JEDEDIAH HOTCHKISS

SUBJECT FILE

Civil War
Battle of McDowell

At the time of the battle of McDowell Major A. W. Harman was the Commandant of the Post, and Captain H. M. Bell was Post Quartermaster at Staunton. On the morning of the battle of McDowell these gentlemen, without orders or leave of absence from their posts, mounted their horses and followed the army to the summit of Bull Pasture Mountain. They were both well acquainted with General Edw. Johnson, who had commanded the army in that direction, and Col. M. G. Jaxxxx Harman, who commanded the 52nd. regiment under Johnson, was a brother of Major Harman. Reaching what was subsequently the battlefield these gentlemen rode from the summit of the mountain to the left up into the fields of Mr. Stitlington and reconnoitred the enemy's position in the vicinity of McDowell. Having done this and ridden all along the crest of the mountain they returned to the road where they met General Johnson and told him what they had seen, and went back with him, calling his attention to commanding positions for artillery etc.. This group of horsemen attracted the attention of the Federal commander and he sent out skirmishers to fire on them, and finally forced them to retire. Going back to the turnpike they found General Jackson there, and at the request of General Johnson they told him about the route they had been over by which artillery could go to the summit and be so placed as to command the enemy's line of battle. Major Harman had been in Jackson's command the earlier part of the war, and they had known each other for years. After their conversation about the position, for which information Jackson thanked him, Major Harman moved away and said to Captain Bell, "We are here without orders, and hadn't we better tell General Jackson about it and ask his permission to stay until after the battle?" Captain Bell concurring Major Harman at once asked the question: Jackson

replied saying, "Have you gentlemen left any one in charge of the post at Staunton that in case I wish supplies for my army sent to Millboro, or the stores there gathered to the same place that it will be done?" Upon their replying that they had not he said "The sooner you get back to your posts the better", whereupon they put spurs to their horses and got back to Staunton that night.

This well illustrates the provision that Jackson always made in meeting any contingencies that might arise. He had left Banks in Harrisonburg and knew very well that if he were bold enough he could readily move forward to Staunton, as he was nearer to that point that Jackson himself was, although Ewell was left on his flank at Elk Run. Of course the cavalry had been left between Staunton and Harrisonburg so that information could be given of any movement of the enemy in time for the removal of stores. Jakcson had provided in case of a reverse at McDowell and of such a movemrnt of Banks to fall back to the southwest by feasible roads leading from the line of his advance in the direction of Millboro station of the Virginia Central Railroad, a point some 60 miles west of Staunton.

This statement I had yesterday, April 1st. 1892, from the lips of Capt. subsequently Major, H. M. Bell.

The Battle of McDowell. - Personal Incidents.

On the 10th of May, 1862, as stated on page 80 of Allan's History of Jackson's Valley Campaign, I was sent by Gen. Jackson to blockade Dry River Gap, an object which I accomplished after an afternoon and all night ride, covering between 80 and 90 miles. The details of that circumstance I have never written out. Having recently, May 29, 1896, had opportunity to talk over incidents connected with this with Capt. F. F. Sterrett, as hereafter stated, I will relate the particulars of my ride, etc.

In the forward movement of Gen. Jackson from Staunton to McDowell, on May 8th, I was put in charge of an advanced line of skirmishers that climbed up the spur on the right of the ravine followed by the turnpike to the top of Shenandoah mountain where Fort Johnson had been erected and held by the Confederates during the preceding winter. Gen. Jackson supposed that the Federals would make a stand on the top of the mountain and therefore directed the movement that I was in charge of to flank them in that position. A similar movement was made on the opposite spur of the mountain. After a very arduous climb up the steep side of and along the spur, we reached the crest of Shenandoah mountain and moved forward to the gap where thr turnpike crosses only to find that the enemy had abandoned the summit and retreated to the crest of Shaw's Ridge, the next mountain range to the west. Signaling back that the way was clear the army advanced and pressed forward to Shaw's Ridge, where the same tactics were pursued by skirmishers with the same result, except that a Federal battery fired a few shots before abandoning the crest of the ridge. Our army again pressed forward across Shaw's Ridge and down to the Cow-Pasture river when the same tactics were again resorted to in following the enemy up Bull Pasture mountain, except that I signaled back from each turn in the road and the head of the army advanced more rapidly than up the more direct courses of the road in crossing the other ridges. Reaching the summit of Bull Pasture mountain which the enemy abandoned without contest, Jackson had his advanced forces deployed, mainly in the fields on the summit to the left or southwest side of the road.

As I had had the year before carefully examined all the country aroud McDowell and was familiar with its topography, I responded to Gen. Jackson's request for information about the position of the enemy at McDowell and along the terrace on the western side of Bull Pasture river by taking him out to a projecting ledge of rocks on the right hand side of the road, from which the enemy's position was visible and pointed out to him the details of the locality, supplementing this with a sketch map made on the spot, showing the details, in a general way of the topography of the region lying before us. After this I rode with the General and a portion of his staff accompanied by Gen. Johnson and his staff up to the crest of the mountain and into the field on the left along the eastern margin of which Gen. Johnson had deployed his men concealed in the woods, with skirmishers advanced into the brushy field which extended down the western slope of the mountain nearly to Bull Pasture river as shown on my map. Our party attracted the attention of the enemy and a line of skirmishers was advanced and opened on us. We soon retired and Gen. Jackson, having reached the conclusion that there would be no further engagement that day and desiring to bring up and ration his army in preparation for the next day, he directed me to find a road by which artillery could be brought up into the field where we then were, intending thence to shell the enemy's position the next morning, directing that after I had found this road we should, that is the staff, go back to Wilson's where we had established head-quarters and get some supper and rest, he himself remaining with Gen. Johnson on the mountain. His instructions to me were to have the artillery on the top of the mountain by three o'clock the next morning.

