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H.C. Wright

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CONFEDERATE REMINISCENCES

The turning-point of the Confederate invasion of New Mexico in 1862 was at Pigeon's Ranch, a short distance east of Apache Cañon and Glorieta Pass. At the time it was owned by, and got its name from, a Frenchman named Alex. Valle who talked "pidgin" English. It was a stopping-place of the old Santa Fe Trail, and later a post-station in the stage service. Through the courtesy of the present owner, Mr. T. L. Greer, we are enabled to record the recollections of three old Confederate comrades which differ in a number of details from the usually accepted account of that campaign. (Bancroft, xvii, 680-700; Twitchell, *Leading Facts*, ii, 357-390.) They do not explain why Chivington, after destroying their supply-train in the rear, failed to hold the strong position in Apache Cañon and so bottle up the Confederate force; but they confirm the fact that Sibley was not there. They seem to refute pretty clearly the assertion that the flag of truce was used as a subterfuge to enable them to slip away to Santa Fe, leaving their dead and wounded uncared for, nor does the retreat southwards appear to have been entirely a rout. Especially noteworthy is their tribute to the honorable treatment given their sick and wounded in Santa Fe by General Canby, and the gracious services of Mrs. Canby.—L. B. B.

Trinity, Texas,

Aug. 5, 1927.

Dear Mr. Greer:

The last week of July my daughter and her daughter and their husbands were in New Mexico and at your place and enjoyed the short stay there very much. They brought me several pictures and also one of your little booklets which I read with pleasure, but I told them I could give a much more correct statement about the Confederate side than the

little booklet gave, so my daughter, Mrs. Smith, insisted on me writing you. It isn't necessary for me to tell you that my education is very limited, for when I should have been in school I was in the Confederate army for four years.

Well, to begin with you have got the Confederate army that took part in the battle of Pigeon Ranch over estimated. You say, "Sibley's army of Texas soldiers came up with 2500 and fought 3000 Union soldiers which was reinforced that day with 400 volunteers from Colorado, commanded by Captain Chivington, a brave and daring young man," which I hope to have something to say about later on.

In the first place General Sibley was not there and only nine companies of his brigade were there. This was nine companies of the 4th Texas Cavalry of which I am proud to say I was a member.

On the morning of March 25th, 1862, the nine companies left Albuquerque and left Company A, commanded by Captain Hardemann, to guard the hospitals there which were full of our sick soldiers. We had had nothing to eat for several days except bread made of flour and cold water, not an ounce of meat of any kind or an eye of greece. We marched all day in a northeast direction and camped at a gold mine, I disremember the name. We still had our same old bill of fare, flour and water. The next day, the 26th, we marched in the same direction until about the middle of the afternoon, and camped in the edge of a prairie which I think was a part of the Beard sheep ranch. The hands on the ranch began to kill and bring in a large quantity of as fat mutton as any one could wish for, so we were all happy once more, but only for a short time. We began to put our mutton on the fire, and thinking and talking about what a feast we would have in a short time, and happened to look across the prairie and saw the dust rising and it was only a few minutes until it showed to be a man. He had a paper in his hand and loped up to Colonel Scurry's tent and handed the paper to the colonel. We were all watching and saw the

colonel give him a paper and off he went. I was only a boy, but another man was standing by and said: "Hell is brewing and not a mile off." About that time Colonel Scurry came down the line with his old cap in his hand and hollowing out, "Pack up, boys, Major Piran [Pyron] has been fighting 600 Yankees with 20 men for two days and has got a truce until 12 o'clock tomorrow and we must go to him." The next order came in a few minutes to fall in line and leave the packing up for the teamsters, so in a short time we were on the march for Glorieta Pass, and arrived at the Santa Fe Trail where it enters the canyon about one hour before day. We lay down on the ground until day. Soon after day the wagon train began to arrive and we began unloading in hopes of finding our mutton, but no mutton was to be found, so we had to be contented with our regular bill of fare. After breakfast we formed a battle line across the road at the head of the canyon, and held it all day, but nothing unusual occurred that night. We had a heavy guard all night. Next morning [28th] after eating our breakfast we were told to put what we had left in our haversacks, that we would not be back to camp till night, and in a few minutes we were on the march for Pigeon Ranch. When we were in one-half or three-fourths of a mile of the corral the picket guards began firing on us. We formed a battle line where a branch or ravine crosses the road and were soon under a heavy fire and a charge by the Federals. We let them charge up to about 30 yards of us, and then we rose up out of the ravine with a Texas yell, and a volley of rifle fire and drove them back with some loss on both sides. We kept that up for some time when Colonel Scurry decided to divide us up and send about one-half of the men up on the right side, the other on the left. We kept moving up until we were opposite the old corral so we had them under a cross fire and they pulled out and left the battlefield with us. We slept in the old corral that night. As soon as they left Colonel Scurry rode up and called for a white handkerchief, said he

