

CUMBERLAND GAP.

CHAPTER X.

EASTERN KENTUCKY. MIDDLE CREEK AND MILL SPRING.

The General Situation at the beginning of 1862.—The Necessity for immediate Action.—The President's Order of January 27th.—The Situation in Eastern Kentucky.—Humphrey Marshall in the Big Sandy.—Garfield's Brigade.—The March on Paintsville.—Retreat of Marshall.—Middle Creek.—The Battle.—Marshall retreats to Abingdon, Va.—The Course of the Cumberland.—Cumberland Gap.—Zollicoffer's Camp at Mill Spring.—General Crittenden joins Zollicoffer.—Thomas moves against the Confederate Encampment.—The Battle of Mill Spring.—Death of Zollicoffer.—Crittenden's Retreat to Gainesborough.

ANERVOUS disquiet pervaded the Southern mind at the commencement of a new year, the result, in a great measure, of the highly-wrought anticipations which had grown out of the Trent affair. It was presumed that the Federal government would decide blindly, and without regard to the claims of justice, upon the question which had been forced upon it by the unauthorized seizure of Mason and Slidell, and it was a painful surprise to the Confederates to learn that the two commissioners had been quietly and dispassionately rendered up to the British government. The extraordinary unanimity with which the people of the North supported the administration in its efforts to subdue a rebellious section of the country was a disappointment hardly less keen or more easily admitting of consolation. The South, along with its hope of foreign interference, had insanely nourished the fond expectation of what it called "a popular revulsion in the Northern people against the folly and pusillanimity of their rulers."¹ It also very much galled the Confederates to look back upon the closing events of the past year—the repulse at Drainesville and the reverse in Missouri. Nor was the immediate future any more hopeful. The Confederacy was prepared neither in the East nor the West to assume the offensive; in the West this policy was impossible; in the East it was perilous. There was no good reason to expect that the national army would rashly set out upon an ill-advised campaign, directly assailing the formidable strong-holds and fortifications of the Confederacy; there was no necessity compelling that army to rush desperately into any campaign of whatsoever sort and favored by whatsoever advantages; it could wait until its preparations had become so formidable as to be all but irresistible. The naval expeditions of the preceding year had inculcated a wholesome fear all along the Atlantic and Gulf coasts, and this apprehension was only matched by that which the threatened movements of the national forces in the West naturally occasioned. Price was in full retreat southward, with three Union armies in his rear. McCulloch, with his daring band of Arkansas recruits, had withdrawn from the field. Kentucky was overawed. The blockade interposed an almost insuperable barrier between the Southern cities and all foreign ports. The national finances had been efficiently sustained by the entire wealth of the North, while those of the South were already betraying their fundamental weakness. Very soon, too, the twelve months' soldiers of the Confederacy would have to be discharged. It was beginning to be seen, and already it was declared by the Southern press, that it is an old and ever-proven truism, that when two sections are at war, the one which has the least means must find success in early and rapid action, for it can gain little by time, while the other finds in time the power to bring into efficient use its more

varied means. The clearest policy of the weaker section in such a conflict was to find in the rapid use of its revolutionary enthusiasm an overmatch for the slower, less spirited, but more enduring North.¹ The Southern people were impatient for an advance of the Confederate army of the Potomac. "We have gazed," they said, "imploringly on the lion while the fox has been weaving his toils. Are we to continue hemmed in for another six months, and lack all things, or shall our armies *on to Washington*, and lack nothing?"

There was somewhat of a restless spirit at the North also, but based upon entirely different grounds, and far more reasonable in its nature and its conclusions. It was not peevishness, nor the outgrowth of a desperate spirit that would venture all at a single throw; it was rather the expression of confident hope mingled with an element of considerable anxiety—hope so far as we ourselves were concerned, anxiety in regard to the attitude of European Powers. The aristocracy of the Old World was plainly committed to the interests of the Southern slaveholder, and it needed but a single stroke of policy or a change of ministry to give the sanction of authority to the opinions held by the Second Estate both in England and France. Nine months had passed since the declaration of war, and these nine months were especially signalized by reverses to the Federal armies. Every week's delay in moving against the enemy's works enfeebled that respect for our strength as a nation which foreign nations had always entertained, and made the policy of interference, already backed by motives of selfish interest, apparently justifiable as well as natural. If it should come to the worst—if Europe should despair of an early termination of the war on account of the vacillation of our military commanders—then nothing short of national ruin, as complete and irremediable as any upon historic record, stared us in the face. And for vacillation and hesitancy, moreover, there seemed little occasion. Hitherto the case had been different; we had, in spite of the vast resources of the nation held in reserve, been compelled to create the very means and organization through which these resources should become available and effective. But now, through unparalleled activity and determination, the great want had been measurably supplied; and although it was impossible to calculate with certainty upon success in every movement which we were prepared to make, yet it is to be remembered, and was then earnestly insisted upon, that in no war of any magnitude was it ever possible to obviate the chances of failure, whatever may have been the previous preparation. The pressing exigencies urging on an immediate movement of our

