

General J.E.B. Stuart's Report of his Cavalry Expedition Into Pennsylvania in October, 1862

HEADQUARTERS CAVALRY DIVISION

October 14th, 1862

Colonel R. H. Chilton,

A.A. General Army Northern Virginia:

Colonel – I have the honor to report that on the 9th instant, in compliance with instructions from the Commanding General Army of Northern Virginia, I proceeded on an expedition into Pennsylvania with a cavalry force of 1,800 and four pieces of horse artillery, under command of Brigadier-General Hampton and Colonels W.H.F. Lee and Jones. This force rendezvoused at Darkesville at 12 M., and marched thence to the vicinity of Hedgesville, where it camped for the night. At daylight next morning (October 10th) I crossed the Potomac at McCoy's (between Williamsport and Hancock) with some little opposition, capturing two or three horses of the enemy's pickets. We were told here by citizens that a large force had camped the night before at Clear Spring and were supposed to be en route to Cumberland. We proceeded northward until we reached the turnpike leading from Hagerstown to Hancock (known as National road). Here a signal station on the mountain and most of the party with their flags and apparatus were surprised and captured, and also eight or ten prisoners of war, from whom, as well as from citizens, I found that the large force alluded to had crossed but an hour ahead of me towards Cumberland, and consisted of six regiments of Ohio troops and two batteries, under General Cox, and were en route via Cumberland for the Kanawha. I sent back this intelligence at once to the Commanding General. Striking directly across the National Road, I proceeded in the direction of Mercersburg, Pennsylvania, which point was reached about 12 M. I was extremely anxious to reach Hagerstown, where large supplies were stored, but was satisfied from reliable information that the notice the enemy had of my approach, and the proximity of his forces, would enable him to prevent my capturing it. I therefore turned towards Chambersburg. I did not reach this point until after dark in a rain. I did not deem it safe to defer the attack till morning, nor was it proper to attack a place full of women and children without summoning it first to surrender. I accordingly sent in a flag of truce, and found no military or civil authority in the place, but some prominent citizens who met the officer were notified that the place would be shelled in three minutes. Brigadier-General Wade Hampton's command, being in advance, took possession of the place, and I appointed him military governor of the city. No incidents occurred during the night, during which it rained continuously. The officials all fled the town on our approach, and no one could be found who would admit that he held office in the place. About 275 sick and wounded in the hospital were paroled. During the day a large number of horses of citizens were seized and brought along. The wires were cut and railroad obstructed, and Colonel Jones' command was sent up the railroad toward Harrisburg to destroy a trestlework a few miles off. He however reported that it was constructed of iron, and he could not destroy it. Next morning it was ascertained that a large number of small arms and munitions of war were stored about the railroad buildings, all of which that could not be easily brought away were destroyed, consisting of about 5,000 new muskets, pistols, sabers and ammunition; also a large assortment of army clothing. The extensive machine shops and depot buildings of the railroad and several trains of loaded cars were entirely destroyed. From Chambersburg, I decided after mature consideration to strike for the vicinity of Leesburg as the best route of return, particularly as Cox's command would have rendered the direction of Cumberland, full of mountain gorges, particularly hazardous. The route selected was through an open country. Of course I left nothing undone to prevent the inhabitants from detecting my real route and object. I started directly towards Gettysburg, but having passed the Blue Ridge, turned back towards Hagerstown for six or eight miles, and then crossed to Maryland by Emmettsburg, where as we passed we were hailed by the inhabitants with the most enthusiastic demonstrations of joy. A scouting party of 150 lancers had just passed towards

