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Grenville Mellen Dodge

Grenville M. Dodge had been sent west to quell the Indian uprisings and reestablish telegraph and stage communications. After a month had passed, General Grant sent a message asking where he was. The reply came back, "Nobody knows where he is now but everybody knows where he has been." He had left a trail of accomplishment which represented General Dodge — the man who got results. No matter how meager the resources or how formidable the obstacles, he proceeded to use the best available resources to do what needed to be done.

Having graduated from Norwich University and Military Academy in 1850, he spent the next ten years as a civil engineer with railroad companies in Illinois, Iowa, and Nebraska. From 1861 to 1865 he served in the Union army, rising from the rank of colonel to that of major general. He built railroads, made bridges, and erected blockhouses at strategic points; he planned campaigns and fought battles. Since he always accomplished what he set out to do, he was a valuable leader. Grant recognized his dependability and when he needed a man on whom he could rely absolutely he sent for Dodge.

"Gren" Dodge spent his boyhood in Danvers, Massachusetts. During the summers he supported himself by working on a vegetable farm. It was

there that he became acquainted with Frederick Landers, a newly graduated civil engineer. Eager to try his skill at building railroads, Landers decided to construct a siding from the main track of the Eastern Railroad up to his brother's ice house. Grenville helped with the work and found it much more interesting than tending the vegetables. The young engineer recognized the boy's zeal and advised him to go to Norwich University. And so, after a few years, another civil engineer came home to Danvers.

Landers told him that "out west in Chicago" was the place of opportunity and thither he went. His first job was at Peru with the Illinois Central. Soon he was promoted. The outstanding characteristic of his railroad building was the swift yet thorough way in which he did it. Nor did he change his methods down in Tennessee during the war. If some railroad or bridge had been ruined, it was sure to be the one needed immediately by a Union army. In 1863 he built more than a hundred miles of railroad with no tools but axes, picks, and shovels. It was one of the astonishing feats of the war. Dodge always had to build as rapidly as possible. His slogan was "Speed up but build well." After the war, while one of his temporary bridges was being taken out and a truss-bridge erected, one of the workmen remarked, "General Dodge must have thought the war was going to last forever."

Before long Dodge was offered a higher position

with the Illinois Central but he refused it in order to go westward with the Rock Island. In the race between the Lyons and Iowa Central and the Rock Island surveyors across Iowa, Dodge and his men won. When they reached Council Bluffs in 1853, they were greeted with a big celebration, for the people of the West had looked forward to the day when they could travel across Iowa by rail. But Dodge had visions of a far greater achievement — a railroad from the Missouri to the Pacific.

Because he believed that Council Bluffs would be the starting point of the railroad to the Pacific, Dodge established his home there. As a surveyor and a homesteader in the Elkhorn River valley in Nebraska, he became acquainted with conditions on the plains. It took a man with resourcefulness to succeed in that untamed region of the fifties. Though he met many Indians, he never had any serious trouble, which was probably due to his policy of fairness. He always kept on guard against any possible treachery but was also careful to cause no ill feeling by dishonest transactions. It was a useful training school for his later military career.

As he made a study of the possible routes for the transcontinental railroad he became convinced that it should begin at Council Bluffs and follow the Platte River Trail westward just as the Mormons, Indians, and early settlers had done. When Lincoln visited Council Bluffs in 1859, young Dodge was pointed out to him as an authority. The future

President was so interested in the subject that before Dodge knew it he had disclosed secrets that he had been holding for his employers in the East. These arguments made a great impression on Lincoln and when, in the midst of the war, he had to make a decision on the location of the eastern terminal of the Union Pacific Railroad he sent for the young man whom he had met in Council Bluffs.

When the news of the firing on Fort Sumter reached Council Bluffs in April, 1861, Dodge immediately offered the Council Bluffs Guards to Governor Kirkwood. This was a company of men whom he had been training since 1856 for the protection of the frontier towns. Kirkwood decided that they should remain at their post for they might be needed there.

Thereupon Dodge rushed to Washington to procure arms for an Iowa regiment. Having secured the promise of six thousand rifles from Secretary Cameron he hastened back to Iowa to raise the troops. A veteran says of him, "I remember seeing Dodge at Des Moines in the spring of 1861, a short, slender, very active young man, who wore a little, soft, round-topped, brown hat which he had a curious habit of rolling into a ball and nervously thrusting into the outside pocket of a very short brown coat."