¹ In addition to other disparagements, the Confederate army suffered very much from disease in camp, far more than the Federal army—not only by reason of less favorable location, but also, and chiefly, through negligence. Says E. A. Pollard, in his *Southern History of the War*: "The most distressing abuses were visible in the ill-regulated hygiene of our camps. The ravages of disease among the army in Virginia were terrible. The accounts of its extent were suppressed in the newspapers of the day; and there is no doubt that thousands of our brave troops disappeared from notice without a record of their end, in the nameless graves that yet mark the camping-grounds on the lines of the Potomac and among the wild mountains of Virginia. Our camps were scourged with pneumonia and diarrhoea. The armies on the Potomac and in Western Virginia suffered greatly—those troops in Cheat Mountain and in the vicinity of the Kanawha Valley most intensely. The wet and changeable climate; the difficulty of transportation, exposure to cold and rain without tents, the necessary consequence of the frequent forward and retrograde movements, as well as the want of suitable food for either sick or well men, produced most of the sickness, and greatly aggravated it after its accession." The Southern people, when made aware of these facts, with great generosity contributed immense sums in clothing and stores for the relief of their troops. During the latter quarter of 1861, the eleven states of the Confederacy contributed in this way a million and a half in money, besides the voluntary contributions which came from Missouri and Kentucky.

¹ *Richmond Examiner*, Jan. 1, 1862.

armies were those belonging naturally to the situation, and not the effect of popular clamor. Never was there more patience manifested by any people where so much—nothing less, indeed, than the life of the nation—was at stake, and manifested in connection with such stirring enthusiasm and ardent patriotism as was shown by the people of the loyal states in those quiet autumn and winter months, during which they waited without a murmur or the slightest breath of suspicion against the national authority. When, therefore, General McClellan states in his report that, about the middle of January, upon recovering from a severe illness, he found that “excessive anxiety for an immediate movement of the Army of the Potomac had taken possession of the minds of the administration,” it is not to be understood that this anxiety was the result of any growing dissatisfaction among the people. There were currents from across the Atlantic drifting inevitably into a policy hostile to the United States, the bearings of which were more patent to the Department of State than to the nation at large. The altered policy which then became necessary was not, as has sometimes been alleged, and as General McClellan seems in this connection to indicate, the result of the change in the secretaryship of the War Department, by which Edwin M. Stanton took the place of Mr. Cameron. But for the complications rapidly being developed in the Department of State, the War Department could have prosecuted its operations according to a more leisurely policy. Whether, even under these circumstances, that would have been a wise policy, is an independent question; a necessity from without, urging an immediate movement, disposed summarily of the whole matter.

It is from this stand-point that we are to consider the important military order which his excellency the President issued from the executive mansion on the 27th of January, 1862, the substance of which was the following:

“That the 22d day of February, 1862, be the day for a general movement of the land and naval forces of the United States against the insurgent forces.

“That, especially,

“The army at and about Fortress Monroe,

“The Army of the Potomac,

“The Army of Western Virginia,

“The army near Munfordsville, Kentucky,

“The army and flotilla at Cairo,

“And a naval force in the Gulf of Mexico, be ready to move on that day.

“That all other forces, both land and naval, with their respective commanders, obey existing orders for the time, and be ready to obey additional orders when duly given.

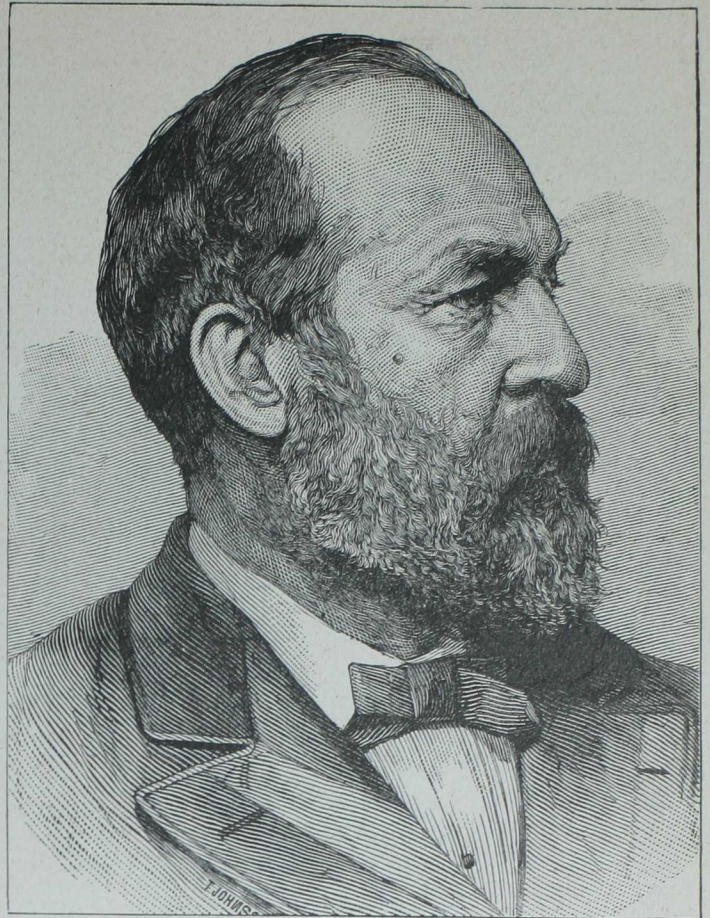
“That the heads of departments, and especially the Secretaries of War and of the Navy, with all their subordinates, and the general-in-chief, with all other commanders and subordinates of land and naval forces, will severally be held to their strict and full responsibilities for prompt execution of this order.”

