteen or twenty

³⁵ Roster of Ohio Troops, vol. 11, pg. 612.

³⁶ Mason, pg. 27.

³⁷ Morgan, pg. 30.

³⁸ Mason, pg. 34.

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rods...sixty men of the [3rd] battalion ...under Major Moderwell reached the fight just in time to see the first battalion disappear over the hill. The rebels instantly rallied and assailed the handful of men under Major Moderwell with a desperate fury.

Erastus Moderwell, who was Erastus Van Tuyl's battalion commander, took a bullet in the stomach during the fray, and his detachment - which may or may not have included Van Tuyl - was nearly wiped out. Then:³⁹

...suddenly, with a rush and a shout, the remainder of the Regiment, all dismounted, appeared on the scene. The new strength came not a moment too soon, for the little detachment was on the verge of being overpowered, in a position where retreat was impossible...The camp of the Twelfth Cavalry was recaptured, and the defeated troopers of Morgan driven through the fields north of town...[they retreated] along the Lexington Pike to the west of Mt. Sterling...[where Morgan] soon got his whole command into a strong position...

Morgan misjudged the situation, thinking the opposing force was far smaller than it actually was. He foolishly decided to take the offensive:⁴⁰

The scattered rebels had been concentrated and re-organized on the hills west of town, and now came bearing down with the desperate purpose of reclaiming the day. The [Union] cavalry men, now accustomed to their weapons and confident of their aim, waited until the enemy was within easy range, and then opened a fire which speedily threw the veteran [Confederates] into confusion...Thus closed, with a complete victory for the Federals, the assault upon Morgan at Mount Sterling.

The Union forces under Burbridge were simply in no condition, after four nights without sleep, to follow the retreating Morgan as he fled toward Lexington. After a night's sleep and some food, they took off in pursuit of the elusive rebel, finding that he had reached Lexington:⁴¹

Morgan had been there, robbed the banks and stores, held the town in terror for the night, and then retreated, eight hours before the arrival of Burbridge, taking a northerly course toward Cincinnati...Lexington was full of rebel sympathizers [who were interested in throwing the pursuers off the track]...[by] information received from trusty negroes, it was found that [Morgan] was still to the northward... concentrating in the neighborhood of Cynthiana... Cynthiana was reached before midnight, and it was ascertained beyond doubt that Morgan with his whole force occupied the village...

At dawn, on Sunday, 12 June, 1864, the exhausted 12th Ohio and their comrades mounted a full cavalry charge on the village of Cynthiana, sending Morgan and his remaining troops not killed or captured scurrying off in a disorderly retreat, never again to pose a serious threat to Kentucky or Ohio. Morgan had lost nearly half his original force of 800 during this adventure. The Confederate War Department, which had not authorized his expedition in the first place, was livid. Not only had he lost much and accomplished little, but his open thievery directed toward

³⁹ Mason, pg. 36.

⁴⁰ Mason, pg. 40.

⁴¹ Mason, pg. 42.

civilians offended the Southern sense of honor. John Morgan would never again be permitted to ravage Kentucky.^{42, 43}

As to the Twelfth Ohio:⁴⁴

Utterly worn out with a full fortnight in the saddle almost without food or sleep, the Twelfth returned by easy marches to Lexington, and took up its old camp on the fair grounds...[where they] were set to the pleasanter duty of preparing for the autumn campaign...

The parade-ground soldiers had tasted battle, and acquitted themselves with honor.

Saltville

With Morgan disposed of, General Burbridge once again turned his attentions to Saltville. The Twelfth Ohio Cavalry and other mounted units - including the Sixth Regiment of the United States Colored Cavalry - were to play a role not unlike that of Allied strategic bombers in World War II: fly in, destroy the target, then get out. Unfortunately for the cavalry, they would have to cross the Alleghenies on land, not by air. Actually, their mission was to attack Saltville from the north while troops from General Sherman's forces in Georgia closed the vise from the south. Saltville, located in a more-or-less north-south valley, would be forced to yield. As it turned out, Sherman never did send troops, and Burbridge's forces were to suffer near-disaster because of it.⁴⁵

Leaving Prestonburg, KY on 27 September, Burbridge followed the Louisa fork of the Big Sandy River, crossed through Laurel Gap, then descended the mountain into the Clinch River Valley. Confederate units harassed him at strategic points in the mountains, but he was able to thwart their ambush at the last pass - Low Gap - and pour his troops into the valley north of Saltville. On October 2, the battle began.

