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This dissertation, directed and approved by the candidate's committee, has been accepted by the Graduate Committee of The University of New Mexico in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY IN HISTORY

GENERAL WESLEY MERRITT: NINETEENTH CENTURY CAVALRYMAN

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1975

GENERAL WESLEY MERRITT: NINETEENTH CENTURY CAVALRYMAN

BY
DON EDWARD ALBERTS
B.S., University of New Mexico, 1956
M.A., University of New Mexico, 1972

DISSERTATION

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree of
Doctor of Philosophy in History
in the Graduate School of
The University of New Mexico
Albuquerque, New Mexico
May, 1975

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Don Edward Alberts, Ph.D.
Department of History
The University of New Mexico, 1975

Wesley Merritt's forty-five year career as a Regular officer in the United States Army was both significant and unusual. He graduated a year before the Civil War broke out, and he served with distinction during that conflict and during the "Indian Wars" that followed. As he neared retirement age at the end of the nineteenth century, America's interest in overseas expansion brought Merritt once again into action during the Spanish-American War.

Merritt left no body of personal papers or correspondence, and his official reports and correspondence, as well as published and unpublished accounts of officers and men who served with him, provide bases for reconstructing his life and career. Merritt's high rank meant that his reports and official correspondence were published in official documents dealing with the Civil War and Spanish-American War. Between these two conflicts, regimental and departmental command meant that Merritt's official papers were recorded by his own and superior commands and are preserved in the National Archives at Washington, D.C.

Merritt's Civil War career was spectacularly successful. After commanding a cavalry regiment, he was promoted to brigadier general before the Battle of Gettysburg. One of that war's "boy generals," Merritt successively commanded a cavalry brigade, division, and corps in all the major battles in the East. After

Appomattox, Merritt accompanied General Sheridan to Texas and was prominent in reintroducing Federal power to that state.

Postwar Army reorganization brought Merritt to effective command of one of the two Negro cavalry regiments serving on the southern plains of Texas. Merritt became one of the most successful and understanding officers in training, educating, and leading the Black troopers. Promoted to command of the Fifth Cavalry, Merritt fought against Sioux, Cheyennes, and Utes on the northern plains and mountains following Custer's Little Big Horn disaster.

With conclusion of the Indian Wars, Merritt served as Superintendent of the United States Military Academy and, as a general officer once more, in departmental commands. He supervised the opening of Oklahoma Territory and commanded troops engaged in breaking railroad strikes resulting from the industrial troubles of the early 1890's. Merritt wrote extensively in professional journals and was a founder of the Cavalry Association. He was an advocate of transition from frontier police to modern, professional Army. He commanded the Army's first "war game" exercise in implementing this necessary change.

Merritt was the second-ranking general in the Army at the outbreak of the Spanish-American War. He commanded the Philippine expedition, which captured Manila, and served as Military Governor of Manila. Merritt's professional organization and command contrasted sharply with the ineptness displayed by other American generals operating in the Caribbean, and he was the most successful major general of the Spanish-American

War.

Throughout his career, Merritt's modesty, responsibility, and success contrasted favorably with his many rivals. His was a record of long, successful, and progressive service that few, if any, nineteenth century officers could equal.

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ABBREVIATIONS

AAAG	Acting Assistant Adjutant General
AAG	Assistant Adjutant General
ACP	Appointments, Commands, and Personal File
AG	Adjutant General
AGO	Adjutant General's Office
<u>ANJ</u>	<u>Army and Navy Journal</u>
<u>B&L</u>	<u>Battles and Leaders of the Civil War</u>
<u>CWH</u>	<u>Civil War History</u>
<u>CWT</u>	<u>Civil War Times</u>
<u>DAB</u>	<u>Dictionary of American Biography</u>
DD	Department of Dakota
DE	Department of the East
DG	Department of the Gulf
DM	Department of the Missouri
DP	Department of the Platte
DP and 8AC	Department of the Pacific and Eighth Army Corps
DT	Department of Texas, District of Texas
F.G.O.	Field General Orders
F.O.	Field Orders
G.C.M.O.	General Court Martial Orders
G.O.	General Orders
GPO	Government Printing Office
HQ	Headquarters
JAG	Judge Advocate General
<u>JMSI</u>	<u>Journal of the Military Service Institution</u>
<u>JUSCA</u>	<u>Journal of the United States Cavalry Association</u>
L.C.	Library of Congress
LR	Letters Received
LR. Regis.	Letters Received Register
LS	Letters Sent

MDG	Military Division of the Gulf
MDM	Military Division of the Missouri
MDSW	Military Division of the Southwest
MHRC	Military History Research Collection
MSS	Manuscript
NA	National Archives
O.I.W.	Order of the Indian Wars
O.R.	Official Records
R	Roll
RG	Record Group
S.O.	Special Orders
S of W	Secretary of War
<u>SWHQ</u>	<u>Southwestern Historical Quarterly</u>
<u>TMH</u>	<u>Texas Military History</u>
TS	Telegrams Sent
USA	United States Army
USMA	United States Military Academy
<u>W.O.W.</u>	<u>Winners of the West</u>
5MD	Fifth Military District

INTRODUCTION

. . . Never disturbed by doubt, or moved by fear, neither circumspect nor rash, he never missed an opportunity or made a mistake.

- Major General Eben Swift

With qualities such as these, and a little bit of luck, the career of a nineteenth century soldier might be expected to be successful. Wesley Merritt had both, and his forty-five year Army career invites few parallels among his many peers and rivals. He graduated from West Point the year before the Civil War broke out, and that conflict offered opportunities for action, promotion, and fame which would never again exist during the lifetimes of its participants. He became one of the "boy generals" of that war, rising from the rank of second lieutenant in two years. A mature sense of duty, gained from his early superiors, Generals Philip St. George Cooke and John Buford, combined with a sense of opportunity, led Merritt to a long and close relationship with that most demanding of Union commanders, Philip H. Sheridan. By the close of the Civil War, Merritt was Sheridan's ablest lieutenant, commanding, as major general, a corps of Union cavalry that blocked the escape of General Robert E. Lee from Appomattox Court House.

Wesley Merritt was a cavalryman through and through. His pre-war service and Civil War service were in that arm,

so it was natural that when Sheridan was sent to Texas immediately after Lee's surrender, in order to counter any threats from the French imperialist government of Mexico and to supervise the "reconstruction" of frontier Texas, Merritt would accompany him. Sheridan's vehicle for reintroducing the Federal influence to Texas was the two cavalry columns commanded by Wesley Merritt and his less-capable rival, George Armstrong Custer. Together, Merritt and Custer brought the power of the Federal government to a state whose interior had scarcely felt the effects of war and where Negro slavery flourished unhampered by any agreements at Appomattox.

With the mustering-out of the huge Civil War volunteer army, the Regular Army was left with the task of occupying the conquered southern states and of garrisoning the frontier posts from Canada to Mexico as well as fighting the series of police actions which have come to be popularly known as the Indian Wars. In this much-reduced Regular Army, Major General Merritt became Lieutenant Colonel Merritt, a rank reduction experienced by many of his contemporaries. Merritt's maturity and reliability were called on to their utmost in this capacity as he recruited and commanded one of the two new Negro cavalry regiments authorized by Congress in 1866. He patiently and humanely transformed basically good raw material into the veteran Ninth Cavalry which, along with its sister regiment the Tenth Cavalry, became famous on the Western Frontier as the "Buffalo Soldiers."

Merritt's continued growth as an experienced frontier commander and his reputation for responsible judgment combined with aggressive operations brought him, in time, to command of the famous Fifth Cavalry. He led this regiment in the campaign which followed the defeat and death of his old rival Custer and in the Ute Uprising of 1879. His appointment as Superintendent of the United States Military Academy at West Point brought to an end his Indian Wars activities, and also brought him again to general officer's rank.

The intimate experience with large-scale "civilized" warfare during the Civil War and with the small-unit "guerrilla" warfare of the plains might have tended to insulate Merritt and other American army officers from the events of the world outside the United States. To some extent it did, but this tendency was moderated in Merritt by extensive personal travel throughout Europe during the late nineteenth century and by his studies and writing during his term as Superintendent at West Point. He grasped the changes the United States Army would eventually have to undergo to maintain its position in a changing world. He was not in a position to effect all these changes, but he was instrumental in taking some of the first steps. He was involved in establishing professional officer associations, in experimenting with and introducing new techniques and equipment, and in directing the first modern "war game" exercise ever held by the U.S. Army. During this period Merritt also gained experience in civil problems and administration, since the military forces within his command were used

to suppress the labor problems brought about by the Pullman Strike of 1894 and to supervise the opening of the Oklahoma Strip in 1889.

Experience in these broadened fields served Merritt well when, as a major general once more and the second-ranking officer in the United States Army as the Spanish-American War broke out, he commanded operations in the Philippines, including the capture of Manila and the delicate negotiations with the Philippine Insurgents led by Emilio Aguinaldo.

Throughout a long and changing career, Merritt carried out all of these operations in an efficient, responsible, and highly successful manner. In his entire career, "this magnificent soldier," as Sheridan described him, was never defeated, never failed where reasonable chance of success existed, and never sought self-acclaim through showmanship or bravado. This latter characteristic generally accounts for his lack of historical treatment. He is recognized by students of the Civil War and Indian Wars, but he has remained almost entirely eclipsed by his more flamboyant but less significant comrades-in-arms. When Wesley Merritt died in 1910, the world was only four years away from the first "total" war with its submarines, tanks, machine guns, airplanes, and poison gas. He had played a significant part, not only in preserving the Union during the greatest American war to that time, but in guiding the Army through the transition from a frontier police force to the budding professionalism of the early twentieth century. Such an achievement was very rare. His story is overdue.

Chapter 1

EARLY LIFE

Opportunity was looking for the man, and honorable service was thrust upon all who wanted it.

--Major General James H. Wilson

A high percentage of American general officers have been descendents of families that emigrated to America during colonial times, and Wesley Merritt clearly falls within this military mainstream. His earliest ancestor in America was Thomas Merritt who first appears on the records of Rye, Westchester County, New York, in 1667, as a surveyor and as a newly selected minister.¹ The Merritts tended to stay in New York well into the nineteenth century.

Wesley's father, John Willis Merritt, was sixth in descent from Thomas Merritt of Rye. In 1827 he married Julia Anne de Forest, also a member of an old and well-known New York family. John Willis Merritt was educated as a lawyer in New York City and began his practice of law there in the same year that he and Julia Anne were married. He maintained a successful legal practice until the late 1830's, while he also found time to publish several novels and music criticism for the New York Mirror.² Julia Anne Merritt was also busy during this period. Their daughter, Julia Cynthia, the first of ten children, arrived a year after the marriage; thereafter

a new child was born with almost clocklike regularity through the decade of the 1830's. Wesley Merritt was the fourth child, born in New York City on June 16, 1836.³

The great economic crisis of 1837 finally had its effect on the young lawyer's career, and his financial troubles induced him to abandon his profession and to move his family west to a land of greater opportunity--Illinois. In 1840, with four-year-old Wesley and their other five children, the Merritts moved to southern Illinois, in the vicinity of Lebanon, where they planned to farm. There young Wesley spent an unexceptional childhood until the age of twelve. Nothing in John Willis Merritt's background would tend to recommend him as a farmer, but he managed at least to support his growing family in this fashion for seven years.⁴

By 1848 the country was well into the era of sectional conflict which would culminate in the Civil War. Besides such philosophic ideas as abolition of Negro slavery, the nation had to deal with the immediate problems of the admission of the slave state of Texas and the status of the territory gained by the Mexican War. All of these problems were constantly before the literate public. Whether the prospect of participating in or writing about the debates of the day attracted John Willis Merritt or whether he had his fill of the drudgery of farming, or both, we do not know. He did, however, move his family from the farm to the small Illinois town of Belleville in 1848, and there he became editor of the Belleville Advocate. After three years in

Belleville, John Willis Merritt saw even greater opportunity for his new career as a newspaper editor and moved to the small southern Illinois town of Salem in 1851.⁵

Salem was a bustling little town of about fifteen hundred people. It had an importance in the political and economic life of Marion County and southern Illinois out of proportion to its modest size, since it was the center of an extensive agricultural and milling region and was located on the Vincennes and St. Louis stage route. Salem was prosperous and needed a newspaper which would advocate the views of the majority of the people of the immediate region. John Willis Merritt founded the Salem Advocate in 1851 as the town's first newspaper, and he acted as its editor through the period of the Civil War, being joined in its ownership by his sons E. L. Merritt and J. D. Merritt.⁶ The Salem Advocate was a success and John Willis Merritt became one of the region's leading citizens. He was financially successful and, by 1860, accumulated property valued at approximately \$12,000. This consisted of 250 acres of land, a "handsome old homestead" and twenty-three lots in Salem.⁷

In this small-town environment Wesley Merritt lived from the age of fifteen to nineteen. His father urged his older sons to follow his own early career as a lawyer; accordingly, Wesley studied during his teenage years at the school of the Christian Brothers and then, for a legal career, with Judge William Haynie in Salem. Wesley's older brother, Thomas Emmett, also studied law with another Salem attorney,

P. P. Hamilton, a few years later and was admitted to the bar in 1862.⁸ Although Wesley's legal education was cut short by his appointment to West Point in 1855, the legal and political interests of his father and older brother continued and inevitably led them into the political arena.

The political inclinations and activities of his father, his family, and his acquaintances could reasonably be expected to have an important effect on the political and social attitudes of young Wesley Merritt as he studied law in Salem. The sectional conflict during the decade of the 1850s was accelerating in violence after the compromises attempted by Congress were unsuccessful. Collapse of the Whig Party and emergence of the Republican Party tended to provide the vehicle for polarization of the electorate with moderates being forced to choose between the Republican Party and the Democratic Party.

The Merritts were staunch Democrats. In this they reflected the views of a large majority of Salem and Marion County which were heavily populated with settlers from the southern states. Marion County not only supported favorite son, Stephen A. Douglas, but voted solidly Democratic in the 1858 mid-term election in which Douglas defeated the "Black Republican" Abraham Lincoln for a seat in the U.S. Senate. The same held true in the presidential election of 1860 where Lincoln was more successful, and even in 1864, when, in the midst of civil war, President Lincoln appealed to a much broader constituency than did General George B. McClellan.⁹

John Willis Merritt, editing the Advocate, considered himself a true moderate, and perhaps he was if the political extremists are considered to be either abolitionists or disunionists. He was much closer to the latter position, however, when in 1860, he proposed that southern Illinois join nearby Missouri as a separate western republic in the event disunion became a reality.¹⁰ The Salem Advocate was almost totally devoted to providing a forum for Stephen A. Douglas while he was alive. Entire front pages were devoted to Douglas' speeches, and editor Merritt continually castigated Lincoln and the other Republican candidates. Between political campaigns, the paper carried "Douglas for President" and afterwards, "McClellan for President" banners at its head, while editorializing against abolitionists, "nigger-lovers," "Black Republicans," and other undesirables. During the 1860 Presidential election, the elder Merritt got so involved that he even offered, in the Advocate, to bet all his Salem property, against an equivalent sum, on the outcome of the election in Illinois and to "remove to old Virginia the day after Lincoln's election." Fortunately, nobody took him up on the wager. Some local and military news slipped in once the Civil War began, but even local news often took the form of attacking upstate Chicago as a hotbed of "niggerism."¹¹

John Willis, E. L., and Thomas Emmitt Merritt also became personally involved in politics at the local and state levels. John Willis first became President of the Board of Trustees of the Town of Salem, Delegate to the 1860 Democratic

National Convention, Justice of the Peace, and then State Representative. Wesley's younger brother, E. L. Merritt, ran unsuccessfully for the office of State Representative, but his older brother, Thomas Emmett, was more fortunate and became State Representative and State Senator during the Civil War period.¹²

During the Civil War, the Salem Advocate was almost a "Copperhead" newspaper. There is no evidence that John Willis Merritt or either of Wesley Merritt's brothers involved with the paper, were members of any conspiracy, but their sympathies were definitely with the "Copperhead" movement. In this they were probably typical of Democratic papers of the Middle-West.¹³ The editorial of July 23, 1863, praised "That noble patriot Vallandigham . . . ," and the editor frequently portrayed Vallandigham and the "Copperheads" and "peace-advocates" as true patriots while the abolitionists were the real "traitors." The Merritts strongly supported the war effort, but they considered the Democrats to be the real friends of the soldiers and the Republicans to be greedy exploiters.¹⁴

Residence in Salem and political activity brought the Merritt family into intimate contact with the Chance family, another prominent Salem and Marion County unit. The election of Jacob O. Chance as Circuit Clerk and his subsequent marriage to Wesley's favorite younger sister, Emily Osborn Merritt, inextricably linked the fortunes of the two families; both remained prominent in Salem and southern Illinois affairs.

Their descendants continue the traditional names of these two families to the present time.¹⁵

Most of this family political activity was still in the future, however, as Wesley Merritt studied the law with Judge Haynie. Since no personal papers or letters from this early period of his life survive, little can be said about his personal attitudes, and it can only be inferred that they reflected those of his family at the time he left Salem. His background was typical of other young men with whom he would soon come into close contact. The son of a professional man, from an upper-middle class, Protestant, Anglo-Saxon family with a Colonial heritage, Merritt differed from the other potential military leaders at West Point only in having had his additional legal training and, at nineteen, in being two years older than the usual incoming cadet.¹⁶

In 1855, Wesley Merritt made the decision which was to determine the course of his life. He applied for admission to the United States Military Academy at West Point. In April, 1855, he was recommended for appointment by W. H. Bissell, Congressman from the Eighth District of Illinois. John Willis Merritt's political advocacy very likely did nothing to harm Wesley's chance for favorable consideration both by Congressman Bissell and by Jefferson Davis, who in 1855 was Secretary of War. Within a month, Davis had approved Merritt's appointment to West Point, and both Wesley and his father had signed their agreement.¹⁷

The West Point that Cadet Merritt entered on July 1, 1855, was different from the West Point of the past in two important aspects. The course of instruction was increased from four years to five years in order to better prepare the young Regular officers it graduated, and the Cadet Corps, usually apolitical, responded reluctantly to the sectional excitement prevalent at the time throughout the nation.¹⁸ Jefferson Davis brought to the office of Secretary of War an enthusiasm for the military which manifested itself in attempts to reorganize the Army Line and Staff relationships, to adopt new operational tactics and strategies, and to procure new equipment and arms. In most of these attempts he was successful. His later leadership of the Rebellion has naturally cast a doubt on his motives during the 1850s; however, in 1855 there was little evidence of a Southern conspiracy to subvert or use the Army, or of Davis' part in any such plan. One of his military reforms was the establishment of the five-year term at West Point. It, like Davis' plan to use camels for Western military transportation, later fell victim to the demands of the Civil War.¹⁹

Wesley Merritt's class, which convened in 1855 and graduated in 1860, was the only class in the history of West Point ever appointed to pursue the five-year course and to complete it. His class started with 121 Cadets, but, while Merritt had no trouble with the entrance examinations, nineteen or twenty of his classmates were initially rejected as deficient.²⁰

The academic curriculum was heavily technical in nature. The first-year courses in mathematics, English grammar and French were followed by advanced mathematics, more French and Spanish, drawing, geology, chemistry, a general science course--Natural and Experimental Philosophy, and civil and military engineering. These technical courses were relieved by the only course which could be considered to be one of the Humanities--Ethics. Ethics included world geography, a survey of world history, and a religious interpretation of the duties of man in society, devotion to duty, and Christian morality. All this was taught by the Chaplain in one course lasting half an academic year. This extremely narrow professional training offered little opportunity for the type of contacts which tend to change a young man's attitudes.²¹

The educational system which implemented the curriculum of 1855 was little changed from the original system which was instituted by Colonel Sylvanus Thayer in 1817. Each Cadet participated in small classes and prepared a textbook or reading assignment for every lesson. He was graded on every lesson, and each class period was a "steady, mental drive for both instructor and cadet." Five years of such pressure was a severe test of determination as well as of academic ability, but James H. Wilson, one of Merritt's classmates and later a famous Civil War cavalryman, felt that the extra ability and knowledge gained from the five-year course was very valuable in the absence of any opportunity for post-graduate study.²²

The academic work was supplemented by practical application in the areas of cavalry, infantry, and artillery tactics, drill, and military engineering. The practical instruction for Merritt started as soon as he reported to West Point in the summer of 1855. The new cadets went into "summer camp" on the Plain; here he first learned the basics of orderly camp life, drill, and discipline.

West Point discipline was legendary. It was based on a system wherein demerits were awarded for any breach of military etiquette such as failure to salute an officer, failure to respond to the drum calls, failure to stand guard properly, etc. Demerits were also awarded for tardiness or lack of classroom preparation. A cadet was permitted only one hundred demerits in a six-month period; accumulation of more than this number automatically expelled him. Demerits were liberally awarded--so much so, in fact, that attrition from this source became unreasonable; consequently, the system was moderated in 1857, after Merritt's second year, by re-defining the offenses for which demerits were given.²³ The discipline was hard on any cadet inclined to resist it, but Merritt was never tempted to "buck the system." Quiet by natural inclination, he apparently took to heart the admonition that "No soldier ever opens his mouth except to bite a cartridge." In spite of this, however, Merritt had a fiery temper which he had to learn to overpower. Only once during his stay at West Point did he allow himself to indulge in it: he engaged in a fist-fight with one of the

lowerclassmen, Judson Kilpatrick. Eventually the two combatants reconciled themselves and later fought side-by-side at Gettysburg.²⁴

Many of Merritt's instructors and classmates gained recognition and fame during and after the Civil War. Colonel William J. Hardee, author of Infantry Tactics and future Confederate general, was Commandant of Cadets and drilled the class in the "school of the soldier." On the faculty were Oliver O. Howard, who later became a Union general and head of the Freedman's Bureau, John Gibbon, who organized and led the famed "Iron Brigade" before advancing to command of a Union corps, and John M. Schofield, who later became the Commanding General of the United States Army.²⁵

Merritt's classmates and acquaintances among the upper and lowerclassmen included many cadets who would win fame as leaders of the Civil War armies. James H. Wilson attained corps command at the head of the Union cavalry in Alabama. Stephen D. Ramseur and Thomas Jefferson Rosser both opposed Merritt as Confederate generals in the Shenandoah Valley. James P. Martin served with Merritt on General Cooke's staff during the Peninsula campaign. John W. Wilson later became Chief of Engineers. Alexander Pennington fought with Custer in the Army of the Potomac cavalry. Lyman Mischler was killed defending his guns against a Texan charge at Valverde, New Mexico, and John Jay Sweet was killed in the charge of Cook's cavalry at Gaines' Mill. Horace Porter served as aide on Grant's staff

during the final campaign against Lee. Emory Upton became a leading Union infantry commander and one of the brightest of the post-war military thinkers. Alonzo Cushing died repelling Pickett's Charge at Gettysburg and won the Medal of Honor for it. And, two years behind Merritt came his future rival--the practical joker of his class--George Armstrong Custer.²⁶

The isolation imposed upon cadets at West Point by physical surroundings and by rigorous disciplinary and academic requirements was broken after two years of study by the "midterm furlough" which allowed the cadets to return home for that summer. Normally this intermission and the few social events and "hops" allowed upperclassmen were the only contact the young men had with the outside world until after graduation. But in the late 1850s, the excitement and general interest in the mounting sectional crisis and the anxiety over the manner of its resolution served to break this normal isolation. Merritt's classmate, James H. Wilson, described the atmosphere:

During the time at the Academy, and afterwards, till the first gun of the war, politics ran high. The Corps of Cadets was as representative a body as Congress itself. All read the newspapers, and all took sides.²⁷

The routine of the Academy went on as usual, of course, and there is evidence of some reluctance to argue over sectional issues, but Wilson observed that "when at leisure we had fierce discussions in spite of ourselves." Friendly relations were usually maintained, but the closest intimacies were sectional rather than national. In this the

Corps was indeed a representative body. Even Wesley Merritt was drawn into these "fierce discussions." His fight with Kilpatrick resulted from the latter's advocacy of abolitionist sentiments, as Merritt supported the same views as his father back in Salem--a distaste for both abolitionists and disunionists.²⁸ Most of the cadets probably shared Merritt's moderation, but some of the southerners were "hot-headed, masterful fellows" who believed in slavery as a divine right, and there were plenty of freesoilers and even a few abolitionists, including Emory Upton. By the time Merritt completed his five-year course, and the summer of 1860 arrived, the cadets had become politicized if not completely polarized.²⁹

As graduation approached, Cadet Merritt was able, temporarily, to put political interest aside and to look forward with relish to his first assignment in the Regular Army--the famous old Second Dragoons, stationed on the frontier in Utah.

Of the 121 cadets who had entered West Point with him in 1855, 41 graduated in June, 1860. Wesley Merritt had done especially well in the applied military courses and had done average work in the academic courses. He was rated in the middle of his class; twenty-second of his forty-one classmates. At the foot of the class was Cadet Borland of Arkansas, son of that state's Senator. A year later Cadet Custer would fill the position, but by that time class rank would no longer matter.³⁰

More mature at twenty-four than most of his peers, Merritt was tall and handsome with a strong, healthy constitution, which he would well need during the next few arduous years. He had a "thoughtful" look and was described as "dignified" by his classmates; he also gave an impression of responsibility and reliability. His superiors, from the time of his first Regular Army assignment, recognized this sense of responsible behavior. His class had less than a year before war broke out, and the time came when opportunity was looking for the man, and honorable service was thrust upon all who wanted it, so that only the weak and unready failed to get it to their heart's content.³¹ Wesley Merritt was strong and ready.

FOOTNOTES

Chapter 1

1. Richard Carl Brown, "Social Attitudes of American Generals, 1898-1940" (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, University of Wisconsin, 1951), 5; Joseph D. Merritt, "The Merritt Family," MSS, Family History, Swope Collection. In Possession of Mrs. Russell (Neone Hobbs) Swope, Northbrook, Illinois, 1.
2. History of Marion and Clinton Counties, Illinois (n.p., n.d.), Genealogical & Local History Div., L.C., 197; John N. Greely, "Wesley Merritt," Dictionary of American Biography, XII, 572; Barry C. Johnson, Merritt and the Indian Wars (London, 1972), 4. This thirty-two page booklet consists of a short biographical essay introducing a reprint of Merritt's article, "Three Indian Campaigns," Harper's New Monthly Magazine, LXXV (April, 1890).
3. Joseph D. Merritt, "The Merritt Family," 1; Douglas Merritt, Revised Merritt Records (New York, 1916), Genealogical and Local History Div., L.C., 110.
4. Greely, "Wesley Merritt," DAB, XII, 572.
5. Ibid., History of Marion and Clinton Counties, 197.
6. History of Marion and Clinton Counties, 106-7, 191, 197; Salem Advocate (Ill.), March 24, 1858.
7. Salem Advocate (Ill.), Oct. 25, 1860.
8. The Biographical Encyclopedia of Illinois of the Nineteenth Century (Philadelphia, 1875), 383; Greely, "Wesley Merritt," DAB, XII, 572.
9. Biographical Encyclopedia of Illinois, 383, Salem Advocate (Ill.), Nov. 10, 1858; Nov. 8 and 22, 1860, and Nov. 10, 1864.
10. Salem Advocate (Ill.), Dec. 6, 1860.
11. Ibid., March 24 and Oct. 6, 1858; April 5, May 10, May 17, June 7, and Oct. 25, 1860; and July 31, 1862; History of Marion and Clinton Counties, 106.
12. Salem Advocate (Ill.), June 28 and July 5, 1860; Sept. 26 and Nov. 14, 1861; and Jan. 9, 1862; Biographical Encyclopedia of Illinois, 383.

13. Frederic S. Klein, "The Great Copperhead Conspiracy," CWT, IV (June, 1965), 21-26.

14. Salem Advocate (Ill.), July 23, July 30, and August 6, 1863; and Feb. 4 and 22, June 23, and Sept. 1, 1864.

15. Salem Advocate (Ill.), June 28, 1860; The Republican (Salem, Ill.), June 17, 1927; History of Marion and Clinton Counties, 197; Merritt O. Chance, Interview, Washington, D.C., August 7, 1974; Mrs. Russell Swope, Taped Interview, 3 Reels in Author's Collection, Northbrook, Illinois, August 11, 1974. Hereafter cited as Swope interview.

16. Brown, "Social Attitudes," 12-14, 16.

17. Hon. W. H. Bissell to Jefferson Davis, Letter of Nomination, April 16, 1855; Endorsement by Jefferson Davis, April 19, 1855; Appointment Acceptance Form Signed By Wesley Merritt and John Willis Merritt, May 4, 1855: Cadet Acceptance Papers, 1805-1866, Archives, USMA Library, West Point.

18. James Harrison Wilson, Under The Old Flag, I (New York, 1912), 7, 22-23.

19. Robert M. Utley, Frontiersmen in Blue (New York, 1967), 13, 25-28, 50-58; Russell F. Weigley, History of the United States Army (New York, 1967), 189-94.

20. Wilson, Under The Old Flag, I, 7.

21. Brown, "Social Attitudes," 21-23, 35; Jay Monaghan, Custer: The Life of General George Armstrong Custer (Lincoln, Nebraska, 1959), 25; James T. King, War Eagle (Lincoln, Nebraska, 1963), 11-13.

22. Brown, "Social Attitudes," 20-21; Wilson, Under The Old Flag, I, 17.

23. Monaghan, Custer, 26.

24. Ibid., 23; Diary of Cadet Tully McCrea, Entry for March 14, 1858. MSS, Special Collections, USMA Library, West Point. Hereafter cited as McCrea Diary.

25. Wilson, Under The Old Flag, I, 11-12; Monaghan, Custer, 21; Mark M. Boatner III, The Civil War Dictionary (New York, 1959), 374, 340-41, 413-14, 427, 726-27.

26. Battles and Leaders of the Civil War, I (Popular Ed.; New York, 1956), 106-8; Hereafter cited as B&L; George F. Price, Across The Continent with the Fifth Cavalry (2d ed.; New York, 1959), 108; George W. Cullum, Biographical Register of the Officers and Graduates of the U.S. Military

26. (Continued)

Academy, IV (Boston, 1901), 118-20; Boatner, Civil War Dictionary, 215, 661-62; Monaghan, Custer, 19, 25, 30, 34; Wilson, Under The Old Flag, I, 18, 27.

27. Wilson, Under The Old Flag, I, 22-23.

28. Ibid., 27; Salem Advocate (Ill.), Nov. 22, 1860; McCrea Diary, Entry for March 14, 1858.

29. Wilson, Under The Old Flag, I, 19, 27; Monaghan, Custer, 38; Salem Advocate (Ill.), April 5 and June 14, 1860.

30. Eben Swift, "General Wesley Merritt," JUSCA, XXIV, (March, 1911), 829; Cullum, Biographical Register, IV, 119; Wilson, Under The Old Flag, I, 21; Monaghan, Custer, 42. Eben Swift was Merritt's aide and adjutant for many years in the Fifth Cavalry and in Departmental Commands. Swift eventually attained the rank of Major General.