This was followed on the 31st by a special war order, “That all the disposable force of the Army of the Potomac, after providing safely for the defense of Washington, be formed into an expedition for the immediate object of seizing upon the railroad southwestward of what is known as Manassas Junction, all details to be in the discretion of the commander-in-chief, and the expedition to move before or on the 22d day of February next.”

The subsequent modification of this special order by the President, and the events of the Peninsular campaign, will form the leading subjects of a subsequent chapter. In the mean time we turn to the Western field, and to the events which there followed each other, in execution of the President's order, from Garfield's victories in the valley of the Big Sandy to the evacuation by the enemy of all the important strong-holds in Kentucky.

During the month of January, Eastern Kentucky was the one sole field of active military operations. The Confederate force in Kentucky at this time was distributed among the three important military positions commanding the southern part of the state and the main avenues into Tennessee, viz., Columbus, Bowling Green, and the region about Cumberland Gap. A small portion of this force, however, was located in the eastern part of the state, consisting of a few regiments of Kentucky troops under Colonel Humphrey Marshall, occupying an intrenched position at Paintville. We have previously given an account of the retreat of the Confederate force, not quite 1500 strong, under Colonel Williams, in November, from Prestonburg and Picketon into Virginia. This was the result of an attack by General Nelson, who, if he had pursued the retreating enemy, might, perhaps, have reaped important fruits from his victory by the destruction or occupation of the Virginia and East Tennessee Railroad. But this would have been a hazardous undertaking, considering the distance over which supplies would have to be transported, and the mountainous nature of the country to be traversed, added to the embarrassments which would have grown out of the hostile disposition of the inhabitants. General Nelson did not even continue the pursuit of Colonel Williams through Pound Gap, but withdrew to the central portion of the state with his forces. Immediately afterward Humphrey Marshall gathered together a brigade of Confederates at Paintville, with a battery of artillery and a few companies of cavalry.

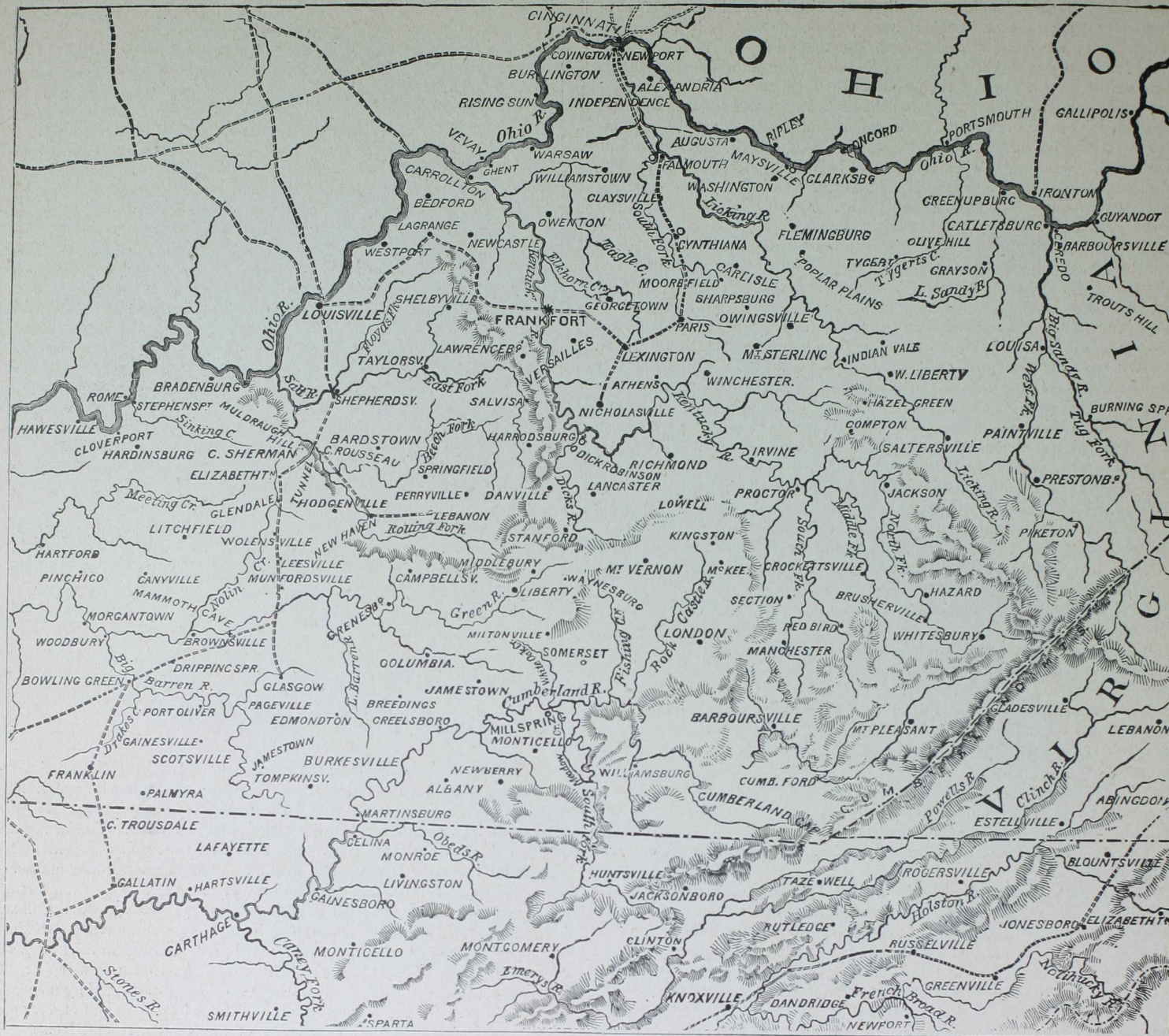
The colonel—a man of aldermanic dimensions—had occupied a somewhat prominent position in politics, and had served in the Mexican war, having led the famous charge of the Kentucky volunteers at Buena Vista. He had been elected to Congress in 1849; was appointed commissioner to China by President Fillmore, and afterward became a leading member of the American party. He was not, however, destined to distinguish himself as a military hero in the valley of the Big Sandy, although great hopes were entertained at the South that he would make his way triumphantly to Frankfort, and establish the authority of the provisional governor Johnson in the place of the regular state government.