Actually, the Confederates were extremely weak in numbers of troops defending Saltville, but they had one overwhelming advantage: the terrain. Confederate generals Robertson and Dibrell positioned themselves some 500 feet above the valley on the nearly-impregnable *Chestnut Ridge*. The only hope for Federals to take this position would be to come over a lower hill to the north - called *Sanders Hill* - fight through the withering fire raining down from Chestnut Ridge, cross a

⁴² Foote, S. "The Civil War, A Narrative," vol. 3, pp. 357-362. Readers are advised to consult this reference for the Morgan's-eye-view of this event.

⁴³ Walker, G., "The War in Southwest Virginia, 1861-65," 1985, pg. 110. Morgan met his end when he made the mistake of spending the night in the home of an East Tennessee woman, Mrs. Williams, who was a Union sympathiser. She alerted Federal troops. They surrounded the home, flushed Morgan out, and shot him dead as he fled.

⁴⁴ Mason, pp. 48-49.

⁴⁵ Marvel, W., "Southwest Virginia in the Civil War - The Battles for Saltville," H.E. Howard, Inc., Lynchburg, VA, 1992, pg. 111.

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creek called *Cedar Branch*, then scale Chestnut ridge itself. This daunting task was left to Colonel Ratliff's 12th Brigade, with troops from the 11th Michigan, 12th Ohio, and 5th U.S. Colored Cavalry.⁴⁶ Dibrell's Confederate Kentuckians fought like madmen, enraged as they were by having to face black soldiers in the field of honor. One desperate Rebel actually ran ahead to capture the 12th Ohio's colors, but the Ohio standard-bearer refused to yield it, driving the guidon's sharp brass point clean through the maniacal attacker's belly.⁴⁷

More than once duels took place between individuals at a distance of not more than half-a-dozen paces...At...times a rebel would pop out from behind a tree or rock only a few feet from an advancing Yankee, and then it was the quickest and surest shot of the two who lived to tell the story.

As Erastus Van Tuyl and his fellow troopers advanced painfully up Chestnut Ridge, they expended two critical commodities: time and ammunition. By the time the 12th Ohio had taken the top of Chestnut Ridge it was getting dark. Their ammunition - and that of their adversaries - was gone, and they looked down on their objective knowing that retreat would be inevitable. The other Union brigades, located in the valley where they were completely at the mercy of Confederate artillery, had made no progress during the day. The saltworks were in view, but could not be reached that day. Confederate troops of General Breckinridge and General Jubal Early had arrived on the scene. The Union position was untenable.⁴⁸

Lighting fires to simulate a bivouac, the Federal Cavalrymen stole off in the night, crossing the gap in the mountains just a half hour before the Confederates sealed it off. They had eluded wholesale slaughter or capture by the narrowest of margins!⁴⁹ Two officers who *were* wounded and captured witnessed:⁵⁰

...the horrible butchery of the negro wounded [soldiers of the Colored Cavalry] which took place the morning after the battle...[also, they] were both present when Champ Ferguson, the prince of guerrillas, entered and murdered in his bed, a wounded Lieutenant of the Thirteenth Kentucky Regiment whom he had known previous to the war.

This humiliating defeat did not put an end to the Union's designs on Saltville. Though winter was setting in, the commanders were desperate to press the attack once again - the sooner the better. The South was being brought to its knees. Sherman had burned Atlanta in September, and was now "Marching through Georgia" laying waste everything in his army's path. Every

⁴⁶ Marvel, pg. 113.

⁴⁷ Mason, pg. 65.

⁴⁸ Here, the Union and Confederate memories differ. Mason, the 12th Ohio's historian [pg. 66], claimed that Early's troops were 5000 strong, making Breckenridge's total force twice that of Burbridge's. But Marvel [pg. 120] claims these were "ghost battalions" - figments of the discouraged Yankee imagination.

⁴⁹ Mason, pp. 58-72.

⁵⁰ Mason, pg. 70. These Yankees were not the only ones to report on the massacre of negro prisoners. A Kentucky Confederate soldier, George Mosgrove, witnessed the slaughter, which he reported in an 1895 book entitled "Kentucky Cavaliers in Dixie." His report was reprinted *circa* 1991 as the "Saltville Confederate Times," R. Allison, editor. [Public Library, Saltville, VA].

saltworks, bridge, or railway that could be destroyed now would hasten victory. The attack had to be pressed now!