31. Wilson, Under The Old Flag, I, 31; McCrea Diary, Entry for March 14, 1858.

Chapter 2

EARLY SERVICE

. . . to this day when one meets an old soldier of those days he swells with pride as he impresses on the hearer that he belonged to the 'Old Second Dragoons.'

--Wesley Merritt

This famous regiment, to which Merritt was assigned immediately upon graduation, had been organized in 1837 to fight in the Second Seminole War. After duty in the swamps and everglades of Florida, the Second Dragoons gained more fame in the Mexican War. Continuous duty on the western frontier followed; they saw action against Comanche and Apache Indians in Texas, Utes in northern New Mexico, and Brule Sioux in Nebraska. The regiment was also part of the Regular Army force interposed as a buffer between the contending parties in Kansas in 1856. During the following year, it marched to Utah against the Mormons. The latter offered no resistance to federal troops, and the year 1860 found the Second Dragoons peacefully stationed at Camp Floyd, Utah Territory, some forty miles from Salt Lake City.¹

The Second Dragoons were commanded by the most capable of the pre-Civil War cavalry leaders, Colonel Philip St. George Cooke. After long service during the Mexican War and on the frontier thereafter, Cooke had been promoted colonel of the regiment in 1858 and had just rejoined the command

after a two-year leave in Europe during which he observed the cavalry tactics in use there. He prepared a System of Cavalry Tactics during this period that was subsequently adopted by the Army and remained, with modification, the standard regulations for cavalry throughout the Civil War and Indian Wars. Cooke was the soul of the regiment and the driving force behind the esprit which the officers infused into every trooper from first sergeant to trumpeter. Cooke insisted on the mounted charge for cavalry and was opposed to fighting on foot except in cases of dire necessity. His motto "Sharp sabers and sharp spurs" forced a free, fast, and furious charge on the enemy. Many of the young officers of his command digested this philosophy and put it to good use in the next few years. Merritt was fortunate in being assigned to Cooke's command as he left West Point.²

His appointment was as a brevet second lieutenant as he graduated from the Academy. A temporary or probationary device, the brevet reflected the fact that there was a set number of second lieutenant positions in each regiment. An officer was not just commissioned second lieutenant, but rather, was commissioned, after a probationary period, to fill one of these particular second lieutenant positions or "slots." The use of brevet commissions changed during the Civil War when it became a device to bestow a more-or-less meaningless promotion in honor of battlefield heroism or some other exploit. The pride the fledgling officers felt in their new status, however, was not diminished by the prefix,

and the leave allowed the graduates before joining their stations in the field was put to good use.³

Salem, Illinois, was on the way to Utah Territory, and Merritt was able to visit his family during the summer of 1860. Throughout the five-year stay at West Point, John Willis Merritt had never, in the Advocate, mentioned his son's career at the Academy except to note that two local boys had been admitted and that they would "take the place of Lt. Wesley Merritt who has just graduated." Apparently parental pride quickly grew when Brevet Second Lieutenant Merritt arrived home, since the elder Merritt wrote an editorial in which he extolled one of the virtues of America and the Army. The son of Commodore Vanderbilt had graduated third from last in Wesley's West Point class, and in an editorial, cleverly entitled "Money vs. Merit," the elder Merritt compared the records of Cadets Vanderbilt and Merritt and concluded that hard work and intelligence would win out over money and preference.⁴ Thereafter, as Merritt's career advanced rapidly throughout the Civil War, his father occasionally mentioned him in the Advocate--but hardly more so than any other newspaper would have done.

Merritt travelled westward to Utah during the autumn of 1860 and joined the Second Dragoons at Camp Floyd on November 11. The regiment was mainly engaged in scouting for Indian trouble and in pursuing deserters; there was little actual combat either in Utah or with the detachments of the regiment stationed in New Mexico. Many of the company officers

were off on these detached duties temporarily, so Merritt was assigned as acting second lieutenant of Company E in the absence of its regular second lieutenant and captain.

Merritt's assignments during this winter of 1860-1861 were not inspiring, but they did give him some immediate experience in temporarily commanding different companies of the regiment. He was assigned as the regular second lieutenant of A Company when an opening occurred in April, 1861. A month later Merritt was promoted to first lieutenant of B Company.⁵

If the operations of the Second Dragoons were not too exciting during Merritt's first winter with them, there was extreme excitement and activity on the national scene as well as within the regiment itself. Just as Merritt joined at Camp Floyd, Abraham Lincoln was announced as the next President of the United States, and the process of secession gained momentum as state after state decided to abandon the old Union. Party spirit ran high among the officers of the Army by this time, and the "fierce discussions" of West Point became even more fierce as the time approached to actually act upon one's convictions. An increasing number of officers from all the Army regiments began to leave or resign during the winter of 1860-1861 to support the Southern cause, usually for reasons of birth, but occasionally for reasons of convictions alone. The departing officers often tried desperately to influence others to abandon the "Old Flag" while loyal officers were just as forceful.

Within the Second Dragoons, political debates and discussions led to heated arguments. Merritt was in the middle of these even as a very junior officer; because he was one of the few junior officers actually at Camp Floyd rather than in the field or on detached duty, he was assigned informally as the regimental adjutant and the acting assistant adjutant general of the Department of Utah, which Cooke also commanded.⁶ These temporary duties brought him constantly into intimate contact with the senior officers of the regiment.

At Camp Floyd there were not only officers openly advocating disunion and resignation, but officers advocating abolitionist sentiments and more conservative officers holding neither of these "extreme" views. Cooke came from one of the old, established families of Virginia. His own son would soon become a Confederate general, while his son-in-law became the most famous Rebel cavalryman of all--J. E. B. Stuart. Nevertheless, Cooke's loyalty to the Union never faltered. Merritt had several serious discussions with him on this subject and could later state that not only did Cooke's loyalty never waver, but that the colonel was instrumental in persuading many other officers to remain loyal.⁷ Likewise, John Buford, captain of Merritt's own company, was a Kentuckian; William P. Sanders, a Mississippian, was later killed as a Union general; and John Gibbon, stationed with his battery of the Fourth Artillery at Camp Floyd, was a Pennsylvanian who had, however, been appointed from North Carolina. Merritt was a firm believer in the principal taught in the "Ethics" course

at the Academy which was clear and unequivocal on the point that those who had taken the oath of allegiance to the Union had no reserved rights--whether or not the states or citizens did. But Merritt, not a southerner by any strict definition, was considered to be one, since the loyalty of southern Illinois was highly suspect at the time.⁸

These men of conservative opinion, Cooke, Buford, Sanders, Gibbon, and Merritt, were perhaps too free in expressing their views to other officers at Camp Floyd; "some fanatical persons," as Merritt put it, secretly reported them to Washington as having views inimical to the government. In the atmosphere of confusion and alarm that existed during the spring of 1861, severe damage to the careers of these officers might have resulted from such a charge. Cooke, however, learned of the matter and had the report quashed. He also sent his adjutant to arrest the officers who sent the report. Merritt later blamed his actions at the time on his impetuous temper which he had allowed to overcome his better judgment--a grave fault, in his view, which would not happen often thereafter. In the event, he donned his full-dress uniform and set out to find the offenders and to read the order to them in formal style. He found the first of them playing billiards in the Sutler's store; suddenly forgetting all about his official mission, he proceeded to take personal satisfaction at once. The incident not only provided conversation and amusement around the post, it also very likely did nothing to diminish Merritt's standing in the eyes of his superior

officers, Cooke and Buford.⁹

When fighting actually started in the East, many Regulars feared that the conflict would be over before they even received orders to proceed to the theater of war. As a matter of fact, the Second Dragoons had been ordered east even while these impatient spirits chafed at their inactivity at Camp Floyd, but the order had somehow miscarried and did not arrive until early July. They were to proceed to Washington by way of Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, and St. Louis, Missouri, as quickly as possible.¹⁰

Cooke required but a few days in which to organize the march to the States and the abandonment of Camp Floyd. He formally appointed First Lieutenant Merritt to the positions of regimental adjutant and acting assistant adjutant general, Department of Utah, in June. The adjutant's function was to act as the instrument of the commanding officer, and through him the necessary orders regulating the affairs of the regiment were issued and reports received by Cooke. The close relationship between commander and adjutant is obvious, and Merritt was deeply involved in the preparations for the upcoming cavalry march.¹¹

With modern transportation, the thousand-mile trip from Utah to Fort Leavenworth today is interesting but hardly difficult. In 1861, however, it meant a journey of approximately two-month's duration. The topography was not rugged, but until the column reached Fort Laramie, water and mid-summer grazing were scarce. With haste a necessity, no time could be

lost in allowing the horses or men long periods of rest. The result was that the commander of such an extended march had to carefully balance the requirements for haste with the welfare of his men and horses. As the column under Cooke marched through the heat and dust toward Kansas, Merritt got a lesson in cavalry leadership that he never forgot. Much of his later reputation as a cavalryman was based on his application of that lesson.

Cooke's attention to the command on the march never relaxed. Orders against mounting too early or dismounting too late were strictly enforced as were orderly marching and watering regulations. The results of this careful balancing of objectives was that the Regulars were able to make about twenty-five miles per day and still arrive at their destination in good enough condition to have gone immediately into battle if the occasion had demanded. Wesley Merritt always attributed his later success as a cavalry leader to the two main lessons he had learned from Cooke--(1) this constant attention to detail, and (2) the value of the instant, impetuous, mounted charge against the enemy. Surprisingly few Civil War cavalrymen gave the first of these principles much attention.¹²

Merritt wrote of the return to the States before the regiment left Utah, and he anticipated arrival at Fort Leavenworth about the middle of August. As the Regulars marched, a martial spirit also gripped Salem, Illinois. The elder Merritt proudly announced the "rapid advancement" of

his son who "had risen to the rank of First Lieutenant in a year's time when such advancement ordinarily requires 10 to 12 years." John Willis Merritt had also become "strongly imbued with the war spirit" and was enlisted in the Marion County Home Guards along with three of Wesley's brothers. This spirit apparently cooled quickly since there is no further mention throughout the Civil War of military participation by any of these Salem Merritts.¹³

The return of Merritt's regiment was only one of many such marches during the summer of 1861 as a beleaguered government summoned its Regular soldiers to its defense. Nevertheless, it was a dramatic scene as the "Old Second Dragoons," after a sixty-day journey marched into Fort Leavenworth accompanied by Gibbon's battery and several companies of infantry and heavy artillery equipped as infantry. From Fort Leavenworth, Merritt accompanied the regiment on through Missouri to St. Louis and then to Washington, where they arrived in October 1861, ready for battle.¹⁴

Merritt's frontier service had lasted only little more than half a year, but he had learned much and made personal contacts which would significantly affect his subsequent career. The Civil War saw the rise of hundreds of young officers to prominence. Many were aggressive, gallant, and responsible--characteristics which Merritt shared. Yet relatively few--a handful perhaps--rose to the positions of responsibility and command which were his. Others, capable and brave, served actively throughout the same period of time

but emerged at the end of the war with essentially the same position and rank they held in 1861. Some combination of circumstances obviously favored a few officers; the combination was not identical in all cases, but, in retrospect some common elements can be identified. With few exceptions the successful young officer was a West Pointer. He was physically capable of continuous service, and, if wounded, he was able to return to active duty in a reasonably short period of time. He had courage and the ability to make men follow him. He was reasonably temperate in his habits. He was cool and responsible under the stress of actual combat. These outstanding characteristics were not uncommon, but they were not enough.

In any extensive campaign or action, gallantry and success by the junior officers--the lieutenants, the captains, the majors--would be commended by their superiors. By the time the report of the division or corps commander consolidated the actions of his component units, it was the conduct and achievements of the colonels and other generals which was individually commended and praised.

There were only a few exceptional ways around this tendency. A charge or gallant action under the immediate eye of the commanding officer, if it brought decisive results and was led by an identifiable junior officer, might bring that officer individual notice. Artillery junior officers were occasionally noticed and commended individually since their batteries were often identified with them

by name. But the circumstance offering the best probability for individual recognition of a junior officer was to be a member of the general's staff--and not just any staff member. The more responsible and senior staff positions, chief-of-staff or quartermaster for example, seldom were in action; the position of aide was unbeatable. The aide was available to the commander during combat, could be sent as responsible emissary from the commander, could be sent to command or lead some action directly ordered by the commander, and, if nothing else, was always visible. If any junior officer was mentioned in the general's report of combat, that man was likely to be one of the general's aides.

General Cooke's report of the cavalry action during the battle of Gaines' Mill provides a good example. Cooke mentions the position of one battery under an artillery captain and the movement and operations of his regiments under their various colonels, and concludes: "I again have the pleasure of commending the bravery and ability with which my staff (Capt. W. Merritt, Second Cavalry; First Lieut. James P. Martin, Seventh Infantry; and Frank Beach, Fourth Artillery) performed their duties."¹⁵ Merritt behaved bravely under fire at Gaines' Mill as did so many others, but his name was mentioned and theirs were not.

A certain amount of fortune was also necessary. The young officer had to be lucky enough not to be critically wounded. He had to be lucky enough to be in an organization which was in significant action, and he had to be lucky enough

to be attached to the staff of a successful or prominent commander if he was a staff officer. He could augment this fortune with a sense of opportunity or by currying favor in some manner, but some "break" was indispensable.

Merritt had been fortunate in this respect from the start of his career as a Regular officer. The departure of the southern officers from the Second Dragoons had made possible his selection as adjutant to his colonel. His relations with the colonel had, as a result, been "as intimate as was possible between a mature man and a youngster just from West Point."¹⁶ That this colonel was Philip St. George Cooke, the pre-eminent cavalryman of the Army, was Merritt's great good fortune. Not only were the lessons taught by Cooke valuable, but the fact that Merritt's performance as adjutant and acting assistant adjutant general was such that Cooke decided to continue him as the adjutant general on his staff when Cooke was promoted to brigadier general in November 1861, could only help his career. Merritt was additionally fortunate to have been assigned to the Second Dragoons since he became well known to Captain Alfred Pleasonton, who would later command the Army of the Potomac cavalry during 1863, and to the captain of his own B Company, John Buford, who would soon be his own commander in the First Cavalry Division.¹⁷

All these pieces would eventually fall into place for Merritt as the Civil War progressed, but as he had marched toward Washington with the Second Dragoons in the summer of 1861, changes were made which would effect that, and the

other, horse regiments. There had been, before the war, two regiments of dragoons, one regiment of mounted rifles, and, as a result of Jefferson Davis' efforts as Secretary of War, two regiments of cavalry. All performed essentially as cavalry on the western frontier. President Lincoln had ordered an increase in the Regular Army and had called out a body of volunteers before Congress assembled to ratify his actions. One result was the authorization of an additional Regular cavalry regiment, the Third Cavalry. Congress continued the authorization of this new regiment in an act of July 19, 1861.

Congress also approved an act on August 3 which reorganized the Regular horsemen into one cavalry arm. The First Dragoons became the First Cavalry, The Second Dragoons became the Second Cavalry, the Mounted Riflemen became the Third Cavalry, the First Cavalry became the Fourth Cavalry, the Second Cavalry became the Fifth Cavalry, and the new Third Cavalry, soon to be recruited, became the Sixth Cavalry. The action was probably unwise and was surely unpopular. There was a great attachment to the old designations and to the distinctive uniforms worn by each. All were now to look alike, with yellow-trimmed uniforms. The Second Dragoons, however, managed to retain a vestige of their old identity; they were allowed to wear their orange-trimmed clothing as long as the existing stock lasted, and it lasted, in some mysterious manner, well through the Civil War.¹⁸

Merritt accompanied Cooke as adjutant general, and then as aide-de-camp, while Cooke organized the Regular cavalry into what continued throughout the Civil War as the most renowned Union cavalry unit--the Reserve Brigade. By December the scattered companies were mostly united and Cooke began their training in earnest. The new Regular or Reserve Brigade went into camp just north of the Capitol at Cantonment Holt. They acted as city guards and patrolled occasionally across the river into Virginia. As the training became more rigorous, the desertion rate for the Regular cavalry increased, but the regiments became proficient in the brigade-size maneuvers and drills for which there had been no previous training or requirement.¹⁹

Merritt was busy almost without interruption with the organization of these maneuvers and with the administration of the brigade. Officers who were with the Regular Brigade during this winter of 1861-1862 remembered the furious pace at which Cooke drove them toward perfection. Cooke reviewed the drills personally and had officers practice tactical theory at night by playing "war games" on a large table in the mess-hall after the evening meal. The open spaces north and east of the Capitol shook under the pounding of the brigade horses throughout the winter; by spring the Regular cavalry was efficient and tough. Merritt later attributed the credit for establishing the pace and standard of excellence which characterized the Regular cavalry throughout the war to Cooke's efforts during this period. Their effectiveness,

however, would not be apparent for some time.²⁰

On July 27, 1861, Major General George B. McClellan assumed command of what became known as the Army of the Potomac. "Little Mac" looked like a general and was a superb administrator. Throughout the autumn and winter of 1861-1862, he organized and reorganized. By spring, 1862, he was loath to disrupt his superb force by submitting it to the chances of aggressive battle.

His command of the Army of the Potomac almost ruined the Federal cavalry. The story has been told many times, so it will suffice to say that the regiments and companies of the Regular Brigade were parceled out to the various infantry brigade, division, and corps commanders to act as their headquarters guards, orderlies, guides, and grooms for the staff officers. The Volunteer cavalry regiments received similar treatment. As McClellan prepared to move his huge army to the Peninsula of Virginia and to attack the Confederates in a lightning blow of Federal power, Wesley Merritt observed:

It was during this period . . . that General McClellan exhibited the lack of capacity, which afterwards became so notorious, to command successfully an army. He was especially deficient in the instincts which characterized the great army commanders of history, with reference to the proper uses of cavalry.²¹

Under these circumstances, it is not strange that many of the cavalry officers, including Cooke, were somewhat disgusted with conditions affecting the cavalry. Nevertheless, Cooke went ahead with reorganizing the cavalry of the Army. General George Stoneman was chief-of-cavalry at McClellan's

headquarters. Most of the Volunteer and Regular cavalry had been assigned as escort and headquarters detachments either at McClellan's headquarters or to General Edwin V. Sumner's Second Corps and General Samuel P. Heintzleman's Third Corps. The handful of horsemen remaining were commanded by Cooke and were organized into the Cavalry Reserve which was in turn attached to General Fitz-John Porter's Fifth Corps. Cooke organized these remaining regiments into two small brigades-- General William Emory's, consisting of the Fifth Cavalry, Sixth Cavalry, and the Sixth Pennsylvania Cavalry; and Colonel George Blake's, consisting of the First Cavalry, Eighth Pennsylvania Cavalry, and a squadron of Illinois Cavalry.²²

In March 1862, the Federal army under McClellan, including Cooke's cavalry, was transported by water southward to the tip of the Peninsula between the York and James Rivers. During the whole of the Peninsula Campaign, with one exception, the Union cavalry would play a minor role. For Merritt, however, the campaign provided his first actual combat experience. He was promoted to captain in the Regular Army, on April 5, 1862, while the cavalry was preparing for its part in the campaign. He was still carried on the rolls of the Second Cavalry, but was on detached service as Cooke's aide-de-camp, having relinquished the position as regimental adjutant on January 1. As Cooke's aide, he at least got to witness and play a part in the cavalry action, which he would not have been able to do had he served as a company commander with his old regiment.²³

McClellan advanced his army up the Peninsula toward Richmond with the sluggishness for which he became renowned. He covered the one hundred-odd miles during the months of April and May, averaging little more than a half-mile per day. His army numbered approximately 105,000 effective soldiers, opposed to the Confederate army on the Peninsula, which ranged between 80,000 and 90,000 effectives.²⁴

The cavalry engaged in skirmishing and reconnaissances near Yorktown, Williamsburg, and Hanover Court House on the march to capture Richmond and had considerable success, considering the small numbers engaged at any one time. By May 29, McClellan was within sight of Richmond and fought an indecisive battle with the Rebels at Fair Oaks. There, seven miles from his goal, he stayed for almost a month, building up his huge army against an imaginary overwhelming enemy force, while Abraham Lincoln admired his "slows." Two weeks later, in mid-June, General J. E. B. Stuart, with about 1200 cavalry, rode completely around McClellan's inert army on his famous reconnaissance.

Cooke was ordered to pursue his son-in-law but was forbidden by McClellan to march in this pursuit any faster than the accompanying infantry column. Failure was predetermined by these limitations on the cavalry's movements, but Fifth Corps commander Porter reported that "I have seen no energy or spirit in the pursuit by General Cooke of the enemy, nor has he exhibited the characteristics of a skillful and active guardian of our flanks."²⁵ Cooke seriously considered

disobeying the positive order and consulted his staff on the dilemma. Merritt and others around Cooke dissuaded him from this course, but in later years Merritt felt that he was mistaken in his advice and was so inclined only because of his youth and inexperience in actual conditions of combat leadership.²⁶ The reputations of both Cooke and the Union cavalry suffered because of the failure to stop Stuart.

Not only did McClellan remain inert, but he had sent the entire Fifth Corps, at least one-fourth of his army, across to the north side of the Chickahominy River, separating it from the other three corps. The Chickahominy flowed sluggishly through deep banks and was bordered on either side by swamps and heavily-timbered lowlands. It constituted a considerable barrier to the passage of any element of the army--artillery, infantry, or cavalry. Passage, and therefore communication between the separated major army forces, was dependent upon control of the few bridges over the Chickahominy. Porter's Fifth Corps thus formed the Union right wing, with General Stoneman and about half of Cooke's cavalry scouting on the extreme right. On June 27, Lee, with the Army of Northern Virginia, fell on this separated and vulnerable Union position, bringing on the battle of Gaines' Mill.²⁷

The line of battle of the Fifth Corps extended from a strong position about 1200 yards from the Chickahominy, along an open plateau in an arc to the north and east, with the right resting near the crossroads of Old Cold Harbor.

Union forces held this ground under furious Confederate assaults which were reinforced by the arrival of General "Stonewall" Jackson with his corps from the Shenandoah Valley. The efforts temporarily exhausted both sides by mid-afternoon.

Cooke's Cavalry Reserve had been placed, by order of Porter, on the far left of the Fifth Corps' line, near the reserve artillery and below the crest of the plateau. Cooke's force had been reduced by the detachment of Emory and about half of the reserve cavalry to support Stoneman's adventures on the Union right, and they were thus completely out of the battle. Cooke and Merritt were near the left front of the Union line during late afternoon when it became apparent to them, from movements directly opposite their position, that the Confederates were massing for an attack aimed at breaking the Union left, getting behind the Fifth Corps, capturing the bridges over the Chickahominy, and destroying this part of McClellan's army before it could either escape or be reinforced from south of the river. Accordingly, Cooke sent Merritt to Porter's headquarters, located near the Watts house, behind the Union center, for orders and to warn Porter and his staff of the impending danger. While Merritt was on his way, about 6:30 P.M., the Confederates attacked out of the dense woods in front of the Union left and center. The Federal infantry held, but the scene at Porter's headquarters shocked the young aide.

Someone on Porter's staff was reading a dispatch just received from McClellan congratulating Porter on his victory

and ordering him to "drive the rebels off the field, and to take from them their artillery." With such a grasp of the situation, little help would be forthcoming from "Little Mac." Porter's headquarters had a better understanding of the true state of affairs, at least in their immediate front. Merritt saw hasty preparations for the retreat of the headquarters being made and "everything in the most wretched confusion." He could obtain no orders for the cavalry, so he rode back to Cooke's headquarters flag where a classic cavalry situation was developing.²⁸

Cooke's force was small, consisting of 237 officers and men of the Fifth Cavalry, a similar number from the Sixth Pennsylvania Cavalry (Rush's Lancers), about 100 men from the First Cavalry, and a few provost guards. The Confederates, superior in numbers and spearheaded by General John B. Hood's brigade of veteran Texans and Georgians, broke the left center of the Union infantry line near the Watts house.²⁹

Inspired by this success, they poured out of the smoke and trees bordering the plateau and onto its open crest. With the infantry departing for the rear and the Rebels rapidly approaching, the Artillery Reserve batteries parked in front of the position of the Cavalry Reserve began to limber up preparatory to saving themselves. It was a critical time for the future of the Union army, and Cooke saw what had to be done. With no infantry for support he would blunt the Confederate charge with artillery, supported

only by his line of horsemen. He ordered the artillery to stand and open fire on the approaching Rebels. This they did with a will. Meanwhile, Cooke brought the cavalry into line between the artillery batteries and instructed Captain Charles Whiting, commanding the Fifth Cavalry, to charge whenever the safety or support of the batteries required such a move. As Cooke was placing the Lancers farther to the left of the artillery line, the Confederate infantry of General James Longstreet's corps came irresistibly on. Merritt was sent to the artillery commander with orders for continued firing and assurance that the cavalry would support him. And support him they did, in what was one of the most famous and dramatic cavalry charges of the Civil War.³⁰

As the bayonets of Hood's men showed over the crest of the plateau, the Fifth Cavalry came to attention, drew sabers, and with a wild cheer, charged straight into the face of the Fourth Texas Infantry. The enemy was almost too close for the charge to gain the momentum that carries a charge to success. The formation was partially disrupted by the artillery pieces, but a portion of the charging horsemen broke through to be stopped by the trees on the far side of the plateau. The Confederate infantry was shocked and they halted, thinking that Union infantry must be behind the cavalry. They quickly recovered, however, and poured a devastating musket fire into the cavalrymen. Whiting was captured when his horse was killed under him, and he fell in front of the Texans. Merritt's classmate, Lieutenant

Sweet, was shot to pieces before he hit the ground. Of this gallant little band, only one officer escaped unhurt. As survivors straggled back to the Union lines, Cooke formed the rest of the Cavalry Reserve as a rear guard and protected the artillery long enough for at least some of the guns to be extracted. The Confederates made little further advance. During the night, after the infantry of the Fifth Corps was safely over the Chickahominy, Cooke and his staff, now joined by McClellan's cavalry escort, the Second Cavalry, took up the pontoon bridge and were the last to leave the north bank of the river.³¹

Cooke's cavalry, with the steady Union artillerists, had saved the Fifth Corps, and perhaps even McClellan's army, from destruction, and it ruined his career. Had the Fifth Corps been victorious, or had McClellan's Peninsula Campaign been successful, the charge of the Fifth Cavalry would have been praised without limit. But in defeat, a scapegoat was needed. Lincoln looked at McClellan and Porter; McClellan and Porter looked at Cooke. Porter had seen nothing on the Union left except the return of the survivors of the cavalry charge and the retreat of the artillery. That these few men had saved his corps was more than he could admit, and the reports of both Porter and McClellan blamed Cooke for having thrown the Union left into confusion through a rash attack, causing its collapse.³² The Comte de Paris, observing on the crest of the plateau at the time of the charge evaluated the results:

The sacrifice of some of the bravest of the cavalry, certainly saved a part of the artillery; as did, on a larger scale, the Austrian cavalry on the evening of Sadowa. The main fact is that with your cavalry, you did all that cavalry could do, to stop the rout.³³

McClellan conducted a capable and rapid retreat to Malvern Hill and the James River, where he evacuated the Union forces to join General John Pope's forces facing "Stonewall" Jackson south of Washington. "Little Mac" had one more chance to prove his genius. He failed again at Antietam in September 1862, was removed by an exasperated Lincoln, and disappeared forever from American military history. Fitz-John Porter also fought his last battle at Antietam. Pope relieved him for "disobedience, disloyalty, and misconduct in the face of the enemy" at the battle of Second Bull Run, and he was cashiered in January 1863, for his failures during that battle. Philip St. George Cooke may have been pleased with these events, but he was on his own way out of active combat command, nevertheless.³⁴

Although he behaved well in his first big battle and was highly commended for bravery and skill, Merritt's career, identified as it had been with Cooke's, did not look especially promising in the late summer and fall of 1862. After the army arrived at Harrison's Landing on the James River in August, Cooke requested that he be relieved from command, and his request was granted. Merritt accompanied him back to Washington and killed time while the battle of Antietam was being fought in nearby Maryland and while Cooke was assigned to Court Martial duty in Washington. After the duty

in Washington, Cooke became General Superintendent of the Recruiting Service, and, after the war, commander of The Departments of the Platte, the Cumberland, and the Lakes until his retirement in 1873. But Cooke's active career, to all intents and purposes, was over, and he was never officially vindicated. He did not, however, take his young protege down with him. Instead, Cooke urged Merritt to take a position as aide to General Samuel P. Heintzleman, who was commanding the Military District of Washington and the defenses of Washington. Merritt joined Heintzleman's staff on September 16, 1862, thus successfully "changing horses in the middle of the stream."³⁵

Duties in the defenses of Washington were not particularly exciting to the vigorous young cavalryman, especially after the action of the spring and summer. Requisitioning supplies for the cavalry encamped around the Capitol and inspecting camps became tedious to Merritt over the winter of 1862-1863. The cavalry took little part in the great battle of Fredricksburg in December, but that battle had a direct and beneficial effect for the Union cavalry. The commander of the Army of the Potomac, General Ambrose Burnside, who had replaced McClellan, lived up to his own predictions that he was not qualified to lead so large a command. On January 26, Burnside was succeeded by Major General Joseph Hooker--"Fighting Joe." Hooker was to show himself less capable than he had, himself, widely forecast, but he understood what changes were necessary in the

organization of the Army of the Potomac. Prominent among these was the organization of the cavalry into the Cavalry Corps commanded by General Stoneman.³⁶

Tired of his Washington staff job, Merritt wanted to return to active service as the weather warmed and the campaigning season neared in the spring of 1863, preferably with his own Second Cavalry, now brigaded with the other Regular cavalry regiments as the Reserve Brigade and commanded by his former captain, now brigadier general, John Buford. When, instead, Merritt was offered a position as aide on Stoneman's staff, Cooke advised him to take it. On the first of April, 1863, Merritt accepted this appointment just as the fighting was about to begin.³⁷

FOOTNOTES

Chapter 2

1. Wesley Merritt, "Life and Services of General Philip St. George Cooke, U.S. Army," JUSCA, VIII (June, 1895), 80-83; Theo. F. Rodenbough, From Everglade to Cañon with the Second Dragoons (New York, 1875), 165.
2. Merritt, "Cooke," 84; Rodenbough, Second Dragoons, 192-93.
3. Regimental Returns, Second Dragoons, October, 1860, Microcopy 744, Roll 17, NA.
4. Salem Advocate (Ill.), July 5 and August 23, 1860.
5. Regimental Returns, Second Dragoons, Nov., 1860 and Jan., April, and May, 1861; Annual Return of the Alterations and Casualties Incident to the Second Regiment of Dragoons for 1860, Microcopy 744, Roll 17, NA; Rodenbough, Second Dragoons, 223-4.
6. Swift, "General Wesley Merritt," 829; Merritt, "Cooke," 84.
7. Merritt, "Cooke," 85.
8. Regimental Returns, Second Dragoons, November, 1860; Swift, "General Wesley Merritt," 829; Merritt, "Cooke," 84-85; Boatner, Civil War Dictionary, 719-20.
9. Swift, "General Wesley Merritt," 830; Merritt, "Cooke," 84-85.
10. Merritt, "Cooke," 85; Rodenbough, Second Dragoons, 192-93.
11. G.O. No. 8, Dept. of Utah, June 25, 1861; G.O. No. 2, Second Dragoons, June 27, 1861; Both in Regimental Returns, Second Dragoons, June, 1861; Merritt, "Cooke," 85.
12. Merritt, "Cooke," 85-86.
13. Salem Advocate (Ill.), May 23 and July 11, 1861.
14. Merritt to Cullum, August 10, 1867, Cullum File, Special Collections, USMA Library, West Point; Regimental Returns, Second Cavalry, August, Sept., and Oct., 1861; Merritt, "Cooke," 85-86; Rodenbough, Second Dragoons, 192, 93.