JAMES A. GARFIELD.

The Big Sandy, having its head waters in Virginia, forms the northwestern boundary between that state and Kentucky, emptying its waters into the Ohio. At Louisa, a small village situated some twenty-five miles southward from its mouth, West Fork joins the main stream. Following the road up this fork for twenty-five miles farther, we reach Paintville. At high water the river is navigable as far as Picketon, twenty-five miles beyond, and in November General Nelson had no difficulty in transporting his supplies to that point. On the 7th of January, however, when Colonel James A. Garfield broke up his camp on Muddy Creek and advanced against the enemy, the river was low, and occasioned great difficulty in the transportation of supplies. His force at starting was about 1500, consisting of the Forty-second Ohio and the Fourteenth Kentucky, accompanied by a squadron of cavalry. On the route he was re-enforced by a battalion of Virginia cavalry, under Colonel Bolles, and 300 of the Twenty-second Kentucky, making the entire force with which he marched on Paintville about 2200 men. Another battalion of cavalry, under Colonel Wolford, together with the Fortieth Ohio, was also moving toward the same point from the west along Paint Creek. Hearing of this threatened attack, Humphrey Marshall had left his intrenchments two days before, and retired to a position among the heights at Middle Creek, a little below Prestonburg, leaving only a small force of cavalry at the mouth of Jennie's Creek, three miles west of Paintville, to act as a corps of observation and to protect his trains. Before reaching Paintville, Garfield was made aware of the situation of this cavalry force, though he had no certain knowledge of the whereabouts of the other and main portion of the enemy. Dispatching Colonel Bolles's cavalry and a company of infantry to attack the former from the north side, he himself, with a thousand men, crossed the Paint at four o'clock in the afternoon, to make an armed reconnoissance, which resulted in the discovery that the main body of the enemy had withdrawn. It was over two hours since he had sent Bolles up the creek, and now, seeing that he had a fair opportunity of securing the Confederate cavalry force, he promptly sent a messenger with orders to the colonel not to attack until he should have time himself to get in the rear and cut off the retreat. The orders, however, came too late, as the attack had already been made, and the colonel was then engaged in pursuing the enemy up the Jennie; so that when Garfield, a little later, had gained, as he supposed, the rear of the enemy, he soon discovered their cavalry equipments, which they had left in the confusion of flight, strewing the road, and indicating with certainty that the Confederates had escaped. Bolles, in the mean while, after pursuing until he came up with Marshall's infantry rear-guard, returned to Paintville, where the Federal forces encamped for the night.

The next morning the arrival of the Fortieth Ohio and Wolford's cavalry brought the number of the Federal forces up to 2400 men. On the 9th, Garfield, detailing 1100 men from his four regiments, and detaching two cavalry squadrons to move along his right up Jennie's Creek, followed the river road south to Prestonburg, the distance to this town from Paintville being twelve miles. He had been delayed a whole day at the latter place, awaiting supplies from George's Creek, a few miles below on the river, which arrived in such scanty amounts as to render it impossible to give three days rations of hard bread—and it was useless to set out with less



MAP OF KENTUCKY AND NORTHERN TENNESSEE

than that—to more than 1500 men. It was necessary, therefore, that fully 1000 men should remain behind until the arrival of farther supplies.