On July 6th, he was commissioned colonel of the Fourth Iowa Infantry and forthwith ordered to repel a threatened invasion from Missouri with the

companies then in Camp Kirkwood at Council Bluffs. Meanwhile the other companies were sent directly to Benton Barracks and thence to Rolla, Missouri. It was not until the middle of September that the entire regiment was in camp together. Without any opportunity for preliminary drill, the Fourth Iowa had to get its instruction in the presence of the enemy. Moreover, the equipment which had been promised in Washington never reached Rolla. Old muskets of 1818 and 1829 models were the best available. Thirteen of them burst at the first firing.

But the regiment did get military training. In addition to the ordinary exercises, Dodge gave drills of marching through brush for he anticipated that type of warfare. His regiment had to work harder than any other at the post and they complained of their clothes being torn on the bushes. Four months later at the Battle of Pea Ridge, they were to understand the reason for such strenuous training.

Nevertheless they were loyal to their colonel for he inspired them with his own enthusiasm just as he had won the friendship of his railroad surveyors. In a letter to his mother he said, "I do not think I have an enemy in the regiment. I know I can lead them through a hot place; they will follow me until the last man drops." He did not underestimate the courage of his men.

But the summer of 1861 was not the only time he had to make soldiers out of raw material. As he

returned to Corinth after repairing a railroad in 1862, thousands of negroes followed him, having heard that he favored emancipation. Such a motley crowd of poorly-dressed, hungry, frightened blacks presented a big problem to Dodge, for they had to be fed and protected. Seeing that his men did not like to be kept from active work, he conceived the idea of organizing two companies of negro soldiers, with a few of his men acting as officers, to guard this fugitive camp. That solved the problem.

Again in 1865, soon after he took command of the Department of the Missouri, General Thomas asked for all of his spare troops. Knowing the need, he sent twelve thousand men, which constituted all of his organized forces. The situation in Missouri was precarious, due to the ever-present guerrilla warfare and rival factions. Realizing the danger in which the State was thrown, he set to work with his usual zeal and thoroughness to drill his raw recruits. They held the guerrillas in check and no serious outbreak resulted.

Later in 1865 he used his ingenuity of manufacturing troops in still another way. The St. Louis prisons were crowded with Confederates who were aching to be released. These men had no objection to fighting Indians and so Dodge filled out his regiment with two companies of Rebel Volunteers.

The first time Grenville M. Dodge had a chance to show his military genius was in the battle of Pea Ridge. It was there that the Army of the South-

west met Price's army and fought for three days. On the second day, March 7th, hostilities began at eight thirty in the morning and did not cease until five in the afternoon. The Fourth Iowa had its first baptism of fire, and covered itself with glory. The men knew how to fight and they were persistent. Even the wounded would not leave the field, but remained, loading their guns and shooting from the ground. "Don't give up, Colonel, hang to 'em", they shouted, and Dodge continued the assault until the enemy fled.

But the supply of ammunition was running out. Was it to be another Bunker Hill? As the Confederates charged in full force, Dodge ordered his men to wait until the graycoats were within fifty feet, and then they fired their last round of cartridges. That final volley threw the enemy into confusion. "Charge!" came the order from the indomitable colonel. And the Fourth Iowa obeyed — without ammunition — but with bayonets fixed.

Pea Ridge was a murderous battle. Not only was the mortality unusually high but the hospital equipment was entirely inadequate to care for the wounded. Dodge was continually at the front, accepting more than his share of the danger. After having three horses shot under him he was wounded in the side. As soon as possible he started on the two hundred and fifty mile trip over a rough road to the St. Louis hospital. "It was during this ambulance trip," he wrote, characteristically, "that I received