15. The War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies (Washington, D.C., 1880-1901), Series One, XI, Pt. 2, 41-42; Hereafter cited as O.R., with all citations referring to Series One.
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17. Ibid., 80; Merritt to Cullum, August 10, 1867, Cullum File, Special Collections, USMA Library, West Point; Regimental Returns, Second Dragoons, Oct., 1860; Albert G. Brackett, History of the United States Cavalry (New York, 1865), 225.
18. G. Price, Fifth Cavalry, 102-3; Brackett, History of Cavalry, 210, 219.
19. G.O. No. 106, AGO, Dec. 5, 1861, Regimental Returns, Second Cavalry, Dec. 1861; Annual Return of the Alterations and Casualties Incident to the Second Regiment of Cavalry During the Year 1861: Both in Microcopy 744, Roll 17, NA; Merritt, "Cooke," 86-87; Rodenbough, Second Dragoons, 232.
20. Rodenbough, Second Dragoons, 254, 344; Merritt, "Cooke," 87.
21. Charles D. Rhodes, "The History of the Cavalry of the Army of the Potomac, . . . During the War," JUSCA, XI (March, 1898), Prize Essay, 4-5; Hereafter cited as Rhodes, Essay; Merritt, "Cooke," 87. For differing interpretations of McClellan's abilities see Warren W. Hassler, Jr., General George B. McClellan: Shield of the Union (Baton Rouge, 1957); and H. J. Eckenrode and Bryan Conrad, George B. McClellan: The Man Who Saved The Union (Chapel Hill, 1941).
22. Brackett, History of Cavalry, 229-36; Merritt, "Cooke," 87; B&L, II, 313-17; Rodenbough, Second Dragoons, 283-4; Merritt Contributed Chapter XXIII, "Personal Recollections--Beverly Ford to Mitchell's Station (1863)," hereafter cited as Merritt, "Recollections."
23. Cullum, Biographical Register, IV, 955; Regimental Returns, Second Cavalry, February, April, and July, 1862.
24. B&L, II, 315, 317; O.R., XI, pt. 3, 238.
25. Rhodes, Essay, 7; Merritt, "Cooke," 87-88.
26. Merritt, "Cooke," 88.
27. Ibid., 89-90; B&L, II, 315.
28. Merritt, "Cooke," 89; B&L, II, 319-43.

29. O.R., XI, Pt. 2, 41-42.
30. Ibid., Merritt, "Cooke," 90-91; Rhodes, Essay, 8.
31. Merritt, "Cooke," 90-91; Rhodes, Essay, 9; B&L, II, 346, 364; O.R., XI, Pt. 2, 42; Rodenbough, Second Dragoons, 263 f.n.
32. ANJ, January 23, 1864; B&L, II, 340-41; O.R., XI, Pt. 2, 43, 223, 273, 282.
33. Source Book of the Peninsula Campaign (Carlisle, Pa., 1924), 351; B&L, II, 345.
34. Richard N. Ellis, General Pope and U.S. Indian Policy (Albuquerque, 1970), X; Boatner, Civil War Dictionary, 661-62; Rhodes, Essay, 10.
35. Swift, "General Wesley Merritt," 831; Merritt, "Cooke," 91-92; Boatner, Civil War Dictionary, 392; O.R., XI, Pt. 2, 42; Merritt to AGO, Statement from Ft. Laramie, Feb. 3, 1882, ACP, NA; Merritt to Cooke, April 8, 1885, VI (Dec., 1885).
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Chapter 3

CHANCELLORSVILLE TO MITCHELL'S STATION

Colonel, you are my prisoner!

--Captain Wesley Merritt

Like hell I am!

--Colonel Wade Hampton

The Union cavalry Merritt rejoined was considerably changed from that he had left the previous August. Stoneman had organized his new Cavalry Corps into three divisions. Alfred Pleasonton commanded the First Division, William Averell commanded the Second Division, and David McM. Gregg commanded the Third Division. The old Regular Brigade, first organized by Cooke in the winter of 1861-1862, was also reunited under John Buford. The Regular or Reserve Brigade was independent of the three cavalry divisions and included all four of the Regular cavalry regiments serving with the Army of the Potomac, the First, Second, Fifth, and Sixth, plus the Sixth Pennsylvania Cavalry.¹ With this new organization, General Hooker planned at last to use the cavalry as an effective fighting force.

As an aide on Stoneman's staff, Merritt was assigned the collateral duty as Ordnance and Mustering Officer. Preparations for the first operations of the 1863 campaigning season were already under way as he joined the staff. Refitting the cavalry for the upcoming action was necessary

since the winter of 1862-1863 had been spent in almost constant skirmishing along the Rappahannock River and in picketing its fords, while the infantry was reasonably comfortable in winter quarters. As Ordnance Officer, Merritt was responsible for supervising the arming of the Cavalry Corps.²

Since the days of the Peninsula Campaign, the Regular and Volunteer cavalry had been armed similarly. Each trooper had a saber, usually the light, curved model of 1860, and a pistol--Colt's or Remington's six-shooters being most common. Both of these latter arms were percussion weapons requiring considerable attention and time to reload. A shortage of carbines early in the war was rectified by April of 1863, and each trooper carried one slung on his right side from a wide leather belt over his left shoulder. Many types were tried, but the most common and most favored carbine up to this time was the Sharps, a single-shot, breach-loading weapon which was strong and reliable.

A long struggle had taken place since the commencement of hostilities to arm the cavalry troopers with a repeating, rather than a single-shot, carbine. President Lincoln was instrumental in overcoming the objections of the Ordnance Department, based on logistics and cost, to adoption of the more efficient weapon. By the time Merritt became Cavalry Corps Ordnance Officer, this new weapon, the Spencer Carbine, a seven-shot repeater which would become the supreme cavalry weapon of the war, was not yet ready for

issue, but would be within two months. The famous Michigan Cavalry Brigade was one of the first units issued the new Spencers; although, for almost a year, theirs were the longer-barrelled rifles rather than the handier carbines.³

One of the Volunteer regiments, the Sixth Pennsylvania Cavalry, or Rush's Lancers, as they were commonly known in the Cavalry Corps, was armed differently. In addition to the pistol, they had served through the first two years of war armed with a lance, on the recommendation of McClellan, who had admired lancer regiments in Europe before the war. The lance was useless as a weapon in the wooded areas of Virginia, and being a nuisance, it was gradually displaced by the saber and carbine. The Sixth Pennsylvania still carried some lances when Merritt arrived but discarded them completely within weeks.⁴ Rush's Lancers served with the Reserve Brigade throughout the war, and were accepted by the Regulars as thoroughly reliable and professional.

Reorganization of the Cavalry Corps, by itself, would not have brought the troopers to a state of efficiency that both Hooker and Stoneman thought necessary. The early months of 1863 had been spent in rigorous training. Buford kept the Reserve Brigade drilling and setting-up recruits in their camp near Falmouth. The strength of the regiments was built up even though service in the Volunteer units was more attractive than was service with the Regulars, for the states often offered bonuses or other incentives in order to fill recruiting

quotas. Merritt's old regiment, the Second Cavalry, was up to 900 men, the most it would have during the war. Under Stoneman, discipline was tightened and boards of examination for officers were established. By this means old and incompetent officers were dismissed and were replaced by young and intelligent men.⁵

This intensive training culminated with a grand review of the Cavalry Corps the week Merritt arrived on Stoneman's staff. Lincoln came down from Washington and reviewed the troopers at Falmouth Heights. A magnificent scene rewarded him as the column, well armed and drilled and led by Buford, took three or four hours to pass the reviewing stand. Merritt always felt thereafter that the cavalry, under Hooker, had commenced a "new life." Unfortunately, neither Hooker nor Stoneman had quite the capacity to lead such men successfully.⁶

Hooker's plans for the upcoming campaign were good. He would pass through the area known as the Wilderness, an appropriately named region of thickets and woods centered on a road intersection and watering spot known as Chancellorsville, some twenty miles west of Fredricksburg. He would thus threaten to interpose his army between Lee, still holding the defenses of Fredricksburg, and Richmond. Lee would be forced into disadvantageous battle and would have to evacuate Fredricksburg in order to fight the Army of the Potomac. With the Union infantry and artillery, Hooker expected to fight and defeat Lee in the Wilderness, while Stoneman's Cavalry Corps

protected the right flank of the army and fought its way to the Confederate rear, cutting the supply lines to Richmond and blocking that avenue of escape. The cavalry's part in the ensuing battle of Chancellorsville became known as "Stoneman's Raid." The plan was good, and it almost worked.⁷

The week preceding the start of the campaign was one of almost incessant rain. The Union forces were north of the Rappahannock River, which because of the rain became a formidable barrier. Nevertheless, an air of excitement could be felt in the cavalry camps as the first coordinated action of the year opened. On the morning of April 29, the Regulars splashed out of their camp to the accompaniment of their band playing "Listen to the Mocking Bird." The horsemen forded the Rappahannock at Kelly's Ford or on the railroad bridge just east of present Highway 15. Each trooper carried three days' rations for himself and horse, and a supply-train consisting entirely of pack-mules carried an additional three days' ration for the men and two for the horses. No wagons accompanied the column, and Stoneman prepared for a rapid raid toward Richmond, destroying bridges and Rebel transportation facilities enroute.⁸

Merritt was now to experience his first command responsibilities during the Civil War. Averell, commanding one of Stoneman's divisions, was detached to fight any enemy cavalry forces that attacked the raiding column. This lethargic officer almost immediately went into camp with almost half of the available cavalry and showed a lack of

aggressive spirit that would, in the following year, see him removed from command by Sheridan.

After a miserable night without fires, so as not to warn the Rebels of the impending raid, 4 A.M. came, and with it a cold, drenching rain and time for the troopers to saddle-up and commence the work of destruction. The raiding column continued southeastward, sending out small detachments to destroy enemy facilities. Merritt was given command of a detachment of about fifty men, including pioneers or engineers, to destroy the bridges and facilities on the South Anna River below Yanceyville, Virginia. He set out by 3 A.M. on the morning of May 3, after having received his instructions only hours before. The "flying column" of the First Maryland Cavalry went straight to the bridges, being reinforced by a small party from Gregg's staff enroute. Ground Squirrel Bridge and Factory Bridge were both strongly built, though wooden, and required considerable time and effort to destroy. The axes of the pioneers and their fires finally accomplished the complete destruction of these two important structures; although burning the rain-soaked pilings was no simple matter in the absence of any inflammable liquids.⁹

After burning his bridges, Merritt led his command on to Ashland Station, some twenty-five miles north of Richmond, where he burned the depot and nearby stocks of ammunition, stores, and cord-wood. The command tore up the railroad for some distance and also cut the telegraph line and buried the wire in the woods to prevent its immediate

re-use. Merritt brought his little command back to the main column at Yanceyville after a successful forty-eight hour raid.¹⁰

On May 5, with his six-days' supplies exhausted, and no sign that the Army of the Potomac had defeated Lee, Stoneman decided to return to the main army or to where its camps had been. The cavalry encountered considerable difficulty in finding its way through the twisting back-country roads of Virginia, but arrived without incident back at the Rappahannock. Daylight of May 8 disclosed to the saddle-weary troopers "the cheering fact that we could cross the river by swimming not over 20 yards."¹¹

While most of the cavalry was engaged in Stoneman's Raid, the main force fought the battle of Chancellorsville. "Fighting Joe" Hooker boldly executed his plan and brought Lee out of Fredricksburg into what, even to Lee, looked like certain defeat at the hands of a superior force. "Stonewall" Jackson, however, marched his Confederate infantry corps around the Union army by way of a little-used back road and fell on the unsuspecting right flank of the Army of the Potomac. The Union cavalry did not adequately guard this flank, as Stoneman had been ordered to do, and a near-rout sent Hooker's men back through Chancellorsville toward the Rappahannock and safety. Jackson was mortally wounded during the fighting. Hooker was stunned by a cannonball's striking near him, and for whatever reason, "Fighting Joe" decided that Lee had beaten him and ordered the retreat of the Army

of the Potomac. In what has been described as Lee's greatest victory, much of the Union infantry was not even engaged. The famous "Iron Brigade," organized by Merritt's old Academy instructor, John Gibbon, marched back across the river much disgusted by such leadership. It was this army that Stoneman's command rejoined on May 8, 1863.¹²

The Union forces were not destroyed or even badly damaged, except in spirit. Stoneman's Raid, though vigorously conducted, inflicted no lasting damage on the enemy, but its effect on the morale of the Federal Cavalry was considerable. It taught the horsemen how to cut loose from their base of supply and gave them a confidence in their mobility never before experienced. The approach of battle had caused "Jeb" Stuart to divide his Confederate cavalry forces and to offer slight opposition to Stoneman's column, so actual fighting experience was minimal, but the experience gained was invaluable to the Union troopers.¹³

As part of the main operations of the Army of the Potomac, Stoneman's Raid, was less than a success. The right flank of the army was unprotected, and that condition led to defeat. Although his days as army commander were numbered, Hooker remained in command as the army lay north of the Rappahannock during the month of May, awaiting Lee's next move. Hooker removed Stoneman from command of the Cavalry Corps on May 22, and replaced him with the senior cavalry division commander, General Alfred Pleasonton.¹⁴

At this point in his career, Merritt made another fortunate change. Pleasonton had been one of the company commanders in the Second Dragoons in Utah while Merritt was serving as regimental adjutant. Whether Pleasonton now asked for his services or whether Merritt offered them, is unknown, but he transferred to Pleasonton's staff and spent a little over two weeks with that commander. Pleasonton was a more-or-less austere old bachelor and would have gotten along well with his dignified young aide. He also became quite attached to a couple of his other young staff officers, Elon Farnsworth and George Custer. Custer had graduated from West Point the year after Merritt and had seen cavalry action and staff duty with McClellan during the preceding two years. He had also acquired a knack for pleasing his superiors which would, complimented by genuine dash and personal courage, lead him on a meteoric career parallel to Merritt's. The two young officers were not yet rivals, however, and Merritt left no impression of his feelings toward Custer during the time both served on Pleasonton's staff. Custer felt that "Pleasonton was like a father to him--hitherto only McClellan had received such affection." To deepen this affection, Custer gave Pleasonton a horse he admired, and when Custer saw that Pleasonton liked a picture of the actress Fanny Fifield that Custer had in his quarters, Custer got a full length rendition and presented it to his chief. Custer and Farnsworth also dressed like Pleasonton--picturesquely wearing broad-brimmed hats like his as they rode about as part of his retinue.¹⁵

Whether Merritt tired of this duty or just wanted to rejoin his old regiment for more active fighting during what promised to be a very active upcoming campaign is not clear. Staff duty had been good to him. He had been highly praised by Stoneman for his part in the preceding campaign, but he did transfer back to the Second Cavalry in early June. He expected to command one of its squadrons, the tactical unit within the regiment, but found himself, instead, in command of the regiment. This situation was common within the Regular regiments as so many senior officers were detached to serve as commanders of the Volunteer regiments. Buford had moved up to command of the First Cavalry Division as Pleasonton vacated the position to command the Cavalry Corps. Command of the Reserve Brigade, with the Second Cavalry as one of its component regiments, fell to the senior officer of the Fifth Cavalry, Major Charles Whiting, who had led the famous charge a year before at Gaines' Mill.¹⁶

Merritt soon got the action he sought. Lee planned to invade the North in June 1863, by moving his three large infantry corps successively from the vicinity of Culpepper, Virginia, through the gaps in the nearby Blue Ridge Mountains, into the Shenandoah Valley. From there the Confederates would march northward, cross the Potomac into Maryland, and then travel up the Cumberland Valley of Pennsylvania toward the capital of that state, Harrisburg. As the infantry columns moved out of Culpepper during the first week of June, Rebel cavalry under Stuart had the task of screening Lee's

intentions from the Union cavalry north of the Rappahannock, only about twenty-five miles distant.

To do so, Stuart had four of the five Confederate cavalry brigades, some 9,536 troopers, with accompanying artillery batteries. With such a concentration of Rebels at Culpepper and most of his horsemen nearby, and with Lee himself available, Stuart could not resist the temptation to hold a grand Cavalry Review to show off his troopers to the infantry and to his commander. On June 5, the Southern cavalry paraded and engaged in mock charges and battle; then again, on June 8, they repeated the performance as Lee watched. This impressive display was held near Brandy Station, a small depot on the Orange and Alexandria Railroad between Culpepper and the Rappahannock. Nearby was a long, open ridge, Fleetwood Hill, and upon this hill Stuart held his review and located his headquarters. His troopers, worn down by the preparations and by two days of review, prepared to cross the Rappahannock the next day, June 9, to cover the northward movement of Lee's infantry.¹⁷

June 9, however, brought the biggest surprise in the Confederate cavalry's history. Hooker, guessing Lee's intentions, ordered Pleasonton to take all his Cavalry Corps, plus two attached infantry brigades, on a reconnaissance-in-force toward Culpepper to discover the position, intentions, and strength of Lee's army. By June 8, as Lee was reviewing Stuart's cavalrymen on Fleetwood Hill, the Federal cavalry was approaching the Rappahannock from its camps near

Warrenton. Pleasonton had 7,981 cavalymen on hand, fewer than Stuart's force, but these were augmented, some said slowed down, by 3,000 infantrymen. The fight about to open would thus be between approximately equal cavalry forces.

Pleasonton divided his forces into two main columns. The first, commanded by Buford, consisted of his own First Cavalry Division, the Reserve Brigade with Merritt's Second Cavalry, and one infantry brigade. At dawn, Buford was to cross the Rappahannock at Beverly Ford, just west of the present Highway 15 bridge, and drive toward Brandy Station. The second column, commanded by David McMurtrie Gregg, included Gregg's Second Cavalry Division, the Third Cavalry Division, and one infantry brigade. Gregg would cross farther down the river, at Kelly's Ford, also at dawn. Gregg would then subdivide his column and approach Brandy station with two division-sized thrusts, uniting with Buford.¹⁸

Merritt bivouacked his regiment near the Rappahannock on the evening of June 8, but there was scant comfort for the men. No fires were permitted; the horses were kept unsaddled, but bridled--the Regulars sleeping with their arms through the looped reins. Although this sounds like a risky and anxiety-producing procedure, the veteran cavalymen were used to it. Strangely enough, the horses almost never stepped on the sleeping men. Cavalymen who served throughout the Civil War often never had known of injury occurring from this kind of readiness. Awakened about midnight, the

men were in the saddle well before 4 A.M.¹⁹

A fog covered the river fords on the morning of June 9, as Buford led his column toward the greatest cavalry battle ever conducted on the North American continent. Merritt and the Second Cavalry, along with the Fifth Cavalry, led the Reserve Brigade down the slope toward the hidden river at dawn. The Regulars were few in number, being worn down once again by the spring operations, but they had signed up to fight for Uncle Sam, and they earned their pay on this day. Rush's Lancers rode with them, having exchanged their unique weapons for Sharps Carbines. Merritt was commanding in his first big battle; it would not only be his first, but also his most important, fight.²⁰

Neither Buford nor Merritt knew what was happening on the rest of the field, of course, although Gregg should be fighting shortly, away to their left. In their front, after the leading brigade had crossed the ford, Merritt led the Second Cavalry splashing across to the south side of the river and almost immediately into twelve hours of combat. After a furious saber fight, the enemy drew up a line of horse artillery and cavalry near St. James Church, some two miles from Beverly Ford. Buford's attack pushed the Confederate horsemen before it, but was halted as the Union batteries tried to silence the Rebel artillery. Merritt was assigned the task of supporting these Union guns for more than an hour. As soon as the fire from the Rebels found the location of the supporting Second Cavalry, Merritt

would shift their position and remain until they were again in danger. This activity was displeasing to Pleasonton, who was on that part of the field, and he sent a courier to Merritt forbidding any further change of position. Merritt in turn sent an aide to explain his actions and was supported by Pleasonton. The Second Cavalry had not been badly hurt so far, but the day's work had hardly begun for them as they waited for the order to charge the Rebels.²¹

The fields in front of Merritt were generally open as was the entire length of Fleetwood Hill, some two and a half miles farther on. Woods were interspersed and provided shelter for sharpshooters of both sides, but a finer natural arena for mounted fighting could scarcely be imagined. A gallant charge by the Sixth Cavalry and Rush's Lancers had broken through the Rebel artillery before noon only to be countered by a Confederate attack on the Federal horsemen. A successful cavalry charge necessarily became disorganized once its momentum was halted by obstacles or distance, and its participants were vulnerable to a countercharge by enemy horsemen. So it was with the Regulars and Lancers, who barely cut their way back to Buford's ranks. In support of this charge, Merritt led the Second Cavalry forward against the Rebel artillery and its supports, but they limbered up and moved off before the charge could reach them. The new artillery line established by Stuart's horse artillery near the crest of Fleetwood Hill, together with the cavalry regiments Stuart was concentrating there,

was enough to cause Buford to halt the attack until Gregg could come into action, hopefully near Brady Station.²²

About noon, Gregg's men broke over the farthest crest of the ridge that was Fleetwood Hill, near the Fleetwood House. They were in Stuart's rear, on high ground, and Stuart moved regiments away from Buford's front to fight off this new and potentially mortal threat. Possession of the hilltop changed as charge after charge was mounted by both sides.

General W. H. F. "Rooney" Lee, son of Robert E. Lee, held the Confederate line in Buford's front. His brigade had been depleted to support Stuart's fight against Gregg near the Fleetwood House; thus Buford saw his chance to smash this force and gain what was now Stuart's rear. Buford sent his infantry forward and broke the front ranks of Lee's line. Into this gap the Lancers charged, overran the sharpshooters behind stone walls, and were in turn counterattacked by a waiting Rebel regiment, the Ninth Virginia Cavalry. Now came the hour for the Second Cavalry. All the months of discipline, drill, and hardship were focused on this moment as these 225 men prepared to save the Lancers.²³

Merritt sent one squadron forward as skirmishers and charged at the head of his Regulars. The formation was disrupted by a fence, a thicket, and a ravine, in the path of the charge, so Merritt halted his men momentarily, reformed, and sent them crashing into the flank of the Ninth Virginia. Merritt described the action:

We rode pell-mell, with sabres in hand, at the astonished enemy. . . . The next moment it had broken and was flying, while the horsemen of the Second, mingling with the enemy, dealt sabre-blows and pistol-shots on every side. There was little halting to make prisoners, as friend and foe, mixed inextricably together, rode on in this terrible carnage, each apparently for the same destination.²⁴

Mort a Cheval, au galop--never was death so near for the commander of the Second Regular Cavalry. Merritt was in advance with one of his officers, Lieutenant Paul Quirk, as the regiment fought. The charge and hand-to-hand melee continued up the hill, across the plateau, and to the crest on the other side. There the Confederates counter-attacked, and as the victorious Regulars retired back down the northern slope, Merritt found himself, in the confusion of dust and smoke, alone with Quirk and the Confederate cavalry.

Merritt started the charge with saber in hand but drew his pistol and emptied it during the furious melee. Now he found himself armed only with his saber and his audacity. The latter saved him. A group of high-ranking Rebel officers was nearby. One of them yelled "kill the damned Yankee!" as Merritt raced over to the apparent leader of the group, brought his saber to a point, and demanded, "Colonel, you are my prisoner!" The Confederate was probably Wade Hampton, commanding a brigade, or possibly "Rooney" Lee. Since neither mentioned the incident in their official reports, it can not be positively determined. Whoever he was, his response was more forceful than courteous. He

replied, "The hell I am!" and aimed a heavy blow with his saber at Merritt's head. Merritt parried the blow, which was sufficient, however, to cut through his hat and a handkerchief he had tied around his head as a sweatband and to slice his scalp. The wound, the only one Merritt ever received in battle, was not serious, but it did convince him of the danger of his position. The surrounding Rebels opened a fire on him as he and Quirk bolted for the receding Union line. In spite of this fire and orders to surrender, Merritt made it back to the Second's position where "a kindly Hibernian gave me the hat off his own head."²⁵

With this furious action by Buford, the fighting ended, and Pleasonton withdrew the Federal cavalry upon the approach of a detachment of Confederate infantry from nearby Culpepper. Almost 20,000 horsemen had fought the first and largest cavalry battle of the war, mostly at close quarters with saber and pistol. The result was a drawn battle, if only the lists of casualties are studied, but the experience made the Union cavalry. They gained the self-confidence they would never again lose during the war, while the prestige and superiority of Stuart's men, previously a significant factor, was forever broken.²⁶

Pleasonton felt that the action was the hardest of the Civil War. If the results were great, so was the cost to the Federal cavalry. They suffered 866 casualties against the Rebels' 485, but even these numbers do not indicate the

damage done to some regiments, particularly the Lancers and the Regulars. Merritt's Second Cavalry lost almost a third of its strength as casualties, and other Regular units were similarly damaged.²⁷

For Merritt the battle of Brandy Station had far-reaching consequences. He was commended individually in Pleasonton's report of the battle and would soon be promoted, mainly for his actions there. Merritt's leadership of the furious assault and his impetuous attack on the Confederate officer would later cause his recommendation for the Medal of Honor. Captain Custer, Pleasonton's aide, was also commended, and was sent to Army headquarters with the message of victory and a captured Rebel battleflag. The Union cavalry, in high spirits, had only a short rest north of the Rappahannock before entering on a month of almost continuous active operations.²⁸

Neither the outcome of the war, at least at this point in time, nor the outcome of the major battles was going to be determined by cavalry battles--even ones as extensive as Brandy Station had been. Operations of the infantry corps of both armies were all-important. Thus, knowing the location, movements, and intentions of the enemy infantry forces was of inestimable value. The gathering of this information through reconnaissances-in-force and the denial of this information to the enemy through counter-reconnaissance was the primary job of the cavalry, North and South.

Lee's advance was not delayed by the Union reconnaissance and Confederate counter-reconnaissance which resulted in the battle of Brandy Station. He moved the Southern infantry corps into and down the Shenandoah Valley, which provided an almost ideal "protected back-door" approach to the Northern states through Pennsylvania. The Blue Ridge Mountains border the Shenandoah Valley on the east. They are broken at intervals by "gaps" through which pass the roads between the Valley and the Piedmont region of Virginia. The Blue Ridge in this region was heavily wooded, but interrupted with fields and pastures. Small bodies of horsemen could ride over the entire region without difficulty, providing they were familiar with it. Large bodies of horsemen, or infantry, were forced to use the roads, however. The country was ideal for mounted "guerrilla" operations, and Confederate guerrilla leader John Mosby centered his operations there, recruiting men, horses, and supplies from the local population. Merritt would become more intimately acquainted with "Mosby's Confederacy" a year and a half later, when he would return to burn it. Now in June 1863, the region became the theater for a short, violent series of cavalry battles.

To seal the Blue Ridge gaps from prying Federal eyes, Lee assigned to Stuart the task of repelling any Union reconnaissances into the Shenandoah Valley as his infantry moved north. To do so Stuart occupied Manassas Gap, Snicker's Gap, and Ashby's Gap with artillery and cavalry

and encamped on the eastern approaches to these passes near Middleburg and Rectortown. By June 15, he had pushed slightly forward to occupy the gaps through the Bull Run Mountains, a lower range of hills, parallel to and east of the main Blue Ridge.²⁹

Hooker, meanwhile, was desperate for information as to Lee's movements and progress so that the Army of the Potomac could march parallel to Lee's troops and remain between Lee and the national capital. This was a classic job for Pleasonton's cavalry, which was assigned the task of penetrating the Blue Ridge passes and observing Lee's army.

Merritt led his men out of their camp near Warrenton Junction toward the Blue Ridge Mountains, along with the rest of the Reserve Brigade, which was operating with Buford's First Cavalry Division. They marched first to Thoroughfare Gap, then back to the railroad near Manassas Junction, where Merritt learned that Hooker had started the Army of the Potomac northward. A short rest and meal was interrupted by Pleasonton's order to move northwest to Aldie and thence through Ashby's Gap and Snicker's Gap into the Shenandoah Valley. Gregg's Second Cavalry Division led and fought a hard, indecisive battle with Stuart's horsemen in the little town of Aldie on the seventeenth, a day before Merritt and the Reserve Brigade arrived. Thus, he missed the first of three engagements, but after remaining saddled and under arms all of the following day, he advanced on the flank

of Gregg's division. As Gregg fought the second main battle near Middleburg, the Second Cavalry had a sharp fight during which Captain T. F. Rodenbough's squadron captured a number of Rebel troopers acting as pickets. In the evening of June 20, the Reserve Brigade was ordered toward Middleburg to support Gregg. Merritt led the Second Cavalry, the advance regiment, through a gap in a stone wall into an enclosed meadow just as Rebel cavalrymen attacked him in flank and rear. He quickly dismounted the Regulars, who, leaving every fourth man to hold the horses, dashed for the surrounding stone walls, beat the Rebels to that shelter, and repulsed the enemy after a severe small-arms fight. This fast action saved the Reserve Brigade from heavy losses which otherwise would have ensued.³⁰

While near Middleburg and Aldie, Merritt first observed the character of the people of the region.