Humphrey Marshall, with over 3000 men, had taken up a position among the heights on the forks of Middle Creek, two miles below Prestonburg. His force consisted of two Virginia and two Kentucky regiments, one of the latter under the command of Colonel John S. Williams, being the same which Nelson had two months ago driven out of the state through Pound Gap. Two small detachments of cavalry and a battery of four pieces guarded the approaches to a position naturally very good for defense. On the evening of the 9th Garfield's advanced column drove in the Confederate pickets, and a messenger was dispatched to Paintville with orders to move forward all the available force to participate in the morrow's conflict. As another boat-load of supplies had arrived that day from below, Lieutenant Colonel Sheldon was enabled to take about 700 men, at the head of which force he started early the next morning. The main body of Garfield's force, having slept on their arms in the rain until four o'clock A.M., moved up Abbot's Creek one mile, and crossed over to the mouth of Middle Creek, a little north of Prestonburg, arriving there at eight o'clock. Supposing the enemy to be encamped on Abbot's Creek, it was Garfield's plan to gain his rear by moving up Middle Creek, thus cutting off the retreat, while an attack was made at the same time by the cavalry upon the front. Small bodies of Marshall's cavalry were met all along the march up Middle Creek for two miles and a half, when the Federal troops were drawn up on the slope of a semicircular hill. A thousand yards farther up the stream divided into two forks, which were held by the enemy. It was now noon, and with the small force available for an attack the approach was of necessity a cautious one, the re-enforcements not having arrived. It was not wise, through an armed reconnoissance, to seek information as to the numbers and disposition of the Confederate force, as this reconnoissance would inevitably bring on a general engagement, in which the Federal troops would not only be overwhelmed by a superior force, but would labor under the additional disadvantage of being precipitated into a battle without any previous plan of operation. Besides, the enemy was so posted in his concealed position as to command the road at the head of the gorge, and also to flank it from the left-hand side. His artillery, together with

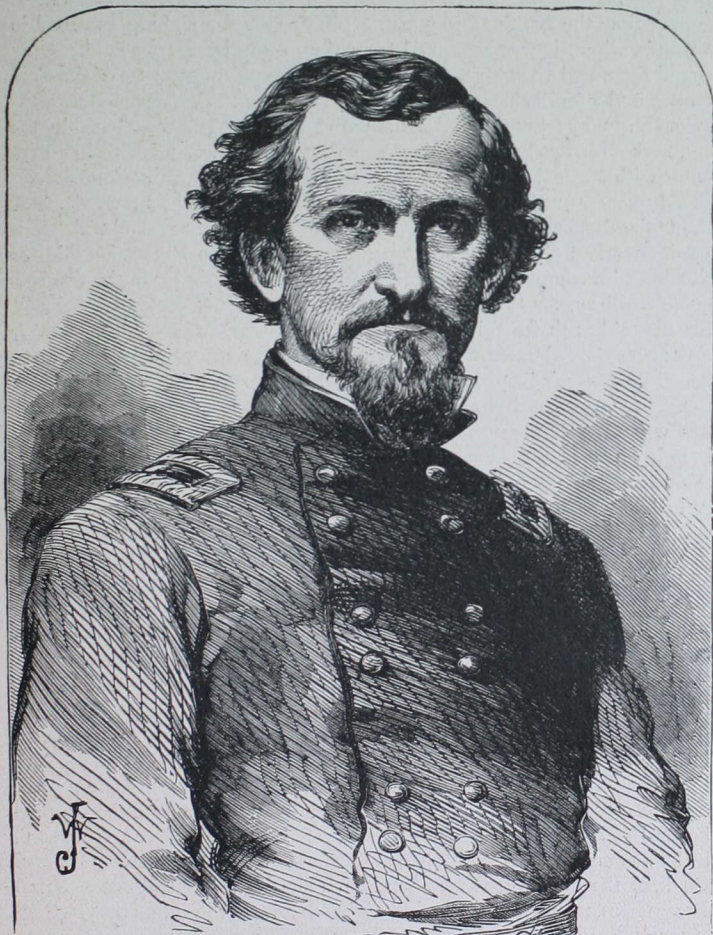
Colonel Williams's regiment, was on the right-hand side of the road at the head of the gorge, and a crescent-shaped hill on the opposite side concealed another column just behind its crest. It was Marshall's design to draw the Federal forces up the road, and then to open upon them from the front and left. Anticipating a manoeuvre of this nature, Garfield, having taken up his position on the slope of a semicircular hill on the right-hand side of the creek, dispatched twenty mounted men, who made a headlong charge up the valley, and, drawing the enemy's fire, disclosed the position above indicated. Two columns, consisting each of two companies, were sent, one along the crest to the right, behind which Colonel Trigg's Virginia regiment was stationed, and the other across the creek, to ascend the rugged crest farthest up the gorge on the left. The right column became immediately the target of the enemy's artillery, but the latter was so badly served that its shells did not explode, while the small force dispatched to the left, after climbing up the rocky ridge on their hands and knees, engaged the enemy on that side. Both columns were re-enforced. Trigg's regiment was withdrawn across the creek, and the battle raged chiefly on the left, which Garfield still farther re-enforced with one hundred and fifty men. The Confederates in the mean time had gained a commanding position on the top of the ridge, and directly in front of the Federal reserve force, on which they opened a heavy fire, that was returned with good effect. To guard against a flank movement, which was now threatened by the enemy's right, another column of one hundred and twenty men was ordered to cross at a point lower down and drive the enemy from his new position, a movement which was successfully accomplished. After some pretty severe fighting, a similar success attended the Federal column on the crest nearer the creek, the enemy being also driven from his position at that point. On account of the great disparity of the two opposing forces, the Federals were obliged to resort in many cases to an irregular mode of fighting, sheltering themselves whenever opportunity offered behind trees and rocks. They had no heavy artillery, and the cavalry, having gone in a mistaken direction, did not participate in the engagement. The battle had now continued in this desultory style for over three hours, and it was four o'clock P.M. when Sheldon came up with re-enforcements from Paintville. These had started early in the morning, and had marched fifteen miles without breakfast; but their courage, not

