

CHAPTER SIX

The Push

John Pemberton's attention was being pulled in several directions. While Grant showed signs of a major operation unfolding west of the Mississippi River, the raids taking place elsewhere posed serious challenges for the Confederate general. By April 22 it was obvious that Grierson's incursion into Mississippi, which Pemberton had dismissed just two days earlier as "a mere raid," was something much more substantial.¹

"Heavy raids are making from Tennessee deep into the State," Pemberton informed theater commander Joe Johnston at Tullahoma, Tennessee, on April 22, "and one is reported now at Starkville, 30 miles west of Columbus." The Vicksburg commander added, "Cavalry [is] indispensable to meet these raids," but "the little I have is in the field there, totally inadequate to prevent them."²

Unfortunately for Pemberton, he had no mounted troops south of the Confederate cavalry chasing Colonel Hatch to meet the enemy or defend key points, including the vital Southern Railroad of Mississippi. "I have so little cavalry in this department," he complained, "that I am compelled to direct a portion of my infantry to meet raids in Northern Mississippi," Pemberton informed Richmond. Abraham Buford's infantry, then in motion in Alabama, received word to halt and await further orders while other bodies of infantry were instructed to move north along the

1 *OR* 24, pt. 3, 770.

2 *Ibid.*, 761, 770, 776-78.

rail lines to take positions better suited to meeting or stopping the enemy raid. Eventually, most of the troops in the eastern portion of the state would end up under the command of Maj. Gen. William W. Loring. Meanwhile, additional commands also concentrated on the compromised area, including Brig. Gen. Winfield S. Featherston's brigade, which moved to the Mississippi Central at Winona and Duck Hill, some of Loring's brigades, which moved north along the Mobile and Ohio from Meridian to aid General Ruggles, and Brig. Gen. Lloyd Tilghman's brigade, which moved north along the Mississippi Central from Canton. These infantry maneuvers, however, would be hard pressed to make any difference unless the Federals stumbled into an area they defended.³

Despite these hurried activities and his concern for what was unfolding in central Mississippi, Pemberton's main attention remained focused on Grant's operations west of the Mississippi River in Louisiana. Another movement of Federal vessels past the Vicksburg batteries on the night of April 22 was disconcerting, as were the infrequent messages reaching him concerning the Union raid. Pemberton told General Loring, who was moving troops northward from Meridian to meet Grierson, to keep him informed "hourly." The end of his message demonstrated the concern he felt about Grant's operation when he added that Loring's troops may "be required here at any time. Six boats passed Vicksburg last night."⁴

Pemberton's concentration on Vicksburg, his lack of cavalry, and the need to use infantry instead of mounted troops made the Confederate pursuit of Grierson less successful than it might have otherwise been. The fractured Southern command structure also accounts for the chaotic pursuit. Ruggles was in charge of the district when Grierson rode into it, but Gen. Samuel Gholson was in command of the state troops there. These included Col. J. F. Smith's 2nd Mississippi Cavalry State Troops, Capt. T. W. Ham's four companies of the 16th Battalion State Troops, and two companies of partisan rangers under Maj. William M. Inge. In the field, however, these officers and commands reported not to Gholson but to Colonel Barteau. (Regular Confederate cavalry units operated under their regular commanders, such as Barteau.)⁵

3 Ibid..

4 Ibid., 779.

5 Ibid., pt. 1, 535, 552; Bearss, *The Vicksburg Campaign*, vol. 2, 197.

The fact that many of the commanders did not get along only made the fluid and dangerous situation that much worse. When the troopers of Lt. Col. James Cunningham's 2nd Alabama Cavalry heard Hatch's small two-pounder firing the day before, the mounted outfit left camp at Okolona and rode toward the fighting. Barteau, however, was none too impressed and blamed much of the previous day's failure on Cunningham's tardiness in reaching the field. "The reinforcement," Barteau reported snappily, "was too late to be of any service. In fact, the tardiness of his movements allowed the enemy to reach Okolona; for had he joined me before reaching Palo Alto, we should have routed and scattered the enemy." Cunningham then made matters worse, Barteau reported, because "upon his late arrival he desired to assume command, which I declined to grant him." Unsure of their relative rank status, Barteau added, "If I committed an error in this respect, I am subject to such remedy as the case may require." With some of the Confederate officers arguing among themselves, and all of them working within a rickety system of command, the hope of actually catching Hatch, much less Grierson, became that much more difficult.⁶

Still, Barteau had done well by staying just a few hours behind Hatch's Iowans. Smith's and Ham's units had rejoined Barteau after the fighting at Palo Alto, when Barteau again divided his forces, this time sending the state troops toward Pontotoc while he moved toward Okolona with his own and Cunningham's regiments. The latter command, however, was blocked by a flooded creek, which Barteau described as having "no bridge, and the water swimming deep," and stopped its advance. Trouble between the lieutenant colonels, meanwhile, continued to fester. When Cunningham informed Barteau that "his command was exhausted and without rations [and] that he could not continue the pursuit," Barteau decided he had had all he could stand of Cunningham. His own men, after all, were at the point of exhaustion and had been in the field longer than Cunningham's troopers. Barteau accepted his explanation and simply continued on with his own command. The Alabamians' departure weakened the pursuing force, and the Confederates left broken-down horses and men all along the road. Barteau, meanwhile, with Ham's, Smith's and Inge's troops, pushed northward, hoping for a chance to catch up with the withdrawing Federal column. What they would do if

6 Ibid., pt. 1, 535, 552; Bearss, *The Vicksburg Campaign*, vol. 2, 197.

they actually caught Hatch's Iowans remained to be seen, because each Confederate had only about ten rounds of ammunition.⁷

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The main beneficiaries of the Confederate chaos were Hatch's Iowans, although Grierson also gleaned advantages from it. By the morning of April 22, Grierson was moving south toward Louisville with an extensive set of obstacles to surmount, but not a single hindrance was the result of Confederate defenders or pursuers, primarily because Hatch's bold diversion continued to attract Barteau's attention.⁸

Hatch's Iowans avoided major trouble throughout the afternoon of April 21 and by nightfall were falling back slowly to the northeast, fighting a careful rear-guard action designed to keep the enemy in pursuit. With Barteau's command at bay, Hatch camped for the night east of the formidable Tibbee Creek, not far from the Mobile and Ohio Railroad. It had been a hectic day and evening for the midwesterners, who at one point rode down a large watershed blocked by Confederates to find an alternate crossing point. Bonfires raged on each bank during the night as the soldiers crossed via a makeshift footbridge and the horses swam across. As one Iowan recalled, "Three or four troopers would seize each horse and throw him into the stream, when they would, by the aid of long poles, compel him to swim to the opposite bank." The men took apart the small cannon and used ropes to haul it across.⁹

Hatch continued his diversion the next morning, rousting his Iowans early on April 22 and moving toward the railroad. They soon found the Confederates were still in active pursuit, and the Union cavalrymen fended off the enemy in a series of minor skirmishes that stretched for miles. This time, however, it was not just Gholson's state troops and Barteau's regulars in pursuit but also "citizens in the country, armed with shot-guns and hunting rifles, firing constantly on our flanks."¹⁰

7 *OR* 24, pt. 1, 535-36.

8 *Ibid.*, 523-24.

9 Pierce, *History of the Second Iowa Cavalry*, 51; Grabau, *Ninety-Eight Days*, 114; Company C, 2nd Iowa Cavalry, Muster Roll, RG 94, E 57, NARA.

10 *OR* 24, pt. 1, 530.