The people, under the influence of an invasion, became insolent and warlike, the women and children defiant, the men surly and dogged by day, and by night, villainous and murderous. A detachment on scout or on picket was fired into, under cover of the night by men and even women, under the influence of Lee's advance, who a few days before were vaunting their loyalty to the Union as they begged for Army rations and clothing. Fortunately, the target-practice of these--either because of their cowardice or inexperience--was uniformly bad, and rarely did any serious damage.³¹

Pleasanton expected Stuart to attack Gregg's Second Cavalry Division during the day of June 20, and the Reserve Brigade, reinforcing Gregg by dark, was kept alert and "standing to horse" all night. Merritt's men were entertained by a sensational lightning display all night as they

stood, thoroughly drenched by the thunderstorm, in the meadow they had so narrowly won that evening.³²

Hooker, impatient for information on Lee's movements, demanded that Pleasonton break through the Blue Ridge gaps, still held by Stuart after two serious engagements, and "fight, that day"--June 21. Pleasonton, through faulty planning, sent Buford's division almost out of the upcoming battle of Upperville. The Reserve Brigade, however, fought with Gregg's division. Heavy charges were made all day, and the saber used freely as Pleasonton sought to force Stuart through Ashby's Gap. The Sixth Cavalry was cut up as it charged with the Fifth, supported by the First Cavalry and by Merritt with the Second. Stuart was forced back but he still held the gap with his cavalry and artillery as night fell, thus fulfilling his mission. Pleasonton retired to Aldie, where he established his headquarters and where Merritt bivouacked for the night.³³

Pleasonton fought hard, but he failed to force his troopers through the passes. Buford, however, sent a small party through the woods to the crest of the Blue Ridge. These men observed a Rebel infantry camp about two miles long, near the Shenandoah River just below Ashby's Gap. The atmosphere was too hazy for observation beyond the river, but that information at least partially informed Hooker of Lee's progress.³⁴

Pleasonton felt an urgent need to reorganize his cavalry force immediately after the battle at Upperville,

even though Hooker was moving north and the cavalry could not pause long to rest and refit. Casualties had been high, especially in the Second Cavalry Division and in the Reserve Brigade. The Regulars had taken more than half of the total casualties suffered by the entire First Cavalry Division and were much worn down by continuous operations and combat in an area which offered little opportunity for "living off the land," since the population was openly disloyal, and since the countryside was harassed by Mosby's men. The Sixth Cavalry, of the Reserve Brigade, had lost particularly heavily.³⁵

The Reserve Brigade had fought, since Brandy Station, under the temporary command of Major Samuel Starr of the Sixth Cavalry. Major Charles J. Whiting, of the Fifth Cavalry, was the senior major in the Reserve Brigade, and he had temporarily commanded the brigade at Brandy Station. Shortly afterwards, however, Whiting was relieved of command of the brigade for alleged disloyalty. In what appears to have been a most unjust act against a Union officer, Whiting was dismissed from the service in November 1863, after having led the famous charge of the Fifth Cavalry and having been captured at Gaines' Mill, for "using contemptuous and disrespectful words against the President of the United States." The need for a permanent commander of the Regulars was urgent, and Pleasonton, in his report of the battle of Upperville, asked for the promotion of good officers.

It is necessary to have a good commander for the regular brigade of cavalry, and I earnestly recommend Capt. Wesley Merritt to be made a brigadier-general for that purpose. He has all the qualifications for it, and had distinguished himself by his gallantry and daring. Give me good commanders and I will give you good results.³⁶

It was a fine recommendation, and Merritt must have been thrilled at the prospects. The Cavalry Corps was ordered to move promptly as Hooker took the Army north of the Potomac River to stay between Lee, who had already crossed, and Washington. Stuart took three of the five Confederate cavalry brigades on a raid into Maryland, behind the Union infantry forces, depriving Lee of the reconnaissance capability he needed just at this time. Merritt led the Second Cavalry across the river on June 27. The day before, Hooker wired Secretary of War Edwin Stanton with the request that "Capt. Wesley Merritt, 2 Cav, be made a brigadier-general for distinguished services at Beverly Ford and Upperville." It was the last time "Fighting Joe" would have an effect on Merritt's career. On June 27, as the Regulars crossed the pontoon bridge over the Potomac at Edwards' Ferry, heading north, General George G. Meade relieved Hooker in command of the Army of the Potomac.³⁷

Under Meade, Pleasonton now completed the reorganization of the Cavalry Corps begun under Hooker. The cavalry that had hitherto been guarding Washington was assigned to the Cavalry Corps as its Third Cavalry Division. Judson Kilpatrick, with whom Merritt had the fist-fight at West Point, was given its command. Kilpatrick had been

conspicuous in leading a brigade during the last month's fighting and, like Merritt, had been highly commended in Pleasonton's reports. The creation of this new division created two new brigades within it and thus, two more openings for brigadier generals.³⁸

The day after he took command of the Army, Meade repeated Hooker's request. He asked for the immediate promotion of Captains Wesley Merritt, George Custer, and Elon Farnsworth to the rank of brigadier general of volunteers. The Secretary of War assured him they would be appointed the following morning, and on June 29, 1863, these "three dashing and brilliant young officers, who are appointed in violation of red tape and regardless of political influence because of their rare fitness to lead cavalry," began their careers as general officers.³⁹

Brigadier General Wesley Merritt had just turned twenty-seven years of age as he made this biggest single step in his military career. Back in Salem, Illinois, his father announced the promotion proudly in an editorial quoting the Missouri Republican. "General Wesley Merritt . . . appointed a Brigadier-General of Volunteers solely upon the grounds of merit, the honor having been entirely unsolicited." Merritt was undoubtedly pleased with the promotion. He sought promotion for the rest of his career at least as eagerly as his contemporaries, but he was never unscrupulous in doing so, restricting his own personal activity in soliciting promotion to clearly stating his

qualifications.⁴⁰

His qualifications, even at this period of his life were impressive. His duty on the staffs of Cooke, Stoneman, and Pleasonton had certainly kept him visible to those commanders, and hence, available for individual commendation. He earned the commendation through competent, disciplined staff work and courageous but cool demeanor in combat. Merritt was young enough to be ambitious and "dashing," certain qualities indispensable to the successful cavalry leader, but old enough to be responsible in his judgment. His intelligence and maturity gave him the ability to learn from others. He was especially influenced by Philip St. George Cooke and John Buford. From these commanders, Merritt learned the value of mounted and dismounted action, eternal care of men and horses, and the best possible reconnaissance and intelligence. Merritt was able to synthesize these lessons and tactics into his own style of cavalry leadership and fighting.⁴¹

Merritt had other characteristics which made him one of the finest cavalry leaders of the Civil War. According to his adjutant and future major general, Eben Swift, Merritt was one of those rare men whose facilities were sharpened and whose view was cleared on the battlefield. His decisions were delivered with the rapidity of thought and were as clear as if they had been studied for weeks. Merritt later told Swift that he never found that his first judgment gained by time and reflection. "Never disturbed

by doubt, or moved by fear, neither circumspect nor rash, he never missed an opportunity or made a mistake."⁴² The latter characteristics are most descriptive of the "dashing" Cooke and "Old Reliable" Buford.

These personal characteristics endeared Merritt to the Regular troopers who thereafter felt that if food and supplies could be obtained, they would be obtained, and that if a rigorous campaign or heavy casualties were encountered, the hardship and losses were well calculated against the results to be expected. The Reserve Brigade would remain under Merritt for the rest of the Civil War, and they were fortunate that this was so.

Merritt was also fortunate, as he always admitted, in being given the command of the Reserve Brigade. The Regulars already knew and respected his abilities, as he knew and respected theirs. His brigade still consisted of the First, Second, Fifth, and Sixth Cavalry and Rush's Lancers, and these regiments had served together for two years of strenuous training and fighting. The pride and élan instilled in the Reserve Brigade, first by Cooke, and then, most importantly, by Buford, had been displayed on many fields and was, by mid-1863, a model to be copied and admired by the rest of the Union cavalry.⁴³

As he took command of the Reserve Brigade in their camp near Middletown, Maryland, on June 29, Merritt was a tall, dignified young officer. He had dark brown hair and a "baby-faced" look which would, until old age, make him

appear younger than he actually was. Although a year later, he would grow a small moustache, he was now clean-shaven, an unusual Civil War style and one which added to the impression of youth. A fine horseman, he was thin but strong and healthy. There is no record to indicate that the continuous field service of the Civil War ever caused him a day of sickness.

There was no undue commotion or ceremony as Merritt took command and moved the Regulars out toward the passes of Maryland's South Mountain, near Mechanicstown. In the camp of the Michigan Cavalry Brigade on the same day, however, there was considerable excitement. Not only were the troopers of this fine Volunteer unit engaged with the Confederate cavalry as Stuart rode behind the Army of the Potomac, but the officers of the brigade met their new commander for the first time. Major James H. Kidd, commanding the Sixth Michigan Cavalry, one of its regiments, looked up, not at all amused, but amazed, to see George A. Custer ride into camp dressed in a new black velvet suit with gold lace covering the sleeves, and a brilliant crimson necktie. This astonishing costume was soon digested by the Michiganders, however, and Custer led them to renown during the rest of the war. How much was due to the excellent manpower he commanded and how much credit was due to Custer, is impossible to determine. Kidd always claimed that Custer's widely-held reputation within the cavalry service, as a dashing, brave, but reckless, leader was unjustified. Custer's postwar

career, however, would tend to support the more popular view.⁴⁴

Merritt was fortunate in being given command of the Reserve Brigade, also, because it was now an integral part of Buford's First Cavalry Division. The other two new brigadier generals, Custer and Farnsworth, were assigned to Kilpatrick's Third Cavalry Division. Kilpatrick was personally brave, but quickly gained the nickname "Kill-Cavalry" for his reckless disregard for the lives of men serving under him. This disregard cost Farnsworth his life at Gettysburg, four days later, so little can be said of his style or potential as one of Merritt's rivals. Farnsworth's uncle was an influential Illinois Congressman and friend of Abraham Lincoln and had been active in securing a promotion to the rank of major general for Pleasonton during June. This much-appreciated promotion may have influenced Pleasonton's recommendation for Farnsworth's promotion to brigadier general at the end of the same month.⁴⁵

Merritt had none of these things on his mind as Union and Confederate forces were advancing toward one another around the town of Gettysburg. Pleasonton had ordered him to picket and patrol the roads through the mountains behind Lee's army, while Buford took the other two brigades of the First Cavalry Division over South Mountain, the extension of the Blue Ridge running through Maryland into southern Pennsylvania, on Lee's trail. Buford was anxious and annoyed by this detachment of the

Regulars, as was Merritt, and requested their return. He feared they would be isolated from the impending action, and they very nearly were.⁴⁶

Gettysburg was, in the main, an infantry and artillery battle. The Union cavalry, however, played important roles. Buford took his two brigades, without Merritt and the Reserve Brigade, back across South Mountain by way of Fairfield, to Gettysburg, by noon on June 30. He discovered the location of one-third of Lee's army, A. P. Hill's infantry corps, nearby at Cashtown. Determining the probable whereabouts and intentions of the balance, Buford forwarded the information to Meade. Upon this intelligence, Meade rushed the Union infantry corps forward to prevent Lee uniting his scattered army.

The Battle of Gettysburg opened early on July 1, as Buford conducted a model cavalry action and fixed his own reputation as an outstanding cavalry commander. As the Confederate infantry rushed toward Gettysburg on the Cashtown Pike, Buford dismounted his troopers west of Gettysburg and fought so furiously that the Rebel infantry was temporarily stopped. This delay bought enough time for the Federal First Corps, with the famous "Iron Brigade," to get into position to contest with the Confederates so effectively that, by nightfall, Meade's army was united well enough to defy Lee's attempts to break its position atop Cemetery Ridge, east of Gettysburg. General Winfield Scott Hancock, who had arrived on the field as Buford was holding

back the Rebel infantry, was filled with admiration and thought that among the most inspiring sights of his military career was "the splendid spectacle of that gallant cavalry as it stood there, unshaken and undaunted, in the face of the advancing Confederate infantry."⁴⁷ Merritt could hardly have patterned his own operations after a better teacher.

The Union cavalry took almost no part in the fighting on the second day of the battle of Gettysburg. Gregg and the Second Cavalry Division guarded the Union right flank, while Buford and the First Cavalry Division were sent south of Gettysburg, near Emmittsburg, to guard the Union left flank. Buford sent for Merritt, and the latter came down out of the mountains to join the First Cavalry Division on July 2.⁴⁸

July 3, 1863, was a day of intense cavalry activity. On the Union right, several miles east of Gettysburg, Gregg, with Custer's brigade attached, engaged in a serious fight with Stuart's cavalry and defeated the Rebels. During the same time period, General George Pickett's charge was being launched against Union infantry positions on Cemetery Ridge. On the Union left, Buford was ordered to take two brigades to the rear to guard the Army's supply trains massed near Westminster. Merritt was ordered to send a detachment from the Reserve Brigade to the Confederate rear to capture a supply train reported near Fairfield and to advance toward Gettysburg to secure the Union left flank from any attempt by the Confederates to turn it.⁴⁹

Merritt sent the Sixth Cavalry, commanded by Major Starr, westward toward Fairfield to intercept the reported wagon train. The Sixth found, instead, a large body of Confederate cavalry, three regiments of William E. Jones' brigade. The Sixth Cavalry instantly charged and broke the Seventh Virginia Cavalry, but were countercharged and broken in turn. Starr was wounded and captured along with 183 of his men. Altogether, the regiment lost more than fifty percent of its officers and men in the brave, but unsuccessful, raid.⁵⁰

While the Sixth Cavalry was fighting Jones near Fairfield, Merritt advanced along the Emmittsburg Pike with the rest of the Reserve Brigade. The Lancers led the column, which arrived near the left flank of the Union army about 2 P.M. as Lee's artillery was firing on Cemetery Ridge preparatory to Pickett's charge. Merritt dismounted the Lancers and sent them against the Confederate infantry of General Evander Law, which was threatening the Union left. The fight increased in fury as Merritt sent his old regiment, the Second Cavalry, into battle along with his accompanying horse artillery section. Merritt's men took increasingly heavy losses as Law reinforced his own infantry line and as the Confederate infantry and the dismounted Union troopers fought back and forth on the extreme Union left flank.⁵¹

Kilpatrick, with Farnsworth's brigade, had preceded Merritt onto the Union left earlier in the afternoon and

was now on Merritt's right. A portion of General James Longstreet's Confederate Corps, including Law's brigade, advanced toward the two Round Tops in order to prevent reinforcement from that part of the Union line being sent to meet Pickett's charge and, possibly, to capture ammunition trains parked in the rear of the Round Tops. Kilpatrick ordered Farnsworth to charge the center of Law's line in order to halt this advance. Both Merritt and Farnsworth could see the foolhardiness of the order, since the terrain was steep and rocky, broken by woods and stone fences, but Kilpatrick was adamant. Farnsworth gallantly charged into the Confederate infantry line with a small force and was killed along with many of his men in the attempt. Merritt renewed his attack until heavy rains in the evening put an end to active fighting for the Reserve Brigade at Gettysburg. The sacrifice of Farnsworth and his men by Kilpatrick had been without significant effect, but the attack by Merritt had caused Law to weaken his main line to protect his flank and rear, providing a valuable diversion.⁵²

In the Gettysburg fighting, the Reserve Brigade suffered heavily, with 417 casualties out of approximately 1500 engaged in the fighting at Fairfield and on the extreme Union left. Merritt almost missed the battle, but fought vigorously and successfully against some of the best infantry troops of the South. Pleasonton, as well as Buford, commended the two surviving new generals. "Brigadier-Generals Merritt and Custer, brigade commanders, have

increased the confidence entertained in their ability and gallantry to lead troops on the field of battle."⁵³

There was no rest for the Union cavalry, damaged as the Regular regiments were. Lee retreated back through Maryland to cross the Potomac into Virginia between July 6 and July 17. Merritt joined the rest of the First Cavalry Division on July 5 and led the Reserve Brigade into nine fights with the Confederate army during the next ten days, including those at Williamsport, Hagerstown, Boonsborough, Funkstown, and Falling Waters. He was without supply wagons for much of the time due to the vigorous cavalry operation and was without any regular issue of rations or forage, living off the land for five of those days.⁵⁴

On July 18, Merritt crossed the Reserve Brigade back into Virginia, scouting after Lee's retreating Army of Northern Virginia and fighting almost continually throughout the rest of that month and into August. The Reserve Brigade was engaged heavily at Front Royal and at Manassas Gap during that time. By the end of the month, Lee was safely across the Rappahannock River and encamped around Culpepper Court House, near where he had started the campaign. The Union and Confederate cavalry both sent reconnaissance raids into the enemy-occupied areas along the Rappahannock; severe cavalry fights at the old battleground of Brandy Station and at nearby Rappahannock Station resulted. Praise from Buford during these latter battles was lavish. "Merritt fought beautifully."⁵⁵

Three months of constant and severe fighting had drastically reduced the strength and effectiveness of the Reserve Brigade. Even though Merritt paid constant attention to the condition of the horses of his command, as he did to the welfare of the men, the rigors of constant campaigning exhausted and crippled the mounts. So, too, did a disease known as "foot-rot" which disabled the finest-appearing horses in one day's march. He found approximately one-third of the otherwise-serviceable horses in his command to be suffering from this disease, which was apparently contracted in the Quartermaster corrals in Washington from which replacement horses were forwarded to the front. The arms and equipment of the Reserve Brigade were equally in need of replenishment. Merritt managed to have his command sent back to the newly-established Cavalry Bureau depot at Giesboro Point, near Washington, to refit.⁵⁶

The Regulars camped at Giesboro Point for two months, recruiting and training new troopers, refitting their equipment, and training and receiving new mounts. The inability of the Quartermaster Corps to maintain an adequate supply of remounts for the horses killed or disabled in active service had led to the establishment of the Cavalry Bureau in July. It was charged with the organization and equipment of the cavalry forces; although it would never completely maintain the cavalry at their full effectiveness, it was a big improvement over the previous system.

Merritt was not impressed with his stay at Giesboro Point. One reason probably lay with the newness of the establishment, but, more importantly, two months was not long enough to train either effective cavalrymen or cavalry horses. The training of a trooper took considerably longer than the training of infantry or artillery troops. Merritt felt that the time spent at the depot was of little advantage to the Reserve Brigade, except for the rest it provided, and that the old and tried equipment and horses should be consolidated in the field and issued to re-equip parts of regiments or brigades, while the remainder of the units were sent in to recruit and refit. Whether or not more time at Giesboro Point would have benefited the Reserve Brigade, Merritt never knew. On October 11, he was ordered to immediately rejoin the Army of the Potomac, then located near Centreville, west of Washington.⁵⁷

Since Merritt had been detached in early August, the Federal forces had been engaged in skirmishing with Mosby's men in Loudoun County, Virginia, and in a reconnaissance to and across the Rapidan River in the vicinity of Orange Court House during September. The reason for Merritt's hasty recall from Washington was the start of what became known as the Bristoe Campaign.⁵⁸

On October 10, 1863, Lee advanced his Confederates from their encampments south of the Rapidan River to the northwest in an attempt to outflank Meade, who had the Army of the Potomac encamped around Culpepper Court House, between

the Rapidan and Rappahannock Rivers. Buford, with the First Cavalry Division, scouted along the Rapidan River, while the Second and Third Cavalry Divisions fought the enemy cavalry on the right of the Union positions, where Lee's troops were marching. Meade withdrew the Union army northward back across the Rappahannock River, the following day. Buford followed, going into camp near Warrenton Junction on the Orange and Alexandria Railroad. In the meantime, he had sent for Merritt and the Reserve Brigade.⁵⁹

Merritt left to join Buford in such a hurry that many of the Regulars were left behind. From the Second Cavalry alone, more than 200 men who were still dismounted had to be left at Giesboro Point. The command suffered almost immediately from the "hoof-rot" disease, but after a two-day march, he rejoined Buford late on the night of October 13, near Bristoe Station, on the Orange and Alexandria Railroad. Meade drew the Union army farther back to the defensive lines around Centreville, staying between Lee and the Capitol. On October 17, Merritt was able to report the advance of the enemy against the right of Meade's line. By the following day, however, Lee started retiring back toward Culpepper Court House, with Stuart's cavalry covering his rear.⁶⁰

Buford's whole division was in constant motion in front of the Union positions, and its supply system was completely disrupted. Even when a railroad train was run up to Bristoe Station from Alexandria, Merritt found that

it was loaded with forage for the horses, but absolutely no food for the men. He urgently wired for rations, but went hungry for two days before his requests could be filled.⁶¹

As Lee retired southward, Meade followed, with Merritt and the Reserve Brigade constantly leading the advance and fighting with the Rebel cavalry rearguard. Both armies encamped, by October 22, on opposite sides of the Rappahannock to recuperate from what had been an aimless, poorly-run, and costly campaign by both sides. After resting for two weeks, Meade crossed the Rappahannock, with the first Cavalry Division and Merritt's brigade pushing through Culpepper Court House. Lee withdrew to the Rapidan River and entrenched strongly on its banks.⁶²

In late November, Meade tried to outflank Lee's position along the Rapidan by marching his infantry around Lee's eastern flank in what became the Mine Run Campaign. It was a short, unsuccessful adventure which ended by December 1. Merritt played only a minor role guarding the infantry's trains on the lower Rapidan River. He had, however, for the first time commanded Buford's First Cavalry Division in action.⁶³

Buford, one of the genuine heroes of Gettysburg, was greatly admired within the cavalry service and was simply idolized by Merritt and the other members of the Reserve Brigade and the First Cavalry Division. He had been Merritt's friend and teacher since the days with the Second Dragoons in Utah. They shared many characteristics.

Buford detested sham and "phonies." He ran the division on a steady, regularized basis and had little use for flamboyant publicity-seekers or reckless cavalry leaders. Merritt pleased him immensely. Buford was only thirty-seven years old by November 1863, but he was exhausted by constant active field service since the war had begun. He had also apparently suffered from rheumatism during the fall campaigning. Just before the Mine Run Campaign, on the advice of his surgeons, Buford took sick-leave and went to Stoneman's home in Washington to rest and to secure better treatment than could be given in camp. There he reportedly contracted typhoid fever and died on December 16, 1863. On the same day Lincoln signed his much-desired commission as major general. When he was told of the promotion, Buford, who wanted no such honor based on pity, wondered, "mean it?"⁶⁴

His association with Buford had benefited Merritt immensely, and Merritt took over the First Cavalry Division when Buford left. Colonel Alfred Gibbs assumed command of the Reserve Brigade. December operations consisted of skirmishing with Confederate cavalry pickets along the Rapidan and reconnaissances south of the river. There was little significant action, and as winter set in, the Army of the Potomac went into permanent winter quarters between the Rappahannock and Rapidan Rivers around Culpepper Court House.

Merritt established the First Cavalry Division in camp at Mitchell's Station, south of Culpepper. It was a winter and a camp long remembered by the cavalrymen of the division. By the first week of January 1864, Merritt's command had constructed a permanent cantonment which was a model of comfort and convenience. Merritt described it with pleasure:

Large log huts were built for men and officers on the four sides of a rectangle, the officers' quarters on one long side, opposite which were the men's barracks. . . . The interior, thoroughly policed and nicely kept, constituted a magnificent parade for undress occasions, and a ground for the winter sports of both men and officers.

Before blazing fireplaces, the troopers could rest and relax from a strenuous campaigning season.⁶⁵

The cavalry was not yet emancipated from the old duties of providing escorts and mounted pickets for the entire front of the Army of the Potomac. This duty in the middle of winter wore down the horses and elicited much griping among the troopers because infantrymen had much lighter duty. Nevertheless, there was still time for recreation. The Reserve Brigade, after a heavy snow in January, was reported by Gibbs as being engaged in "Rabbit-drill," which supplemented the regular rations. The regular rotation of picket duty took up two days of every five, but the remaining three days could be devoted to routine camp duties and to playing football--an amusement lately originated for the benefit of the men. One member of Merritt's old Second Cavalry reported that "when there are no duties an immense india-rubber

football is produced, and the whole regiment enters into the game with the spirit and zest of schoolboys . . . who seem for the time to forget all their troubles in the sport."⁶⁶

For Merritt the winter of 1863-1864 passed pleasantly also. His division was engaged in a reconnaissance to Barnett's Ford on the Rapidan in early February. He led the division in person in this effort to ascertain the position and strength of the Confederate forces. Only brisk skirmishing resulted, and he returned to the quarters at Mitchell's Station. There he got to know his new staff better. He would be associated with several of them for the rest of the Civil War and afterwards in Texas and on the northern plains. Captain Miles Keogh would later die with Custer on the Little Big Horn, and First Lieutenant Albert P. Morrow would serve with Merritt in the new Ninth Cavalry after the war. Together they planned the winter operations of the First Cavalry Division.⁶⁷

Merritt took the opportunity during the winter encampment to apply for Buford's position in the Regular Army, also. While commissioned as a brigadier general of volunteers, Merritt was still a captain in the Regular Army. In January 1864, he applied for appointment as major in the Inspector General's Department, a position made available by Buford's death. No action was taken on the request, and Merritt remained a Regular captain until after the Civil War.⁶⁸

The "routine camp duties" became less and less routine as the winter progressed. A new cavalry drill and tactical formation had been adopted. These replaced the single-rank tactics of Philip St. George Cooke with a double-rank system. The new tactics were not popular, and no particular reason was advanced for their adoption. Nevertheless, hard work for the cavalry was called for if they were to be proficient in the new drill by the time the spring campaign season arrived.⁶⁹

By mid-February, the pace of activities increased. Merritt was ordered to organize a review of his own division and the Third Cavalry Division for February 15. He held a separate preliminary review of his First Cavalry Division, then commanded both divisions in the main review by Pleasonton, held on the plain near Stevensburg. Spectators commented on the contrast between the Reserve Brigade and the other cavalry formations, which should have pleased Merritt. After the review, the officers of Rush's Lancers gave a dinner for Merritt which brought an air of civilized society to the cavalry camp.

The dinner was excellent and nicely served, in a long log house (built as a chapel), warmed by a huge fireplace. After dinner a party of amateur musicians appeared and performed admirably . . . and two or three hours slipped away rapidly under the combined influences of music, tobacco, and an occasional toast.⁷⁰

As the Cavalry Corps drilled and picketed, it also organized for an expedition to Richmond planned for the last of February. Merritt took no part in this abortive Kilpatrick/

Dahlgren expedition, but came to know and be known by the other cavalry officers of the corps during its planning. One officer, Major James H. Kidd, commanding the Sixth Michigan Cavalry in Custer's brigade, provided a valuable estimate of Wesley Merritt and Merritt's reputation as he matured in command during this winter of 1863-1864. Kidd was a great admirer of Custer, and his observations are more valuable because of it. As Merritt entered an officers' meeting, Kidd observed:

An officer wearing an enlisted man's overcoat entered and modestly took a seat at the back of the stage. Not obvious, not obtrusive, but retired, he seemed to shun observation. . . . As a cavalry commander he was trained by John Buford. The latter was rightly called 'Old Reliable' . . . solid rather than showy, not spectacular, but sure. Such also was Merritt, an apt pupil of an illustrious teacher, the lineal successor of Buford. . . . Modesty which fitted him like a garment, charming manners, the demeanor of a gentleman, cool but fearless bearing in action, were his distinguishing characteristics. He was a most excellent officer.⁷¹

FOOTNOTES

Chapter 3

1. Rhodes, Essay, 17, 95.
2. Ibid., 17-19; O.R., XXV, Pt. 1, 107.
3. James H. Kidd, Personal Recollections of a Cavalryman with Custer's Michigan Cavalry Brigade in the Civil War (Ionia, Mich., 1908), 78; Robert V. Bruce, Lincoln and The Tools of War (Indianapolis, 1956), 116; William B. Edwards, Civil War Guns (Harrisburg, Pa., 1962), 148-52; Buckeridge, Lincoln's Choice (Harrisburg, Pa., 1956), 43; Rhodes, Essay, 5, 17-19.
4. Fairfax Downey, Clash of Cavalry (New York, 1959), 38-39; Rhodes, Essay, 5.
5. Willard Glazier, Three Years with the Federal Cavalry (New York, 1873), 126; Rodenbough, Second Dragoons, 268.
6. Glazier, Three Years, 162; Merritt, "Recollections," 285.
7. O.R., XXV, Pt. 1, 1065.
8. Ibid., 1058; Rodenbough, Second Dragoons, 274-75, 530; Rhodes, Essay, 20.
9. O.R., XXV, Pt. 1, 1059, 1070, 1071-72.
10. Ibid., 1071-72; B&L, III, 153.
11. O.R., XXV, Pt. 1, 1062-63.
12. Edward J. Stackpole, Chancellorsville (Harrisburg, Pa., 1958), 367-68; Alan J. Nolan, The Iron Brigade (New York, 1961), 109.
13. G. Price, Fifth Cavalry, 118; Rodenbough, Second Dragoons, 531.
14. Rhodes, Essay, 24.
15. Source Book of Peninsula, 334-35; Monaghan, Custer, 123, 134.

16. Theo. F. Rodenbough, The Regulars at Gettysburg (n.p., n.d.), 31 Archives, MHRC, Carlisle Barracks; Swift, "General Wesley Merritt," 831; Merritt to Cullum, August 10, 1867, Cullum File, Special Collections, USMA Library, West Point.
17. Douglas Southall Freeman, Lee's Lieutenants, III (New York, 1944), 1-6; Downey, Clash of Cavalry, 78-84; Rhodes, Essay, 23-24; O.R., XXV, Pt. 2, 825.
18. Downey, Clash of Cavalry, 88-90; Merritt, "Recollections," 285; O.R., XXVII, Pt. 1, 905-906.
19. Kidd, Cavalryman, 125; Downey, Clash of Cavalry, 91; Merritt, "Recollections," 285.
20. Freeman, Lee's Lieutenants, III, 7-8; Merritt, "Recollections," 285-6.
21. Theo. F. Rodenbough, ed., The Photographic History of the Union and Confederate Cavalry in the Civil War (1861-1865) (Reprint; Glendale, N.Y., 1970), 228-30; Merritt, "Recollections," 286-87.
22. Wilbur S. Nye, "Brandy Station, June 9: Stuart vs. Pleasonton," CWT, II (July, 1963), 24; Merritt, "Recollections," 287.
23. O.R., XXVII, Pt. 1, 1044-45; Merritt, "Recollections," 287, 290.
24. Downey, Clash of Cavalry, 90; Merritt, "Recollections," 287-88.
25. New York Times, June 16, 1863; Swift, "General Wesley Merritt," 831; Merritt, "Recollections," 289.
26. Nye, "Brandy Station," 24; Rodenbough, Photographic History, 2; Rhodes, Essay, 25-26; O.R., XXVII, Pt. 1, 902-905; Merritt, "Recollections," 291.
27. O.R., XXVII, Pt. 1, 170; O.R., XXVII, Pt. 2, 719; Merritt, "Recollections," 290.
28. O.R., XXVII, Pt. 1, 903-904, 1045; Butterfield to Secretary of War, Letter of Recommendation, April 27, 1900; Harrison to Butterfield, Letter of Recommendation, May 2, 1900; AGO Brief on Medal of Honor Recommendations, May 9, 1900; ACP, NA.
29. Rhodes, Essay, 27.

30. Merritt, "Recollections," 291-93; Glazier, Three Years, 230-31; Abner Doubleday, Chancellorsville and Gettysburg, Campaigns of the Civil War, VI (New York, 1886), 101-103; O.R., XXVII, Pt. 1, 906.

31. Merritt, "Recollections," 292-93.

32. Ibid., 293; Doubleday, Chancellorsville and Gettysburg, 104.

33. O.R., XXVII, Pt. 1, 946; Glazier, Three Years, 231-33; Doubleday, Chancellorsville and Gettysburg, 104; Merritt, "Recollections," 294.

34. Wilbur S. Nye, "Cavalry Actions--June 17-21," CWT, II (July, 1963), 25; O.R., XXVII, Pt. 1, 912-13, 920-21.

35. O.R., XXVII, Pt. 1, 922.

36. Ibid., 912-13; Theo. F. Rodenbough and William L. Haskins, The Army of the United States (New York, 1896), 225; Rodenbough, Second Dragoons, 445.

37. Hooker to Stanton, June 26, 1863, War Papers of Gen. Merritt, RG 94, NA; Rhodes, Essay, 29; Glazier, Three Years, 235-37.