After recuperating for a month at Lexington, the Twelfth Ohio and the rest of Burbridge's troops crossed the mountains again, this time through the Cumberland Gap, passing Tazewell, Tennessee. They swam their horses across the Clinch River under Confederate fire, and rendezvoused in early December at Bean's Station with a brigade of Tennessee Cavalry under Gen. George Stoneman, their new overall commander. After various side adventures - including the capture of "*several millions in confederate money, the main Treasury of the Government, as it afterward proved,*" Burbridge's column - including the 12th Ohio - captured Abingdon, VA, virtually without resistance. Then, near Marion, VA on the 17th of December, the Federals faced their first real resistance, in the form of a Confederate Cavalry Brigade under General Vaughn:⁵¹

Just before dawn, General Stoneman ordered the Twelfth Ohio up to the front to join the Brigade of [General] Gillem, [who] upon confronting his new and formidable enemy, had four regiments in hand, the 9th, 10th and 12th Tennessee and the 12th Ohio. They were only two thousand men in all, but they were men upon whom he relied. Comprehending the situation at a glance [Gillem]...shouted...the order to "CHARGE." Away over the field to the foot of the hills went the Cavalry, up the slope, through the Camp, sabreing the rebels in their very tents, and in ten minutes Vaughn's full brigade, with eight pieces of cannon was in pell mell retreat along the pike toward Wytheville. Then began one of the most remarkable and determined pursuits in the whole history of the war... For thirty five miles Gillem's regiments rode and sabred without firing a shot. One by one they gathered the eight cannon of Vaughn... it was one in the afternoon when [Gillem's] advance trotted over the hill that looked down into Wytheville, the headquarters of Breckenridge and the military centre of the Department. He had chased his enemy thirty-three miles in six hours. Three hundred prisoners had been taken and half as many killed or wounded.

Now the Union Cavalry was getting somewhere:⁵²

There might be trouble...the main army of Breckenridge had not yet been met. There was not a moment to lose. The Twelfth Ohio was set to work destroying the immense military stores of the post, and two Tennessee regiments were immediately sent forward twenty miles further to destroy the magnificent bridge by which the railroad to Richmond crosses the New River... The Twelfth Ohio... fired the church which had served Breckenridge as his arsenal, and marched away toward Marion, to the music of such a fusillade as even the havoc of war seldom creates.

It was fortunate that the Federals had been able to attack Breckenridge's headquarters, rather than attempt another futile assault on his entrenched troops at Saltville. Breckenridge, seeing his "department being torn to pieces by a Cavalry division," was drawn out of Saltville, and planted his troops near a bridge east of Marion. Major Herrick, who had led the troops which had just

⁵¹ Mason, pp. 80-82.

⁵² Mason, pg. 83.

taken this bridge, dashed ahead to reconnoiter, only to see four hundred of Breckenridge's cavalry coming forward:⁵³

Spurring down the hill to within sight of Major Moderwell, who headed the two hundred of the [third battalion] Twelfth Ohio, who alone had crossed the bridge [Moderwell's command included Company "K", Erastus Van Tuyl's outfit]... he shouted "The cavalry is coming to meet us, meet them with a charge." The order was instantly obeyed, and with drawn sabres, the two hundred in a close column of fours... charged round the hill and came crashing into the front of the rebel column, four hundred strong and brave, but not confident enough to eschew fire arms at such a time, and trust to the sabre. As the two columns came together, the Confederates checked their horses and began firing; the two hundred drove savagely into them and soon had them turned and in full retreat.⁵⁴

Stoneman and Breckenridge fought almost continuously for 2 days, the 17th and 18th of December, 1864, and by the morning of the 19th, the Union field glasses scanning for enemy troop positions detected nothing. Breckenridge, it seems, had evacuated during the night. Stoneman's troops struck northward for Saltville, and spent the next day destroying some 300 buildings used in salt manufacture, 3000 salt kettles, and numerous salt wells.⁵⁵ Their mission was well accomplished:⁵⁶

[Stoneman] could report complete success. Salt had been scarce in the Old Dominion for two years. Now it would be practically nonexistent, leaving the suppliers of Lee's army with no means of preserving what little meat they could lay hands on for shipment by rail or wagon to the hungry men in the trenches outside Petersburg and Richmond.