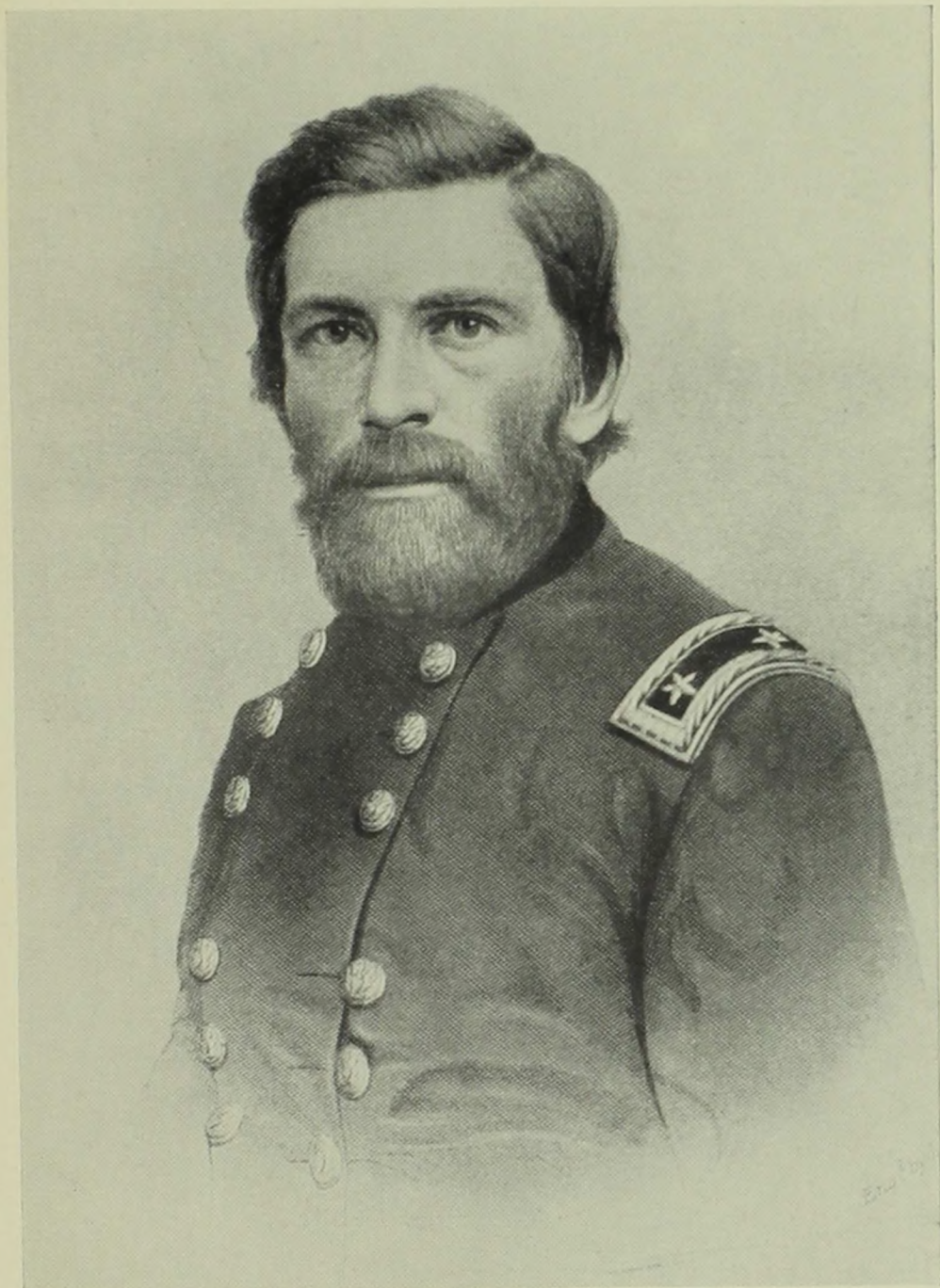
a telegraphic dispatch from General Halleck notifying me of my promotion for services in this battle. It was thought and was also stated in the papers, that I could not live and I told General Halleck afterwards that they expected to have the credit of making a Brigadier General and at the same time to have a vacancy. I fooled them for the promotion insured my getting well."

Dodge remained a brigadier general until June, 1864, although Grant urged his promotion long before that and Sherman and McPherson insisted on giving him commands above his rank. Jealous officers complained of a brigadier general commanding a whole corps. Aware of this criticism, Dodge finally wrote to Sherman asking for a command better suited to his rank. But that forthright general wrote this short, unofficial note in reply: "Suppose you wait until someone that has a right to complain does so; and go ahead and do your duty and not trouble yourself about other's business." Not long after this, President Lincoln solved the problem by sending Dodge a commission as major general. With two stars on his shoulder straps, Dodge commanded the Sixteenth Corps in the battle of Atlanta.