daunted by these unfavorable circumstances, demanded to be tested in the fight with the already checked, if not baffled foe. The enthusiasm occasioned by their arrival was unbounded, and Garfield promptly dispatched his entire reserve to the right for an attack upon the enemy's main position and the capture of his guns. Appreciating the new phase which the battle was taking, Humphrey Marshall ordered a retreat, which was continued to Abingdon, in Virginia. It was a short winter's day, and was now too dark to admit of pursuit. The sky was illuminated with the burning of the enemy's stores preparatory to his disorderly flight. The next morning, on the arrival of the cavalry, a pursuit was sustained for several miles, and some prisoners were taken. Two or three days afterward the entire command returned to Paintville.

This success, disposing of the Confederate force in Northeastern Kentucky, had an additional brilliancy imparted to it from the fact that it inaugurated a long series of victories. Humphrey Marshall's political antecedents, and the reminiscences which haunted many citizens of the North of his plump presence in Congress and in the famous American Convention, gave somewhat of piquancy to the dramatic features of this episode of his defeat. The victor, the young colonel from Ohio, was soon promoted to a brigadier, and afterward a major generalship, and in 1863 was elected to Congress from Ohio, his native state. Although not a graduate of West Point, he proved a most efficient officer in the early Western campaigns.

If we now cross the mountains crowding the southeastern portion of Kentucky, we shall find ourselves in the valley of the Cumberland River, which has its rise among these mountains, and, taking a westward direction in its zigzag course, after its two head tributaries, coming down along either side of Pine Mountain, have formed a junction at Cumberland Ford, just north of Cumberland Gap, runs through Barbourville and Williamsburg, thence northwestwardly, just leaving Somerset to the north, while it sweeps down into Tennessee, and, after a long and very winding course to the east, passes through Nashville, and then returns through a more regular channel into Western Kentucky, and empties into the Ohio at Smithland, about fifty miles above Cairo, having described a course twice the length of the Hudson. That portion of Kentucky which this river cuts off before it first enters Tennessee was held by the Confederacy, and was a very important tract of country, guarding the entrance into Tennessee from Eastern Kentucky.

relief from Bowling Green, the scheme was abandoned. General Alvin Schœpf, a European officer of considerable experience, now took up a position at Somerset with about 5000 available men, a few cavalry, and a single battery of artillery. Fifteen miles to the southeast of this position was that occupied by Zollicoffer, at Mill Springs, on the south bank of the Cumberland. In itself considered, the Confederate position was one of great strength. The banks of the river, rising to the height of three or four hundred feet, afford sites favorable for fortification; and Zollicoffer had not only an intrenched camp at Mill Springs, but another on the opposite bank at Beech Grove. The northern encampment was occupied by five regiments, and fortified with twelve pieces of artillery; on the southern bank there were stationed two regiments and a considerable cavalry force. Apparently of great strength, the position was really a very weak one. The surface of the ground surrounding the encampment afforded no good range for artillery against an attacking infantry force; but a still greater disadvantage was the scarcity of provisions. Wayne County was the only fruitful portion of the state from which the Confederates could draw supplies. Over a hundred and thirty miles intervened between them and Knoxville, and the Cumberland, commanded by Federal troops, afforded a precarious channel of communication. The unfavorable situation was heightened by impassable roads; and as the immediate vicinity was rapidly exhausted, the Confederate soldiers were sometimes reduced to one third rations, while their mules and horses were often without any supply whatever. About the first of January General Crittenden arrived from Knoxville and assumed command of the army, which had been already re-enforced by Carroll's brigade.



FELIX ZOLLICOFFER.