Gettysburg, and I regretted exceedingly that my march did not admit of the delay necessary to catch them. Taking the road towards Frederick, we intercepted dispatches from Colonel Rush (lancers) to the commander of the scout, which satisfied me that our whereabouts was still a problem to the enemy. Before reaching Frederick I crossed the Monocacy, and continued the march through the night via Liberty, New Market and Monrovia, on Baltimore and Ohio railroad, where we cut the telegraph wires and obstructed the railroad. We reached at daylight Hyattstown, on McLellan's line of wagon communication with Washington; but we found only a few wagons to capture, and pushed on to Barnsville, which we found just vacated by a company of the enemy's cavalry. We had here corroborated what we had heard before – that Stoneman had between four and five thousand troops about Poolesville, and guarding the river fords. I started directly for Poolesville, but instead of marching upon that point I avoided it by a march through the woods, leaving it two or three miles to my left, and getting into the road from Poolesville to the mouth of the Monocacy. Guarding well my flanks and rear, I pushed boldly forward, meeting the head of the enemy's column going toward Poolesville. I ordered the charge, which was responded to in handsome style by the advance squadron (Irving's) of Lee's brigade, which drove back the enemy's cavalry upon the column of infantry advancing to occupy the crest from which the cavalry were driven. Quick as thought Lee's sharpshooters sprang to the ground, and engaging the infantry skirmishers, held them in check till the artillery in advance came up, which, under the gallant Pelham, drove back the enemy's force upon his batteries beyond the Monocacy, between which our solitary gun quite a spirited fire continued for some time. This answered, in connection with the high crest occupied by our piece, to screen entirely my real movement quickly to the left, making a bold and rapid strike for White's ford to force my way across before the enemy at Poolesville and Monocacy could be aware of my design.

Although delayed somewhat by about 200 infantry, strongly posted in the cliffs over the ford; yet they yielded to the moral effect of a few shells before engaging our sharpshooters, and the crossing of the canal, now dry, and river was effected with all the precision of passing a defile on drill – a section of artillery being sent with the advance and placed in position on the Loudoun side, another piece on the Maryland height, while Pelham continued to occupy the attention of the enemy with the other, withdrawing from position to position until his piece was ordered to cross. The enemy was marching from Poolesville in the meantime, but came up in line of battle on the Maryland bank only to receive a thundering salutation, with evident effect, from our guns on this side. I lost not a man killed on the expedition, and only a few slight wounds. The enemy's loss is not known, but Pelham's one gun compelled the enemy's battery to change its position three times.

The remainder of the march was destitute of interest. The conduct of the command and their behavior towards the inhabitants is worthy of the highest praise; a few individual cases only were exceptions in this particular. Brigadier-General Hampton and Colonels Lee, Jones, Wickham and Butler, and the officers and men under their command are entitled to my lasting gratitude for their coolness in danger and cheerful obedience to orders. Unoffending persons were treated with civility, and the inhabitants were generous in proffers of provisions on the march. We seized and brought over a large number of horses, the property of citizens of the United States. The valuable information obtained in this reconnaissance as to the distribution of the enemy's force was not communicated orally to the Commanding General, and need not be here repeated. A number of public functionaries and prominent citizens were taken captives and brought over as hostages for our own unoffending citizens whom the enemy has torn from their homes and confined in dungeons in the North. One or two of my men lost their way, and are probably in the hands of the enemy.

I marched from Chambersburg to Leesburg (90 miles), with only an hour's halt, in thirty-six hours, including a forced passage of the Potomac – a march without parallel in history.

The results of this expedition in a moral and political point of view can hardly be estimated, and the consternation among property holders in Pennsylvania beggars description.

I am specially indebted to Captain B.S. White (Confederate States cavalry), and to Messrs. Hugh Logan and Harbaugh whose skillful guidance was of immense service to me. My staff are entitled to my thanks for untiring energy in the discharge of their duties.

I enclose a map of the expedition, drawn by Captain W.W. Blackford to accompany this report; also a copy of orders enforced during the march.

Believing that the hand of God was clearly manifested in the signal deliverance of my command from danger, and the crowning success attending it, I ascribe to Him the praise, the honor and the glory. I have the honor to be, most respectfully, your obedient servant,

J.E.B. Stuart,

Major-General Commanding Cavalry.

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