

Battlefield Dispatches

Report of Maj. Gen. J. E. B. Stuart, C. S. Army, commanding cavalry, of operations October 30-November 6. HDQRS. CAVALRY CORPS, ARMY OF NORTHERN VIRGINIA, February 27, 1864.

*(From "Operations in N.VA, W.VA, MD, and PA (Chap XXXI)" from **The War of the Rebellion – A compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies** published in Washington DC, 1887)*



Federal cannon and troops on Unison Rd

COLONEL: I have the honor to submit the following report of the operations of the cavalry division from October 30, 1862, when I crossed the Blue Ridge, to November 6, 1862, when my command recrossed the Rappahannock, including notices of operations along that front subsequent to that time.

On October 30, 1862, it having been ascertained that the enemy had crossed the Potomac in force in the vicinity of Leesburg, I was directed by the commanding general to cross at once' with one brigade of my command into Loudoun, with a view to watch the enemy's movements, and to delay his progress while our army was changing its position, so as to confront him on the Rappahannock

At this time General Longstreet was moving his corps by way of Front Royal to Culpeper Jones' brigade was left to bring up Jackson's rear in the valley, while Hampton's brigade, then in the vicinity of Martinsburg, was ordered to join me near Upperville by November 3.

I crossed with Fitz. Lee's brigade, under Col. Williams C. Wickham (Brig. Gen. Fitz. Leo having been disabled), and six pieces of the Stuart Horse Artillery, under Maj. John Palham, at Castleman's Ferry and Snicker's Gap. This brigade had been much diminished and its efficiency greatly impaired by the "greased heel" and sore tongue, at that time prevailing among the horses, and some of the regiments scarcely numbered 100 men for duty, the aggregate of the brigade for duty being less than 1,000. Proceeding in the direction of Middleburg, I bivouacked that night near Bloomfield.



Federal troops on Unison Rd

Having ascertained during the night that there was a force of the enemy at Mountville, where the Snickersville turnpike crosses Goose Creek, I started on the morning of the 31st with the command for that point. Pursuing an unfrequented road, I succeeded in surprising the enemy, who were in force of about 100, and dispersing the whole without difficulty; killed and captured nearly the whole number, among the former Captain Gove, of the First Rhode Island Cavalry. The attack was made by the Ninth Virginia, in advance, supported by the Third, which last continued the pursuit of the fugitives several miles to Aldie. Here, the enemy being in force, the Third Virginia retired to the hill overlooking the town until re-enforced by the rest of the command. The Fourth Virginia, now in advance, pushed on toward the village, meeting midway a column of the enemy charging up the lane. After a brief and fierce conflict, the leading squadron of the enemy was put to flight, and driven pell-mell down the narrow lane upon the next squadron, which was moving up at a gallop. The collision between these two bodies resulted in serious damage to both, and the whole was soon hut to flight and driven into the village. The enemy's artillery, which crowned the heights adjoining the village, now opened upon our advancing columns, and compelled us to discontinue the pursuit. Our pursuit had been too rapid for the artillery to keep pace, but it finally came up, and was hut in position on the heights overlooking the village, and opened a destructive fire upon the enemy, compelling him to abandon his position. At this time I was deterred from further attack by information that the enemy was advancing from the direction of Mountville, which I had just left, and which was completely in my rear. I therefore retired just at dark, by way of Middleburg to a point a few miles beyond that place, where we encamped for the night.



Confederate Cavalry on the outskirts of Unison village

It was subsequently ascertained that General Bayard was in-command of the enemy's forces, and that they retreated, without halting, to Fairfax Court-House, and that the reported advance from Mountville was a mistake.

The enemy suffered heavily in killed and wounded. Our own loss was very slight. In the camp captured at Montville several flags, numbers of saddles, valises, blankets, oil-cloths, and other valuable articles were captured, which the enemy had abandoned in their hasty flight.