Hatch did his best to bob and weave his way through the danger while still endeavoring to confuse the enemy as to his intent and direction. "Before noon we had marched to all points of the compass," one Iowan declared, "baffling all attempts on the part of the enemy to keep track of us." The Federal column passed through numerous swamps, which the same Iowan declared "everywhere abounds" in central Mississippi, and came across slaves sent out by their owners to hide their horses and mules. By the time Hatch made a dash north for safety, he and his Iowans had gathered as many as 600 horses and mules and around 200 slaves.¹¹

Even with the larger Confederate numbers nipping at his column from various directions, Hatch was able to make good time. He was careful not to outrun his pursuers and yet make sure he was far enough ahead to avoid having to wage a pitched fight a second time. If the Confederates discovered that his was not the only Union column in central Mississippi, they might well conclude Hatch was the lesser risk and pursue Grierson. Consequently, Hatch had to make as much fuss as possible, and he reasoned Okolona was as good a place as any to do so. Whatever fuss he intended, however, would be limited, because Hatch's Iowans had only about 21 rounds of ammunition per man themselves.¹²

Around 4:00 p.m. on April 22, the 2nd Iowa Cavalry rode into Okolona, a small town along the Mobile and Ohio Railroad almost midway between West Point and Tupelo. They easily dispersed the few Confederate defenders there, even though some regular cavalry was mixed in with the state troops. Once it was safe to do so, the men went to work destroying the railroad and anything else they could find of military value. A large barracks complex that could house as many as 5,000 men was torched, and a large stash of supplies and ammunition that Hatch's men could not take with them destroyed. Some of the destruction included "about three hundred shot-guns and rifles, mostly Enfield."¹³

11 Ibid., 531; Pierce, *History of the Second Iowa Cavalry*, 52; "The Enemy in Starkville," *Jackson Daily Mississippian*, April 21, 1863; Joe Rollins, "Ex-Slave Autobiography," in West Point, Mississippi, Miscellaneous Papers, Mississippi State University.

12 OR 24, pt. 1, 531; Pierce, *History of the Second Iowa Cavalry*, 52; "The Enemy in Starkville," *Jackson Daily Mississippian*, April 21, 1863.

13 OR 24, pt. 1, 530-31.

Hatch knew he could not remain in Okolona overnight, for the railroad offered the Confederates a quick means of concentrating against him. With the sun dipping toward the western horizon and the shadows growing longer by the minute, Hatch rode his troopers northwest and camped about five miles outside town. He needed to get away from the railroad, but he still needed to play his role as bait lest his pursuers abandon him and go after bigger game.¹⁴

The Iowans had covered 20 to 25 miles in their ride north toward Tennessee on April 22 and continued on toward Tupelo on April 23. The longer they lingered along the railroad, however, the greater the danger. Hatch gained information that Confederates from General Chalmers's command in northwestern Mississippi were moving to cut him off. That made sense because the various Union raids sent out of Memphis and La Grange to keep Chalmers occupied were over (unbeknownst to Hatch, Gen. Sooy Smith's and Col. George Bryant's commands had returned to the Memphis vicinity by April 23), and the men and horses were back in their respective camps. Chalmers was free to focus his attention elsewhere, but contrary to Hatch's intelligence, he had not yet moved east to intercept the Iowans.¹⁵

Hatch, however, was not in a position to risk Chalmers striking him in front and Barteau (and perhaps other Confederates) in the rear. He destroyed the bridges over the formidable Chiwapa Creek between Okolona and Tupelo to keep the pursuing enemy at bay and moved to Tupelo, where his tired Iowans made camp.¹⁶

As Hatch was dodging his pursuing Confederates while making his way north to Tennessee along the Mobile and Ohio Railroad, Grierson's main body was quickly and quietly moving south. If Hatch regretted playing the role of bait while Grierson continued with the main raid, he said nothing about it to his Iowans. As far as he knew, the overall plan was still operational and working. If the number of Confederates converging on him was any indication, there should be few left to go after Grierson.

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14 Ibid., 530.

15 Ibid., 530, 554.

16 Ibid., 530.

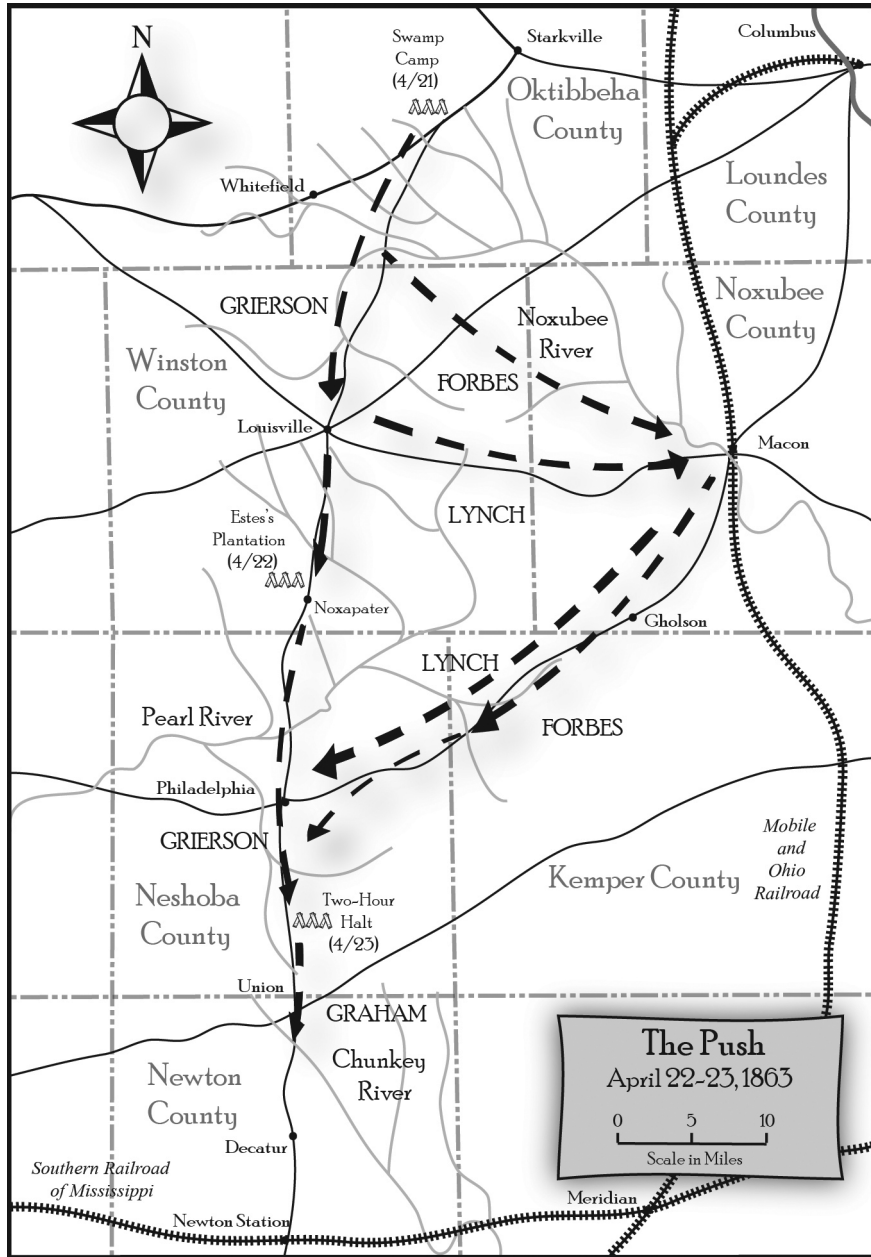
While Hatch was luring Confederates northward, Grierson was entering the final phase of his approach to the Southern Railroad of Mississippi. He was 70 miles north of Newton Station when his Illinoisans awoke on April 22. They were almost within striking distance, and the fact that they had made it this far with little to no opposition was nearly miraculous. If Grierson's fortune held, he would reach the railroad and surely surprise whatever enemy he found there. Now was the time to push hard. Perhaps he could make longer, harder rides each day and cover the distance in as little as two days.¹⁷