However, the Twelfth Ohio had to move quickly back to Kentucky, or risk being ambushed by Southern cavalry, or overwhelmed by Confederate reinforcements. Their return trip was a nightmare, almost as if the gods of the confederacy had been punishing the salt-destroyers:⁵⁷

At dark the column again moved on, and made that night one of the most terrible marches on record during the war. A furious gale froze the heavy rain as it fell, and the road was soon covered with a thick, slippery coating of ice. Horses could no longer walk with certainty, and after a dozen falls, most of the men dismounted and led their animals as best they could... [But] the terrors of the march from the Clinch River to Pound Gap, eclipsed all the previous sufferings of the expedition... [Horses] fell by dozens [and] many men were walking over the frozen road with their feet wrapped only in shreds of cloth... Scores of men had their feet and hands frozen, many [requiring] amputation of one or both feet... Of the forty-four hundred animals which carried Burbridge's men into Tennessee a month before, only eight hundred lived to recross the Cumberlands.

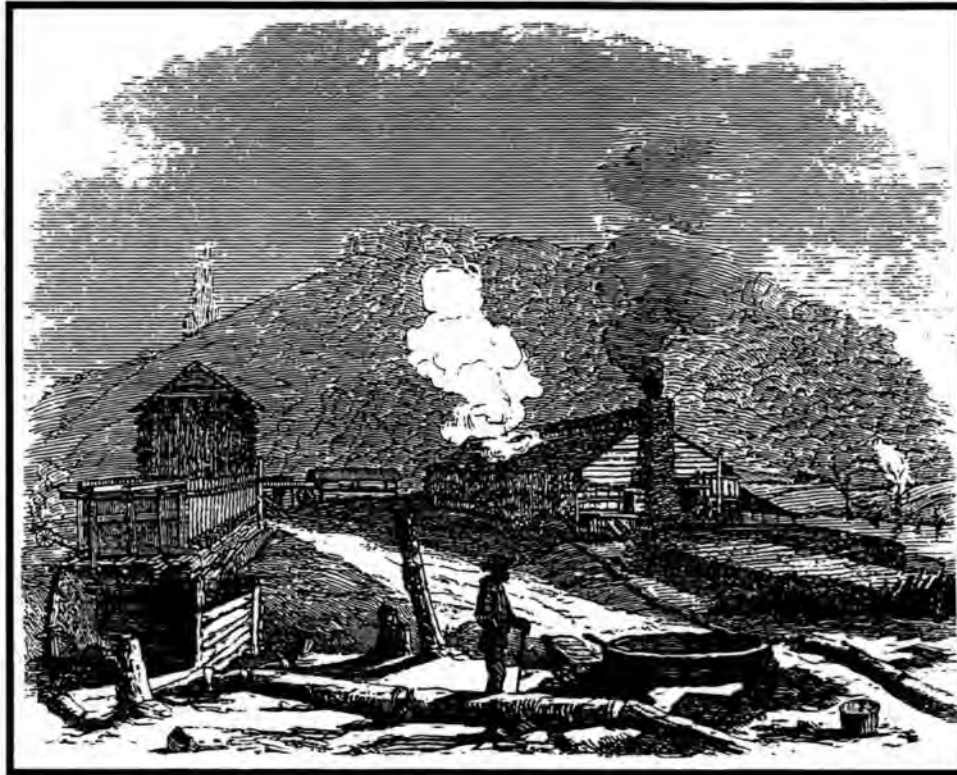
⁵³ Mason, pp. 86-87.

⁵⁴ The seemingly indestructible Moderwell had his horse shot out from under him and received two ugly wounds himself. It will be remembered that he had previously been shot through the stomach.

⁵⁵ Mason, pp. 90-91.