During November 1, a portion of my command being near Union, a point midway between the two turnpikes, it was ascertained that the enemy was advancing from the direction of Leesburg and debouching upon the turnpike at Philomont, a few miles above Mountville. Our pickets having been attacked at that point, the brigade was moved through Union to their support. At this time General D. H. Hill, with his division, was in the vicinity of Upperville and Paris, and my command was so disposed as to cover his front. I immediately took position on the Union Heights to check the enemy's advance if he were in heavy force, or, if only a force of cavalry to attack him. The enemy spent the remainder of the day in reconnoitering, displaying very little force, and in the skirmishing which took place our lines were advanced to the vicinity of Philomont. The playing of bands and other indications rendered it almost certain that there was a large force of infantry present. The command, having encamped for the night near their former position, moved early next morning (November 2) to reoccupy the line of battle held the previous day.

About 8 o'clock, the enemy began to deploy in our front both infantry and cavalry, with six or eight pieces of artillery. Our dispositions were made to receive him by posting artillery advantageously and the cavalry dismounted behind the stone fences, which were here very numerous, and, consequently, afforded the enemy as good shelter as ourselves. Having to watch all the avenues leading to my rear, my effective force for fighting was very much diminished, but the Stuart Horse Artillery, under the incomparable Pelham, supported by the cavalry sharpshooters, made a gallant and obstinate resistance, maintaining their ground for the greater part of the day, both suffering heavily, one of our caissons exploding from the enemy's shot. It

was during this engagement that Major Pelham conducted a howitzer some distance beyond support to a neighboring hill and opened a masked fire upon a body of the enemy's cavalry in the valley beneath, putting them to flight, capturing their flag and various articles-their arms, equipments, and horses, as well as some prisoners-sustaining in this extraordinary feat no loss whatever. The enemy finally enveloped our position with his superior numbers, both infantry and cavalry so as to compel our withdrawal; but every hill-top and every foot of ground was disputed, so that the enemy made progress of less than a mile during the day. The enemy were held at bay until dark at Seaton's Hill, which they assailed with great determination, but were, each time signally repulsed by the well-directed fire of the Horse Artillery. If Major Pelham, directing one of the shots himself at the color-bearer of an infantry regiment, struck him down at a distance of 800 yards. During this withdrawal, Captain Bullock, of the Fifth Virginia Cavalry, by great presence of mind and bravery, saved himself from capture in a very perilous position.



Confederate Cavalry watching Unison Rd

At night I bivouacked the command east of Upperville with the view of occupying as a line of battle the ground along the creek below the town. Some few of our wounded, who were so much disabled that they could not be moved, were left in hospital near Union, with surgeons and nurses.

Captain Blackford, of the Engineers, had been sent with a reconnoitering party to the Blue Ridge, to take a view of the enemy from that elevation. He reported immense trains of wagons coming from Leesburg toward Union, which, together with what had been developed in front, convinced me that it was McClellan's army on a forward movement. My instructions in case of such a movement were to move along the east side of the ridge, keeping in front of the enemy, and delaying his progress as much as possible; but in an interview with General D. H. Hill, at Upperville, he expressed a great desire that I should retire through Ashby's Gap, as it was, he said, of the greatest importance that the enemy should be delayed there in order to enable Jackson's corps to get away. I acquiesced in this arrangement, as I knew that I could detach part of the command to keep along east of the Blue Ridge while the rest was thus occupied, especially as Hampton's brigade was then expected.

Old Newspaper Articles

NEW YORK DAILY TRIBUNE

Monday, Nov 10, 1862

The Late Skirmishes Between Stuart and Pleasonton

Antietam-Rebel Opinion of Our Cavalry

Lee Said To Be Over The Rappahannock.

From our special correspondent Upperville, Fauquier Co Va.

Headquarters of Gen. Franklin, Nov 5, 1862



Confederate Cavalry officer

From the little settlement of loyal Quakers at Purcellsville our line of march yesterday was by an old country road to the hamlet of Union, a hotbed of the most spiteful species of Secessionists. Union, a few days since was the scene of a brisk skirmish between Gen. Pleasonton and Stuart neither of whom accomplished much. Gen. Pleasonton says he drove Gen. Stuart, Gen. Stuart says he led Gen. Pleasonton. We lost in killed and wounded about forty, the Rebels ten or fifteen. Stuart fell back beyond Ashby Gap. Gen. Pleasonton followed throwing shell after him along the road and frightened the inhabitants into the cellars of their dwellings.