38. O.R., XXVII, Pt. 1, 912-13; Rhodes, Essay, 28.

39. Stanton to Meade, June 28, 1863, War Papers of Gen. Merritt, RG 94, NA; Meade to Halleck, June 28, 1863, ACP, NA; New York Times, June 30, 1863.

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42. Swift, "General Wesley Merritt," 837.

43. B&L, III, 437; Doubleday, Chancellorsville and Gettysburg, 219, Append. A.

44. O.R., XXVII, Pt. 1, 943; Kidd, Cavalryman, 128-29.

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46. O.R., XXVII, Pt. 1, 924, 943.

47. Ibid., 914, 923-24, 926-27; Rodenbough, Photographic History, 272.

48. O.R., XXVII, Pt. 1, 943.
49. Ibid., 928, 943; Wilbur S. Nye, "Cavalry Fight at Gettysburg," CWT, II (July, 1963), 31-32.
50. O.R., XXVII, Pt. 2, 751-52; O.R., XXVII, Pt. 1, 948; Rodenbough, Regulars at Gettysburg, 29; Rodenbough, Photographic History, 88.
51. Wesley Merritt, "Cavalry War Lessons," JUSCA, II (March, 1889), 116-17; Merritt, "Recollections," 295-296.
52. O.R., XXVII, Pt. 1, 916, 993; B&L, III, 328, 347; Merritt, "Cavalry War Lessons," 116-17; Doubleday, Chancellorsville and Gettysburg, 197-98; Rodenbough, Photographic History, 230; Glazier, Three Years, 261-62.
53. O.R., XXVII, Pt. 1, 918, 919, 930; Oliver O. Howard, Autobiography of Oliver Otis Howard, Major General, United States Army (New York, 1908), 434.
54. O.R., XXVII, Pt. 1, 928-29, 943-44; Merritt, "Recollections," 296; Glazier, Three Years, 266-67.
55. O.R., XXVII, Pt. 1, 929-30, 932, 945; Merritt, "Recollections," 296-300.
56. O.R., XXVII, Pt. 1, 353; Rhodes, Essay, 43-44; Merritt, "Recollections," 300.
57. Rodenbough, Second Dragoons, 531-32; Merritt, "Recollections," 301.
58. O.R., XXIX, Pt. 1, 140-41; Edward W. Emerson, ed., Life and Letters of Charles Russell Lowell (Boston, 1907), 294.
59. Rhodes, Essay, 45-47.
60. O.R., XXIX, Pt. 1, 351-52, 353; Rodenbough, Second Dragoons, 531-32.
61. O.R., XXIX, Pt. 1, 352, 353, 997-98.
62. William W. Hassler, "The Slaughter Pen at Bristoe Station," CWT, I (May, 1962), 8-13; Rhodes, Essay, 47-48; Merritt, "Recollections," 301.
63. O.R., XXIX, Pt. 1, 802-806; Rhodes, Essay, 48-49; Merritt, "Recollections," 302.

64. Russell F. Weigley, "John Buford," CWT, V (June, 1966), 23; Merritt, "Recollections," 285-86, 302; Rodenbough, Second Dragoons, 458-59; Hagemann, Rebels and Redskins, 214-15.

65. Clendenin to Merritt, Dec. 16, 1863, War Papers of Gen. Merritt, RG 94, NA; Merritt, "Recollections," 302; Rodenbough, Second Dragoons, 533; Hagemann, Rebels and Redskins, 217.

66. Gibbs to Merritt, Personal Note, Jan. 8, 1864, War Papers of Gen. Merritt, RG 94, NA; Rodenbough, Second Dragoons, 533-34.

67. O.R., XXXIII, Pt. 1, 139-40; Merritt to AGO, Jan. 1, 1864, ACP, NA; G. Price, Fifth Cavalry, 121-22; Rhodes, Essay, 51; Rodenbough, Second Dragoons, 534.

68. Merritt to Stanton, Jan. 6, 1864, ACP, NA.

69. Kidd, Cavalryman, 232.

70. Chief-of-Staff, Cavalry Corps, to Merritt, Feb. 13, 1864, War Papers of Gen. Merritt, RG 94, NA; Rodenbough, Second Dragoons, 534.

71. Kidd, Cavalryman, 236-38.

Chapter 4

THE COMING OF SHERIDAN

While the Cavalry Corps of the Army of the Potomac continued its drilling and picket duties as the spring of 1864 approached, changes were being made in its organization that would affect its course throughout the last year of war.

Meade remained in command of the Army of the Potomac, but the position became almost nominal when, on March 12, Lieutenant General Ulysses S. Grant was assigned to the command of the armies of the United States. Grant made his headquarters with the Army of the Potomac--in effect becoming its commander, or very nearly so. The working arrangement between Meade and Grant, at this time, however, did allow Meade sufficient authority to dismiss commanders whom he felt were inadequate for the upcoming campaigns. Alfred Pleasonton was on Meade's list.¹

As Cavalry Corps commander, Pleasonton opposed the disastrous Kilpatrick/Dahlgren raid to Richmond in February, while Meade, at least tacitly, supported it. Pleasonton could not resist an "I-told-you-so" attitude once the raid had failed. Pleasonton also went to Washington to testify before the Joint Congressional Committee on the Conduct of

the War, and during this testimony he decried Meade's failure to gather in the fruits of victory after the Battle of Gettysburg. Meade had previously supported Pleasonton against Stanton's desire to have him relieved from command, but with these ingratiating actions, Meade withdrew his support. On March 23, Pleasonton was removed from command of the Cavalry Corps and banished to the command of the Department of Missouri, which was considered a minor theater compared to Virginia.²

Meade created the vacancy in the command of the Cavalry Corps, but Grant filled it. He sent for one of his most trusted lieutenants from the western armies, a man almost unknown to the eastern cavalrymen, but a man who would shape their destiny for the rest of the Civil War-- Philip H. Sheridan.

As Sheridan assumed the top cavalry post on April 5, 1864, he was only thirty-three years old, five years older than Merritt. He had, earlier in the war, commanded the Second Michigan Cavalry regiment, but he had fought all through the western campaigns as an infantry commander under Grant. Grant felt he was just the man for the job. A short, scrappy, little Irishman, only five feet, five inches and 115 pounds, Sheridan had a fiery temper and a glowing ambition. He set about the immediate reorganization of the Cavalry Corps and, with Grant, appointed officers to command it who showed promise of even more aggressive and successful operations than had been conducted under Pleasonton.⁴

Gregg continued in command of the Second Cavalry Division and led it with distinction under Sheridan. A change was desirable, however, in the Third Cavalry Division. General William T. Sherman wanted Kilpatrick, who had commanded the division for almost a year, to command a cavalry division in his western army. Sheridan and Grant relieved Kilpatrick and replaced him with a former Academy classmate of Merritt's, Brigadier General James H. Wilson. Wilson was an engineer officer with no experience whatever in commanding cavalry in the field. He had served reliably in the West, was trusted by Grant, and had been temporarily assigned to the Cavalry Bureau in Washington before joining the Third Cavalry Division. Wilson was outranked by several experienced officers already in the Cavalry Corps, Merritt included, and there was considerable outrage that an "outsider" should be brought in to command one of the three cavalry divisions. Merritt was not fond of Wilson, although he was not openly antagonistic; still, he was probably among the most outraged. Wilson, likewise, was not friendly to Merritt, although he respected Merritt's abilities and reputation.⁵

A big shake-up took place in the First Cavalry Division. Merritt had temporarily commanded the division since Buford's death, but while he may have been irritated by the appointment of Wilson to permanent division command, there were several other brigadier generals already within the Army of the Potomac without positions due to the many changes being made by Meade and Grant. With his old

commanders, Buford and Pleasonton now gone, Merritt had no particular influence within the cavalry command. He had to relinquish his temporary command on April 11, when the new permanent commander of the First Cavalry Division arrived and assumed command. Brigadier General Alfred T. A. Torbert had commanded a brigade and division of the Sixth Infantry Corps, in the Army of the Potomac, during the fighting of the preceding year and a half and was senior in rank to Merritt. He, like Wilson, had no cavalry experience, but at least Merritt could not complain about the matter of seniority. An unknown quantity as a cavalryman, he proved to be adequate, if not top-notch, in the position, and he looked the part. Torbert was three years older than Merritt, with a dark, handsome look and a flair for fancy dress.⁶

One immediate change was made within Torbert's First Cavalry Division. Custer was senior to Wilson, so Custer transferred his brigade to the First Cavalry Division as its First Brigade. Colonel Thomas Devin still commanded the Second Brigade, and Merritt reverted to his permanent command of the Reserve Brigade, which acted as the third brigade within the division.⁷ These three officers, Merritt, Custer, and Devin would fight together for the rest of the war and would, in time, become "Sheridan's Boys." For the present, however, Sheridan was as unknown to them as they were to him, and the cultivation of a mutual respect had to start from scratch.

With these organizational changes made, Sheridan ordered a review of the entire Cavalry Corps for mid-April to determine the condition of his command for the impending campaign. Almost 10,000 horsemen paraded for their new chief on the open ground near Culpepper. Merritt's Reserve Brigade was in good shape as far as the troopers were concerned. The horses were a different story. With a picket line around the army almost sixty miles long, the cavalry horses had suffered throughout the winter. The troopers could at least move about and warm themselves with small fires during the long days and nights of this unpleasant duty. The horses, however, had to be kept tethered and saddled at all times during the tour of picket duty and were unable either to graze or to be adequately sheltered. Sheridan found the Reserve Brigade horses to be typical of those of the entire corps. The Confederates had been more careful. They had sent most of their mounts to the rear areas to recuperate during the winter months, assigning picket duty to the infantrymen. Sheridan realized how much would depend upon the horses during the upcoming fights and was successful in having the cavalry relieved from this duty for almost two weeks before the army started to move. The horses recuperated during this rest period, and Sheridan described them as being in "passable trim" by May 4, when winter quarters were abandoned and active campaigning began.⁸

With football and blazing fireplaces only fond memories, the Union cavalry moved south, covering the left, or

eastern, flank of Meade's army. Meade intended to move around Lee's eastern flank rather than to attack him in his strongly entrenched positions south of the Rapidan River. This flanking movement took the Federals through the "Wilderness," near and over the old Chancellorsville battleground of the previous year. Almost immediately both armies were engaged in the first of two great and costly infantry battles. For three successive days, May 5, 6, and 7, the Battle of the Wilderness raged in the heavily-wooded region just west of Chancellorsville.

For the first two days, Torberts' First Cavalry Division, with Merritt's Reserve Brigade, guarded the army's left flank and wagon trains from a cavalry attack that Meade erroneously felt was imminent. One brigade of Torbert's forces, however, Custer's Michigan Brigade, had a severe fight with the Rebel cavalry near the Furnaces, south of Chancellorsville, on May 6. The Michigan troopers took heavy losses during that day, but were pulled back in the evening by an anxious Meade, to guard the trains with the rest of the First Cavalry Division. On the same day, Merritt's role in the upcoming campaign took a new turn. Torbert was unable to continue in command of the division. He had an abscess near the end of his spine which had required an operation "under the influence of chloroform" the day previous. This was not only an inconvenient condition for a cavalryman, but a dangerous one during the Civil War, and Torbert was subsequently ordered to Washington for

further treatment. He remained for most of the month away from his command, which was, in his absence, led by Merritt.⁹

Even though there were two brigadier generals commanding brigades within the First Cavalry Division, the command fell to Merritt on the basis of seniority. Both he and Custer had received their commissions as general officers on the same day the previous year, but Merritt had graduated from West Point a year before Custer, and his commission as Captain in the Regular Army predated Custer's. He was, therefore, the ranking officer and was undoubtedly fortunate that such a relationship existed. As he became more and more attached to both of his young generals, Sheridan was careful to always maintain this rank relationship, so that whenever a vacancy in a position of higher responsibility developed, Merritt received it. If the relationship had been reversed, the story of Wesley Merritt as a significant cavalry leader would probably be very brief indeed.

Their rivalry was not yet apparent, however, as Merritt sent the First Cavalry Division into the Battle of Todd's Tavern on May 7. With the countryside so heavily wooded and unsuited for mounted cavalry action or infantry marching, the crossroads between the site of the Battle of the Wilderness and the more open ground to the southeast, around Spottsylvania Court House, took on great strategic value. Grant planned to move around Lee's flank, toward the southeast, and this brought on the Battle of Todd's Tavern. The cavalry was ordered to drive the Rebel cavalry away from

the crossroads intersections at both Todd's Tavern, some five miles from the fighting Union forces, and at Spottsylvania Court House, four miles farther to the southeast and to hold there until infantrymen could relieve them. Control of the intersections was necessary if Grant and Meade were to move more rapidly than Lee and thereby get around Lee's flank.

On the morning of May 7, Merritt sent Custer and the Michigan cavalrymen back into the same area they had won and then abandoned the previous day. Again this fine brigade dismounted, and with their Spencer Carbines, pushed the cavalry of Wade Hampton and Fitzhugh Lee before them. Merritt sent the Reserve Brigade charging down the main road to Todd's Tavern and Spottsylvania Court House, now Virginia Highway 613. A brisk fight took place near Todd's Tavern in the evening, but the Reserve Brigade fought the enemy cavalrymen back through that crossroads toward Spottsylvania Court House. Meanwhile, Gregg had been equally successful on Merritt's left, and the Second Cavalry Division united with Merritt's First Cavalry Division on the road to Spottsylvania Court House during the night of May 7. Sheridan was pleased with the results. "Our cavalry behaved splendidly," he reported.¹⁰

The evening of May 7 was a dramatic and eventful one for the Army of the Potomac. As Meade disengaged from the Battle of the Wilderness, Grant headed the Union forces southeastward, toward Richmond. The infantrymen cheered Grant as this intention became known, and the dense columns of foot soldiers were put on the narrow, twisting backroads

of northern Virginia for a forced night march that would, hopefully, bring them to Lee's vulnerable flank or rear. Night marches were rare and exceedingly difficult with no other illumination than pitch torches and pine trees set afire near the roads.

With the crossroads of Todd's Tavern in Federal hands, Lee began a race with Meade's men for possession of the strategic crossroads and high ridges at Spottsylvania Court House. Sheridan had his cavalrymen much nearer, however, than any infantry, Northern or Southern. His plan was for Wilson, with the Third Cavalry Division, to rush the Rebel cavalry at Spottsylvania Court House early on the morning of May 8. Merritt and Gregg would push around between Lee's advancing infantry and the intersection, drive the Southern cavalry away, and occupy and hold the bridges and crossings of the Po River leading to the town.¹¹

Merritt encamped just east of Todd's Tavern on the night of May 7 as he received Sheridan's orders for the attack. There was little sleep for anyone that night. The infantry of Meade and Lee were marching, or groping, in parallel columns toward Spottsylvania Court House. The noise and continual firing of the pickets of both armies kept Merritt's men awake all night as they rested between the infantry columns. In Custer's brigade, the First Michigan Cavalry regiment was up and mounted all night as a safety measure. Union bands accompanying the marching infantrymen played to the cheering troops, while the Confederate bands,

off in the darkness, replied.¹²

Before dawn Merritt's orders from Sheridan, for the movement to support Wilson's attack on Spottsylvania Court House, were countermanded by General Meade. Meade ordered Merritt to remain back near and in front of the infantry column as it advanced. Gregg was similarly held back, but Meade failed to change the orders for Wilson's morning attack or to notify Sheridan of the changes. Merritt proceeded to put his tired troopers in the saddle and on the road to Spottsylvania Court House as the infantry corps of Gouverneur K. Warren approached. In the darkness and confusion of the night march, however, the horsemen and foot soldiers became intermixed; the march was impeded for both as the confusion increased. Merritt was trying to straighten out the mess and Warren, much agitated by the delay, was complaining to him just as "Little Phil" rode up. Sheridan had just learned about the change in the cavalry orders and was furious about that and was worried that Wilson would push ahead, unsupported, and be defeated by a superior force. Merritt was frustrated by the orders and the mixup with Warren's infantry; so Sheridan, after berating Warren, had Merritt pull his troopers aside while the Fifth Corps straightened itself out and continued down the road to Spottsylvania Court House.¹³ The incident may have remained in Sheridan's mind until the following year, when he relieved Warren from command and thus ruined both the latter's career and reputation.

Sheridan's fears for Wilson's safety were well founded. The Third Cavalry Division charged into Spottsylvania Court House at dawn, expelling the Confederate cavalry holding the crossroads and approaches. Wilson held the position until driven out by the leading division of Lee's infantry. By 11 A.M. on May 8, Warren's infantry marched up to Spottsylvania Court House, but found the Confederate infantry already there and entrenching along a strong line north and east of the town. Lee had won the race.¹⁴

During the next two weeks, Meade attacked the Confederates repeatedly in their formidable positions, losing approximately 18,000 Union troops. Thus, the failure to occupy the crossroads and surrounding high ground was very costly. Grant later felt that "If Merritt's orders had not been changed by Meade, Merritt would have held the bridge at Todd's Tavern (supporting Wilson) and with two brigades of cavalry, detained Anderson long enough for Warren to reinforce Wilson and hold the town of Spottsylvania."¹⁵

The cavalrymen did not share the misfortune of the infantrymen, however, as Grant decided to "fight it out on this line, if it takes all summer." Sheridan conceived of himself as an actual commander of a fighting arm of the army, equal to any of the infantry corps commanders, rather than as a member of Meade's staff in charge of passing-on Meade's orders. With Wilson's division safely withdrawn from the front by noon on May 8, Sheridan decided to force his views upon Meade or to relinquish command of the Cavalry Corps.

Custer, entering Sheridan's headquarters, found "Little Phil" in a towering rage, red-faced and teeth gritting, over the morning's operations. As his rage subsided slightly, Sheridan went to Meade's headquarters, where he had an acrimonious interview with his commander. He accused Meade of interfering with his command and causing undue casualties; furthermore, he told Meade that if things were to continue as they were, he, Sheridan, would quit, and Meade could command the cavalry. Sheridan, however, did calm down enough to propose that, if permitted, he would unite his cavalry command and fight and defeat Stuart's Confederate cavalry. Meade's staff officers were shocked and scandalized by Sheridan's manner and by Meade's reaction to the attack. Meade reported the interview to Grant, who was not at all shocked or surprised, and he immediately authorized Meade to order the cavalry away from the army on an expedition to bring the Southern cavalry to battle and to defeat it. Sheridan knew his man.¹⁶

Sheridan was authorized to concentrate his command and immediately proceed against the enemy cavalry by marching toward Richmond and then to the James River. There he could resupply the command from General Benjamin Butler's Army of the James and return to the Army of the Potomac. Sheridan lost no time in carrying out these much-desired orders.

Merritt had camped for the night at Silver's Plantation, east of Spottsylvania Court House, when the news was received. He spent another sleepless night as orders

for the march were drawn up and delivered. At 4:30 A.M. the next morning, he led the First Cavalry Division out on the Plank Road to Fredricksburg on the expedition that established the reputation of the Federal cavalry and killed "Jeb" Stuart.¹⁷

Sheridan's plan was to march far enough around the eastern flanks of both armies so as to be undetected in the early stages of the expedition. He would then attempt to reach the south bank of the South Anna River, on the route toward Richmond, before engaging the Confederate Cavalry. By these means, Sheridan would be far enough from Lee's infantry that it could not march to the relief of Stuart's cavalry as he engaged the latter in a strictly cavalry fight.¹⁸

Well before dawn, with no bugles to awaken the troopers or to alert the enemy cavalry, Merritt led the Union horsemen through the clear and quiet night. The "column-of-fours" was thirteen miles long, and, quiet as it was, the sabers clanked against boots and saddlebags and aroused the local secessionist dogs, whose howling warned that their progress would not long be concealed. The morning was well advanced before the first Confederate patrols contacted the column, which moved at a walk. Sheridan was not engaged in a fast hit-and-run raid, as were all former Federal thrusts, but was after the Southern horsemen. The First Cavalry Division led the column, followed by Wilson and Gregg, in that order.¹⁹

On this expedition, Sheridan came to know and appreciate the qualities of the men who would be his chief lieutenants for the rest of the war. He needed success to establish his position and reputation as commander of an effective Cavalry Corps, and he demanded success from his subordinates. He was one of the harshest task-masters of the Civil War, and pleasing Sheridan required careful planning plus vigorous action. It was a tall order, and Merritt was one of the few able to meet Sheridan's expectations. Merritt got the opportunity to demonstrate not only his courage and "dash" but his responsible command of a division-sized force of approximately 3500 men. He was successful and cemented his relationship with Sheridan as a result. If a subordinate commander pleased Sheridan and became one of his intimates, some said "cronies," that commander was secure in his position. If, for whatever reason, Sheridan was displeased with a subordinate, that man was on his way out. Obviously, some injustice was done in following such an unstated policy. A few capable officers were dismissed unfairly, and a few less-capable officers were retained, but that was the way Sheridan ran his cavalry command for the balance of the Civil War--and well afterwards.

Merritt gave Custer his chance for recognition and glory on the first day out. Proceeding southward through Tabernacle Church, Thornburg, and Chilesburg, by late afternoon Merritt sent Custer and the Michigan Brigade ahead of the slow-moving main column to cross the North Anna River

and to capture and destroy Beaver Dam Station on the Virginia Central Railroad. Custer's men captured and destroyed two engines at the station along with a large number of railroad cars which were being used to transport some 300 Union prisoners to Richmond. Custer freed the prisoners and burned the depot and a large quantity of supplies stored at Beaver Dam Station. The column was "living off the land," and Custer permitted his troopers to take whatever supplies they could carry on their saddles. Merritt was irritated at such an irresponsible act. He felt that the act was "gaucherie" and that the burned supplies would have served the command well if distributed. The day's other successes, however, were so impressive and the losses so few, that neither he nor Sheridan took any corrective action, but the hasty burning and looting was never repeated.²⁰

About dark, Merritt crossed the rest of the First Cavalry Division to the south bank of the North Anna to support Custer and went into camp. On the morning of May 10, he protected the crossing as Sheridan brought Wilson's and Gregg's divisions across also. Stuart had by this time discovered Sheridan's route and intentions and was making a forced march to place himself between Sheridan and Richmond. During the day, patrols of Confederate cavalymen attacked the Federal column as it moved southward. By nightfall the First Cavalry Division, guarding the column's rear, was across the South Anna River and encamped near Ground Squirrel Bridge, reconstructed since Merritt had burned it a year

before during Stoneman's Raid.²¹

Stuart, in the meantime, was forcing his weary troopers toward Richmond. On the morning of May 11, Sheridan detached one brigade from Gregg's division on a side raid to destroy Ashland Station on the Richmond and Fredricksburg Railroad. These men reached Ashland and destroyed a railroad train and several miles of track before being attacked by a part of Stuart's cavalry. Stuart was already inferior in numbers to Sheridan, but he divided his forces, leaving part to follow the Ashland raiding party, while he took the rest on ahead toward Richmond. By 8 A.M. Stuart was near Yellow Tavern at the junction of Telegraph Road and Old Mountain Road, just east of present U.S. Highway 1, and six miles north of Richmond.²²

Merritt led the main Federal column eastward to Allen Station on the Richmond and Fredricksburg Railroad and began tearing up the tracks north and south of that point. His own Reserve Brigade was the leading element of the First Cavalry Division that day, and Merritt sent the Lancers out to the south to discover any approaching Confederates. Instead, they discovered Stuart going into position near Yellow Tavern and became engaged there. Merritt hurried the Regulars southward to support the Lancers, while he pressed forward with the rest of the division. As he reached the intersection near Yellow Tavern about 11 A.M., Merritt sent his Second Brigade, under Devin, in on the right of the Reserve Brigade. When Custer, next in line, came up, Merritt had him dismount

half of his brigade, leaving two regiments mounted. While Merritt was making these last dispositions, Stuart opened on Merritt's battle line with his horse artillery batteries, and Merritt pushed his dismounted troopers forward to locate Stuart's lines more accurately. While Merritt was thus engaged in setting the stage for the battle of Yellow Tavern, Sheridan arrived to direct the placement of the Second and Third Cavalry Divisions. Many of the troopers had never seen Sheridan and cheered as he passed with his distinctive headquarters guidon and staff.²³

Stuart's dismounted cavalry fought desperately, but Merritt's troopers forced them back until they reached a strong position at the timbered base of a ridge separated from the Federal forces by about 400 yards of open and slightly-rising field. Here Stuart opened a dense small-arms fire on Merritt, supported by artillery fire, which fortunately passed over the heads of the Union cavalrymen. Wilson's Third Cavalry Division came up and went into line on Merritt's flank as did one brigade of Gregg's Second Cavalry Division.²⁴

By 4 P.M., Sheridan had not yet come onto the field to personally direct the fighting, and Merritt determined to assault the imposing Confederate positions. Custer had discovered an approach to the Rebel artillery position which was practical for a mounted attack. He rode over to Merritt and requested permission to attack. Merritt replied, "Go in, General, I will give you all the support in my power." Merritt then ordered a general advance all along the line.

A Federal bugler sounded the advance, and the entire line surged forward. Custer sent the First Michigan Cavalry, followed by the Seventh Michigan Cavalry, forward at a walk, then a trot, then dashing at the Confederate cavalymen and artillery positions. The only mounted Confederate reserve countercharged the First Michigan but was broken by the Seventh Michigan troopers. As the dismounted Regulars and First Cavalry Division men reached their lines, Stuart's troopers broke for the rear, part going north toward Ashland and part south toward Richmond. In the confusion and stampede, one of the Michigan troopers shot and mortally wounded "Jeb" Stuart; he died the following day.²⁵

Sheridan was overjoyed as he joined Merritt on the field just as the general advance and Custer's charge were made. He sent an aide to Custer to congratulate him as soon as the attack proved successful. Merritt did likewise and was unstinting in his praise for "the intrepid commander of the First Brigade."²⁶

Newspaper reporters with Sheridan's column soon had accounts of the brilliant affair in print: the Battle of Yellow Tavern became one of the bright spots in the 1864 Virginia Campaign when it was compared with the inconclusive battles fought by Grant and Meade at the Wilderness and at Spottsylvania and to the unheard-of casualty lists that came in from the Army of the Potomac. The newspaper accounts highlighted Custer's gallant charge to the exclusion of the rest of the Cavalry Corps and started him on the road to

popular identification and fame.²⁷

The newspaper reporters were not going to get Sheridan safely past Richmond and on to his junction with General Butler on the James River, however. Wilson sent his men into the outer defenses of Richmond in the evening of May 11, while Sheridan followed cautiously. All night the cavalymen felt their way around the city to the southeast. The Rebels had planted torpedoes, the Civil War equivalent of land-mines, along the roads Sheridan had to take. These devices were connected to trip-wires strung across the roads, and they blew up several horses of the Reserve Brigade about 3 A.M. as the tired cavalry troopers marched within two and one-half miles of the Confederate capital. Besides being deadly, the mines betrayed the position of the column; the danger was only ended when the Confederate prisoners accompanying the column were sent in advance of the column to locate the offending devices. These men were not fond of the work and identified a nearby resident as the architect of their misfortunes; whereupon Sheridan visited the man, planted some of the torpedoes in his house, connected them to trip-wires across the road behind the column, and then persuaded the local, with his family, to accompany the column until safety should be reached.²⁸

No more trouble with torpedoes delayed the march, but at daylight on May 12, Sheridan was between the formidable defenses of Richmond, with infantry approaching to attack him, and the Chickahominy River. The river was swollen with recent

rains; to make matters worse, the portion of the Confederate cavalry that had retreated northward from Yellow Tavern was now commanded by Fitzhugh Lee, a formidable opponent. Lee came eastward, parallel with Sheridan's march, and was now north of the Chickahominy waiting to contest any crossing that Sheridan might attempt. Sheridan's whole expedition might fail without a rapid escape from what looked like a trap between the city and the river.²⁹

The command was just south of the Meadow Bridges across the Chickahominy. These two structures were a wagon bridge and a nearby railroad bridge, both wooden. The former had been burned, but the railroad bridge was only partially destroyed. It was imperative that the railroad bridge be repaired and the command passed over quickly. The job would have to be done by Sheridan's coolest and most reliable lieutenant; Merritt was assigned the task.³⁰

Merritt immediately put his whole division in motion to effect Sheridan's escape. The Rebels had moved into a strong defensive position beyond the far end of the bridge, with cavalry and a section of artillery posted behind hastily-constructed log barricades. Merritt sent Custer forward to cross the partially-destroyed railroad bridge and to fight off the enemy skirmishers so the rest of the division could rebuild the structure. The Fifth and Sixth Michigan raced across in the face of Confederate fire, and, miraculously, none were even hit. While these few troopers suppressed the Confederate fire, the rest of Merritt's men scoured the

vicinity for boards and beams with which to rebuild the bridge sufficiently for the heavy column to pass over. The work took only about two hours as the troopers worked feverishly, being swept occasionally by charges from the Rebel artillery. When the construction was completed, Merritt mounted parts of his Reserve Brigade and the First Brigade and charged the enemy breastworks in conjunction with the dismounted men of his division. Up the slope the cavalrymen rushed in a resolute assault which broke the Confederates.³¹

Protected by the First Cavalry Division, the rest of Sheridan's force crossed safely, and Sheridan moved on to join Butler's forces along the James River. The Meadow Bridge action was unimportant compared to the greater combats being fought during the same period, but it was a model operation, coolly and successfully carried out by Merritt, and Sheridan was impressed.

By May 14, only five days after leaving Meade's army at Spottsylvania Court House, the Cavalry Corps was at Haxall's Landing on the James River. There, Sheridan rested the men and horses for three days. He had shown that, with resolute and aggressive leadership, the Union cavalry could whip the Confederate horsemen and move safely through the Confederacy itself. The troopers were elated at their success, especially when word of Stuart's death reached the camp on the James River.

After resting and resupplying, Sheridan moved northward once again to join the Army of the Potomac. By May 20,

Merritt reached the Pamunkey River, near White House, and found the railroad bridge there destroyed. His recent bridge-building experience was again called upon as he put the First Cavalry Division to work; fifteen hours later, the structure was again useable. The entire column was across to the north side of the Pamunkey by May 22, and Merritt rejoined the Army of the Potomac, near Chesterfield Station, on May 25.³²

The sixteen-day expedition had far-reaching results. Sheridan had established himself as the active commander of a consolidated Cavalry Corps, co-equal with the infantry commanders. The Union troopers were pleased with their success and confident of their ability to operate independently of accompanying supply trains. Custer was on the nation's front pages and had impressed Sheridan, as well, with his aggressiveness. Merritt had solidified his position as the general officer on whom Sheridan could depend for vigorous, responsible, division leadership. Merritt never lost Sheridan's confidence thereafter.

The day after rejoining the army, Torbert returned to duty with the Cavalry Corps, and Merritt reverted once more to command of the Reserve Brigade. The Regulars were joined, for the 1864 campaigns, by an additional Volunteer regiment, the Nineteenth New York Cavalry, popularly known within the brigade as the First New York Dragoons, after their initial identification in the early days of the war. The Sixth Cavalry, much depleted by their misfortunes and severe fights of the previous year, was detached to act as Sheridan's escort.