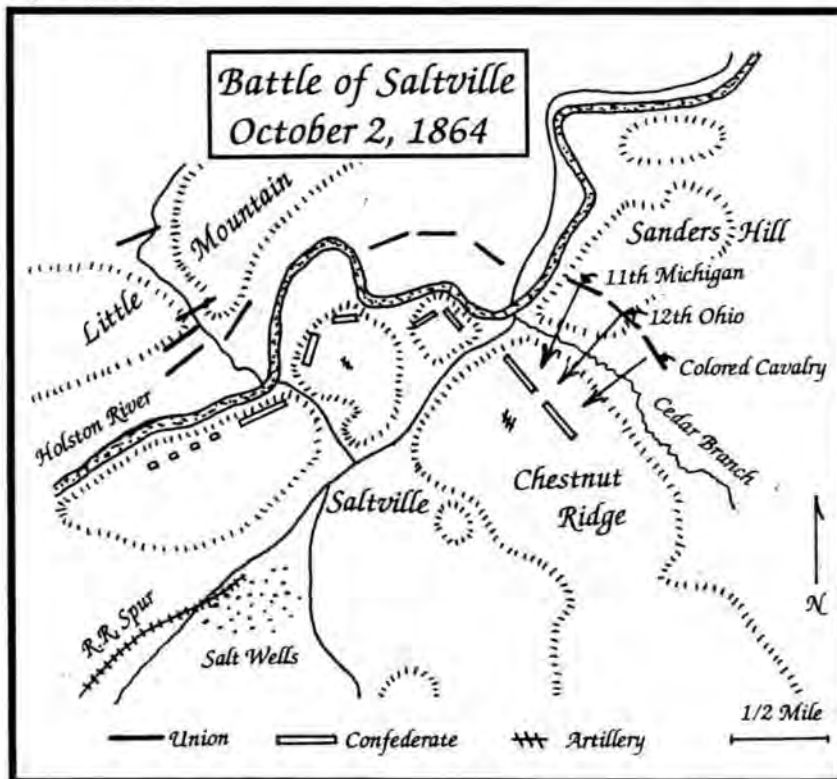
⁵⁶ Foote, pg. 722.

⁵⁷ Mason, pp. 91-94.



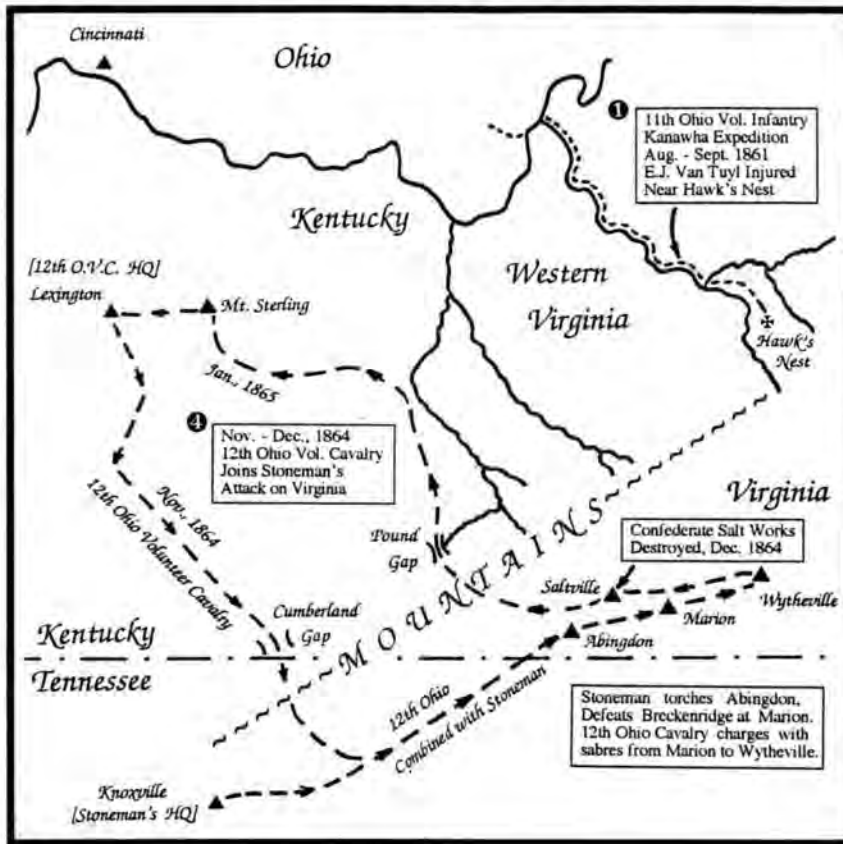
Saltville...Harper's Magazine, 1857

After Marvel ...