Grierson had his men up early on April 22, ready to cross the various watercourses in the Noxubee River bottom on his way to the rail line. Heavy rainfall the night before, however, had swelled the creeks almost to capacity and turned the roads and byways through the swampy terrain into ribbons of mud. The brigade followed the main road through Webster, but the sticky ground and deep water were difficult to traverse. A portion of the column tried to bypass this danger by detouring through Whitefield (present-day Sturgis). The valley was "a dense, overflowed swamp," recalled Adjutant Woodward. "No road was discernable, and the column was simply following the 'blazing' on the trees." Grierson agreed, noting he and his men rode "for miles belly-deep in water." Ammunition was lifted from artillery limbers and distributed to the men to carry above the water. At times, the Illinoisans had no choice but to swim their horses across flooded waterways. After one was crossed, however, another appeared in the distance. The route mandated the crossing of six major streams in addition to numerous swollen tributaries. The Noxubee River channel curved just east of Louisville, forcing the Illinois troopers to cross it twice during their approach to the high ground upon which the town was situated. Their introduction to Winston County, Mississippi, was wet, cold, and miserable.¹⁸

A fortunate opportunity greeted the exhausted column struggling across the soaked valley, recalled Woodward, when "a young doctor of the neighborhood appeared." Although it took some convincing because he was afraid his neighbors would accuse him of assisting the enemy, the Federals finally convinced him to act as a guide. The local "guided the

17 Ibid., 523-24.

18 Ibid., 523-24; Woodward, "Grierson's Raid," 692; Surby, *Grierson Raids*, 34; Daniel E. Robbins to Brother, May 7, 1863.



column around the heads of some deep sloughs and ravines, into which it would have otherwise marched blindly, and probably have drowned men and horses,” admitted the adjutant. Fortunately for everyone involved, the column broke through to higher and drier ground before anyone discovered the doctor helping them. He was sent on his way with a better horse, although it later dawned on Woodward that “the original owner of the mount” might one day find his horse in the doctor’s possession and accuse him of theft.¹⁹

It had been a slow start to a very long couple of days—exactly what Grierson had been hoping to avoid. There was nothing to do about it, however, except to slog onward. It was clear the raiders were still well ahead of any news. The few civilians encountered moving through this area of northern Winston County knew nothing of their pending arrival, and they were surprised when hundreds of Union horsemen suddenly appeared this deep in Mississippi. “The inhabitants through this part of the country generally did not know of our coming,” wrote a relieved Grierson, “and could not believe us to be anything but Confederates.”²⁰

The same phenomenon occurred when the tired troopers finally reached the high ground and approached Louisville. Because of the difficult trek across the river bottoms and the fact that Louisville was nearly 30 miles south of Starkville, it was nearly dark by the time the Illinoisans approached the town. If any of the troopers thought they might rest in Louisville, as they had at other towns, they were sorely disappointed. Grierson intended to keep on moving.²¹

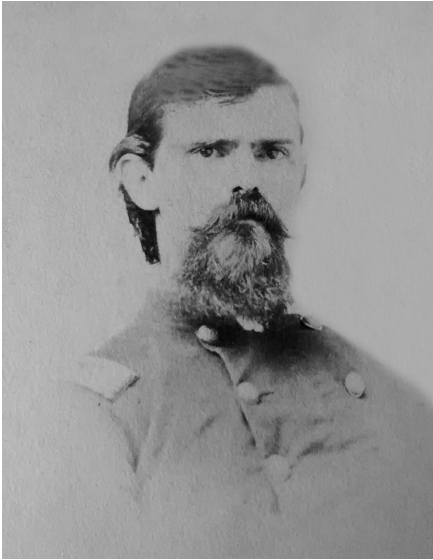
To better facilitate the move through Louisville, Grierson sent ahead a battalion of the 6th Illinois Cavalry under Maj. Matthew Starr “to picket the town and remain until the column had passed.” Starr’s troopers performed as ordered, although word broke out in Louisville of the pending Federal arrival just minutes before Grierson and his men thundered into the place. “Many had left,” observed the brigade commander, “taking only what they could hurriedly move.”²²

19 Woodward, “Grierson’s Raid,” 693-94.

20 *OR* 24, pt. 1, 524.

21 *Ibid.*, 523-24.

22 *Ibid.*, 524.



Matthew Starr. Major Matthew Starr of the 6th Illinois Cavalry was a solid officer who often led detachments on the raid. *Randy Beck*

“The column moved quietly through the town without halting,” Grierson reported, “and not a thing was disturbed.” Civilians who had stayed put “acknowledged that they were surprised,” he continued. “They had expected to be robbed, outraged, and have their houses burned. On the contrary, they were protected in their persons and property.” The destruction of personal property was not uncommon in the Civil War, and the practice would become more destructive as the war dragged on. Yet Grierson had made it clear that destroying personal property was against his wishes. Besides, he had other, more important things on his mind than sacking an insignificant Mississippi village.²³

None of Louisville’s civilians knew any of this. Years later a young girl penned her vivid recollections of the day the Yankees came to town. “Louisville had one wide street, with stores and public buildings on either side,” she wrote, “and my home was on a side street just off of Main Street, with a road separating it from the Old Masonic Building surrounded by a large oak grove.” Many people buried their silver and valuables. “This time my people,” she continued, “accompanied by several other families, fled to a small place we owned about a mile from town and off the main road. I still remember how branches of trees were

23 Ibid.

piled over the road after we passed to show no trace of another road. We carried food.”²⁴

Some Louisville residents resisted any way they could. According to one account, a Union cavalryman, perhaps one of Surby’s scouts, demanded the keys to a smokehouse in which Sara Jane Johnston, whose husband was in the Confederate army, had hidden her fine horse. She refused. When the trooper came to take it by force, the brave woman stood in the doorway and wielded a butcher knife until the Federal left without either ham or horse. Another citizen hid his food and horses except for one “old blind mule named Pompey, which was so feeble the men did not want it.” Trickery also helped. At the Corley homestead, two fine gray mules had wallowed so long in the mud that they looked haggard. The children yelled to the approaching soldiers that they were simply “broken down stock.” The soldiers let them be and passed by.²⁵

Other notable Louisville natives fled quickly. William Bolling, one of Winston County’s pair of delegates to the secession convention two years earlier, had been extremely vocal about his support for the Confederacy and his intent to fight the enemy. “His voice was heard on nearly all occasions,” one county history read, “rallying the patriotic and chivalrous sons of Winston County, to arms. He proclaimed with vehement asseverations that he would be with them in their marches and drink all the blood that was spilt and pay for all the powder that was burnt.” Bolling had his opportunity to live up to his words when Grierson’s troopers arrived. Instead of bravado, however, he was among the first to flee, “hid[ing] himself among the rocks in the mountains of Alabama.” The town doctor, Dr. J. B. Covington, made his getaway in a rather macabre fashion. With a trusty slave in tow, he escaped to an old cemetery outside town, where the slave lifted “one of the box tombs while he crawled in and stayed there until the soldiers passed through Louisville.”²⁶

24 “The Day the Yankees Came to Town: 1863,” *Winston County Journal*, May 1, 2014.

25 Jennie Newson Hoffman, “A History of Winston County Volume 1,” in Federal Writer’s Project: Works Progress Administration, 1938, Winston County Public Library, 146-47.