The First, Second, and Fifth Regulars and Rush's Lancers readily accepted these veteran troopers, who added welcome strength to the Reserve Brigade, since they rode into camp armed with new Spencer repeating carbines. Their firepower would be needed in the near future for the dismounted fighting the brigade would undertake in the Virginia woods.³³

Grant and Meade had moved the Army of the Potomac southward after they had disengaged from the Battle of Spottsylvania and while Sheridan was completing his expedition. Now, as the cavalry returned, Grant decided to move still farther to his left, toward Richmond. The cavalry divisions of Torbert and Gregg were assigned the duty of screening Grant's movements from Lee and the Confederate cavalry. To accomplish this, Sheridan sent Gregg toward Haw's Shop, south of the Pamunkey River, and kept Torbert near the right flank of the army as it began crossing that river. Both divisions moved out of their camps on May 16. Merritt led the Reserve Brigade out about noon of that day, crossed a pontoon bridge thrown across the Pamunkey for the cavalry, and for two days covered the front and right of the infantry columns as they crossed the river.³⁴

The Confederate cavalry was not idle as Lee moved parallel to Grant, still trying to stay between the Federal Army and Richmond. After Stuart's death, the Southern cavalry had been reorganized into three divisions, commanded by Wade Hampton, Fitzhugh Lee, and "Rooney" Lee. On May 28, Hampton confronted Gregg, on the far right, with his own and

Fitzhugh Lee's cavalry divisions reinforced by a strong South Carolina brigade recently joined. Gregg was reinforced by Custer's brigade, since Custer was nearest the scene of conflict. A very serious and costly fight took place between these forces throughout the day of May 28, near Haw's Shop. Merritt brought his Reserve Brigade into line on Gregg's extreme right, but the main battle was fought on Gregg's and Custer's fronts, and Merritt was scarcely engaged. The repeating carbines of the Michigan Brigade finally overpowered the desperate and gallant Confederate resistance and ended one of the most sanguinary cavalry fights of the Civil War.³⁵

The Union cavalry immediately continued toward the southeast, screening the army's movements. On May 30, Merritt brought the Reserve Brigade to the relief of Devin's brigade as the latter fought the enemy horsemen at Matadequin Creek. A spirited attack, during which Merritt's old regiment, the Second Cavalry, charged with their pistols after having expended all their carbine ammunition, broke the Rebels and forced them back to a position near Old Cold Harbor. Merritt camped about one and one-half miles from this position that night.³⁶ The next day, May 31, was an important one for the Cavalry Corps, for the Army of the Potomac, and for Merritt and the Reserve Brigade.

Sheridan rode into Torbert's nearby headquarters during the morning and discussed the options that were available to them in pushing the Confederate cavalry away from the crossroads of Cold Harbor. By mid-afternoon, the plan which

emerged called for Merritt to push forward along the road leading into Cold Harbor, while Devin, with the Second Brigade, took another road and came out on Merritt's left for a concerted push. Merritt forced the Rebel cavalymen back to within a half-mile of Cold Harbor, but Devin's effort was not pressed, and as the enemy retreated into strong temporary breastworks of rails and earth placed across Merritt's line of advance, the Union attack was stopped.³⁷

A partial advance toward this enemy strongpoint convinced Merritt that the position could not be taken by frontal attack without great loss, if at all, but he sent word to Torbert that he thought he could outflank the enemy left and accomplish the same end. Torbert approved the idea and, meanwhile, put Custer's brigade into line on Merritt's left, connecting with Devin's brigade on the extreme left. By the time these maneuvers were complete, the Confederate cavalymen had been reinforced by an infantry brigade, making the task even more formidable. Merritt personally conducted the First and Second Cavalry around the line on a detour through the woods to the enemy left flank, while his remaining regiments, the Lancers and First New York Dragoons, kept the Confederates busy in front. In concert, the entire Federal line moved forward. Two of Custer's regiments, the First and Fifth Michigan, joined the Reserve Brigade in the main effort against the Confederate left; their increased firepower from repeating carbines, along with that of the Dragoons, was effective against the Southern infantry and

cavalry troopers. The flanking maneuver by the Regulars was the critical blow, however, as Merritt's men rolled up the Confederate line and sent them rushing for the rear. Merritt pushed the Rebels about three-quarters of a mile beyond Cold Harbor by nightfall, leaving Sheridan in control of the strategically important crossroads. Tolbert described it as an "eminently successful attack."³⁸

The extreme value of the position Merritt had captured was not apparent to Sheridan, as he had no indication that Meade would bring the Army of the Potomac through Cold Harbor. Accordingly, since the First Cavalry Division was advanced some nine miles in front of the nearest infantry and three or four miles from Gregg's Second Cavalry Division, Sheridan pulled Tolbert's men back to their old camps north of Cold Harbor after dark. Just as the weary Union troopers returned, Meade sent an urgent dispatch for Sheridan to hold Cold Harbor at all costs. Grant had not anticipated its capture by the cavalry, but now he determined to occupy the crossroads. His order meant another day of desperate fighting for Merritt and the Reserve Brigade, but in the meantime, the disgusted troopers would have to fight their way back to the positions they had just vacated.³⁹

Merritt approached the strong line of breastworks before dawn and found to his relief that the Confederates had not observed his withdrawal; consequently the position was still unoccupied. This was indeed fortunate, since the Confederate cavalry had retired after their rout of the

preceding evening, and their places were taken by advance elements of Lee's infantry. Merritt must have been reminded of Buford's cavalry stand on the first day of the battle of Gettysburg, as one of the Confederate infantry brigades desperately attacked his line early on the morning of June 1, while Meade hurried the leading infantry corps of the Army of the Potomac to his relief. The Second Cavalry and the First New York Dragoons bore the brunt of the attack by General Joseph B. Kershaw's Brigade of South Carolina infantry. For fifteen minutes the Confederate infantry assaulted the Union cavalymen, while the latter, lying down behind the strong breastworks, fired with terrible effect with their breach-loading Sharps carbines and repeating Spencers. The loss in the Reserve Brigade was slight in this fight where, for the first time, the cavalry was able to successfully contend with equal numbers of attacking infantry. As the Union troopers prepared for the next assault, a welcome sight met the eyes: from the rear came the glint of morning sunlight from bayonets as the Federal Sixth Corps marched up to relieve the cavalry. Never did the foot soldiers look better to Sheridan's troopers.⁴⁰

By 11 A.M. Merritt had been relieved from the Cold Harbor line and, with the rest of the First and Second Cavalry Divisions, had moved to the left flank of the army, near the Pamunkey River, to rest. Sheridan's cavalry was much exhausted by the week of bitter and active fighting, and for six days they were kept out of the active areas, recuperating their

strength.⁴¹

During that time Grant fought the Battle of Cold Harbor against Lee's entrenched Army of Northern Virginia, losing some 13,000 men as casualties. By June 6, Grant had decided that Lee's position was too strong to be successfully assaulted. Accordingly, Grant planned to move the Army of the Potomac to its left, crossing the James River southeast of Richmond, drawing Lee's army closer still to its capital, and continuing Grant's war of attrition. The huge Federal force would be vulnerable to cavalry attacks during the contemplated movement, and Meade ordered Sheridan to draw off the bulk of the Confederate horsemen toward the northwest of Richmond, away from the contemplated army crossing.⁴²

Merritt led his Reserve Brigade out of their camps on the Pamunkey early on the morning of June 7. Each trooper carried three days' rations for himself, two days' forage for his horse, and one hundred rounds of ammunition, as they left on Sheridan's second expedition. Sheridan had reduced the number of vehicles accompanying the expedition to a minimum in order not to impair mobility. Both the First and Second Cavalry Divisions were on the raid, about 6,000 troopers and attached horse artillery batteries. Sheridan's immediate objective was to strike the Virginia Central Railroad at Trevilian Station, some eight miles short of Gordonsville, destroy the railroad leading to Richmond at that point, and then to continue to Charlottesville where the Lynchburg branch of the same railroad would be cut. The strategic

objective, drawing the Rebel cavalry away from the James River, was almost immediately realized, as Wade Hampton and Fitzhugh Lee, with their cavalry divisions, and Breckenridge's infantry, followed the Blue horsemen. The immediate objectives were not as easily realized, and the Trevilian Station campaign was as close as Sheridan ever came to failure.⁴³

Merritt's men passed northwestward to Polecat Station on the first night out, then continued on through Chilesburg, New Market, and Mt. Pleasant, along the north bank of the North Anna River. By the evening of June 10, the entire command had crossed the North Anna and had encamped within three miles of the first objective, Trevilian Station and the Virginia Central Railroad.⁴⁴

With the enemy cavalry nearby, Merritt's troopers were in the saddle by 5 A.M. and were advancing, as the right of the battle line, toward Trevilian Station. Gregg's Second Cavalry Division was held in reserve by Sheridan, while Torbert's three brigades were sent forward. The country between the North Anna River and the line of the railroad was covered with dense undergrowth and timber. Sheridan, who generally disapproved of any attempt to send separated, converging columns into battle since he felt that the problems of coordination between the columns were almost insoluble, decided on just such a tactic on June 11.⁴⁵

As Merritt and Devin advanced, driving stubbornly resisting Confederate troopers before them, Custer took his Michigan Brigade around what was thought to be the right

flank of the enemy line. Instead, it was a temporary gap between the forces of Hampton and Lee. Custer had initial success, capturing Confederate wagons and supplies, but Lee quickly came up on the far side of Custer, almost trapping and annihilating his command. Custer's personal baggage and Negro servant were captured, although the latter escaped and rejoined him that night. In the Michigan Brigade, 242 men were captured during the day and were started on their way to Andersonville Prison, where eighty-eight of them perished.⁴⁶ By 5 P.M., Sheridan threw in one of Gregg's brigades to aid Custer's withdrawal, and the survivors of the First Brigade were extricated at last.

Merritt had, in the meantime, pushed his opponents through and beyond Trevilian Station. His losses were heavy in the tangles and woods, and especially so in his advance regiment, his own old Second Cavalry. Its commander, T. F. Rodenbough, was wounded seriously enough to take him out of action for the next three months. Merritt described the last phase of the first day's fight: "The enemy retreat finally became a rout; led horses, mounted men, and artillery all fled together in the wildest confusion." The Reserve Brigade, severely cut up, went into camp near Trevilian Station.⁴⁷

On the morning of June 12, Merritt sent out details to cooperate with the rest of Sheridan's troopers in destroying the Virginia Central Railroad. Sheridan apparently thought the Confederate cavalrymen had retreated or were permanently broken. He was surprised to find that Lee and

Hampton held a strongly entrenched position across the path that Sheridan would have to take in order to advance toward Gordonsville and Charlottesville. A general attack on this strong line was ordered, and about 3 P.M., Merritt sent the Reserve Brigade forward once more, as the extreme right of Torbert's line. The attack on the opposite end of the Union line was not vigorously pressed, and Hampton shifted fresh men to Merritt's front and around Merritt's right flank. The Lancers held the extreme right and were in extreme danger when Merritt again sent a squadron of the "Old Second Dragoons," his last mounted reserve, crashing into the Rebel cavalry. Merritt's position was stabilized, but he could not advance; neither could the other parts of the Union line. Sheridan withdrew them from the Confederates' front after dark, ending the Battle of Trevilian Station.⁴⁸

Merritt was highly praised for his actions during the fight. Torbert declared that "General Merritt and Colonel Devin particularly distinguished themselves for bravery and coolness in action." The Reserve Brigade lost almost one-third of its men, more than any other brigade engaged, even though Custer had lost heavily in the rash flanking maneuver. The First New York Dragoons and Second Cavalry were badly damaged. Considering the condition of the Union forces and the strength of the Rebels, Sheridan decided to return to the Army of the Potomac.⁴⁹

The column, slowed by crowds of Negroes who followed the Federal troopers and by the large number of wounded who

were transported through the dust and heat of the Virginia summer in ambulances, wagons, and commandeered buggies, made its way back to the vicinity of White House, on the Pamunkey River, by June 21. A huge train of 900 wagons waited at White House for an escort to join Grant's army, now safely across the James River in front of Petersburg. Sheridan's cavalry was given the duty of escorting this valuable supply train as it marched to rejoin Grant and Meade. The column headed south on June 24, fighting off determined attacks along the way. By June 29, the wagons safely crossed the James River on Pontoon bridges, and the Cavalry Corps, rejoined by Wilson's Third Cavalry Division, was relieved from active duty and sent back to Lighthouse Point, behind the left-rear of the Army of the Potomac, to rest and refit after fifty-six days of almost continuous marching and fighting.⁵⁰

For three weeks, Merritt received remounts to make up his horse losses from the recent campaigns, while recruits and dismounted men partially filled the depleted ranks of the Reserve Brigade. It was a time of quiet and rest for the weary troopers, but they had one more role to play with the Army of the Potomac.⁵¹

On July 26, the First and Second Cavalry Divisions were transported to the north side of the James River to cooperate with Hancock's Second Corps in a diversionary attack on the Confederate lines in front of Richmond. Preparations were underway, to the south, to breach the Rebel lines in front of Petersburg by exploding a gigantic mine. Grant wanted to

draw as many Confederate infantrymen northward as possible by the time set for the mine explosion, July 30.

Merritt, with the Reserve Brigade, marched to Deep Bottom and, on July 27, went into line on the left of the Second Corps. The Second Cavalry was advanced as skirmishers. Almost immediately the Confederate infantry attacked and pressed the troopers rapidly back, when,

With a cheer that makes our hearts pound, the 1st. New York, 1st. United States, and the 6th. Pennsylvania, on the run, dismounted, form themselves on our shattered lines. A few volleys from our carbines make the line of rebel infantry waver, and in an instant the cry is heard along our entire line, "Charge!" "Charge!" We rush forward, firing as we advance, the enemy's colors fall, and the North Carolina brigade breaks in complete rout. . . .⁵²

On the night of July 29, the infantry and cavalry were withdrawn to the south side of the James to participate in the assault that would follow the mine explosion. The Petersburg mine operation failed, as a bloody fiasco, and Sheridan took his weary cavalymen back into camp to await developments.⁵³

The first half of 1864 had been a rigorous period for Union cavalymen. Sheridan had succeeded in establishing their reputations as hard-fighting, aggressive horsemen. Stuart was dead, and the Rebel cavalry would never again defeat their Federal opponents. Custer's fame was growing, even though he had almost lost his command at Trevilian Station. Merritt's command of the First Cavalry Division had been highly commended by Sheridan, for the cavalry chief had the opportunity to work directly with Merritt and to

observe and appreciate his steady, competent style of fighting. Torbert, also, though unlike Merritt in personal characteristics, had relied on his Reserve Brigade commander for steady leadership in the hottest part of the fights at Cold Harbor and Trevilian Station, and the two had drawn closer together as confidants and commanders. Merritt had received brevet promotions as major, lieutenant colonel, and colonel in the Regular Army for meritorious conduct and gallantry at the battles of Gettysburg, Yellow Tavern, and, strangely enough, Haw's Shop, by mid-1864. These honorary ranks might have some value after the war, but as the ranking brigadier general of Volunteers in the First Cavalry Division, he was in a good position to advance his career through promotion in rank or level of command. Both would soon be his.

FOOTNOTES

Chapter 4

1. Rhodes, Essay, 54.
2. Longacre, "Pleasanton," 13, 19-20; Kidd, Cavalryman, 262.
3. O.R., XXXVI, Pt. 1, 787; Philip H. Sheridan, Personal Memoirs of P. H. Sheridan, I (New York, 1888), 348. Hereafter cited as Sheridan, Memoirs; Rhodes, Essay, 54.
4. Sheridan, Memoirs, I, 346.
5. Clarence Edward Macartney, Grant and His Generals (Freeport, N.Y., 1953), 142-43; Boatner, Civil War Dictionary, 459; Kidd, Cavalryman, 261.
6. Boatner, Civil War Dictionary, 842; Rodenbough, Photographic History, 251.
7. B&L, IV, 181.
8. O.R., XXXVI, Pt. 1, 787; Kidd, Cavalryman, 263; Hagemann, Rebels and Redskins, 221.
9. O.R., XXXVI, Pt. 1, 774, 788, 803; Monaghan, Custer, 190; Kidd, Cavalryman, 273-77.
10. O.R., XXXVI, Pt. 1, 775, 811; Sheridan, Memoirs, I, 364; Kidd, Cavalryman, 278-79.
11. Sheridan, Memoirs, I, 365.
12. O.R., XXXVI, Pt. 1, 788; Kidd, Cavalryman, 281, 283-84.
13. Sheridan, Memoirs, I, 366-67; Kidd, Cavalryman, 284.
14. O.R., XXXVI, Pt. 1, 788-89; Sheridan, Memoirs, I, 366-68.
15. B&L, IV, 182; U. S. Grant, Personal Memoirs of U. S. Grant, II (New York, 1885), 213. Hereafter cited as Grant, Memoirs.
16. Kidd, Cavalryman, 284; Sheridan, Memoirs, I, 368-69; Monaghan, Custer, 191.

17. O.R., XXXVI, Pt. 1, 812.
18. Ibid., 789.
19. Ibid., 812; B&L, IV, 189; Kidd, Cavalryman, 289-91.
20. O.R., XXXVI, Pt. 1, 812; Kidd, Cavalryman, 292-93; Hagemann, Rebels and Redskins, 231.
21. O.R., XXXVI, Pt. 1, 812-13; Kidd, Cavalryman, 294-95.
22. O.R., XXXVI, Pt. 1, 813; Sheridan, Memoirs, I 376-77; William W. Hassler, "Yellow Tavern," CWT, V (November, 1966), 8, 11.
23. O.R., XXXVI, Pt. 1, 813; "Yellow Tavern," 11; Kidd, Cavalryman, 296-97, 300; Sheridan, Memoirs, I, 376-77; Joseph Hergesheimer, Sheridan: A Military Narrative (Boston, 1931), 182.
24. O.R., XXXVI, Pt. 1, 790, 813; Kidd, Cavalryman, 303.
25. Hassler, "Yellow Tavern," 46; Monaghan, Custer, 193-95; Kidd, Cavalryman, 305.
26. O.R., XXXVI, Pt. 1, 813; Monaghan, Custer, 195; Custer to Elizabeth Custer, May 14, 1864, in Marguerite Merington, The Custer Story (New York, 1950), 97.
27. Wilson, Under The Old Flag, I, 407.
28. Sheridan, Memoirs, I, 380-81; Rodenbough, Second Dragoons, 535; Hagemann, Rebels and Redskins, 234-35.
29. Sheridan, Memoirs, I, 383-84; Kidd, Cavalryman, 308.
30. O.R., XXXVI, Pt. 1, 813; Kidd, Cavalryman, 309.
31. O.R., XXXVI, Pt. 1, 791, 814; Sheridan, Memoirs, I, 382; Kidd, Cavalryman, 310, 313.
32. O.R., XXXVI, Pt. 1, 788-89, 814-15; Kidd, Cavalryman, 314.
33. B&L, IV, 181, 193.
34. O.R., XXXVI, Pt. 1, 804, 848; Sheridan, Memoirs, I, 395-96.

35. O.R., XXXVI, Pt. 1, 804; Sheridan, Memoirs, I, 402; Kidd, Cavalryman, 321-22; Rhodés, Essay, 59.
36. O.R., XXXVI, Pt. 1, 794, 848.
37. Ibid., 805, 848-49; Sheridan, Memoirs, I, 405-406.
38. O.R., XXXVI, Pt. 1, 805, 849; Kidd, Cavalryman, 331.
39. O.R., XXXVI, Pt. 1, 806; B&L, IV, 193.
40. O.R., XXXVI, Pt. 1, 806, 849; Rodenbough, Second Dragoons, 536-37; Kidd, Cavalryman, 335.
41. O.R., XXXVI, Pt. 1, 806-849.
42. Sheridan, Memoirs, I, 413-14.
43. Ibid., 416-20; B&L, IV, 233; Kidd, Cavalryman, 345.
44. O.R. XXXVI, Pt. 1, 849; B&L, IV, 233.
45. Kidd, Cavalryman, 347.
46. Ibid.; O.R., XXXVI, Pt. 1, 849.
47. O.R., XXXVI, Pt. 1, 807, 850.
48. Ibid., 850-51; B&L, IV, 234; Kidd, Cavalryman, 263.
49. O.R., XXXVI, Pt. 1, 808; Kidd, Cavalryman, 367-68.
50. O.R., XXXVI, Pt. 1, 798-99; B&L, IV, 235-36.
51. O.R., XXXVI, Pt. 1, 789-800; Kidd, Cavalryman, 370.
52. O.R., XXXVI, Pt. 1, 800; B&L, IV, 236; Hagemann, Rebels and Redskins, 253.
53. O.R., XXXVI, Pt. 1, 801.

Chapter 5

SHENANDOAH VALLEY

I owe it all to my boys Merritt and Custer.

--Philip H. Sheridan

After his failure to break the Confederate lines around Richmond and Petersburg with the mine explosion, Grant drew the Army of the Potomac into a siege of the Army of Northern Virginia and the Rebel capital. As this seven-month operation began, other Southern forces were still actively opposing the Federals in Virginia.

The Confederate guerrilla leader, John Mosby, was more active than ever in Loudoun County and elsewhere in northern Virginia. Federal forces were rebuilding the Manassas Gap Railroad through "Mosby's Confederacy" from Washington and were occupying the surrounding region as well. The railroad activity and scattered Union forces acted as an irresistible attraction to Mosby's men, and by midsummer, they were more than a nuisance to Union commanders.

Some Confederate officers, including cavalryman Thomas Rosser, felt that Mosby's activities siphoned off potential recruits and supplies from the regular Confederate service and that Mosby was, everything considered, a nuisance to the Confederate cause and a service to the Federals. Grant disagreed with this estimate, however, and sought remedies for

the constant "irregular" depredations.¹

Easier to deal with, at least in theory, was the main Confederate force operating in the Shenandoah Valley and commanded by General Jubal Early. During June and July, 1864, this irrasible, but aggressive and capable, officer, leading "Stonewall" Jackson's old Second Corps, with attached cavalry, had driven two Union generals from the Shenandoah Valley. He then proceeded northward, toward the Potomac River, crossed it into Maryland, and marched toward the Federal capital. Huge numbers of Union troops had been required to defend Washington from just such threats since the early days of the Civil War, and Early's penetration was the deepest yet. Early had no intention of actually attempting to capture Washington. He planned to draw off as many Federals as possible from Grant's Army around Richmond and Petersberg and to protect the Shenandoah Valley, at least until the season's crops could be harvested and secured for the use of Lee's Army.²

By July 11, Early was fighting with Union defenders of Washington at Fort Stevens, near Silver Spring, north of the city. He withdrew the following day, having accomplished part of his mission, and recrossed the Potomac, taking up a position near Berryville, in the lower Shenandoah Valley between Winchester and Washington. From there he could also deny to the Federals use of the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad which ran through the lower Valley and connected Washington with the West.³

With the Army of the Potomac besieging Lee, Grant had relatively little occupation for the Cavalry Corps near Richmond. He decided to deal with Early and Mosby in their own territories and to deny to the Rebels any future use of the Shenandoah Valley, either as a commissary or as a sheltered pathway to the North. The instrument of his new policy would be a new army, independent of the Army of the Potomac, operating in the Shenandoah Valley. Philip Sheridan would command it, and Wesley Merritt would play a major role.

On August 1, 1864, two days after the mine explosion, Sheridan was temporarily removed from command of the Cavalry Corps of the Army of the Potomac and was assigned to a newly-created geographical command, the Middle Military Division. Since his operations would be directly involved with the defense of Washington and West Virginia, the Shenandoah Valley being the invasion route to both regions, the Departments of Washington and West Virginia were consolidated with the Middle Department and the Department of the Susquahanna into the new Middle Military Division. Sheridan could thus draw upon troops from these Departments in organizing his army.⁴

From the Army of the Potomac, Sheridan took with him the First Cavalry Division under Tolbert, the Sixth Infantry Corps under General Horatio Wright, and one division of the Nineteenth Corps. From West Virginia, two small infantry divisions, commanded, as the Eighth Corps, or the "Army of West Virginia," by Major General George Crook, were available,

as was one cavalry division, commanded by General William Averell, who had been transferred there after his dismal performance with the Army of the Potomac Cavalry in 1863. An additional small provisional cavalry brigade was attached to Sheridan's command. It was led by Colonel Charles Russell Lowell, Jr., a member of the well-known Massachusetts family, and a Regular cavalryman, and consisted of Lowell's own Second Massachusetts Cavalry regiment and detachments from many other scattered regiments gathered from the Department of Washington for the Shenandoah Valley campaign.⁵

Sheridan lost no time in organizing the new campaign. He left Grant's army, stopped off in Washington for further instructions, and by August 7, assumed command of the Middle Military Division and established his headquarters at Halltown, near Harper's Ferry, in the lower Shenandoah Valley. His forces were ordered to concentrate at that point.

Merritt broke up the camp of the Reserve Brigade on August 1, the same day Sheridan's orders were received. The Regulars were delighted at the news of their transfer to the Valley, as part of Torbert's First Cavalry Division. The region between Washington and Richmond, east of the Blue Ridge, was devastated by three years of war, and the prospect of campaigning in the more open, and less-ravaged Shenandoah Valley was attractive to the horsemen.⁶

Within a week, the Reserve Brigade had arrived at the Cavalry Depot at Giesboro Point, near Washington. From there Merritt led them through the city toward Sheridan's

concentration point. He took the occasion to indulge in a small luxury as his troopers passed through the main street of Georgetown. Merritt and some of the other cavalry officers dismounted and gorged themselves on ice cream in one of the streetside parlors as the Union horsemen filed past. Their commander quickly rejoined the column, and led them through Harper's Ferry, arriving at their camps near Halltown on August 9. Torbert had preceded Merritt to Sheridan's headquarters, and great changes had taken place in the organization of Sheridan's forces for the upcoming campaign.⁷

With a mixed force of infantry, artillery, and cavalry at his disposal, Sheridan's command of the cavalry now became merely supervisory. He felt that the two divisions of cavalry already enroute to his new army, Torbert's and Averell's, and Wilson's Third Cavalry Division from Grant's army, which had by now been ordered to join him, constituted too large a force to be adequately controlled by the army commander. Consequently, he created the position of chief-of-cavalry, in effect, commander of a cavalry corps, and assigned the post to Torbert.⁸

Merritt was promoted to command of the First Cavalry Division in Torbert's place. His temporary command of this division during Sheridan's first expedition and his subsequent field leadership paid off now as Sheridan staffed his army with officers upon whom he felt he could rely for aggressive, but prudent, action.⁹

Merritt's First Cavalry Division was the only cavalry force actually with Sheridan's army at Halltown as the fight for control of the Valley began. Averell, with the Second Division, was still enroute from West Virginia, and Wilson, with the Third Division, was enroute from Richmond. It would be more than a week before all the horsemen could unite under Torbert's control. In the meantime, Merritt would have to carry the entire burden of mounted action.¹⁰

To do so, he had approximately 3,500 troopers in four brigades. Custer commanded the First (Michigan) Brigade. Devin commanded the Second Brigade. The Third Brigade was led by Lowell, who had whipped his quickly-organized provisional brigade into shape by the time he joined Merritt on August 11. The Reserve Brigade acted as Merritt's fourth unit, but was, within a week, consolidated with Lowell's small brigade and put under Lowell's command. The Regulars, with the Second Massachusetts Cavalry replacing the First New York Dragoons in the brigade, fought out the rest of the Civil War, as they had since Gettysburg, under Wesley Merritt.¹¹

Merritt's brigade commanders, especially Devin and Lowell, were unusually competent cavalry officers. Devin, like Merritt, had been a favorite of John Buford. Buford had recommended Devin for promotion, but his death prevented the issue being pressed. Merritt always considered Devin, whose style of fighting resembled his own, his "Old War Horse" and was unstinting in his praise of Devin's courage

and reliability throughout the remainder of the war. Sheridan shared Merritt's appreciation, and Devin became one of "Sheridan's Boys"--but always as third-best.¹²

For Lowell, Merritt cultivated a genuine respect and friendship. Lowell and Merritt shared many common personal characteristics. They were neither lax nor unreasonably harsh in enforcing discipline within their commands. Both were cool and courageous in battle and modest in reporting their own achievements. Merritt was probably more ambitious for rank than Lowell, although the latter's short career under Sheridan does not allow a rigorous comparison. Both were rather formal and cool in performance of their official duties but were relaxed and friendly with their peers when time permitted. Lowell was the brother-in-law of Colonel Robert Shaw, who had commanded the war's most famous Negro regiment, the Fifty-Fourth Massachusetts, in the attack on Fort Wagner the previous year. Shaw's death and contemptuous burial by the Confederates, "with his niggers," stirred the North. Lowell, an articulate believer in Negro equality, may easily have contributed, along with Sheridan, to Merritt's change in attitude toward the basic issues of the war. Merritt had come, by mid-1864, to view Negro slavery, rather than disunion, as the major evil to be stamped out by the Federal forces. Lowell would almost certainly have become one of Sheridan's select inner circle, but he had only two more months to live.¹³

The relationship between Merritt and Custer at this time is more difficult to analyze. There is no evidence, in their correspondence, of any friendliness or unfriendliness. Merritt praised Custer during the August 1864, fights for "the masterly manner in which he handled his command."¹⁴ And Custer fought well throughout this campaign. Merritt was probably disgusted at the undeserved publicity heaped on Custer during the earlier 1864 campaign, but Custer was relatively moderate in his glory-hunting during the early weeks of the Shenandoah Valley campaign; so that there was little to excite the latent rivalry between the two young generals. Their rivalry would burst into the open in October, but for the present, Merritt could afford to give every opportunity to, and praise the success of, his subordinate.

All these relationships took time to develop, and there was little time available as Merritt marched into the Halltown encampment on August 9, commanding the Reserve Brigade, and marched out at 5 A.M. the next morning, commanding the First Cavalry Division and leading Sheridan's advance against Jubal Early. Sheridan had some 26,000 infantry and cavalry opposing Early, whose Confederate force numbered only slightly fewer--about 20,000. The Union forces, soon known as the Army of the Shenandoah although not so designated officially until November, pushed Early steadily southward from his position north of Winchester. Although Merritt's troopers engaged in brisk fighting with the Rebel cavalrymen

of General Lunsford Lomax, Early was indisposed to stand and fight until reinforcements, which he was daily expecting from Lee's army, arrived. By August 12, Merritt had pushed Early back to Fisher's Hill, a rugged defensive position south of Strasburg. The Union infantry followed up Merritt's gains, but were not seriously engaged in the fighting.¹⁵

That part of the Shenandoah Valley which was about to become the theater of battle differed from the lower Shenandoah Valley. The entire Valley is bordered on the east by the Blue Ridge, its important gaps connecting with the Confederate-held region around Charlottesville and Gordonsville. The Allegheny Mountains form its western border and run almost parallel to the Blue Ridge in a southwesterly direction from the Valley mouth on the Potomac River near Harper's Ferry and Martinsburg, West Virginia. The Shenandoah River flows northward into the Potomac. Strasburg lies about midway between the Potomac River and the upper limit of the Valley, south of Staunton. Near Strasburg, an isolated range, the Massanutten Mountains, rises to divide the region southward into two distinct valleys. The easternmost, through which the south branch of the Shenandoah River flows, is the Luray Valley. The western valley, containing the north branch of the Shenandoah River, retains the original name. The two branches join near Front Royal, at the entrance to the Luray Valley. From approximately sixty miles along the Potomac, the valley narrows in width to about twenty-five miles in the vicinity of Strasburg and Front

Royal. The Shenandoah Valley immediately south of Strasburg, where Early entrenched, is only some four or five miles wide and very rough. The remainder of the Valley, north and south, is generally open, with low rolling hills, interspersed with dense woods. It was an ideal arena for mounted operations, and it was here that Sheridan's cavalry made the reputation with which it would finish the Civil War.