wanted to send a flag of truce to tell them damned Yankees to come back and pick up their dead and wounded. No one came forward with the white handkerchief, so the old colonel said: "God Damn it, tear off your shirt tail, we have got to have a white flag." I had just picked up a new beautiful white silk handkerchief off of the battlefield. I hated to give it up, but after looking around I decided there was not a shirt tail in the crowd that would do for a white flag, they would have suited better for battle flags, so I walked up and gave the colonel my much prized silk handkerchief. He said it was just the thing and that I should have it back, though I did not expect it, neither did I get it back. The men that took the flag of truce said they followed the Yanks eight miles before they caught up with them, but in a couple of hours they were gathering up their dead and wounded. They worked all night and the next day they buried their dead and loaned us their tools to bury ours. This was the 29th and as we hadn't eaten a bite since early the morning before, so all we had to eat that day was corn we picked up in the corral the horses and mules had wasted. We had to roast the corn in the ashes of our camp fire, but it was a change and we enjoyed it. That was the last we got to eat that day. If the Union commander had only known our condition and held out until 12 o'clock the next day the Confederates would have had to surrender as we had no rations and our ammunition was about exhausted. We started out the morning of the 28th with a good supply of ammunition, but had used it freely all day. When Colonel Scurry would come around he never once told us to be saving with our ammunition, but would tell us to give them Hell boys, which we were trying to do, if he called using bullets Hell they were getting plenty of it. Just at dark on the 29th the bugle called us in line and Colonel Scurry made us a little speech and told us our wagons and all supplies had been burned and our sick taken prisoners and the nearest and only place to get any supplies was in Santa Fee, which was 28 miles

and the only way we could get it would be to beat the Yankees there and we struck out for Santa Fe and reached there early next morning and got quarters and plenty to eat.

Now I will have a few words to say about Captain Chivington, the brave captain from Colorado, after burning and destroying all our supplies which I admit he had a perfect right to do as it was enemy property, and he also had a right to make prisoners of our sick soldiers, but when he lined them up and gave his men orders in case they were attacked by the Confederates to shoot them down like dogs he was going further than any brave man would or could go, and I or any other brave man are bound to consider him a contemptible coward.

Now I have written this and tell it all as I see it from memory of 65 years. I was in my 19th year at the battle of Glorieta, am now in my 85th year. I don't know how many men we had killed. In our company we had only four killed and several wounded. I think the regiment lost about 75 men and maybe more, it all seems like a dream to me now and I only wish it was. Two of my mess mates were killed, John Manton and Willie McCormic, two boys I loved like brothers and both killed on the left wing of our little army firing under Major Ragly who was also killed. I don't know but two men besides myself who were in the battle that are still living. There may be others but I don't know who they are or where they are, you see that has been 65 years ago and men that was as old as 30 years are now 95. The two men that was in the same company with me and also in the battle of Glorieta are living in Austin, Texas. Their names are B. H. Tyler and H. C. Wright. I am sure either of them or both will be glad to write and give you a short history of the part they played in the campaign in New Mexico and if you write to them tell them it is through the request of Harvey Holcomb, Trinity, Texas, and ask B. H. Tyler to send you some of his war songs. He wrote several songs about the war and one about the battle of Val Verde and Glorieta

which I am sure you will appreciate. B. H. Tyler is about 92 or 93 years old now. Mr. Wright is about 87 or 88 years old now. I don't know either of their addresses but if you will address the letter to H. C. Wright, guard at Capital, Austin, Texas, they will get your letter. I want you to get letters from each of them and compare them with my letter and see how near alike we saw things. There will no doubt be a difference as no two men can see any thing alike.

Now before closing I must not fail to give a word for that noble lady, Mrs. Camby [Canby], the Federal commander's good wife. She was living in Santa Fe when we landed there March the 30th, 1862. She lived in a large house and threw open her door and invited in all our sick and wounded and nursed them like they were her own sons. We stayed in Santa Fe about 10 days and she had her house full of our sick and wounded boys as long as we stayed there. At one time she was nursing 14 of our boys.. I will say this that Mrs. Camby captured more hearts of Confederate soldiers than the old general ever captured Confederate bodies. I must quit.

(Signed) Harvey Halcomb,

Trinity, Texas.

P. S. Should you write to B. H. Tyler and H. C. Wright at Austin, Texas, I would suggest that you send them one of your little booklets and let them see how Colonel Sibley's forces was so much overestimated in the battle of Pigeon Ranch. Your little booklet says the Confederates was 2500 strong, but we could not have had more than 600 men all told in the Glorieta Battle. Colonel Scurry said he only had a hand full of men, but they are all damn good scrappers.

I want to thank your little boy for the soubiner he sent me. I appreciate them ever so much.

H. H.

Austin, Texas, Sept. 7, 1927.

Mr. T. L. Greer,

Dear Sir:—Your very interesting letter addressed to Mr. B. H. Tyler and myself was received yesterday. I was not aware that Harvey Holcomb was still living. He has been reported dead several times, and both Tyler and I have written time and again to him and received no answer. I will try again. B. H. Tyler is now 90 years old. I am 87. I know of no other member of our company living. The old brigade met for a reunion in June every year. There were only 10 this year. We unite with the Hoods brigade and meet at Bryan. I inclose this year's program. B. H. Tyler was not able to attend. He lives here with his daughter (93 Rainey street). I dropped him a card yesterday and hope he may be able to come up to the capitol to see me today (he may be out of the city). I want to see him so as to brush up my memory in regard to those old times. There are many things I never knew or cannot recall. But there are some facts that stand out prominently in my mind; and they are utterly in variance with some of the things you have recorded.