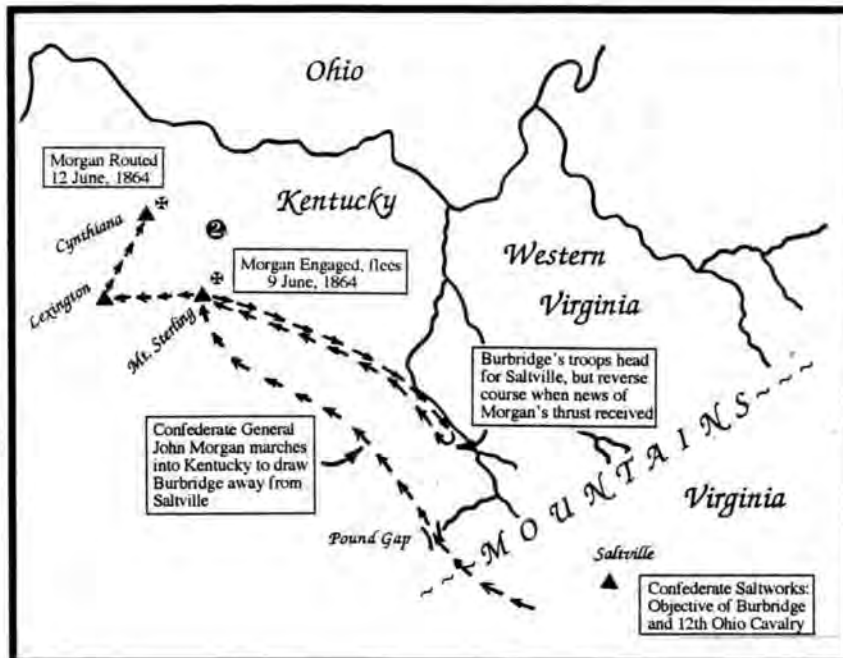


Some 2000 slaves manned the south's last remaining salt works in 1864. Wells pumped brine to the surface, where it was evaporated to produce the meat preservative essential to both soldier and civilian. In October of 1864, the 12th Ohio Volunteer Cavalry was among the Union troops trying to destroy the production facilities at Saltville, Virginia. Rebel forces held the high ground, and despite heroic efforts by the 12th Ohio and U.S. Colored Cavalry, their conquest of Chestnut Ridge came too late - they were forced into a desperate retreat. It would be 2 more months until the saltworks were finally destroyed.

ERASTUS J. VAN TUYL'S WAR 1861 ~ 1864



In 1861, Erastus J. Van Tuyl was injured at Hawk's Nest West Virginia and had to sit out 2 years of the war while he recovered. He re-enlisted in 1863 in the 12th Ohio Volunteer Cavalry, whose most successful campaign was the December, 1864 expedition under General George Stoneman during which they defeated Confederate troops in South-West Virginia and destroyed the Confederacy's sole source of salt, at Saltville, Virginia.



Major Events:

- 1** Kanawha Expedition - E. J. Van Tuyl injured.
- 2** 12th Ohio, headed for Saltville, reverses course to intercept Confederate John Morgan at Mt. Sterling, KY. Three days later, the 12th Ohio Routs Morgan's raiders at Cynthiana, KY.
- 3** Battle of Saltville (opposite). Burbridge's troops, including the 12th Ohio, fail to capture Saltville on October 2, 1864. After this defeat, they retreat back to Kentucky the way they came.
- 4** Under command of Gen. George Stoneman, the 12th Ohio helps defeat Rebels in south-west Virginia. Saltworks destroyed at last.

It had taken them six weeks and over 1,000 miles of journey, but the 12th Ohio could look back on a major victory - one that contributed, surely, to the Confederate surrender the following spring.

Dashing Through Dixie

General U.S. Grant, reflecting on the war's endgame some years later, wrote:⁵⁸

I was afraid, every morning [at the siege of Petersburg], that I would awake from my sleep to hear that Lee had gone, and that nothing was left but a picket line. He had his railroad by the way of Danville south... I knew...that, if he got the start, he would leave me behind so that we would have the same army to fight again farther south... the war might have been prolonged another year.

Actually, there were two railroads out of Virginia for Lee to have taken: south via Danville, or west through Lynchburg. These routes became the responsibility of Gen. Stoneman, who requested that the 12th Ohio be assigned to the 6000-7000 man force he was assembling to raid western Virginia and, among other details, destroy her railroads. Travelling by boat and railway, the 12th Ohio made its way to Knoxville, then marched with Stoneman through North Carolina to Christiansburg, Virginia, where they began tearing up tracks. The 12th then moved with their brigade south to a point on the Danville Railroad, just north of Salisbury, NC, where they severed the rail line and torched the infamous Confederate prison camp. Lee's main escape routes were now sealed. The job was completed on the ninth of April, the very day Lee surrendered at Appomattox.⁵⁹