Sheridan's instructions from Grant and Lincoln before the start of the campaign had both emphasized caution. Disaster to Federal forces in the Shenandoah Valley was commonplace. No further disaster could be tolerated, especially in view of the enormous amount of material and manpower Union forces could now bring to bear on the dwindling resources of the Confederacy. This need for caution conflicted with "Little Phil's" inclinations toward an aggressive offensive, but he was too much the professional soldier to let these inclinations get the best of common sense or to override his specific instructions.

Accordingly, Sheridan halted the Union advance. He had received information that Early was being reinforced by a large infantry and cavalry force from Richmond and was much irritated that Averell and Wilson, with their cavalry divisions, had not yet joined him. One thing Sheridan could not forgive in a general officer was tardiness or lack of effort in getting into position or in coming to his assistance. Within weeks, both of these commanders would be gone from the Army of the Shenandoah. He could count on the single

cavalry division already with the army not to be tardy, however, and he ordered Merritt to send one brigade, and then the whole First Cavalry Division, toward Front Royal. Merritt was to guard the left flank of the Union forces in the event the reported Confederate reinforcements intended not only to join Early, but to attack Sheridan's army from the east, in concert with Early. That was exactly what happened.¹⁶

Merritt accompanied Devin and Custer, with their brigades, to the vicinity of Cedarville and encamped them on the north bank of the Shenandoah River near the fords which any crossing infantry would have to use. He had not long to wait. About 2 P.M. on August 16, the Confederate cavalry brigade of General Williams C. Wickham splashed across the river and attacked Devin's pickets along the banks. Devin brought up his whole brigade in support of his hard-pressed pickets, and a severe engagement ensued, in which Devin was wounded, but refused to leave the field. Devin finally delivered a mounted charge that routed the Rebel horsemen and sent them back across the river.¹⁷

Merritt was not misled by Wickham's attack, which, by itself, would have been foolhardy indeed. He received word almost immediately after the cavalry attack was launched that Confederate infantry in large numbers were marching on the opposite bank of the Shenandoah to get around his left flank. The cavalry action was a mask for this serious infantry movement, which, if successful, would hit Sheridan's army in the flank while it was moving. Sheridan had decided to withdraw

northward down the Valley to a defensive position from which he could await a better opportunity to attack Early. He had already put his forces in motion and was vulnerable during the movement.¹⁸

Merritt countered the infantry attack with Custer's Michigan Brigade, supported by the Reserve Brigade. The Rebel infantry was General Kershaw's division, almost 4,000 veterans, just arriving from the vicinity of Culpepper, and the threat was serious. Merritt had Custer dismount one of the Michigan regiments along the crest of a hill overlooking the river crossing, while the remainder of the First Brigade, mounted, was held in support near the same hill. Merritt described the engagement which followed:

The enemy approached boldly, wading the river, and were allowed to approach within short carbine range, when a murderous volley was poured into their solid ranks, while the whole command charged. The enemy were thrown into the wildest confusion. They had met a resistance which they little expected; they were driven pell-mell into the river, losing a great number in killed and wounded, nearly 300 prisoners, and 2 stand of colors. Reinforcements were hurried up by the rebels, but came too late to retrieve the disaster of the day.¹⁹

This so-called "Battle of Cedarville" was a relatively minor engagement compared to others during the Shenandoah Valley campaign, but it was very important in its results. Merritt fought an almost perfect battle. He was highly praised for good judgment and gallantry by both Torbert and Sheridan. He combined the two basic tactics of the Union cavalry by using the heavy firepower available from the repeating carbines of Custer's dismounted troopers

to stop and hold the advancing Confederate infantrymen, while the shock of a mounted saber charge against the unentrenched foot soldiers broke their ranks. In addition, the Confederates, attacking cavalry in about equal numbers, began to doubt the ability, even of their infantry, to contend with the Union horsemen. The confidence of Merritt's men in their ability to fight both mounted and dismounted was likewise increased. The Federal Cavalry, at least in the Shenandoah Valley, had reached a peak of effectiveness toward which all the previous years of training and experience had aimed, and from which it never declined.²⁰

Merritt was not the only busy commander in the Valley on August 16. Sheridan started the Union infantry back toward the lower Valley during the night, since he was convinced that the only tenable defensive line was that around Halltown, from which he had advanced the week previous. Both Grant and Sheridan vastly overestimated Early's strength, which was approximately equal to Sheridan's in mid-August. Grant enjoined Sheridan to be cautious and to act on the defensive until planned Federal movements around Richmond should cause Early to detach some of his forces. Sheridan grew extremely anxious during the rest of the month, worrying that more reinforcements were being sent against him. Lowell observed that "General Sheridan is the most restless mortal--he would like a report every five minutes, if he could have one."²¹

Sheridan and Merritt had other problems as well. Mosby's Confederate guerrilla bands were active in Merritt's rear. They could raid into the Shenandoah Valley from the sanctuary of the nearby Blue Ridge and Loudoun County, across the mountains, and while their depredations were usually limited in scope, they were a severe annoyance. With the large number of supply trains supporting the Army of the Shenandoah, Mosby's men were attracted to the area in record numbers. While Merritt was fighting on August 16, he received word that the supply train of his First Cavalry Division had been attacked by Mosby while it was parked and inadequately guarded by a detail of "hundred-day men," near Berryville. Most of the train, including food and forage as well as regimental records and officers' baggage of the Reserve Brigade, was burned, causing considerable immediate discomfort to the Regulars. Numerous Union soldiers were killed and captured during this and other raids by the Confederate "irregulars." Their activities added considerably to Sheridan's anxieties.²²

These actions were the catalyst that finally made "total war" the policy of the Federal armies and brought a "scorched-earth" policy to the Shenandoah Valley. Grant and Sheridan agreed that the guerrilla sanctuary of Loudoun County, which provided shelter, supplies, forage, horses, and recruits for Mosby's bands, must be made to feel the consequences of its actions. Sheridan believed that war was not waged solely by the combatants, but that civilians, growing

indifferent to suffering and battle as long as they were not directly affected, contributed to its prolongation. His view of the solution was entirely practical. He observed:

Death is popularly considered the maximum of punishment in war, but it is not; reduction to poverty brings prayers for peace more surely and more quickly than does the destruction of human life, as the selfishness of man has demonstrated in more than one great conflict.²³

Grant authorized Sheridan to send a cavalry division through Loudoun County to destroy and carry off crops, animals, Negroes, and all men under fifty years of age capable of bearing arms. Grant felt that:

. . . in this way you will get many of Mosby's men. All male citizens under fifty can fairly be held as prisoners of war, not as citizen prisoners. If not already soldiers, they will be made so the moment the rebel army gets hold of them.

This harsh and revolutionary order was moderated by a subsequent dispatch from Grant:

In stripping Loudoun County of supplies, etc., impress from all loyal persons so that they may receive pay for what is taken from them. . . . Loudoun County has a large population of Quakers, who are all favorably disposed to the Union. These people may be exempted from arrest.²⁴

Sheridan had his hands full at the time and could not immediately comply with Grant's order. Every cavalry division at his disposal was needed to cover the withdrawal of the Federal forces. Destruction of Loudoun County would have to wait, but, inevitably, its time would come. Sheridan was able, however, to apply his and Grant's policy to the part of the Shenandoah Valley then occupied by Merritt's cavalry. Merritt was ordered to burn all crops in the

valley between Strasburg and Winchester and to seize all livestock that would be useful to the army. Loyal citizens could bring in claims against the Government for this necessary destruction.²⁵

Merritt was ordered to cover the army's withdrawal on August 17, and to begin this first phase of the destruction of the Shenandoah Valley as he fell back. The duty, not among the most agreeable assigned to him, was thoroughly accomplished. Merritt's details of cavalymen stretched across the Valley, burning everything in the shape of subsistence and forage and driving off all serviceable livestock. No other private property and no person or family was injured. By the eighteenth, the First Cavalry Division reached the village of Berryville.²⁶

The good people of Berryville felt that Merritt and the Reserve Brigade, whose trains had recently been burned in their town, might take the opportunity to retaliate on them. Indeed, Merritt organized a search of local houses for any goods taken from the destroyed wagons. He received a letter from the citizens of Berryville asking for forbearance and claiming that they had tried to stop Mosby from destroying Merritt's train, etc.. Merritt was notably unimpressed with their claims, and after several of his troopers near Berryville were killed or captured by Mosby during the next few days, Merritt received permission to seize and hold local males as hostages. Before long, a "motley crowd of men of all ages and conditions, from well-to-do farmers

to poor white trash" was collected. No harm came to them beyond being subjected, for a few hours, to the fatigue and fright incident to their capture.²⁷

By August 21, Sheridan had his infantry drawn back to the vicinity of Charlestown, with the cavalry screening it. Merritt was still near Berryville, and Wilson, who had joined Sheridan with the Third Cavalry Division, was on Merritt's right, covering the Union front as far as Smithfield. Against this position, Early and General Richard H. Anderson, commanding the reinforcements sent to Early, moved in a coordinated attack which Merritt, on the Union left, and Wilson, on the right, resisted. As Merritt maneuvered his division, he both trained and amused his brigade commanders by withdrawing them "in echelon, by brigades"--each brigade alternately facing the enemy and retiring. It sharpened the skills of all concerned, and contrasted sharply with their earlier abilities when the cavalry officers practiced moving wooden blocks on the mess-hall table back in Washington during the first winter of the war. The tenacity of the Confederate attack convinced Sheridan of the correctness of his rearward movement, and he moved his army back to the strong defenses around Halltown.²⁸

As Sheridan waited, the infantry forces built up their strength rapidly, and Averell arrived with the Second Cavalry Division, boosting the cavalry strength to approximately 9,000 troopers. Sheridan still expected Grant's

activities around Richmond and Petersburg to require the return of Early's reinforcements, so he kept the cavalry forces constantly skirmishing with Confederate pickets in order to determine Early's strength and position. There were long days of fighting for Merritt's men as well as for the other two mounted divisions. On August 25, Torbert moved all the cavalry forces westward from Sheridan's front to investigate a reported move northward by Fitzhugh Lee's cavalrymen. Near Leesburg, Merritt ran into a marching column of Rebel infantry. In the mutual surprise, the Confederates were driven back almost a mile, but soon recovered, and, reinforced by Early, counterattacked. Custer's brigade was almost surrounded and cut off, but Merritt sent Devin's brigade in to attack Custer's opponents, and Custer was able to retreat across the Potomac River into Maryland and double back to rejoin Merritt after dark. As night fell, Merritt had his other brigades safely back into the lines before Halltown. Wilson came in shortly, and a serious reversal was averted.²⁹

This action around Leetown was not one of Torbert's better fights. Merritt fought adequately, but not brilliantly, and all-in all, it was a dismal day for the Union horsemen. Much internal dissension resulted. Averell had not even been engaged, and as a result of bad intelligence, was across the Potomac in Maryland guarding against an invasion of the North. Custer was furious. He felt that his Michigan Brigade had been left by Torbert to shift for

itself and that he had had a gallant, but narrow, escape. Wilson, jealous of Merritt, who had been promoted to brigadier general before Wilson, was irritated at what he believed was a conspiracy between Merritt and Torbert to let Wilson's division fight the Rebels alone. One of Wilson's staff officers reportedly overheard Merritt advise Torbert to keep Wilson in the rear during the day's fighting so that Wilson could take the brunt of the enemy attack and allow Merritt and Torbert to "return leisurely to their camps at Sheperdstown."³⁰ It is highly unlikely that, in the middle of a desperate fight involving his entire division, Merritt would be concerned with a leisurely retreat to camp, but he and Torbert did undoubtedly discuss coordination between the First and Third Cavalry Divisions. Nevertheless, Wilson believed the tale, and that could only hurt future joint operations.

Neither Sheridan nor Torbert had time to attempt to straighten out all these potential problems. Sheridan's anxiety about Early's strength and plans was not helped by General Averell, commanding the Second Cavalry Division. Averell was senior to Torbert, his superior as chief-of-cavalry. Averell was much upset over this anomaly, and Sheridan had to wire the Secretary of War to promote Torbert in order to secure a degree of cooperation from Averell. All these irritations added to Sheridan's troubles in late August as he waited for the right moment in which to strike Early a mortal blow.³¹

On the twenty-eighth of August, Sheridan moved the Army of the Shenandoah forward once more. Merritt marched the First Cavalry Division through Leetown in advance of the infantry and engaged in a ringing saber charge against Confederate cavalry guarding the bridges over the Opequon River. He camped along the Opequon that night, but was driven from the bridges the next morning when Early's infantry attacked him in turn. Merritt ordered the Reserve Brigade to fall back slowly before the infantry advance. He had Custer hastily throw up log barricades behind the Regulars and hoped to draw Early's troops into the intervals between these manned barricades and thereby attack his flanks from relative safety. Early refused the bait, and Merritt withdrew to the old defensive line before Halltown, still screening the center of Sheridan's army.³²

For almost three weeks, Sheridan, under increasing criticism for seeming inaction and under extreme pressure to attack, waited in the Halltown lines. By mid-September, he had almost 45,000 men in the field, including Torbert's 9,000 cavalry troopers. Opposed to him, Early had only some 17,000 effectives, including 3,000 cavalrymen in Lomax' and Fitzhugh Lee's divisions.³³

Merritt's First Cavalry Division had taken heavy losses during the preceding month. None of his fights could really be described as full-scale "battles," but his troopers had been skirmishing and fighting continuously. The Regulars of the Reserve Brigade suffered heavily. In

one regiment, Merritt's old Second Cavalry, Captain Rodenbough returned from sick leave, having been seriously wounded at Trevilian Station, to find only four officers on duty with the regiment. They were able to recover their strength somewhat during early September, however. The supply lines from Washington and Harper's Ferry were short and effective, and Merritt was able to feed, equip, and mount his men with a minimum of difficulty. By mid-month, they were ready to start the real fighting of the Shenandoah Valley campaign.³⁴

Early had withdrawn his army to the vicinity of Winchester and had positioned it along the Valley Pike, the main, macadamized thoroughfare running the length of the Shenandoah Valley. On September 15, Sheridan received the news he had waited for; Kershaw's infantry division and accompanying artillery had been sent back to Lee's army at Richmond, reducing Early's strength by almost 4,000 men. Sheridan moved the Army of the Shenandoah slowly southward to Clifton, six miles east of the Opequon, and some twelve miles from Winchester. He planned to let Kershaw move far enough from Early so as to be unable to retrace his route and again reinforce the Confederate chief. Sheridan planned a surprise attack across the Opequon, attacking Early at Winchester in the early hours of September 19.³⁵

Wilson's Third Cavalry Division would cross the river, cut it way south of Winchester to the Valley Pike, and block Early's escape up the Valley. Crook's infantry

corps would support Wilson's thrust, and the infantry corps of Horatio Wright and William Emory would drive Early's lines westward into Winchester. Merritt's First Cavalry Division would move to the north of the Union infantry, connecting with Averell's Second Cavalry Division near Stephenson's Depot, four miles north of Winchester on the Valley Pike. Together, these two divisions would drive into Winchester, trapping Early in or south of the town.³⁶

It was a good plan, but there were flaws in it, mostly of a topographical nature. The Obequon is neither deep nor wide, but its banks are heavily timbered and deeply cut, limiting the number of fords available for crossing large bodies of men. Additionally, the countryside between the river and the Valley Pike is hilly, and these hills command the roads leading from many of the fords toward Winchester and Stephenson's Depot. A more careful examination of the area might at least have found a better approach route for Merritt's division.

Merritt was embarking on perhaps his most dramatic victory, but its early stages were not promising. He had the three brigades of the First Cavalry Division in the saddle and moving toward his assigned crossing of the Opequon by 2 A.M. on the nineteenth. Rebel cavalry pickets at the fords retired to the west bank, and there the infantry resisted his crossing. Merritt arrived at the Opequon just at dawn and sent Custer farther north to Locke's Ford to attempt outflanking the opposing infantry. Merritt sent

the Reserve Brigade across at Ridgeway's, or Seiver's, Ford, supported by Devin's Second Brigade. The Second and Fifth Regular Cavalry and the Second Massachusetts Cavalry charged down the slope, across the river, and up the opposite incline in the face of a galling fire from Confederate infantrymen. By sunrise, all three brigades were across the Opequon, and Custer's Michiganders had joined their line with the Reserve Brigade for a concerted push intended to drive the Rebels steadily westward toward Stephenson's Depot and the junction with Averell's division.³⁷

The enemy contested every foot Merritt gained. Instead of the light infantry picket detail which had been expected, the Confederates were General John C. Breckenridge's infantry division. The line of advance led the Union troopers into a deep valley, bordered by thick underbrush and a steep-sided ridge, and where the road to Stephenson's turned slightly, fronted by a formidable, commanding hill. Breckenridge's men had thrown up rail barricades on these heights, and were supported by artillery. The Federal troopers pushed forward slowly and dismounted. The sound of artillery fire and the rattle of musketry indicated that Sheridan's main thrust was underway on their left. By 11 A.M. Merritt's men advanced only about one mile when they arrived at this barricaded "Second Gibraltar." Merritt threw Custer's Brigade and the Second Cavalry at the Rebel position in a furious charge. The Regulars and the Michigan troopers galloped to the muzzles

of the Rebel guns in the face of a fearful musket fire, but no human force could have taken the position under the circumstances, and the gallant charge failed.³⁸

Merritt was checked, but instead of foolishly ordering another charge, now that the actual strength of the opposing position was known, he waited for events on the other parts of the field to solve his problem. Early desperately needed Breckenridge's infantry by early afternoon and withdrew it, leaving only a few infantrymen to support the Confederate cavalry opposing Merritt. Merritt saw his chance about 1:30 P.M. and ordered a general advance.

Devin's fresh Second Brigade charged the barricaded cavalry position and drove the Southern troopers out and away through the woods. While Merritt advanced, Averell drove his opponents southward along the Valley Pike toward Winchester, and within a half-hour both divisions were united along the Valley Pike just south of Stephenson's Depot and were ready for the final blow to Early.³⁹

Merritt immediately began to move down the turnpike toward the Confederate left flank, which was guarded by Fitzhugh Lee's cavalrymen. Merritt placed his entire division on the left of the road, while Averell placed his division abreast of Merritt on the opposite side. An hour's careful advance, for no word had reached Merritt of the events taking place elsewhere on the battlefield, brought him to Lee's troopers. Instantly he sent Devin's men crashing into the Rebels, and then Custer added his force

to the charge. The enemy horsemen were routed and fled pell-mell into and through Winchester and out of the battle.⁴⁰

Merritt continued toward Winchester, as Averell led his division off to the right in an attempt to get around the Confederate flank. A six-gun battery opened on the First Cavalry Division as it approached the outskirts of Winchester. Devin instantly charged this artillery and its infantry supports, showering saber blows on their heads and shoulders, trampling them under the horses' feet, and routing them. Lowell led the Reserve Brigade into a furious mounted charge on Devin's left against another annoying battery. A withering fire staggered his column, but the Regulars burst through the artillerists and infantrymen, losing heavily in the process. Lowell, with Rodenbough of the Second Cavalry and four troopers, rode straight at one of the Rebel guns and took it, but Rodenbough's arm was blown off in the effort, and his fighting days were over. Merritt brought Custer's brigade forward to cover the other two brigades as they reformed and slowly moved toward the Confederates' final defensive positions.⁴¹

One of the grandest spectacles of the Civil War now presented itself. Early positioned Breckenridge's infantry, as his last reserve, across Merritt's line of advance. These Confederate infantrymen were as brave as any on the continent, but they were reduced in number and faced a fearful sight. Merritt reformed his entire cavalry division, dressed the ranks, and marched toward Breckenridge. Seldom,

if ever, did such an opportunity for a classic saber charge by such a huge force offer itself during the Civil War. As Merritt's men emerged from woods along the turnpike, an imposing and dramatic spectacle unfolded. On a front of more than half a mile, the blue-clad troopers, three lines deep, horses snorting with excitement and guidons fluttering, drew sabers and awaited Merritt's command. The whole division charged with a shout, and Merritt described the event, one of the great moments of his life:

The gallant Custer led it; boot to boot these brave horsemen rode in. The enemy's line broke into a thousand fragments under the shock. The Reserve Brigade followed the blow, and all was lost to the enemy. Many of them threw down their arms and cried for mercy; others hung tenaciously to their muskets . . . and the miserable remnant of Early's army fled madly through the streets of Winchester.⁴²

Early's whole line collapsed at the same moment, but the planned thrust by Wilson's Third Cavalry Division and Crook's Eighth Corps to cut the Confederates off south of Winchester could not be accomplished, and night saved many of Early's survivors to fight another day.

Merritt was praised for his fine performance at Winchester. Torbert credited Merritt's division with the capture of 775 enlisted prisoners, about 70 officers, 7 battleflags, and 2 pieces of artillery. The rivalry with Custer re-emerged after the battle, however, when Custer became irritated that he, rather than Merritt, was not credited with the lion's share of the captures, even though Merritt was unstinting in his praise for Custer's role and

accomplishments. John Willis Merritt reported to his Illinois readers on Wesley Merritt's part in the great battle, but gave the story considerably less space than he accorded the local political news.⁴³

The battle itself was important political news, however. To the Northern electorate, as the presidential election of 1864 approached, Grant's operations before Petersburg looked dismal. Now, just a month and a half before the election, a genuine and significant victory was dramatically announced to the relieved nation. Lincoln was grateful to Sheridan, and that gratitude would soon filter down to Merritt, as a leading figure in the victory.

FOOTNOTES

Chapter 5

1. Emerson, Lowell, 466-67; John W. Munsun, Reminiscences of a Mosby Guerrilla (New York, 1906), 231.

2. Edward J. Stackpole, Sheridan in the Shenandoah: Jubal Early's Nemesis (Harrisburg, Pa., 1961), *Passim*, 45-78.

3. B&L, IV, 501. Merritt contributed the article, "Sheridan in the Shenandoah Valley." Hereafter cited as Merritt, "Shenandoah Valley."

4. Sheridan, Memoirs, I, 452, 466.

5. O.R., XLIII, Pt. 1, 40; Emerson, Lowell, 41.

6. Merritt, "Shenandoah Valley," 501; Rodenbough, Second Dragoons, 336.

7. O.R., XLIII, Pt. 1, 89-90, 421.

8. O.R., XLIII, Pt. 1, 421; Sheridan, Memoirs, I, 472.

9. George E. Pond, The Shenandoah Valley in 1864, Campaigns of the Civil War, XI (Philadelphia, 1883), 121; Sheridan, Memoirs, I, 474.

10. O.R., XLIII, Pt. 1, 42, 423.

11. Emerson, Lowell, 322, 337, 360-61 f.n.

12. O.R., XLIII, Pt. 1, 444; Henry E. Tremaine, Last Hours of Sheridan's Cavalry (New York, 1904), 37-38. Tremaine served as a staff officer in the Cavalry Corps.

13. James M. McPherson, Marching Toward Freedom: The Negro in the Civil War, 1861-1865 (New York, 1965), 102.

14. O.R., XLIII, Pt. 1, 439.

15. Ibid., 17-18, 438; B&L, IV, 532; Pond, Shenandoah Valley, 120.

16. O.R., XLIII, Pt. 1, 18-19; Merritt, "Shenandoah Valley," 502.

17. O.R., XLIII, Pt. 1, 423, 429.

18. Kidd, Cavalryman, 376-77; Sheridan, Memoirs, I, 488-89.
19. O.R., XLIII, Pt. 1, 439; B&L, IV, 532.
20. O.R., XLIII, Pt. 1, 19, 423, 503, 822; Richard Wormser, The Yellowlegs: The Story of the United States Cavalry (Garden City, N.Y., 1966), 245.
21. O.R., XLIII, Pt. 1, 856-57; Emerson, Lowell, 329-30.
22. O.R., XLIII, Pt. 1, 632, 633-64; Rodenbough, Second Dragoons, 341-42: Capt. W. H. Harrison of the Reserve Brigade contributed Chapter XXVI, "Personal Recollections-- Deep Bottom to Winchester." Hereafter cited as Harrison, "Recollections."
23. Sheridan, Memoirs, I, 487-88.
24. Ibid., 486.
25. O.R., XLIII, Pt. 1, 343, 440.
26. Ibid., 440; Harrison, "Recollections," 343.
27. Citizens of Berryville, Virginia, to Merritt, n.d., August 18 or 19, 1864, War Papers of Gen. Merritt, RG 94, NA; O.R., XLIII, Pt. 1, 440, 846-47; Harrison, "Recollections," 342-43.
28. Harrison, "Recollections," 344; Pond, Shenandoah Valley, 134.
29. Harrison, "Recollections," 345; Merritt, "Shenandoah Valley," 504-505; Wilson, Under The Old Flag, I, 543; Monaghan, Custer, 204.
30. O.R., XLIII, Pt. 1, 425; Kidd, Cavalryman, 380-83; Wilson, Under The Old Flag, I, 542; Macartney, Grant, 143.
31. O.R., XLIII, Pt. 1, 857.
32. Ibid., 426; Merritt, "Shenandoah Valley," 505; Harrison, "Recollections," 345-47; Hagemann, Rebels and Redskins, 265.
33. B&L, IV, 524; Merritt, "Shenandoah Valley," 506.
34. Harrison, "Recollections," 348.
35. O.R., XLIII, Pt. 1, 46; Sheridan, Memoirs, II, 11.

36. Ibid.; AAG, Cavalry Command, Middle Mil. Dist., to Merritt, Sept. 18, 1864, War Papers of Gen. Merritt, RG 94, NA.

37. O.R., XLIII, Pt. 1, 443-44; Kidd, Cavalryman, 385; Harrison, "Recollections," 348-49; Rodenbough, Second Dragoons, 385: Capt. Robert Smith of the Reserve Brigade contributed Chapter XXVII, "Personal Recollections--Fisher's Hill to Cedar Creek." Hereafter cited as Smith, "Recollections."

38. O.R., XLIII, Pt. 1, 444; Smith, "Recollections," 355; Hagemann, Rebels and Redskins, 267.

39. O.R., XLIII, Pt. 1, 444.

40. Ibid.; Emerson, Lowell, 464.

41. O.R., XLIII, Pt. 1, 445; Merritt to Custer, Sept. 19, 1864, War Papers of Gen. Merritt, RG 94, NA; Emerson, Lowell, 57.

42. O.R., XLIII, Pt. 1, 445; Joseph P. Cullen, "The Battle of Winchester," CWT, VI (May, 1967), 42; Kidd, Cavalryman, 390.

43. O.R., XLIII, Pt. 1, 427; Salem Advocate (Ill.), Sept. 29, 1864; Monaghan, Custer, 209.

Chapter 6

CEDAR CREEK AND LOUDOUN COUNTY

The ultimate result of the guerrilla system of warfare is the total destruction of all private rights in the country occupied by such parties. This destruction may as well commence at once. --Philip H. Sheridan

Jubal Early was beaten but not broken at the Battle of Winchester. Sheridan lost no time, however, in trying to bring about final Confederate defeat in the Shenandoah Valley.

After having pursued Early's fleeing men along the Valley Pike toward Strasburg until ordered to encamp for the night, Merritt led his weary troopers after Early the next morning. Early quickly established his army on a strong, entrenched, defensive line along Fisher's Hill, southwest of Strasburg, the best position available in the Shenandoah Valley, as Sheridan came up with him on September 21. The Confederates had an observation and signal station atop Massanutten Mountain, looking down on Union movements, so that surprise was very difficult. Nevertheless, Sheridan planned to turn Early out of his entrenchments at Fisher's Hill the next day, and he did, sending him fleeing up the Valley toward Staunton. But another victory was not enough. Sheridan aimed at annihilating the Rebel forces in the

Valley. Early had escaped what looked like an entrapment at Winchester, and Sheridan moved to prevent escape after the victory Sheridan planned for September 22.