At Union a shell entered the cellar of Mr. Robey, a Methodist clergyman, and exploded but a few feet from where himself and family had sought protection. A brick partition in the cellar fortunately saved the entire group from being killed.



Union soldiers on Unison Rd

At the mansion of Mr Keene, one mile South of the village, I found three Rebel surgeons in attendance upon nine wounded Rebels. The surgeons and wounded soldiers were all from the famous Stuart's division and were not at all careful to conceal their contempt for our own cavalry. The 8th Illinois, however, with whom they have frequently come in contact, they pronounced the best riders in our service, and said if they would carry less upon their horses, would make splendid cavaliers. A portion of Gen. Hunt's brigade was also well spoken of, but they had forgotten the name of the regiment. The battle of Antietam they consider a draw game; but all and without exception that if we had fought them on Thursday their entire army would have been taken. These Rebel surgeons are educated, intelligent men, and did not seem inclined to make exaggerated statements. They stated that the capture of an entire company of Rhode Island cavalry near Aldies Gap a few days since was one of the most disgraceful affairs, for a small one, of the war. The company, according to their statement, was doing advanced picket duty, but allowed themselves to be surprised with their sabers off and their horses unsaddled. The captain of the company sprung upon the bare back of his horse and made an attempt to escape, but the horse stumbled almost instantly throwing him off and breaking his neck.



Federal troops bivouacked at Welbourne

Mr Keene, the owner of the mansion where these rebel surgeons and wounded are now sojourning is about the most prominent man of the community and, of course, a leading Rebel. While he claimed protection for his property from all our Generals as their commands passed by, or over, his plantation, and obtained it, he at the same time declared that during his life he shall remain hostile to the Government of the United States. Having read much and puzzled his brains over the metaphysics of Calhoun, he enters into discussion immediately with all who approach him, from the Major General seeking his dwelling for headquarters to the guard protecting the chickens at his door. Furthermore while he boasts that he owes supreme allegiance to Virginia alone, he at the same time maintains that the Federal Government, as he calls it, is bound to pay him for his property destroyed by the army. His logic made but little impression upon either officers or soldiers, and he is this morning doubtless minus several hundred bushels of corn more than he would have if he had remained silent.

From Union, in Loudoun County, we have to-day marched to Upperville, in Fauquier County, a beautiful little village laying at the foot of the Blue Ridge and but a few miles from Ashby's Gap. For many miles around the village the plantations are all large and the mansions generally in a good state of repair. Nearly every family has a representative in the Rebel army. All are Rebels, and not an open door or a cheerful countenance is seen. After a guard has been placed around their mansions, they sink back into a sullen taciturn mood, and do not recover from it until the last straggler has disappeared from among them.

The most prominent residents of this village tell us to-night that Gen. Lee has again outwitted Gen. McClellan; that the main portion of his army is beyond his reach, and safe behind the Rappahannock.

Quotes



Re-enactment of The 1862 Battle of Unison

“One of the best preserved 19th century rural landscapes in Virginia” – Eugene Scheel, historian and author

“The open fields, old unpaved roadways, stone walls and many historic buildings provide an immediate sense of Civil War times” – Edwin C. Bearss, Chief Historian Emeritus, United States National Park Service

“The Civil War battlefield around Unison has the highest integrity of any I have seen” – John Salmon, former chief historian, Virginia Department of Historic Resources

“Those who fought in 1862, could they stand here again, would recognize their battlefield today” – David Lowe, US National Park Service Historian and Cartographer and author of “The Battle of Unison, November 1-3, 1862”

“When you drive through the Unison area, unlike other battlefields, you are looking at what Civil War soldiers saw almost 150 years ago” – David Edwards, director, Northern Virginia Office, Virginia Department of Historic Resources.

“The Unison battlefield and the countryside around it – this landscape, its topography, road and, viewshed are still intact. It is unimpaired by shopping centers, towers, noise, lights and the visual intrusion that can mar an historic landscape” – Kristen McMasters, grants manager, American Battlefield Protection Program, US National Park Service

“As the research amply demonstrates, this battlefield is a very important part of the nation’s history. This treasure remains beautifully preserved and is a wonderful place for both tourism and scholarship” – O. James Lighthizer, President, Civil War Preservation Trust