26 *Ibid.*, 83, 159; William T. Lewis, *The Centennial History of Winston County, Mississippi* (Pasadena, TX: Globe Publishers, 1972), 107-9; Josie Worthy Holman, in

All the effort and fear went for naught as the Federals simply moved through the town without stopping. While the residents wondered what was happening, Major Starr's battalion of the 6th Illinois Cavalry continued guarding the town until the lengthy column passed through. Once out of town and riding south, Grierson relieved the 6th Illinois provosts with a similar battalion from the 7th Illinois under Major Graham, whose duty it was to remain in town about one hour to keep any citizens from moving south to alert anyone in advance of the Federal column and to make sure no enemy followed. A pursuing enemy from Louisville was unlikely, because Grierson had not seen any Confederates since leaving New Albany. Still, there was much at stake and he was a careful soldier. Graham's orders were to "remain until we should have been gone an hour, to prevent persons leaving with information of the course we were taking, to drive out stragglers, preserve order, and quiet the fears of the people." Once Graham's Illinoisans finished their task, they rejoined their comrades as they continued their ride toward the Southern Railroad of Mississippi.²⁷

The same civilian confusion witnessed at Louisville repeated itself as the column advanced farther south. The muddy terrain also played to Grierson's advantage by covering their blue uniforms so thoroughly it was difficult for anyone to recognize them as Federal cavalry. (Grierson was also careful to keep their colors encased most of the time.) After passing through the swamps around Louisville "and reaching the rolling country beyond," recalled Grierson, "the troops were taken for Van Dorn's rebel cavalry and complimented on their appearance."²⁸

The confusion was at least partially understandable. The people in this portion of Mississippi never imagined a heavy Union column of cavalry could have ridden this deeply into the state. Even when the blue uniforms were recognizable, many locals assumed they were Confederates wearing captured Union clothing. A good example of how the mind plays such tricks occurred while clattering past a schoolhouse. The teacher allowed the pupils outside to watch the procession. According to Grierson, "They flocked to the roadside, hurraing for Beauregard, Van Dorn, and the

Accounts, Civil War in Winston County Vertical File, Winston County Public Library, 5; Hoffman, "A History of Winston County Volume 1," 150.

27 *OR* 24, pt. 1, 524.

28 Grierson, *A Just and Righteous Cause*, 156.

Confederacy. One little girl thought she recognized one of the men and, running up, asked him how John was, and if her uncle was along with the soldiers.” On another occasion, ladies picked roses and presented them to the passing soldiers. As one Illinois man admitted, “We enjoyed ourselves very much at the expense of the deluded citizens.”²⁹

When the column stopped at a mill to procure grain for the horses, “the old miller grumbled loudly” when told the soldiers would be taking the grain. The fact that he would receive a receipt did not help soothe his disgust. This particular miller, who had been on the short end of Confederate receipts before, knew they were essentially worthless. “Yes, I’ve met your sort before,” he chastised Grierson. “You always say you’ll pay and you give receipts, but they ain’t worth a damn. I wish the Yankees would come along and clean you out. They might give a fellow something. But you,” he continued angrily, “you eat up everything in the country without keeping them out. . . . Yes, I know you. You say you’ll pay, but I never got a cent for what I gave you before. The yanks might as well have it as you.” The old man was not finished. “Why don’t you go after Grierson instead of hanging around here?” he asked. By leaving “the impression that we were Confederates,” Grierson noted, “we readily gained much valuable information, besides misleading the enemy into many contradictory reports as to our force and movements.” According to Woodward, “The men were instructed that in their intercourse with citizens they should convey the idea that we were Confederates en route to Vicksburg.”³⁰

Leaving the humorous exchange behind them, Grierson and his troopers continued through the darkness. Unfortunately, wrote a rider, the head of the column struck what he thought was “another swamp.” In reality they had come up against Tallahaga Creek, a major tributary and part of the headwaters of the Pearl River system that began in the highlands southeast of Louisville, flowed southwest toward the state capital at Jackson, and then on to the Gulf of Mexico. The Pearl River ran between Louisville and Philadelphia, and Grierson’s column would have to cross it and other major tributaries. It would be hard enough to do so in daylight, but Grierson did not have the luxury of waiting hours

29 Ibid.; Surby, *Grierson Raids*, 33, 35.

30 Woodward, “Grierson’s Raid,” 691; Grierson, *A Just and Righteous Cause*, 156.

for the sun to rise. Instead, he plunged ahead into the boggy land around Tallahaga Creek, where the Federals “lost several animals drowned, and the men narrowly escaped the same fate,” Grierson reported. Another observer complained that “the marshes were swamp, and swamps were ponds. The roads, of which they were utterly ignorant, were like rivers, the water being in many places three or four feet in depth.” Fortunately for Grierson’s men, Surby’s scouts directed them along the best route “unmarked by a beacon post or guide” and provided fresh horses captured along their journey. The fresh mounts were especially valuable because they allowed those troopers who had lost a mount in the bottomland to continue. One observer detailed the problems they faced there:

On each side of the road were enormous trees, and the water was every where from three to four feet deep, with every few hundred yards a mire hole, in which frequently, for a few moments, man and horse were lost to view. The Seventh Illinois being in the rear found these holes impassable, from the action of the large body of cavalry which had preceded them, and they were compelled to leave drowned some twenty noble animals, whose strength was not equal to such an emergency. The men so dismounted removed their saddles, placed them on some other led beasts, and pushed onward cheerfully.

Grierson kept his exhausted men in the saddle until the column reached the Estes plantation just north of Noxapater. There and at the nearby Payne plantation, 10 miles south of Louisville, he finally called a halt and ordered his troopers to go into camp. It was about midnight. After riding at least 30 miles that day (and perhaps as many as 40), the Illinois troopers were tired and sore, and any chance of a respite was welcomed. Only Grierson knew their rest would be brief. He was rapidly approaching his major objective. Lingering in camp would not help them achieve it.³¹

Charner Estes and his son, W. E. W. Estes, were South Carolina natives. In 1857 the 50-year old Charner moved to Mississippi with his children and their families and purchased acreage north of Noxapater and southwest of Tallahaga Creek. By 1860 Charner’s land was valued at \$12,000 and he owned 15 slaves. His 30-year-old son owned 4. With

31 *OR* 24, pt. 1, 524; Grierson, *A Just and Righteous Cause*, 156; Abbott, “Heroic Deeds of Heroic Men,” 276-77; Surby, *Grierson Raids*, 40; Partridge, “Grierson Raided Here 130 Years Ago”; “Details of Grierson’s Great Raid,” *Sacramento Daily Union*, June 10, 1863; “From New Orleans,” n.d., in Thomas W. Lippincott Papers, ALPL.

many of the Estes men off to war, Charner and his wife remained behind to care for 2 of their grandchildren. Son W. E. W., who served in the 35th Mississippi Infantry, was severely wounded at Corinth in May 1862.³²

The men dismounted at the small plantations and made sure their horses were well cared for before turning to themselves. The mixture of long rides, unreliable provisions, and potential enemy action was beginning to catch up with the troopers. As an Illinois man in Prince's 7th regiment recalled, "We traveled so much after night that we were so sleepy we could hardly keep our eyes open." The troopers had eaten only one meal that morning at breakfast, so the lack of quality food also affected them. "We some times would mix up dough & bake on boards & very often we would go to bed without supper," grumbled the same Illinoisan. "Twice I went two days without eating any thing except some sugar & raw sweet potatoes."³³

Rest was what the men wanted and needed, but Grierson disappointed them by calling his troopers back into the saddle after just two or three hours since they had stopped. He wanted to get the column on the road by daybreak on April 23. After securing a carriage from Estes to carry one of the cannons whose carriage had broken down, Grierson and his saddle-sore troopers rode south once more, moving quickly to take advantage of whatever opportunities Hatch was giving them as his Iowans moved along the Mobile and Ohio Railroad some 85 miles to the north.³⁴

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Thus far, Grierson had been able to ride deep into Mississippi without having to cross any major rivers except the Tallahatchie, which he crossed easily, and then skirted the head of the Big Black River near Starkville. Ironically, the smaller rivers and streams were giving him the most trouble. Now, however, Grierson was coming up against a major river system, and there was no way to ride around it. If the crossing of one of its tributaries the previous night was any indication, the Pearl River and its deep and swampy tentacles posed a major problem. They were

32 1860 Winston County, Mississippi, Population and Slave Schedules; Bearss, *The Vicksburg Campaign*, vol. 2, 203; Louis Taunton and Nancy R. Parkes, *Winston County and Its People: A Collection of Family Histories* (Louisville, MS: Winston County Genealogical and Historical Society, 1980), 79-81.