The Civil War did not actually end until June 2, when the port of Galveston, Texas was surrendered to the Union. And word of Lee's surrender did not reach the field troops immediately, at any rate. In addition, many rebels just refused to quit fighting, so Federal troops had to treat all as belligerents, which many were. But the great cavalry charges were over. The indestructible Major Erastus Moderwell took his men - probably including the "other" Erastus [Van Tuyl] - down to the Catawba River, where they were to destroy a railway bridge on April 19th. They learned from a captured picket that the bridge was heavily defended, and since Moderwell had only 250 men, he feared the defenders. Passing himself off as General Stoneman, Moderwell bluffed the eager-to-surrender Confederates into thinking they were outnumbered, and they willingly surrendered. Moderwell and his men took 230 prisoners and torched the bridge.⁶⁰

On the 23rd, while marching back to Knoxville, the brigade received two important pieces of information via military dispatch received at Hendersonville, NC. The first was that President

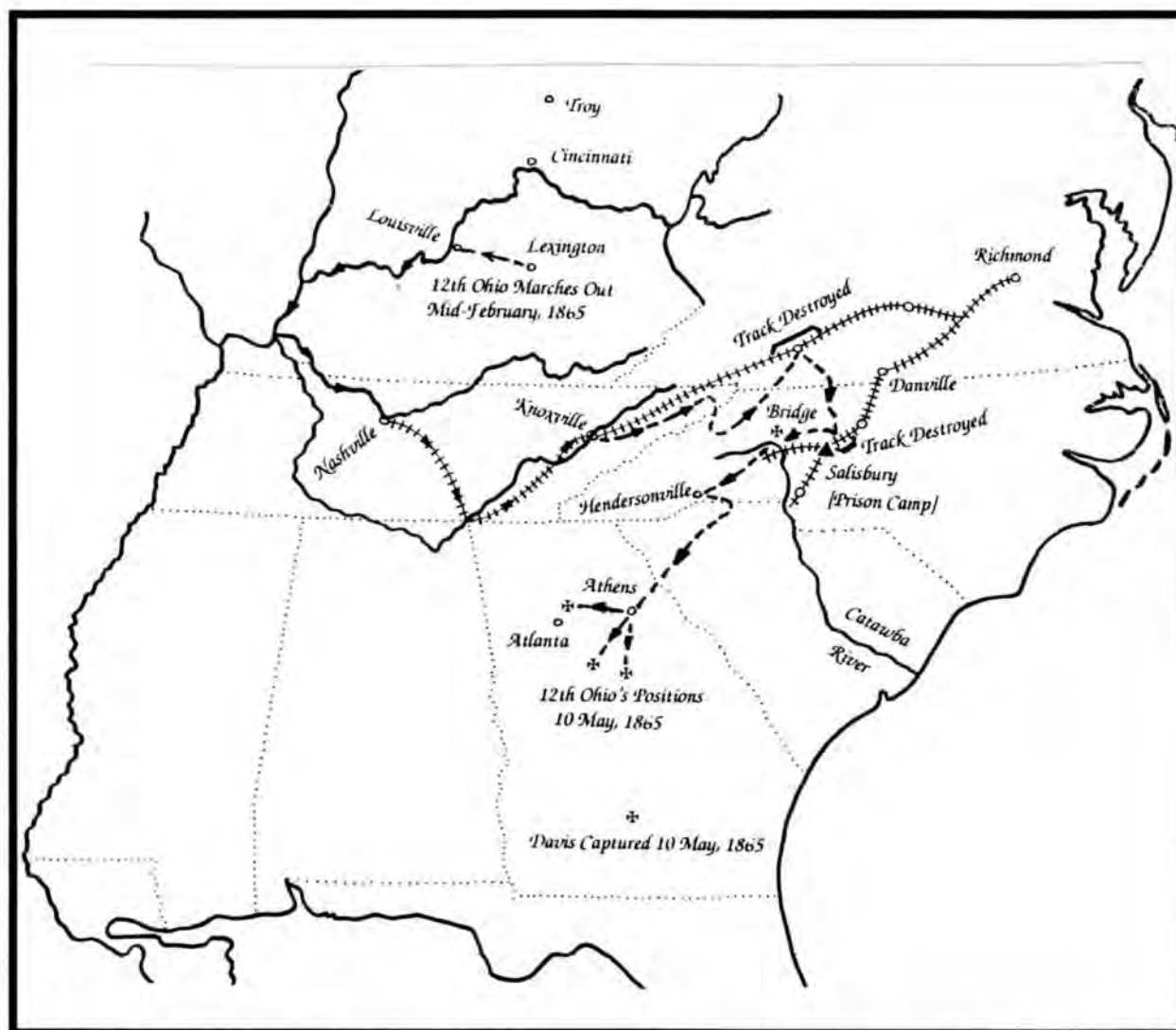
⁵⁸ Foote, pp. 802-803.