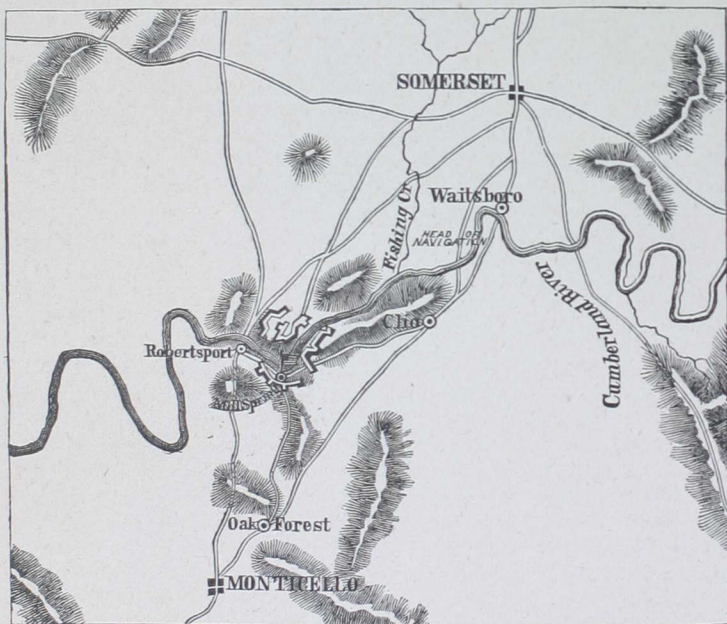
GEORGE H. THOMAS.

The Confederate government early in the summer guarded against a Federal advance into East Tennessee by way of Cumberland Gap by sending General Felix Zollicoffer, with a force of several thousand men, to the threatened point. Occupying the mountain ranges of Southeastern Kentucky, he had made advances into the interior as far as Manchester, his operations generally taking the form of raids, having for their purpose the destruction of railroads, the dispersion of Federal encampments, and, still more frequently, the obtaining of provisions. In September a slight skirmish had occurred at Barbourville between a portion of his troops and a body of Home Guards. In October he had met with a repulse at Camp Wild-cat, near Loudon. An expedition had been planned against him by General Schœpf in November; but a Confederate brigade having been sent to his

Nearly at the same time that Crittenden arrived at Mill Springs, General Buell detached a force from his main army, and sent it against the Confederate strong-hold in Eastern Kentucky. The force thus dispatched consisted of seven regiments and a portion of Wolford's cavalry, under the command of General George H. Thomas, who had distinguished himself both in Florida and Mexico, and had, from 1850 up to the beginning of the war, been instructor of artillery and cavalry at West Point. A native of Virginia, General Thomas was still true to his country, and had already, in August, 1861, been appointed a brigadier general of volunteers. Thomas left Lebanon on the 31st of December, and, after a march of nearly two weeks, reached Columbia, and, after a rest of four or five days, pushed on eastward to Fishing Creek, a few miles west of Somerset. It was now the 17th; the march had been over roads almost impassable, and four regiments and one of the batteries—more than one half of Thomas's column—were yet struggling along on the road from Columbia. To await these, and also to communicate with Schœpf, Thomas halted at this point, ten miles north of the enemy's camp. The Tenth Indiana, of Colonel Manson's brigade, held the advance; and from this regiment two companies were sent out as picket guard on the road to Mill Springs, taking up their position beyond the junction of that road with the one leading from Somerset to Mill Springs. In advance of these was stationed a battalion of Wolford's cavalry. The camp of the Tenth was not far in the rear. Colonel R. L. McCook, with two regiments of his brigade, the Second Minnesota and the Ninth Ohio, were encamped a mile to the right, on the Robertsport and Danville road. This disposition of Thomas's forces guarded all the approaches to his encampment, and also to Somerset. This was the situation on Friday night. During the day Schœpf had visited Thomas, and arrangements were made

for a co-operation of the two columns in the attack on Zollicoffer's camp, which was to take place on the succeeding Monday. Recent rains had swollen Fishing Creek to such an extent as to render it impossible for either of the divisions to support the other in case of an attack being made by the enemy; therefore, to supply the place of the regiments which were yet detained on the road, it was arranged that Carter's brigade should be sent from Somerset to General Thomas. This brigade consisted of the Twelfth Kentucky and two regiments of East Tennesseans. On Saturday the Fourth Kentucky arrived on the field with Wetmore's battery, which, with the regiments and Standart's battery sent from Somerset, raised Thomas's force to a complement of six regiments and three batteries, besides the small detachment of Wolford's cavalry.

In the mean time, the peculiar situation of the Confederate army on the Cumberland led to a movement which anticipated the Federal attack, and resulted in the battle of Mill Spring, otherwise known as the battle of Somerset, though it was fought at neither of these places, but midway between them, at Cross Roads. By extraordinary efforts, Crittenden, having been informed of Thomas's advance, had collected together sufficient provisions for two or three days ahead, and on Friday night had sent out a reconnoitring party, which had met and exchanged shots with the picket guard of the Tenth Indiana and then retired. Saturday night the Confederate officers met in council and determined to advance against Thomas, surprise his camp, and give him battle at early dawn on Sunday morning. There were two considerations which led to this determination. The first related to the enemy, whose two columns would be united in an attack on the Confederate camp, but might be met separately in case Crittenden should take the initiative. The second regarded the position of the Confederate army, which could easily be turned, and which therefore made it necessary that Crittenden should either make the proposed advance, or retreat, leaving the way open into East Tennessee. The Federal force, moreover, was estimated, on the basis of the reconnoissance made the previous night, at considerably less than its real value. Although there was a great deal ventured in this advance, made thus upon a mistaken estimate of the enemy's strength, it had a reasonable hope of success if the surprise could have been calculated upon as certain. This was not the case; for Thomas, fully aware of the probability of an attack, had disposed of his forces accordingly.