33 Freyburger, *Letters to Ann*, 46.

34 Partridge, "Grierson Raided Here 130 Years Ago."

now entering bottomland, observed one trooper, and it was “considerably flooded with water, making progress slowly.”³⁵

Fortunately, Grierson knew a bridge spanned the river on the main road to Philadelphia, a route that jogged west to Pearl Valley. The brigade commander received a steady stream of reports from his scouts about the route and other information from captured Confederate mail. One mail coach taken near Louisville the day before contained, oddly enough, letters written mostly in French. Sergeant Major Augustus LeSeure of the 7th Illinois Cavalry, who was fluent in French, read them for whatever helpful information they might contain, but there was little in the missives of military interest. Unfortunately for the raiders, they had no way of knowing whether the critical bridge was still standing. If word of their presence preceded them, they feared the structure “would be destroyed by the citizens to prevent our crossing.” Its destruction would force Grierson to make a difficult crossing of a major waterway. If their presence this deep into Mississippi was still a surprise, as it had been in Louisville, there was a chance the troopers could reach the bridge and cross without incident. Thus, the faster they rode, the better their chances of finding the span intact. Grierson urged his men on, the 7th Illinois Cavalry taking the advance. “We were all well aware of the necessity of gaining the bridge at all hazards, and no time was lost in reaching it,” Grierson wrote. The bridge, he continued, “must be captured before it could be set on fire or destroyed, as its destruction would be fatal to our progress.”³⁶

Heavy rains had saturated the region over the past few days, and the “rushing of the turbulent flood” increased as the Federal troopers approached the river. When the water came into view that morning, it was obvious the river was at flood stage and flowing rapidly. The Pearl was “very high and unfordable,” concluded Grierson. The Union commander dispatched scouts to collect information, and before long Surby came upon “an old gentleman” named George P. Woodward, who

35 Surby, *Grierson Raids*, 37.

36 OR 24, pt. 1, 524; Grierson, *A Just and Righteous Cause*, 156-57; Abbott, “Heroic Deeds of Heroic Men,” 277; Woodward, “Grierson’s Raid,” 695; Surby, *Grierson Raids*, 36; Pearl Valley Location, Historic Neshoba County Maps, Neshoba County Public Library; Reece, *Report of the Adjutant General of the State of Illinois*, vol. 8, 54; Partridge, “Grierson Raided Here 130 Years Ago”; “The Great Cavalry Exploit of the Times,” *New Orleans Era*, May 5, 1863.

confessed that a few locals, including his son, were planning to burn the bridge upon word of the enemy's arrival. Though genial and kind by nature, Surby could be harsh when necessary. The news convinced the scout that a different approach was needed, so he threatened to burn down the old man's house if he did not disband the group intent on destroying the bridge. "My object," explained Surby, "was to save life if possible, the bridge at all hazards." Woodward saw the wisdom in cooperating and convinced the defenders of the bridge to leave. The Union scouts moved ahead at a gallop, with Colonel Prince of the 7th Illinois Cavalry accompanying them and the balance of his troopers charging behind them. To everyone's delight, the bridge was intact and the few Southerners visible were fleeing as fast as they could get away. It was a close-run affair, because the men had already stripped a few planks off the structure and were preparing kindling to set fire to the bridge. The Federals were on them "so suddenly and unexpectedly that their well-laid plan was disconcerted, and they all fled without firing a shot or lighting the incendiary match," Grierson proudly reported. Several troopers dismounted and replaced the planks so the column could cross the river and its soggy valley. Grierson was overjoyed when he heard "the tread of the horses feet . . . as the command crossed to the south side of the swollen river." Everyone involved knew they had come within a hair's breadth of potential catastrophe. Just "a few minutes delay or hesitation would have cost us trouble, and that delay might have proved fatal to the success of the expedition," he confessed. As fate would have it, the Pearl was the last major obstacle standing between Grierson and the Southern Railroad of Mississippi.³⁷

Grierson, to his wife's chagrin, was not a religious man, although others riding with him attributed their success to God. "Here the shielding Providence of God was manifested," exclaimed Colonel Prince, who agreed with Grierson on the importance of what had just been achieved when he added, "If the bridge had been destroyed it would have been fatal to the expedition." Another man described the crossing of the bridge even more pointedly. "Ten minutes later and all would have been

37 OR 24, pt. 1, 524; Grierson, *A Just and Righteous Cause*, 156-57; Woodward, "Grierson's Raid," 695-96; "Museum Memories," *Neshoba Democrat*, April 24, 2013; Surby, *Grierson Raids*, 38; Jenelle B. Yates and Theresa T. Ridout, *Red Clay Hills of Neshoba: Since 1833: Roots—Reflections—Ramblings: The Early History of Neshoba County, Mississippi* (Philadelphia, MS: Neshoba County Historical Society, 1992), 223.

lost. But for hours and days back minutes of grace had been, by God's care, accumulating for their rescue. It is a solemn thought, and one which those brave troops did not forget to hold in devout recognition," he continued, "that at any time in the whole course of their six days' marchings, haltings, and startings, a few minutes' tardiness on the part of a commander, a few moments' delay with a restive horse, a few minutes' lingering on a tedious ascent, would have brought them too late to the Pearl River bridge, and have made to all of them the difference between life and death." Although he never wrote about it, Rev. Capt. Jason Smith, the commander of the Illinois battery riding with Grierson, surely said a prayer of thanks.³⁸

Securing the bridge over the Pearl River turned out to be much less trouble than Grierson had feared it might be. Riding through the town of Philadelphia just south of the river, however, proved more troublesome. "Our advance caught sight occasionally of a mounted rebel," confirmed Grierson, and the frequency of such sightings increased the closer the Federals came to town. "Finally," continued Grierson, "quite a number of mounted and dismounted men were observed stretched in line across the road, apparently in readiness to dispute our passage." The last thing he wanted was a pitched fight with what looked to be a Confederate force this far from the railroad, but it looked increasingly like he would have no choice. Grierson sent his scouts, along with several regular troopers, forward to test the enemy line. To his surprise and thanks, it dissolved after a few of the enemy fired a handful of wild shots. Riding hard and fast, the scouts captured six of the defenders and their horses. The men were not Confederate soldiers after all, but simply armed citizens of Philadelphia.³⁹

The leader of the ragtag defenders was an older man who served as a Neshoba County judge, "under whose fatherly lead it seemed his citizen neighbors had armed for resistance," reported Grierson. "He was no doubt a very worthy man, and one who would naturally be looked to for advice in an emergency, but he was decidedly out of his element in command of those would-be soldiers." The "misguided" citizens of Philadelphia were "greatly agitated and alarmed" because they

38 "The Grierson Raid," *Weekly Register* (Canton, IL), September 7, 1863; Abbott, "Heroic Deeds of Heroic Men," 277.