Having found the road I went back to head-quarters, reaching there just before dark, and had thrown myself down on my blankets in my tent

to rest while supper was being prepared. I had been reclining but a few minutes when my attention was arrested by the sound of infantry and artillery firing. I at once jumped up and ordering my horse galloped back to the top of the mountain, a distance of about three miles, where I found Gen. Jackson, my remembrance is, all alone in the road, the firing on the left having well nigh ceased. He expressed his gratification at my coming and at once said in his usual incisive rapid way, "Go up on the mountain and give my compliments to Gen. Taliafero and tell him he must hold on there until I come with the Stonewall Brigade which I have sent for". I should have added that just as I reached him Gen. Johnson came up having been wounded and gave him a short account of the situation and then went on down the mountain to the hospital. It was then quite dark. I at once rode rapidly to the foot of the first steep slope of the road where it turned around through a ravine and where a steep log-rolling way led up into the field where the fighting had been going on. I there found broken down private Snapp of the 25th Virginia, whom I knew, resting at the foot of the roll-way. Giving my horse into his charge with instructions to remain there I scrambled up the steep road and soon reached the field where our men appeared to be mixed in confusion looking after the wounded and their officers engaged in trying to get them in order in anticipation of another attack as the firing had ceased. I soon found Gen. Taliafero and delivered Gen. Jackson's message and then went back and got my horse and reported to the General who was still waiting in the road in the gap. We remained there some time until he became satisfied that there would be no further fighting that night when we rode back to camp he repeating his instructions about the artillery the next morning. After getting something to eat I retired after giving instructions to have my horse ready and myself awakened a little before three the next morning.

The morning of May 9th I was up according to orders and rode rapidly to the top of the mountain and forward to the skirmish line or rather to the picket outpost on the turnpike where I learned that the enemy had probably retreated. A little later I learned from Col. Sittlington a citizen whose house was in the valley just below McDowell, and in whose field the battle of the day before had occurred, and who had come up into our lines soon as he had ascertained that the way was clear that the enemy had retreated. This being the case I did not take the artillery to the ridge as directed but sent word to Gen. Jackson then rode up and over the battle field of the day before and after seeing that rode and joined the General at McDowell whither he had ridden soon as he heard the enemy had retreated. We spent that day at McDowell and I sketched the battle field and examined the surrounding country. Our advance moved forward to where the road to Franklin leaves that to Monterey so that Jackson was apprised of the route by which the enemy had retreated. The next morning Jackson moved forward in pursuit after having rationed his troops and followed the enemy to the vicinity of Franklin where Fremont had taken a strong position in Prope's Gap.

Sometime during the afternoon of the 10th I should say between three and four P. M. while we were waiting developments in front the General beckoned to me then turned and rode back along the road by which we had advanced, I following him, until we reached a wood road that turned into the woods to our left. We rode up that a little ways when he turned and addressed me, emphasizing his words, shaking his long index finger towards me, and said, in his quick, rapid way:-"General Banks is in Harrisonburg, Gen. Fremont is at Franklin, there is a good road between them. Gen. Fremont ought to march to Gen. Banks, but I dont think he will do it, I want the road between them and Dry River Gap blockaded by daylight tomorrow morning so he cannot do this. Please take a squad of couriers and ride back to Churchville, by way of McDowell, and take Capt. Sterrett's company of cavalry which you will find near Churchville and go and blockade Dry River Gap. Send me back a

messenger every hour telling me where you are and what you have done."

I asked that Sergt. S. Howell Brown, who was with us on engineering duty, might accompany me; the General assented and I at once got my couriers and we started back riding rapidly and continuously until we reached Churchville a distance of over 50 miles, about midnight. I there found Capt. Sterrett and his cavalry company, mustering about 60 men, and having given him my orders to promptly assemble his men and come across to my house I rode to my home and fed my horse and got something to eat, taking Sergt. Brown with me. When Capt. S. reported with his men I was ready to move and we pushed forward by way of Mossy Creek to the vicinity of Ottobine Church not far from Dry River Gap where we obtained axes, crowbars etc. from the farm houses of the vicinity many of whom I knew personally and thus provided for pushed rapidly forward into Dry River Gap at Rawley Springs, with videttes in advance and up into the gap some three miles where the road to Franklin is in a rocky gorge where I directed the men to dismount part of them taking charge of the horses and commenced felling trees and rolling rocks into the road as we fell backward. We commenced our blockading operations just about daylight and in the course of a few hours had the road very effectually blockaded for some distance to the rear, quite sufficiently in my opinion to delay any advance of the enemy until Jackson could get back into the valley to meet a movement towards Staunton. I had sent back messengers each hour to the General, according to instruction so that he was regularly apprised of my movements and what I had done.

Before entering the gap I had taken the precaution of sending pickets out towards Harrisonburg, only 12 miles distant, where Gen. Banks still lay with his army.

Having completed the duty assigned me on the morning of the 11th we retired to the vicinity of Ottobine where we got breakfast and fed our horses and rested for a short time. I then dismissed Capt. Sterrett and his company to return to Churchville where he had been posted picketing the roads leading from Harrisonburg towards Lebanon Springs and Gen. Jackson's rear, guarding against any movement of Banks from that direction. After being thus refreshed and my horse rested having as before stated ridden between 80 and 90 miles, if not fully 100 counting the distance back to Ottobine, I took the Briery Branch Gap bridle path acrosss the Shenandoah mountain to the vicinity of Doe Hill where I spent that night having learned when I reached there late in the day that our army was falling back from Franklin towards McDowell. The next morning, May 12th, I rode to McDowell and rejoined the General not far from the middle of the day.