On the evening of July 21st, General Sherman's army had closed up within two miles of Atlanta and occupied high ground commanding the city. Unless General Hood could check the encircling movement of the Union army, his communication toward the south would be seriously threatened. He therefore

determined upon the grand strategy of sending Hardee's corps of about forty thousand men around the left flank to attack McPherson's Army of the Tennessee in the rear, cut off retreat, and capture Sherman's whole army. It was a brilliant plan that came dangerously near success. But as the Confederates came out of the woods a short distance away, the Sixteenth Army Corps faced about and met the first heavy onslaught with such a deadly volley that the assault was checked. Though impelled by the knowledge of the desperate emergency and the motive of preconcerted surprise, it was the attackers that received the real surprise. Dodge's men, numbering less than five thousand, suddenly attacked in the rear by a much larger force from the cover of heavy timber, nevertheless stood and fought in an open field and drove the enemy pell-mell back to the woods.

From noon until midnight the battle raged. The enemy seemed to be everywhere — in front, on the flank, and behind. Some of the Union troops fought in seven different positions, so often did the direction of the battle shift. As the Sixteenth Corps met the first shock of the conflict, so too it fired the last shots that night at Bald Hill. Engaged on four parts of the battle field, its losses, consisting almost entirely of killed and wounded, were heavier than the casualties of any other unit of its size. Yet it never wavered. Eight captured battle flags were the symbols of the masterly leadership of General Dodge and the valor of his men.



MAJOR GENERAL GRENVILLE M. DODGE

Despite his acknowledged ability, Dodge did not escape criticism. In order to secure reliable information about the enemy he hired loyal residents in the South as scouts. For fear of having their identity disclosed, they refused to sign receipts for the money they received. So insinuations of graft were made and there were no vouchers to prove the lie. Nevertheless Lincoln and Grant took his word, and one of his friends said, "Grin and bear it." But it was mostly "bearing" and not much "grinning".

Grant had only praise for the generalship of Dodge. He spoke of him to Stanton as "an exceedingly efficient officer". In planning the Vicksburg campaign, he stationed a reserve force at Corinth to protect communication lines, and selected Dodge for this duty — a man of judgment who could be depended upon to act decisively in an emergency and obey orders. The dispatch ended with the significant words, "I know you will stay there."

Just as Sheridan found his place as a cavalry leader, so Dodge found the particular work for which he was fitted. He had the technical knowledge and the practical experience of railroad construction which enabled him to build and maintain the transportation facilities that were so vital to an advancing army. But repairing railroads and constructing bridges which had been destroyed by the enemy was not as glorious as winning battles. "He is too valuable an officer to be anywhere except at the front," Grant wrote to Sherman, "and one

that you can rely upon in any and every emergency." Nevertheless, much of Dodge's most valuable service was behind the lines.

As Sherman was closing in upon Atlanta, he was halted by the bridgeless Chattahoochie River. Dodge thought that his men could cut the timber from the forest and build a bridge in a week. But when he arrived on Monday he saw the possibility of speeding the work by using the lumber of some idle factory buildings. Sherman's troops marched across the bridge on Wednesday.

Rebuilt bridges could be destroyed again if not sufficiently garrisoned. Earth defenses had been used with limited success, but something more effective was needed. Dodge conceived the idea of erecting two-story, log blockhouses at the bridge heads. A company occupying one of these could repulse a regiment. Indeed, they were so successful that Grant had them erected at strategic points on all the railroads.

Because of Dodge's ingenuity and engineering ability, the officers of the Union Pacific Railroad urged him again and again to leave the army to become their chief engineer. But he considered building railroads down in Tennessee out of twisted rails and native timber more vital to his country. Not until 1866 did he accept the position.

This building of a railroad across a continent through hostile country where every man had to have a gun constantly by his side was an undertak-

ing the like of which had never been attempted. Each day taught lessons, and year by year the mileage increased. The chief engineer was quick to profit by experience and change his methods if the old way did not work. The plains were crossed, and the mountains too. By applying the slogan, "Speed up but build well", the road was completed in 1869, several years before the expiration of the contract.

Whether as a railroad engineer, a soldier, or a frontiersman, Grenville M. Dodge established a world-wide reputation for resourcefulness and accomplishment. He had the faculty of doing as well as planning. During the war his conduct in battle was no less brilliant than his counsel at headquarters. Obstacles were challenges to be accepted, not barriers to justify defeat. In his campaign against the Indians, at the end of the war, he ordered the troops never to retreat. As Sherman said to McPherson in a crisis, "I think you had better send Dodge."

RUTH E. DUGAN