39 Grierson, *A Just and Righteous Cause*, 157.

believed the Federals were going to either shoot or hang them. Grierson quieted their fears, “good-humoredly” explaining they were not there to tamper with civilians, only regular Confederate forces. When one Philadelphian asked if he was going to burn the town, Grierson peered at the dilapidated courthouse and other buildings, smiled, and sheepishly replied, “No Sir. My orders are not to leave the countryside better off.” Additional conversation ensued, an informal parole administered, and the men were turned loose, “a wiser if not better lot of men.” Surby recalled the odd scene of the Mississippians “standing in line with arms extended perpendicular, and Colonel Prince swearing them not to give any information for a certain length of time.”⁴⁰

Grierson bid his captives goodbye and moved through Philadelphia, where, he reported, “nothing was disturbed.” There might have been good intelligence to be had or supplies in town waiting to be found, but the Federal leader did not have the time to question civilians or locate and destroy things of military value. He had to keep riding south. “We moved through Philadelphia about 3 p. m. without interruption,” he reported. Concerned his column might be discovered and confronted with a credible enemy force, he kept Surby’s scouts “well out in every direction with a view to prevent any information as to our whereabouts or movements reaching the enemy.”⁴¹

Night was only a few hours off by the time the tail of the column exited the town. Grierson pushed on another five miles, angling southeast toward Meridian to give any watching Confederates the impression his objective lay in that direction. Once well away, he called a halt to feed his mounts and take stock of the situation. Usually the horses were fed when the column stopped to camp for the night, and where they had stopped was a logical place to camp. The regiments had already covered about 25 miles that day, but this night was different. When darkness arrived, observant troopers who were surprised with the order to stop earlier than usual to feed the mounts began to realize they would not make camp

40 Ibid.; Surby, *Grierson Raids*, 39; Steven H. Stubbs, *Neshoba at War: The Story of the Men and Women of Neshoba County in World War II* (Philadelphia: Dancing Rabbit Press, 2003), 10-11.

41 OR 24, pt. 1, 524; Grierson, *A Just and Righteous Cause*, 157-58.

at all that night. Grierson was only stopping to feed his horses and rest the men for a couple of hours before taking to the saddle once more.⁴²

* * *

While Grierson continued south at a rapid pace, he took care to cover his flanks and confuse the enemy. Before arriving at Louisville, he had sent an entire company west toward the Mobile and Ohio Railroad at Macon, south of the West Point–Starkville–Columbus area and north of Meridian. It was the same area he had directed Colonel Hatch to ride toward with his Iowans, although he had no way of knowing Hatch had actually retreated northward. Perhaps Grierson intended to mass a large number of Federal raiders at the small Mississippi town as a further distraction for the Confederates. If Hatch had failed to reach the railroad near Macon, pushing a company in that direction offered another opportunity to damage the line. Grierson talked over the plan with his officers, all of whom agreed it was dangerous but necessary.⁴³

According to one Federal, “The detachment to be thrown against this road was used as a forlorn hope, and was expected to be thrown away.” Grierson’s actions lend some credence to this claim because he asked for volunteers rather than select the men himself. A couple of scouts stepped forward, but they changed their minds once they had time to think about it. Grierson next asked Colonel Prince of the 7th Illinois Cavalry to “pick” the volunteers. The selection fell upon Capt. Henry C. Forbes’s Company B when Prince “dropped back to what chanced to be for the day’s march his rear Co.” When the colonel asked the captain if he would undertake the dangerous journey, Forbes agreed—despite Prince’s being unable to tell him much about what he would find or how to get back to the main column. Prince “could give him no intimation of the course the regiments would take, but that it seemed to him highly probable that after they had crossed the Vicksburg road they [Grierson’s

42 *OR* 24, pt. 1, 524; Woodward, “Grierson’s Raid,” 696.

43 William D. Lyles to Daniel Ruggles, April 22, 1863, in John J. Pettus Correspondence, MDAH; *OR* 24, pt. 1, 528; Grierson, *A Just and Righteous Cause*, 164; Surby, *Grierson Raids*, 31.

Henry C. Forbes. As commander of Company B, 7th Illinois Cavalry, Captain Henry C. Forbes led his company on a raid within the raid, making a miraculous journey and escape. *University of Illinois*



column] would swing eastward into Alabama, and through it retreat northward to the Federal lines.”⁴⁴

Company B was a solid outfit. Under Forbes’s leadership, the 30-plus troopers had become a brotherly unit. Forbes often acted as a father figure and even paid for supplies out of his own pocket. His younger brother, Stephen, was also a member of the company. One family member described the pair as “the one, a dashing, sagacious captain of thirty; the other, an impulsive, loyal corporal of nineteen.” Ironically, the Forbes brothers also had a cousin who lived in Mississippi and fought for the Confederacy with the Jeff Davis Legion in Lee’s Army of Northern Virginia.⁴⁵

44 Forbes, “Grierson’s Raid,” 13-14; Abbott, “Heroic Deeds of Heroic Men,” 274; “From New Orleans,” n.d., Thomas W. Lippincott Papers, ALPL. For more on Henry C. Forbes and his poetry, see the Henry Clinton Forbes Collection, University of Arizona.

45 Forbes Edited Letters, 1863, in Stephen A. Forbes Papers, UI, 203; Brown, *Grierson’s Raid*, 79-80; J. B. Forbes to S. A. Forbes, November 27, 1908, in Stephen

Stephen, the younger of the Forbes, was a good soldier with a poetic bent. In a letter home, he used colorful prose to describe the April weather. "The woods are green and the sun bright, the sky blue and the birds musical, the peach trees are covered with young fruit, the thunderstorms are getting quite fashionable, and everything bears evidence of the unmistakable presence of spring. Perhaps it seems a little strange to you," he added, "that we should think anything about pleasant weather, we, who have come down here to kill our fellows and carry distress to families, to dislocate the country and destroy life by wholesale." There was no glory in war, he confided to his sister. "If you only knew what a commonplace matter it was to be a soldier . . . we are not at all anxious for a battle . . . what a miserable dressing for a shattered bone or a gunshot wound glory makes! In short," he continued, "for all of the untold honor that is to descend unto our cherished names for unnumbered generations is we shed our blood for our country, it hurts like the deuce to be shot." Stephen went on to describe how he dreamed of "myself riding boldly over the hills and coming suddenly upon the enemy and blazing away at them with my revolver, when at least three men were to tumble down." He also dreamed of "blood running down from my left shoulder, never my right; when, after a few days of graceful bandaging, I would be alright and eager for another one, and have the honor of carrying rebel lead in my body to the grave."⁴⁶

The dreamy youth at the beginning of the war was, by 1863, a grizzled veteran who knew better. Stephen had been captured in the 1862 fighting around Corinth and had spent four months in a Confederate prison before spending a similar stretch in a hospital. In an odd twist of fate, the enemy had shipped him south to a Confederate prison along the same railroad he was now riding toward on horseback, and he had stopped in the same town of Macon that was now the target of his detachment.⁴⁷

Henry Forbes was older, wiser, and more down-to-earth than his artsy younger brother. The realist in him was soon on full display. Before he led his company away from the main column, Forbes pulled a few troopers of questionable health out of the ranks. He also asked that his

A. Forbes Papers, UI.

46 S. A. Forbes to Sister, April 13, 1863.

47 Roth, "Grierson's Raid," 18.

Stephen A. Forbes. The younger brother of Captain Henry C. Forbes, Stephen A. Forbes revisited places he knew well from his earlier stint as a prisoner of war in Mississippi. *University of Illinois*



men detailed to ride and scout with Surby—William Buffington, Arthur Wood, and Isaac Robinson—be returned so they could perform similar duties for his own small column. It did not take long for some of the men to wonder what they were getting into, or, as one would put it, whether “this little band would ever rejoin their comrades, unless, indeed, in a Confederate prison.” Captain Forbes put it a different way, writing simply, “A soldier accepts every challenge to duty.” And so the 36 troopers of Company B rode east with orders from Grierson to, “if possible take the town, destroy the railroad and telegraph, and rejoin us.”⁴⁸

48 William D. Lyles to Daniel Ruggles, April 22, 1863; *OR* 24, pt. 1, 528; Grierson, *A Just and Righteous Cause*, 164; Brown, *Grierson's Raid*, 80; Forbes, “Grierson's Raid,” 14; Forbes, “Grierson's Cavalry Raid,” 105. See also Forbes, “An Adventure of Co. B.”