MAP OF MILL SPRING AND THE VICINITY.

The Confederates marched out of camp at midnight in perfect silence, with Zollicoffer's brigade in the van, followed by Carroll's, making altogether a force of eight regiments, with six pieces of artillery. After a march of six hours, through drizzling rain and over muddy roads, the skirmishers of the Fifteenth Mississippi encountered the Federal pickets at daybreak. The captain of one of the companies on picket guard had just reported to Colonel Manson that all was quiet, when a courier arrived with tidings of the attack. The long roll was instantly beat, and a company was promptly dispatched to the support of the pickets, followed immediately by the entire regiment, which had just formed in line of battle about seventy-five yards from the picket-firing, when Zollicoffer was seen close in front with the Mississippi regiment, supported by Battle's and Stanton's. For an hour the Indiana soldiers stood against these three regiments, when half of their number were obliged to retire from their position on the right of the road. At this moment the Fourth Kentucky came up on the left, and a part of McCook's brigade on the right, making the numbers engaged at this point, on each side, nearly equal. The position now held by the Federal troops was about a thousand yards in the rear of that originally taken by the Tenth, which, by the superior numbers opposed to it, had been driven over one hill and up the slope of another. Here the battle raged most hotly, and for a time without any sensible advantage on one side or the other, until at length the Fourth Kentucky and Tenth Indiana, their ammunition being nearly exhausted, took shelter in the woods along the crest of the second hill, when the Confederates rushed forward from their cover in the woods across the field intervening between the two positions. The crest once



ROBERT L. MCCOOK.

gained, the field was theirs. Every nerve was strained to the utmost. Carroll's brigade was ordered up to support Zollicoffer, and on the Federal side McCook's two regiments were called into action. One of these, the Second Minnesota, rapidly made its way among the logs and brushwood to the left, taking the place of the Fourth Kentucky and the Tenth Indiana, and at the same time the Ninth Ohio got into position on the right of the road in the woods, where it was separated from the enemy by a corn-field. Only the road separated the two regiments. In the rapid movement of the Confederates under Zollicoffer, the latter was killed by S. S. Fry, colonel of the Fourth Kentucky; but the regiments under his command, maddened by the event, rushed furiously on till they came into an almost hand to hand encounter with McCook's brigade, the Second Minnesota and the Confederates opposed to them pushing their muskets through the same fence. For half an hour the desperate conflict continued, and still remained doubtful. The Confederates had clearly an advantage in the numbers engaged, while the Federals had a compensating advantage in position, and also in the management of artillery, for the Confederate batteries overshot McCook's brigade, while his told with fearful effect against the enemy. Suddenly the battle turned; the Confederates were driven back to their first position. In the mean while, Carter's brigade having gained the enemy's right flank, a bayonet charge was ordered along the whole line, and the retreat of the Confederates was turned into a rout. They had lost their favorite leader, and Crittenden in vain endeavored to rally them against the pursuing Federals. One or two feeble stands were made, but without effect, and before night they had been driven within their intrenchments at Beech Grove, having lost in killed and wounded 300 men, besides fifty taken prisoners. The Federal batteries were brought up, and from commanding positions on the neighboring hills opened a cannonade on the enemy's camp. Schœpf had joined Thomas, and it was intended to carry the fortifications the next morning by storm, but in the night the Confederates effected a retreat across the river. This movement was attended with great distress and a complete demoralization of the Confederate army, the scattered fragments of which were afterward collected together at Gainsborough, on the Cumberland, about thirty miles below the point at which that river enters Tennessee.

The part which Colonel McCook's brigade played in the battle of Mill Spring was prominent. The colonel, a native of Ohio, was thirty-five years of age, and was destined, in a few months, to lose his life, not on the fair field of battle, but by the hand of the assassin. He was murdered, August 6, 1862, by a company of guerrillas, in ambush near Salem, Alabama. Colonel McCook, at the beginning of the war, was placed in command of the Ninth Ohio regiment, which had reached so high a degree of discipline that McClellan pronounced it the first in the army. With this regiment he had passed through the West Virginia campaign; under Rosecrans he was given the command of the second brigade. At Philippi, Rich Mountain, and Carnifex Ferry his command was always foremost in the fight. The battle of Mill Spring was the last in which he participated. He was wounded here, but it was not long before he was again at the post of duty. For his energy and bravery in this battle he was appointed a brigadier general, but his attachment to his old regiment led him to decline the commission.¹

¹ A large number of the McCook family were engaged in the civil war on the Federal side. Among them are the following: General Alexander McCook, the brother to whom Robert sent his last message: "Tell Aleck and the rest that I have tried to live like a man and do my duty;" Daniel McCook, jun., adjutant general in General McCook's staff, and who was to suffer death from wounds received at Kenesaw Mountain in 1864; Edwin McCook, then a captain in Colonel Logan's Illinois regiment; Lieutenant Edward S. McCook, of the regular army; Major Anson McCook, Second Ohio; Henry McCook, captain of an Illinois regiment; Sheldon McCook, a lieutenant in the navy.