In the first place Gen. Sibley was not at Glorieta. He did not even command the brigade at Val Verde, a month or two before. He was utterly incompatable (some said a coward), and Col. Tom Green was in command at that time. At any rate after that battle we never saw him again. Col. Green had command as brigadier general and later as division commander until two years later he was killed. As well as I remember (I will consult Tyler about it) only two of our regiments (4th and 5th) took part in the Glorieta fight. If so then we did not have over 1200 or 1500 men. Even if the 7th (3rd of our brigade) were present we could not have had quite 2,000.

We left Santa Fe and marched some 15 or 20 miles to meet the Fed's. We camped two or three days waiting for

them, but they did not show up. Then our scouts brought word that they were on their way, and leaving our camp we went forward and met them at the pass. It was a hard fight for they were brave men. But tho we were greatly outnumbered we drove them steadily back until at last they retreated in great confusion. So much so that a white flag messenger had to gallop for miles before he could find officers in sufficient command to stop the retreat and send back men to bury the dead and care for the wounded. It was a great shock to us to find that after we had won the battle we had lost the victory by our supplies having been destroyed.

Your account says they killed 1100 mules. At the outside we did not have over 500, and I for one never saw or heard of a dead one. They captured the mules and drove them off, and burned our wagons (less than 100) and supplies.

There was a lot of sick and wounded men there; also cooks, drivers and camp guards. These they payrolled. The most of our men marched back to Santa Fee that night and there commandered supplies. But others remained on the battlefield to care for the dead and wounded. A few provisions were found. I myself found a lot of baled buffalo meat (the first and only lot I have ever seen); said to have been put up by Indians and a number of sacks of flour. These were stored at a little place about a mile, as well as I can remember, down the road from the pass. I had a dear friend shot down by my side in the battle. I was compelled to leave him, but when the fight was over I went back to look for him, but did not find him till the next day. He had been taken off the field (had wandered off himself) and got to this little place—there I found him with a dozen more wounded men piled on the dirt floor helpless and forgotten. I at once took charge and as I said found a lot of meat and flour hidden away. I secured a sack of flour and a bale of meat, the rest disappeared like magic. In a little dugout (or

potatoe house) I found a hen just beginning to set on 13 eggs. That hen made into soup and those eggs fed those poor fellows nearly a week until the last of them (that lived) was hauled into Santa Fee.

Here I want to state that Mrs. Gen. Canby, the lovely wife of a noble man and also a sympathiser with the south, invented a way in the absence of ambulances to bring the wounded to town. She had tent cloths nailed across the rough wagon beds, so as to form hammocks, on which wounded could ride in comparative comfort, thus doubtless saving many lives. I with my wounded friend remained nearly a week until the only ambulance could be obtained for him. (I am glad to say he finally recovered and lived to be 84).

Our troops remained in Santa Fee (I think) about a week and then started for Texas. Doubtless they endured hardships on the way, but as for having to kill and eat their horses and mules, that is all nonsense. There were but few deaths on the way, and the fact that only 1200 reached Fort Bliss only shows how greatly their numbers were overestimated in the battles. Neither did the Feds follow them up closely. It was quite a while after they left Santa Fee before the Feds ever came in sight of the town, and five months later when I passed through Mesilla no federal troops had been nearer than Fort Craig over a hundred miles above.

You see I had remained in Santa Fee at the hospital to care for my friend. Now I never heard before that Gen. Canby commanded the Feds at Glorieta. We had left him at Fort Craig after the battle of Val Verde and how he could have passed our army and gotten away above Santa Fe I can't see. It may be so but I never heard it before. However he was in command of the forces that came into the town after our troops left, and right here I want to pay tribute to one of the noblest men that ever served in any army.

It was fully a week after the troops entered S. F. before

we were aware of it. Not a man was allowed to come near the hospital, and not until our supplies and provisions had entirely failed did we have any intercourse with them at all. At last our officers with 3 or 400 sick or wounded on their hands were forced to appeal for help. They went to Gen. Canby and stated the case.

He replied: "Gentlemen, I had no intentions of interfering with the hospital in any way. But the only way I can assist you would be as prisoners of war."

They told him that was what we expected. He then sent down and took our weapons, also our names, commands, etc. Then he issued us full supplies of everything needful, and months afterwards when we were able to travel furnished mules, wagons and provisions and sent us back to Texas, of course under parole. A nobler man never lived and when he was murdered by Modoc Jack I was grieved to my heart. But I must close before I become tiresome. I could write much more, but will spare you. I would love to meet you, and if you ever come to Austin come to see me. You will find me at the capitol.

Very truly yours,

(Signed) H. C. Wright.

I met Mr. Tyler and he could not add anything to what I have written. He is very feeble.

H. C. W.