The small Federal company rode southeast and soon came upon one of the consequences of the raid into Mississippi. Behind and on either side of the main column was a mad rush of civilians desperately trying to move out of the reach of the roaming Federal cavalry. "We had not been long on our route before we were made ludicrously aware of the tremendous panic which the raid was causing in these parts," explained Captain Forbes. Much like a boat creating a wake through otherwise calm water, Grierson's raid had caused a wave of panic all along the route. Gossip and rumors inflated Federal numbers into the thousands, and the kind treatment meted out along the route evolved and spread into stories of harsh treatment. "The whole region was terrorized," observed Forbes. The Illinois troopers were shocked they had caused such an uproar, because so little alarm had been raised along the main route. After some effort, Company B reached the front of the human wave and overtook it, where, explained the captain, "We found ourselves in the midst of the left hand crest of the panic-stricken overflow from the main march, a stampede wh[ich], as we afterwards learned extended 20 to 30 miles in either direction. As our march cut through this crest diagonally," he continued, "near evening we got outside it and approached Macon."⁴⁹

The key question facing Forbes was whether Macon had been alerted to their approach and then garrisoned. He questioned several local slaves but found them unreliable. "They were exceedingly gullible: they always preferred the biggest story," he explained, and "if the negro could divine what he thought his questioner would wish to hear, he would often say it, although he had to manufacture his statement out of whole cloth." Forbes called a halt at "Madame Augustus' plantation" a couple of miles outside Macon and sent scouts ahead to find out the truth. They returned a few hours later with a prisoner, John Bryson. Unfortunately, as Forbes explained it, Bryson "had that most difficult virtue to contend with, a nice sense of honor. He refused to give information." What happened next is unclear, but Forbes confirmed that "much diplomacy was finally rewarded" with news that a train was expected any minute with troops. The intelligence was supported by a report from the scouts who had heard locomotive whistles. A scout dressed in a Confederate uniform and sent into town returned with confirmation of the news. Forbes wisely

49 Forbes, "Grierson's Raid," 14-15.

decided to bypass Macon, which he considered “too large a prize to be captured by 36 men.”⁵⁰

Forbes may have failed in taking Macon, but he succeeded in other ways. Exaggerated rumors of his strength increased the value of his diversionary side raid, and the people who had gathered in Macon were not motivated to march out and stop them. “This is a good example of an instance in which the shadow is more important than the substance,” Forbes concluded. Meanwhile, he continued, “We had accomplished what we were sent for: we kept all eyes on the Mobile and Ohio Road.”⁵¹

Knowing he had nothing left to accomplish, Forbes released Bryson and gave him “a good horse and . . . a poor pistol,” a gesture that prompted the Confederate to part “with many expressions of esteem. . . . He had seen the Yankee Devils at close range and they were not so black as common report had painted them.” Forbes turned Company B around and rode back toward the main column.⁵²

The troopers of Company B trotted through the night and the following day in an effort to link up with Grierson, passing through the small hamlets of Summerville, Gholson, Pleasant Springs, and Caffadelia in their effort to do so. At Summerville, the small column was taken by surprise when “an ovation from an entire female Seminary, whose lovely members had been temporarily released from their tasks to give us joyful greeting . . . fluttered their dainty kerchiefs and kissed their daintier finger tips to us.” As the amazed troopers later learned, the scouts riding ahead of the column “had lied to them, making them suppose us a company of Alabamians in pursuit of the horrid Yankees.” A military school for boys in Summerville repeated the mistake when the cadets stepped outside to cheer the passing riders. One overly excited youngster dressed in his uniform performed “a series of hand springs which he turned on the grass.” The ruse was soon discovered, however, and the inhabitants realized the riders were Yankees. Once that knowledge sank in, the animated gymnast “strutted away rigid as an icicle,” penned one eyewitness, “with the rankling consciousness nevermore to be

50 Ibid., 16; William D. Lyles to Daniel Ruggles, April 22, 1863; *OR* 24, pt. 1, 528; Grierson, *A Just and Righteous Cause*, 164; “The Yankee Raid,” *Jackson Daily Mississippian*, May 2, 1863.

51 Forbes, “Grierson’s Raid,” 17.

52 Ibid.

dismissed, that . . . [he] had been turning somersaults of joy in honor of [the] invaders, who, as he slipped behind a hedge, were roaring with irrepressible laughter.”⁵³

A similar occurrence unfolded at Gholson, where a fine old gentleman offered everything he had to the supposed Confederates. The man “gloated over the thought that we had the courage to march toward those execrable Yankees whom report placed to the south and west of us in immense numbers,” wrote Forbes, “and when we told him that if we could but overtake them we would go through them from end to end if we perished to a man, his ardor knew no bounds.” As it had in Summerville, the realization that all was not as it appeared soon dawned on the residents of Gholson, and a proffered supper was enjoyed “with some lack of hospitality, [although] it was eaten with a relish that did not need that fine sauce.” The Federals, wrote Forbes, left the old man “a sadder, a wiser and a madder man.”⁵⁴

Company B picked up Grierson’s trail at Philadelphia, which the main column had ridden through 21 hours earlier. The troopers also came upon “a large number of horses tied near the old-fashioned hotel.” Forbes ordered his men to surround the building and learned the citizens were forming a company to resist more enemy raids. “To a man and to a horse and to a shot-gun they were made prisoners,” confirmed Forbes, who added that the Federals “sat down to their dinner which was just being spread as we appeared on the scene.” He and his men also engaged in “some one-sided swapping of horses, but we left as good as we took, save that ours were less fresh.”⁵⁵

Matters took a more serious turn just south of Philadelphia, where the three scouts from the company who had not heard the bugle call to halt had ridden on and met up at a house with straggling Confederate soldiers. The suspicious Southerners accused the scouts of being spies. The accusation triggered an argument that escalated until shots rang out. Forbes’s men heard the firing and set their spurs, but they were too late to affect the outcome. When they arrived at the scene, scout William Buffington was “dead on his back in the middle of the road”

53 Curtiss, diary, April 23, 1863; Forbes, “Grierson’s Raid,” 17-18.

54 Forbes, “Grierson’s Raid,” 18-19.

55 Forbes, “Grierson’s Cavalry Raid,” 110; Forbes, “Grierson’s Raid,” 19.

and a wounded Charles E. Martin and the third companion were found hiding nearby in the woods. “We left our dead soldier stretched on a Southern porch, under solemn promise from the householder that he would decently bury him,” one Federal reported. The troopers of Company B rode away despondent, “not merely because we had lost a comrade,” explained Stephen Forbes, “but because the men who had killed him were ahead of us and now knew who and what we were.” The fear of an ambush was “in all our minds as we rode that day through the thickety woods, scanning every cover and watchful of every turn in the road.”⁵⁶

* * *

Grierson and the main column, meanwhile, had made decent time while Forbes and Company B sidetracked to Macon. The Federal commander remained concerned about Forbes’s ability to reach the town and cut the Mobile and Ohio Railroad. When the main column passed through Louisville, Grierson decided to send yet another detachment east to Macon to sever the railroad or at least cut the telegraph lines running along it. As he later explained, he worried that Forbes “might not be able to reach the line of the railroad with so large a force.” This time Grierson dispatched a pair of volunteers to make the trip: Capt. John Lynch of Company E, 6th Illinois Cavalry, and a trooper, Cpl. Jonathan W. Ballard. Lynch and Ballard dressed in civilian attire before splitting off from the main column, focused on cutting the telegraph wires “to prevent information of our presence from flying along the railroad to Jackson and other points.” After a long ride Lynch and Ballard came up against the same obstacle Forbes’s small command had encountered, namely, Confederate forces. The pair managed to make it to the outskirts of town where, Grierson later reported, they “ascertained the whole disposition of their forces and much other valuable information.”⁵⁷

Lynch kept a cool head when he ran into Confederates already agitated at the news of Forbes’s approach from the north. The enemy was

56 Curtiss, diary, April 24, 1863; Forbes, “Grierson’s Raid,” 20; Forbes, “Grierson’s Cavalry Raid,” 110; Woodward, “Grierson’s Raid,” 705; “Museum Memories,” *Neshoba Democrat*, April 24, 2013; Surby, *Grierson Raids*, 74; Zenas Applington to Wife, March 4, 1862, in John W. Clinton Papers, ALPL; William Buffington, Compiled Service Record, NARA.