⁵⁹ Mason, pp. 95-103. Lee did break out of Petersburg on April 2, but was unable to escape Sheridan's pursuit. He surrendered on April 9th at Appomattox Court House, VA.

⁶⁰ Mason, pp. 103-105.

Stoneman's Raids...

The 12th Ohio Volunteer Cavalry's Last Campaign



In the closing months of the War, Lee was besieged at Petersburg, VA, with the Danville and Lynchburg railways as his best means of escape. General George Stoneman, ordered to destroy the railroads, asked for the 12th Ohio's help for one last incursion into Dixie. They tore up the tracks, destroyed a bridge, and liberated a prison camp before learning of Lee's surrender and Lincoln's assassination. As a last assignment, the 12th pursued the fleeing Jefferson Davis in Georgia, but failed to capture him, apprehending instead the Confederate vice-President, Alexander Stephens, and General Braxton Bragg.

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Lincoln had been assassinated, and that consequently the armistice had been suspended.⁶¹ The second news was that Jefferson Davis, erstwhile President of the Confederate States of America, was fleeing south through the very region where they were operating, and that they were to drop everything and pursue him. Davis had already passed through by the time they could get moving, so they marched day and night toward Georgia, hot on his trail. On the 10th of May, with the Ohioan's brigade still well behind, Davis fell into the clutches of Union Cavalry coming up from the south. Disappointed at missing their chance to bag Jeff Davis, the 12th Ohio did have the opportunity to capture, sometime later, Alexander Stephens, the Confederate Vice President, and to take into custody Confederate General Braxton Bragg.⁶² Finally, on the 1st of June, the 12th Ohio, after ranging as far south as the Atlanta-Charleston rail line, rode into camp near Knoxville, Tennessee. They had traveled over 1000 miles on this, their last great march.

Of the 1462 men who had joined the 12th Ohio Cavalry, only 628 remained to be mustered out when the unit was finally decommissioned on 14 Nov., 1865. Relatively few had been killed in action, but a number had died of disease, and others had resigned or deserted during the war. Erastus Jefferson Van Tuyl served through it all - receiving a promotion to 1st Lieutenant on 28 June, 1865, in recognition of a job well done. He had served longer, and more arduously than any of his forbears in the Revolution, or, as far as we know, any Van Tuyl before or since.

Postscript

Erastus J. Van Tuyl was a down-to-earth man who returned easily to civilian life, practicing his carpenter's trade throughout most of his life as he raised a family, first in Winchester, Indiana, then in Verona, Missouri. But he never could get the Army out of his blood. Like many of his compatriots, he belonged to veteran's organizations and even elevated his rank a bit *post-bellum*, liking to be called "Cap" - after the rank he never quite attained, but apparently coveted. When his beloved Sallie died in 1899, "Cap" took off for a last adventure before he was forced to enter an old soldier's home to die. He went out to the State of Washington, lived largely off his military pension, and tried to recapture a little of his youth. Here is a story told by his grandson, amusing in style, and possibly true:⁶³

Ol' "Cap" - they called him that because he was a captain in the Civil War - came out to the State of Washington sometime after grandma died, and he was up in Walla Walla doin' something, I'm not sure what - heard he was homesteading, maybe. Anyway, Ol' "Cap" was out camping one night when he heard this rustling in the bushes. He figgered it was a bear - it was mighty wild up there in them days. So he grabbed his rifle, goes off in the bushes, and shoots him this bear, comes back and goes to sleep. Next morning Ol' "Cap" gets up to go see this bear he shot, walks over to the bushes, and there he sees it... his horse, just lyin' there, with a bullet through its head!

⁶¹ Lincoln had died on the 15th.

⁶² Mason, pp. 106-113.

⁶³ Ardo Rena Van Tuyl used to love to tell this story about his grandad. Ardo's style was always that of the humorous anecdote - no matter how serious the subject matter.

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Erastus J. Van Tuyl died of natural causes on 28 August, 1911, at the National Home for Disabled Volunteer Soldiers, Los Angeles County, California.



Erastus Jefferson Van Tuyl ~1904