57 OR 24, pt. 1, 528; Grierson, *A Just and Righteous Cause*, 155.

contemplating mounting infantry on mules to give chase. Rumors ran wild about Federal numbers, with one Confederate insisting Forbes's 36 men numbered closer to 4,000. After Lynch told the Southerners he had been sent from Enterprise to locate and scout the Federals, a talkative Confederate told him all about his own command around Macon and that the enemy was near the town, just to the north and within a couple of miles. The news was especially welcome because, as Grierson later observed, Lynch was "at once made aware of the movement of Captain Forbes's command." With that valuable information in hand, Lynch told the men that he had to ride back a couple of miles to get two men he had left at a plantation, and he would return with them to camp with the Confederate pickets that night. "The guards thought it alright and allowed him to depart," Grierson reported, adding, "Of course, they were not troubled by another visit from the captain, who made good his escape." Lynch and Ballard rode hard to rejoin the main column on the road to Newton Station. Incredibly, they covered nearly 200 miles in just two days.⁵⁸

By this point Grierson had detachments riding in almost every direction across much of Mississippi. He had earlier sent a lone scout west to the Mississippi Central and Major Love's battalion back north. Colonel Hatch's regiment, meanwhile, was busy luring Confederates north toward Tupelo. Detachments under Captains Lynch and Forbes were moving east toward the Mobile and Ohio, and small numbers of troopers had been dispatched to gather horses and mules to remount troopers whose own animals had broken down during the unrelenting journey. Grierson and the main column, meanwhile, were still riding south.

In addition to the military aspects of the raid, the deep ride through Mississippi exposed the Illinoisans and Iowans to a heavy dose of Mississippi culture and society, including the institution of slavery. Every plantation along the state's meager interior road system allowed the Federals to set eyes on the practice held in such contempt by so many Northerners, including Republican Benjamin Grierson. A few slaves found the opportunity for freedom too powerful to resist and followed

58 William D. Lyles to Daniel Ruggles, April 25, 1863, and D. Lyles to John C. Pemberton, April 22, 1863, in John J. Pettus Correspondence, MDAH; John J. Pettus Correspondence, MDAH; Grierson, *A Just and Righteous Cause*, 158; Woodward, "Grierson's Raid," 695.

the column “of their own accord,” recalled an Illinois trooper. Many of Grierson’s troopers hailed from the Democrat-stronghold southern counties of Illinois, however, and may not have viewed slavery with the same critical eye Grierson did.⁵⁹

Most of the slaves were fearful of the Federals because, like many of the white children in Mississippi, they had been told the “hated Yankees [were a] kind of beast, had horns, hooves and claws; were like the devil and would eat people up, would run the blacks off to Cuba and sell them, etc.,” explained Grierson. Some believed the lies, but Grierson had the distinct idea that the slaves let their white masters try to scare them but believed very little of it. “Among themselves,” he elaborated, “they imagined God was sending the Yankees, like angels, on purpose to make them free.” The arrival of the God-sent angels, however, added another layer of complexity to their already difficult lives. The slaves were happy to see the Federal troops, but they could not openly express their joy for fear of repercussions from their white owners. Grierson noticed this fear and later wrote, “Not a word could be pumped out of them in the presence of their masters. But out of sight of the manor house, from under bushes or logs or fence corners or tall weeds or swamp grass, a wooly head and shambling figure would crawl slowly out, look carefully about, and then tell with grinning lips or point with dusky finger ‘whar massa’s horses done be hid,’ or ‘whar spec de secesh soldiers is.’” And, when it was safe to do so, they would also inquire, “When are you uns gwine to make we uns free?”⁶⁰

* * *

Grierson was doing all he could to keep the enemy off balance by dispatching diversionary detachments, but the ultimate success of the raid depended on his main column. He had to keep moving toward his objective. Word spread among the companies stopped south of Philadelphia that Grierson intended to push on to the Southern Railroad of Mississippi, now only a little more than 20 miles to the south. Like he had the day before, Grierson sent troopers ahead to surprise any enemy at Newton Station while the remainder of the brigade approached the town behind

59 Surby, *Grierson Raids*, 32.

60 Grierson, *A Just and Righteous Cause*, 162.

them. At an officers' council, Lieutenant Colonel Blackburn of the 7th Illinois Cavalry offered to take the advance and Grierson agreed, sending him with two battalions to "capture the place and to inflict all the damage possible upon the enemy." Blackburn's command thundered down the road toward Decatur at 10:00 p.m. The 7th Illinois's remaining battalion, together with the 6th Illinois Cavalry and Smith's battery of small guns, rested an hour longer before mounting up and riding off around 11:00 p.m.⁶¹

For the second day in a row, Grierson refused to allow his men a full night of rest. The troopers had enjoyed only a few hours out of the saddle the night before at the Estes place, halting about midnight and marching once more about 5:00 a.m., with all the attendant duties of feeding and caring for the horses and themselves sandwiched into those five hours. This second night would be even more arduous, with even less time for rest and recuperation.⁶²

Grierson had a couple of good reasons for pushing his men so hard. First, he was so close to the target of his raid that he could not take the chance of any word of his pending arrival reaching Newton Station before he and his men arrived. Grierson knew the Confederates could use the railroad and telegraph to concentrate more troops at Newton than he had in his entire command before the Federal column could cover the last 20 miles to the rail line. If he arrived and Newton Station was well defended, one of the main objectives of the dangerous campaign would go unfulfilled. Getting the entire column out of Mississippi safely at that late date would be doubly difficult.⁶³

The second reason Grierson pressed so hard was that, if surprise could be achieved, he wanted to enter Newton at the best possible time of day, which was about daylight. The tactic of surprising your enemy around dawn had been around since the beginning of warfare. Johnston had attacked Grant at Shiloh under similar circumstances earlier in the war, and the Japanese would strike America at Pearl Harbor 78 years later in the same manner. Reaching Newton at daylight required an approach under the cover of darkness, with the first glow of dawn providing just

61 *OR* 24, pt. 1, 524; Grierson, *A Just and Righteous Cause*, 158; Surby, *Grierson Raids*, 40.

62 *OR* 24, pt. 1, 524.

63 *Ibid.*, 524.

enough light to see where and how to attack. It would also catch many of the enemy sound asleep.⁶⁴

Grierson and his men had ridden nearly 80 miles in just 48 hours—50 miles in the last 24 hours alone. These difficult miles included crossing three major waterways. It would be worth the effort if everything went according to plan. If Grierson could reach the railroad before the enemy concentrated there against him, he could inflict the significant damage and chaos he had been dispatched to achieve.

64 For Pearl Harbor, see Gordon W. Prange, Donald M. Goldstein, and Katherine V. Dillon, *At Dawn We Slept: The Untold Story of Pearl Harbor* (New York: Penguin, 1981).