Sheridan's plan was simple. He ordered Torbert to take Wilson's Third Cavalry Division and two of Merritt's brigades around to the east through the Luray Valley and come out south of Early's forces on the Valley Pike near Harrisonburg. Torbert's march would have the added effect of forcing Early out of his position at Fisher's Mill in case Sheridan's infantry attack was not successful. It was Torbert's chance to perform a valuable service for his chief, yet he failed. Few things displeased Sheridan more.²

By mid-day on September 22, as Sheridan was routing Early at Fisher's Hill, Torbert passed through Front Royal and advanced approximately six miles up the Luray Valley, where he ran into heavy Confederate resistance. Early had anticipated Torbert's move, and had sent Wickham's Rebel cavalry division into the Luray Valley. Wickham entrenched along the south bank of Millford Creek, with his flanks protected by the Shenandoah River and the Blue Ridge. It was a formidable position; after a feeble attack during which Merritt was scarcely engaged, Torbert withdrew. His action became very controversial and eventually led to his replacement as chief-of-cavalry. Torbert claimed that the position was too strong to be taken by his force. Colonel Kidd, who would soon command Merritt's First Brigade, was frustrated and angry at the withdrawal after what he felt was little

fighting. He claimed that "If Custer or Merritt had been in command, it would have been different." Merritt was completely noncommittal and merely reported that "It having been decided impractical to carry the position without great loss of life, it was decided to withdraw both divisions."³

It was one of the times during the Civil War when Merritt was fortunate in not being in overall command when an operation went sour. He never afterward commented on what he thought should have been done, so we do not know whether he would have attempted to break through Wickham's lines at all cost or would have risked his standing with Sheridan by withdrawing. Torbert's decision was looked upon by Sheridan as indicating a definite lack of capacity and aggressiveness; "Little Phil" was angry and greatly disappointed when, once more, Early escaped destruction.⁴

Merritt's Luray Valley adventures were not over, however. As he withdrew toward Front Royal after Torbert decided not to attempt further operations, the advance guard and ambulance train of the Reserve Brigade passed through a deep gorge and were ambushed by a band of about seventy of Mosby's men. The Second Cavalry charged and surprised the guerrillas, killing eighteen and capturing thirteen in a chase through the wooded hills. Since one of the Regular officers, Lieutenant Charles McMasters, was killed by the Mosby men after having surrendered, the Regulars and other First Division troopers were furious and could scarcely be restrained from retaliating on the Rebel prisoners. In fact,

the next day, Custer, who had also captured a group of Mosby's men, shot four of the prisoners and hanged two more on the outskirts of Front Royal. Mosby was absent from the command at the time and later claimed that both Torbert and Merritt condoned the execution but left the dirty work to the willing Custer. There is little evidence for or against the assertion. Merritt never mistreated prisoners either before or after the event, but it is possible that his patience was exhausted by the hit and run tactics and brutality of Mosby's guerrillas. Mosby retaliated in November by hanging five of Custer's men near Berryville. With that action, regardless of its merits, not only Merritt's, but Sheridan's patience as well, was at an end.⁵

As soon as Sheridan learned of Torbert's retreat, he immediately ordered that officer to turn his command about and march rapidly through the Luray Valley in the hope of catching the fleeing Jubal Early. Merritt fought Wickham's cavalry near the town of Luray, easily dislodging the Confederates, who only needed to fall back slowly in order to cover Early's retreat. Torbert did not hurry the pursuit; when he and Merritt rejoined Sheridan's main column near New Market, on September 25, Early was already past that point on his way to a stronger defensive position east of Staunton where he could rest and be reinforced from Lee's army.⁶

While Merritt was separated from Sheridan, and shortly after they were reunited, two changes in the cavalry

command took place which affected Merritt indirectly, but significantly. Sheridan never got along well with Averell, who lacked the aggressive spirit and drive that Sheridan demanded. Sheridan relieved Averell from command of the Second Cavalry Division, while Torbert and Merritt were in the Luray Valley, for showing a lack of enterprise during the pursuit of Early following the battle at Fisher's Hill. Custer was elevated to command of Averell's division, but hardly had time to exercise it before the next major organizational change took place.⁷

Wilson, commanding the Third Cavalry Division was transferred to Sherman's army in Georgia, as chief-of-cavalry, opening yet another position as division commander. Sheridan showed no sorrow at Wilson's departure. Wilson had not seriously displeased Sheridan, but somehow he had not particularly impressed him either. Wilson showed little reluctance to leave and went on to establish a brilliant reputation for himself during the remaining months of the Civil War. The Second Cavalry Division, to which Custer had been assigned, actually "belonged" to Crook's Army of West Virginia; in the event Sheridan rejoined the Army of the Potomac, the Second Cavalry Division would probably not accompany him, while the Third Cavalry Division would. Accordingly, he reassigned Custer to the command of the Third Cavalry Division.⁸

Custer rode away from his famed Michigan Brigade, leaving Kidd to command the brigade, under Merritt, for the

rest of the campaign. Custer's rivalry with Merritt could now become overt since the two young generals held equivalent commands that provided a great deal of opportunity for independent action. Whether by accident or design, Custer had always been placed by Sheridan under a sober and careful chief, either Torbert or Merritt. Now, with Torbert being in disrepute with Sheridan, Custer's unbridled spirit would know few restraints. The only obvious change in Custer's behavior was that, perhaps on Sheridan's request, he discarded his black velvet costume, retaining only the sailor shirt, wide hat, red cravat, and gilt-embellished jacket.⁹

Colonel William Powell, one of Averell's effective brigade commanders, was assigned to command the Second Cavalry Division, and he was quickly sent into the Luray Valley to guard against Confederate attacks from that quarter. He was thus isolated from most of the fighting of the next two weeks.

Early, meanwhile, had retreated into Brown's Gap, a major thoroughfare through the Blue Ridge leading to Confederate-held Charlottesville. Sheridan brought the Army of the Shenandoah up to the vicinity of Harrisonburg. Merritt detached his Reserve Brigade to join an expedition, led by Torbert, which continued on south to and around Staunton where bridges and tracks of the important Virginia Central Railroad were destroyed and crops and livestock either destroyed or brought off for the use of Sheridan's

troops. With his other two brigades, Merritt marched to Port Republic to occupy Early's attention, while the destruction around Staunton and Waynesboro took place.¹⁰

Just as Merritt occupied the village and located Early's lines in Brown's Gap, he was fiercely attacked from his left flank by Confederate infantry. Kershaw, whose withdrawal from Early just before the battle of Winchester brought on that conflict, had proceeded to the vicinity of Culpepper when he was sent back to again reinforce Early's fleeing men. By accident, Kershaw's four brigades came through Swift Run Gap, the next gap north of Merritt's position, just as Merritt arrived. Kershaw's attacking force outnumbered Merritt about two to one, and his attack was delivered with conviction. Merritt resisted with his troopers and horse artillery, but he was forced out of Port Republic to the vicinity of Cross Keys. The fight was not one of Merritt's most glorious, but it might have been one of his most exciting as Kershaw's and Early's men fought during the night, forcing "one of the liveliest retreats on record onto the overconfident Union troopers."¹¹

Early, with Kershaw's reinforcements, remained around Waynesboro, while Sheridan occupied a line across the Valley from Port Republic to Mt. Crawford. Now Sheridan brought the concept of "total war" to the upper Shenandoah Valley. All the cavalymen were sent out to destroy the unharvested crops of the fertile valley, to drive off all livestock, and to burn all mills in the region to prevent

the processing of any crops that might be missed or grown during the remainder of the war. Merritt carried out his part of the destruction thoroughly. By October 6, the entire Valley from around Waynesboro and Staunton northward to the vicinity of the Union lines at Mt. Crawford was a smoldering ruins. The Confederates had already harvested and removed the crops from Staunton southward, so a huge part of the Valley was now incapable of supporting the local population, much less the guerrillas who depended upon the area for subsistence.¹²

Sheridan decided to withdraw the Union forces to the vicinity of Strasburg in order to shorten his lines of supply, which were almost overextended in his present position and offered such temptation to Mosby and other local bushwhackers and bands of predatory deserters. As he withdrew, the Valley was to be destroyed behind him. Merritt was given the task of destroying the east side of the Shenandoah Valley, while Custer's Third Cavalry Division was responsible for the west side. Haste was imperative, since any delay gave the local people time to hide the provisions and forage which were ordered to be burned. Merritt felt the policy was severe, but necessary, and fell to his work with a will.

For three days Merritt moved northward, sending out parties to drive livestock and to burn crops and mills. Kidd got a taste of Merritt's sense of urgency and strict interpretation of his orders while engaged in this work. There were many millers in the Michigan Brigade, and the colonel

put them to work grinding corn and wheat for their own use before destroying the mills in his path. Early one morning Merritt rode up to such a grinding party supervised by Kidd. Merritt was angry that the mills were not already afire; Kidd felt that Merritt was afraid Custer might outdo the First Cavalry Division. Accordingly,

The wheels were not stopped, but the torch was applied, and the crackling of flames, intermingled with the rumbling of the stones, made a mournful requiem as the old mill went up in smoke and General Merritt's loyalty was vindicated.¹³

There were many scenes of anguish from Mt. Crawford to Tom's Brook as the Valley went up in flames. The numerous murders and acts of cruelty previously visited on the cavalrymen in the Valley by the "irregular" Rebels did little to elicit sympathy. To their credit, however, no personal violence to any inhabitant or his dwelling was ever reported by friend or foe. Huge clouds of smoke, filling the Valley from one mountain wall to the other, and following the Army of the Shenandoah northward, testified to the thoroughness with which Custer and Merritt employed their troopers. The devastation deprived Early of the subsistence on which he relied for the winter of 1864-1865. The strength of the Confederate forces was also reduced, since the desperate need of the local people resulted in calls for exemption from conscription into the army and in an increased desertion rate as soldiers realized that their families might starve without assistance.¹⁴

Following this "Cloud by day and pillar of fire by night," came Jubal Early. Twice beaten, he was again stronger

than he had been at any time since his departure from Winchester. His reinforcements not only included Kershaw's infantry division, but on October 5, one of Custer's old West Point classmates, Confederate General Thomas Rosser, joined Early with his fresh cavalry brigade from Lee's army. Rosser, the self-proclaimed "Savior of the Valley," was anxious to punish Sheridan for the destruction being visited upon the region. Most of the Rebel cavalymen were Virginians, many from the Shenandoah Valley itself, and they were "furious and desperate at being eyewitnesses to the destruction of their own homes by these black-hearted vandals."¹⁵

Rosser's overconfidence led him, along with the rest of of Early's cavalymen, under Lomax, to pursue Custer and Merritt closely all the way to Tom's Brook, far in advance of any infantry support. By the evening of October 8, the Valley, including Luray Valley, was devastated all the way from Staunton in the south to Winchester in the north--a distance of ninety-two miles. Sheridan was satisfied with the destruction but annoyed with the Confederate cavalry that dogged the Union troopers' heels all day and that was only driven away by a brisk rear-guard fight at dusk. Lomax followed Merritt along the Valley Pike with one brigade, but was beaten back by Kidd's Michigan troopers. Custer beat back a similar attack by Rosser and two Confederate cavalry brigades on the Back Road, about three miles west of Merritt.¹⁶

Sheridan's irritation led to one of the shortest and most decisive major cavalry fights of the Civil War--the Battle of Tom's Brook. Sheridan ordered Torbert to go out the next day and defeat the enemy's cavalry or "get whipped himself." At dawn on October 9, Merritt was ready for battle. Lowell's Reserve Brigade was lined up, dismounted, across the Valley Pike near Tom's Brook. Devin's Second Brigade extended westward on Lowell's right, while the Michigan troopers, under Kidd, connected Devin's right flank with Custer's left--the latter having his Third Cavalry Division facing Rosser on the Back Road. The country between the opposing lines being relatively open, the action soon became a desperate, hand-to-hand, mounted, saber fight. Lomax and Bradley Johnson opposed Merritt on the Union left and center, and they fought desperately for about two hours. Merritt sensed that the enemy was weak at the center, where the forces of Lomax and Rosser connected. He had held two regiments, the First New York Dragoons and the Fifth Cavalry, in reserve, and as the Rebels gave indications of tiring of the pressure put on them by the First Cavalry Division, he threw Devin's brigade, supported by the reserve regiments, at the weak center. As the Dragoons and Fifth Regulars hit the Confederates in a furious saber charge, the enemy center crumbled; the rest of the lines of Lomax and Rosser dissolved in utter rout.¹⁷

Merritt described the "Woodstock Races" which followed:

The success of the day was merely a question of the endurance of horseflesh . . . once or twice the rebel artillery made a stand and fired a few shots . . . Lowell's brave troopers caught sight of the battery and rode it down, sabering everyone who made resistance. . . . The fragments of the enemy's column could be seen flying miles in advance; where they stopped, the terror-stricken wretches could scarcely tell themselves--I cannot.¹⁸

Union troopers pursued their fleeing opponents some twenty miles to the vicinity of Woodstock and Mt. Jackson capturing everything on wheels--caissons, limbers, guns, wagons, and forges, as well as considerable livestock. Torbert claimed that "there could hardly have been a more complete victory and rout. . . . Brigadier-Generals Merritt and Custer and Colonels Lowell and Pennington . . . particularly distinguished themselves--in fact, no men could have rendered more valuable services and deserve higher honors from the hands of the Government." For Merritt, Tom's Brook was the last significant fight with Confederate cavalry during the Civil War. Their strength and confidence were shattered. Sheridan was pleased with his two young generals and with the utter success of the day. Feeling little threat from Early, he continued the withdrawal of his army to a position on Cedar Creek, north of Strasburg.¹⁹

In this position across the Valley Pike, the Army of the Shenandoah encamped for over a week. Sheridan left for Washington on October 15 to discuss his future operations with the Secretary of War and with Chief-of-Staff Henry Halleck. The infantry forces were protected by Merritt's division of cavalry on their left flank and by Custer's on

the right--the whole under the temporary command of General Wright of the Sixth Corps. Powell's Second Cavalry Division was near Front Royal, guarding against any surprise Confederate movement through the Luray Valley or the Blue Ridge. The Confederate signal station on Massanutten Mountain looked right down on the Union camps, but the Union forces were very strong, with approximately 35,000 men, compared to Early's forces, which numbered no more than 13,000, almost exactly the same strength with which he had fought at Winchester a month earlier.²⁰

On the Union left, deep, wooded ravines led up from fords across the Shenandoah River near Strasburg, toward the infantry camps. Hidden by a heavy fog and aided by inadequate Union vigilance, Early attacked before dawn on October 19. His determined troops were in among the camps of the nearest infantrymen, Crook's Eighth Corps, before the Federals knew what was happening. The attack routed the Union infantry, who poured to the rear, north and northwest, along and across the Valley Pike. There was every indication that the Shenandoah Valley campaign might end in disaster. Merritt, who had previously been posted near where the surprise attack started, had just been moved to the opposite flank of the army, near Middle Marsh Creek, with Custer's division still farther out to the right.²¹

About 4 A.M., he heard firing near Custer's position and immediately dispatched a staff officer to Lowell's camp with instructions to reinforce the picket lines. A feeble

cavalry attack by Rosser against Custer's division and Merritt's picket line was easily repulsed. Fog hanging over the entire area prevented any idea of what was happening on the Union left, but soon hordes of panic-stricken infantrymen came streaming through Merritt's camp. His entire First Cavalry Division was already mounted and awaiting some clarification of events. Torbert rode up with his escort regiment, the First Rhode Island Cavalry. He and Merritt put these troopers and Merritt's Fifth Cavalry, sabers drawn, into a long line intended to intercept and stop the flying soldiers. The attempt was futile; Torbert, sensing that disaster had overtaken the Union left, ordered Custer to leave three regiments from his division to hold Rosser, who had again attacked the Union right, and to move to the left flank of the infantry with the rest. The Rebel cavalry was so demoralized and ineffective as a result of their recent debacle at Tom's Brook that they were easily checked and played no significant part in the battle.²²

Merritt also recalled his First and Reserve Brigades from the picket lines and sent Devin's Second Brigade after Custer's troopers, to the Union left. Merritt accompanied Tolbert to the field of battle after ordering his other two brigades to follow as quickly as possible. As Merritt crossed the Valley Pike about one mile north of the village of Middletown, the full scope of the calamity burst into view. The Federal infantry was in full retreat, except for one steady and courageous unit--General George Getty's

division of the Sixth Corps. The cavalymen went into position on the left of Getty's infantry and attacked a strong and victorious force of Rebel infantry that was crossing the large, undulating, open fields east of the turnpike and north of Middletown. These Confederates, the divisions of Kershaw and John Pegram, were faced with the spectacle of solid ranks of two divisions of Union horsemen, calm and determined, drawn up before them. Merritt and Custer attacked, driving the Confederates back across the open country into the yards and behind the houses and fences of Middletown, where, supported by artillery, they remained.²³

Merritt recalled the First Cavalry Division and realigned them with the infantry and with the Third Cavalry Division, awaiting the enemy's next attack. The Rebels opened a heavy artillery fire on the cavalry ranks. There was no way to avoid it completely, even though Merritt shifted them slightly from time to time. They had to sit in the saddles under this galling fire for some hours. In this position, Sheridan, arriving from Winchester about 11 A.M., found the Union cavalry. They had saved the day, and the campaign, for Sheridan. He was impressed and recalled that "when I arrived, this division [Getty's] and the cavalry were the only troops in the presence of and resisting the enemy."²⁴

Sheridan hurriedly reorganized the stragglers into a semblance of order and prepared to counterattack Early. The opposing forces, due to the tremendous Union losses of the morning, were approximately equal in numbers, but the

initiative now lay with Sheridan. He moved Custer back to the right flank of the new infantry line, leaving Merritt's division to protect the left flank.

Merritt realigned his brigades for the counterattack. Devin was placed in column of battalions--three lines of two ranks each--on Merritt's right, near the Valley Pike. Lowell held the Reserve Brigade, in similar formation, in the center, with Kidd's Michigan Brigade holding the extreme left of the Union lines. Merritt rode along his entire line, inspecting and approving the dispositions and calming the troopers, who were becoming restless under the continuous artillery bombardment. As he stood with his staff, in front of the Michigan troopers, talking with their commander, one of the round shot from the batteries at Middletown ricocheted in front of him and whizzed past, nearly striking him. Merritt continued the conversation and predicted to Kidd that the enemy "would retreat as soon as a vigorous assault was made."²⁵

While Merritt was engaged in exerting this kind of personal leadership through example, Custer, riding in from his position on the right flank, leaped off his horse at the sight of Sheridan and threw his arms around his chief with expressions of excitement and thanks that Sheridan had arrived. Such antics disgusted some cavalymen, but Sheridan remembered, and was properly impressed. The praise heaped upon Custer for his relatively minor part in the Battle of Cedar Creek owed much to such gestures.²⁶

By 4 P.M., Sheridan ordered a general advance by the entire Union line. Custer met with little resistance on the right, but on the left, Merritt faced a severe test. The Rebel artillery and infantry were strongly posted behind stone fences and buildings. He described the advance of his First Cavalry Division:

The Reserve and Second Brigades charged into a living wall of the enemy, which, receiving the shock, emitted a leaden sheet of fire upon their devoted ranks. . . . The First Brigade . . . moved forward like an immense wave, slowly at first, but gathering strength and speed as it progressed, overwhelmed a battery amidst a desolating shower of cannister and a deadly fire of musketry. . . . Never has the mettle of the division been put to a severer test than at this time, and never did it stand the test better. . . . Into that fearful charge rode many a noble spirit who met his death. One more prominent than the rest . . . the fearless Lowell. . . .²⁷

Merritt broke the Confederates and drove them through Strasburg, where he and Custer pursued Early's stragglers until recalled by Torbert after dark. The action was among his most important services of the war, but it was marred by Lowell's death. Lowell had been his friend and had shared Merritt's pride in the brigade of Regulars. Lowell had written to his wife just before his last battle that he was satisfied now that he "had command of this Brigade; it has only been commanded before by Buford and Merritt."²⁸

Cedar Creek was the last real engagement of the Shenandoah Valley campaign, and Sheridan soon moved the army still further back, around Kernstown and Winchester, to ease his supply problem. The results of the battle of Cedar Creek were far-reaching. The country, General Grant, and Abraham

Lincoln were jubilant, the latter especially so since the good news came just before the November elections. In appreciation, Sheridan was promoted to the rank of major general in the Regular Army--only Grant was higher. The aggressive and tenacious Early was shattered; he retired to Staunton to winter with his skeleton force. For Merritt, there were also many results.²⁹

The part both young cavalry generals played in the Battle of Cedar Creek was widely publicized. The New York Herald claimed that "No encomium either, is sufficient to express the extreme gallantry and soldierly conduct of Generals Merritt and Custer, nor the masterly manner in which they handled their divisions. . . ." All the newspapers were not so generous in Merritt's case. Custer had kept a pet newspaper reporter, E. A. Paul of the New York Times, with him throughout the campaign, and the articles written by this early-day "public relations" man were less objective. The Times described Custer's part in the Battle of Cedar Creek: "Custer, young as he is, displayed the judgment of a Napoleon." Lowell had written to the editor of the Army and Navy Journal just before his death, objecting to the constant praise showered on Custer, due to "his absurd newspaper reporter." He felt Custer had become the laughing stock of the cavalry, at least among the cavalrymen themselves.³⁰

The rivalry between Merritt and Custer broke into the open immediately after the battle. Merritt was in such good

favor with Sheridan that he felt no need to engage in self-promotion. Custer, however, even though he also was solidly favored by Sheridan, knew no restraints in his quest for fame and publicity. At the time, battlefield trophies-- captured men, wagons, and, particularly, artillery guns-- were one measure of success for a commander. Custer lusted after them. At the Battle of Tom's Brook, Custer was credited with having captured six guns, while Merritt captured five. Torbert pointed out that, with an uneven total number, a more even division of the credit could hardly be devised, but Custer gloated over his success in "beating" Merritt.³¹

There was very little value in enumerating the number of guns captured at Cedar Creek since almost all had been abandoned by the fleeing Confederates after Sheridan's general attack. Merritt reported that his First Cavalry Division had captured twenty-two of the forty-five artillery pieces which were taken. If he had been interested in competing numerically with Custer, he could easily have claimed twenty-three, preempting a majority; there was no way to prove the exact number, anyway. The Assistant Adjutant General of the Armies acknowledged receipt of the twenty-two guns from Merritt within a week. However, Custer claimed to have captured forty-three out of a total of forty-eight guns and had his resident newspaperman, and others who visited his camp, repeat the claim in print. Merritt heard rumors of this exorbitant claim, but he could not believe that even Custer could be so outrageously false. He was wrong. Once

Merritt saw the claims in print, over Custer's signature, he officially objected. Merritt pointed out that even if there was no positive proof, there was ample presumptive evidence, since the number of captures should roughly approximate the degree of severity of service experienced by the two cavalry divisions during the battle. The degree of severity of service would be adequately shown by a comparison of the casualties suffered by each division during the fight.

Merritt pointed out that his division took more losses in the pursuit of the retreating enemy than Custer's division took during the entire battle. The casualty figures bore him out--Merritt's First Cavalry Division lost 108 men killed and wounded at Cedar Creek, while Custer's Third Cavalry Division lost twenty-six: a ratio of about four to one. Little came of the incident, since it was of no practical importance except to Custer, but the newspapers gave it wide publicity, and the rivalry between the two grew into an active dislike for one another. Wesley Merritt had now identified Custer as a self-seeking liar.³²

The scars from this seemingly minor conflict never really healed for Merritt or Custer, but it mattered little to Sheridan. Riding to join his shattered army on October 19, Sheridan had passed through miles of demoralized, fleeing soldiers. Suddenly, before him had appeared a magnificent sight. Getty's lone division of infantry and artillery stood imperturbable before Early's advancing and victorious Rebels, while alongside the infantry, calm and

steady, unmoved by the surrounding panic, and in perfect order, stood his two old cavalry divisions from the Army of the Potomac. They had saved Sheridan's Army of the Shenandoah from destruction, they had saved Sheridan's campaign, and they had probably saved Sheridan's career as well. He rewarded them handsomely. Whatever faults "Little Phil" may have had, he was lavish in praising subordinates who met or exceeded his expectations. Two days after the battle, he wired Grant: "General--I want Getty of the Sixth Corps and the brave boys Merritt and Custer promoted by brevets." His request was granted, and within a week, Merritt acknowledged his acceptance of promotion to the rank of brevet major general of volunteers.³³

Though Custer received the lion's share of publicity, newspapers, large and small, praised the two new major generals. The New York Herald claimed that "they are both heroes, and their promotion is well deserved." Back in Illinois, the Salem Advocate described the achievements of Wesley Merritt during the campaign with great pride.³⁴

With Early out of the picture, Sheridan was free to eliminate his second most irritating opponent, John Mosby. During September, Sheridan had organized a special counter-guerrilla force with the specific task of defeating Mosby. Almost all of this force were killed or captured by Mosby's men. Mosby continued his bushwhacking tactics and raided into Maryland during October, but Sheridan was too busy to attend to him. With the army in camp around Winchester,

Sheridan decided that his previous tactics were ineffective and that the only real solution to the problem of the Confederate guerrillas was to devastate Loudoun and adjacent Fauquier Counties, "Mosby's Confederacy," as he had the Shenandoah Valley. Merritt was chosen for the job, since Custer probably could not have been trusted to spare the homes and property of the Quakers residing in those counties, in accordance with the policy established by Grant and Sheridan the preceding summer. On November 27, Merritt was ordered to destroy all forage and subsistence, burn all barns and mills, and drive off all livestock between the Bull Run range and the Shenandoah River and north of the Manassas Gap Railroad. No dwellings were to be burned and no personal violence was to be offered to the citizens of the region.³⁵

At 7 A.M. the following morning, Merritt led the First and Second Brigades of his division out of their camps and climbed toward the crest of the Blue Ridge. The autumn weather had been superb up to this time, but now it turned very cold. The troopers suffered intensely in their saddles, some even becoming frostbitten. Sheridan arranged for cooperative movements and diversionary raids from Harper's Ferry, to the north, and from Washington, farther east, but they had little effect on Merritt's operations. The troopers all carried a full supply of ammunition, four days' rations, and grain on their horses; no supply wagons accompanied the expedition since rapid movement was necessary. Upon reaching

the crest of the Blue Ridge, Merritt sent parties spreading out through the region toward Bloomfield, Upperville, Middleburg, and Aldie.³⁶

The work of destruction progressed rapidly by day, although there were loud complaints from the local people. Merritt simply repeated Sheridan's statement that "they have furnished too many meals to guerrillas to expect much sympathy." Regiments of the Reserve Brigade were sent along the crest of the Blue Ridge and between the Shenandoah River and the western base of the mountains as Merritt organized a sweep for Mosby's men and for hidden livestock. During the nights, local residents drove their livestock along back paths to hiding places in the mountains, but few escaped the Union troopers. Mosby's men fired on some of the raiding parties despite Merritt's precaution in sending out protective flanking parties. The guerrillas also helped shift livestock to areas already burned or swept, since these regions were unlikely to be revisited. After five days, Loudoun County and the northern part of Fauquier County were desolated, and Merritt brought the frozen cavalymen back into their camps near Kernstown.³⁷

Merritt had thoroughly complied with his instructions. Between 5,000 and 6,000 head of cattle, nearly 1,000 fatted hogs, and about 600 horses were brought into camp. Few barns and outbuildings, except those of the loyal Quakers, survived. Capturing or fighting Mosby's men was much more difficult, however. Merritt found it "next to impossible to come in

contact with any guerrillas, as they avoided even the smallest portion of the command. By strategm and hard racing between thirty and forty of these men were killed or captured."³⁸

Merritt's losses were slight. His provost-martial was captured by Mosby's men, and Merritt never knew his fate until, at a party in St. Louis ten years later, one of the former guerrillas informed him of the circumstances. Both Sheridan and Merritt were overconfident of the abilities of a large force to counter guerrilla activities; Sheridan had originally felt "that one good regiment, with spunk," could settle Mosby. Now he realized his error and praised Merritt, who had "carried out his instructions with his usual sagacity and thoroughness."³⁹

As winter settled into the lower Shenandoah Valley, the cavalymen skirmished occasionally with small parties of Early's horsemen, but with little effect. One last expedition in 1864, however, excited Sheridan's imagination. He planned an expedition for mid-December, to break up the Virginia Central Railroad near Charlottesville and Gordonsville, across the Blue Ridge. Torbert would lead Merritt's and Powell's cavalry divisions through Chester Gap on the main raid, while Custer would take his own Third Cavalry Division up the Shenandoah Valley as a diversion.⁴⁰

Torbert led his 8,000 troopers out of the snow-covered camp and into and across the mountains on December 19. Horses and men suffered intensely from the cold, and many frostbite cases were encountered. The whole expedition was a fiasco.

It is difficult to imagine more disagreeable duty for a mounted trooper than marching over sleety, slushy, or icy roads in winter, and bivouacking in the snow without the means of protection. Torbert's command accomplished little except to demoralize the men and to ruin horses; he returned to Sheridan's camp after nine days of misery. Custer's men had fared even worse. Custer allowed himself to be surprised in his camp near Lacy's Spring, by Rosser's Confederate troopers. Custer was forced to abandon his bivouac and retreat back down the Valley, losing 42 men in the process and having an additional 280 men frostbitten. Sheridan felt that "Custer did not accomplish all that was expected of him."⁴¹

After the failure of the Charlottesville Raid, Sheridan sent most of his infantry back to the Army of the Potomac at Petersburg or elsewhere as needed. During January and February of 1865, Merritt's men picketed the front of Sheridan's depleted army, only occasionally contacting Early's troopers. Sheridan set up a camp north of the Potomac, at Pleasant Valley, Maryland, where dismounted troopers could be sent to refit and remount. Those troopers who remained enjoyed a reasonably comfortable time, not as luxurious, perhaps, as the encampment at Mitchell's Station during the preceding winter, but adequate. The residents of the Shenandoah Valley and "Mosby's Confederacy" fared poorly by comparison. The work of desolation was so complete, in fact, that Sheridan had to request permission to

issue a limited number of rations to the desperate civilians.⁴²

The leisure provided Sheridan, for the first time, with the opportunity to become better acquainted with his subordinates. The cavalry activity, since he assumed command in the East during the previous spring, had been almost continuous, and he had mainly observed his officers professionally. One of his cavalymen, Brigadier General Duffié, who had displeased Pleasonton during the Upperville-Aldie battles of 1863, was captured by the Rebels between Winchester and Martinsburg. Sheridan did not care for him and informed Chief-of-Staff Halleck: "I respectfully request his dismissal from the service. I think him a trifling man and a poor soldier. He was captured by his own stupidity."⁴³ Slowly, those officers who displeased Sheridan were removed. Wilson and Averell were gone; Torbert soon left on leave never to return. Custer and Merritt pleased Sheridan immensely in battle; now he observed them socially.

Custer brought his wife Libby to his headquarters for the winter and got his brother Tom assigned to his staff. The headquarters were merry that winter as "Libby and Tom and Autie [Custer] chased one another through their dwelling in wildly hilarious games of tag. . . ." In addition, Custer had taken a pledge of temperance while courting his wife and pursued abstinence with the zeal of a recent convert. These juvenile high-jinks and aversion to liquor impressed the hard-drinking Sheridan no end.⁴⁴

In Merritt, however, "Little Phil" found not only a fellow-tippler, but a genial and mature companion. Merritt later confided to his aide some of the stories of their drinking bouts during the last winter of the Civil War, as well as their adventures in the "Court of Venus." Of the latter, no details survive, although they were close enough by rail to Washington and Baltimore to enjoy the pleasures of those cities frequently. Neither Merritt nor Sheridan ever let drink interfere with their performance of duty, but it did take the edge off of winter.⁴⁵

With some leisure, Merritt could look back on the Shenandoah Valley campaign as his most successful yet. The troopers he had spent so much time training for just such operations had performed magnificently. His own performance was reflected in his recent promotion to brevet major general, and his immediate future seemed reasonably secure, since he was Sheridan's favorite subordinate. Every indication was that the Rebellion could not last long once active operations began in the spring. Nobody knew what would happen to the Regular Army and its officers after the war, but last impressions would be important, and perhaps Sheridan and Merritt could make even more of a name for themselves before the war ended.

FOOTNOTES

Chapter 6

1. O.R., XLIII, Pt. 1, 427; Sheridan, Memoirs, II, 33-34.
2. Sheridan, Memoirs, II, 40-41; Merritt, "Shenandoah Valley," 510, f.n.
3. O.R., XLIII, Pt. 1, 428, 441; Kidd, Cavalryman, 395-96.
4. O.R., XLIII, Pt. 1, 27; Sheridan, Memoirs, II, 40-41.
5. O.R., XLIII, Pt. 1, 441; Charles W. Russel, ed., The Memoirs of Col. John S. Mosby (Boston, 1917), 301; Frédrick F. Van de Water, Glory-Hunter, A Life of General Custer (Indianapolis, 1934), 80-82; Smith, "Recollections," 358.
6. O.R., XLIII, Pt. 1, 428-29, 441.
7. Sheridan, Memoirs, II, 43, 45; Robert R. Boehm, "The Unfortunate Averell," CWT, V (August, 1966), 35.
8. O.R., XLIII, Pt. 1, 429-30; B&L, IV, 531; Sheridan, Memoirs, II, 52.
9. Kidd, Cavalryman, 396; Van de Water, Glory-Hunter, 65, 84.
10. O.R., XLIII, Pt. 1, 441.
11. Ibid.; Sheridan to Merritt, Sept. 28, 1864, Sheridan Papers, No. 1, MSS Div., L.C.; Sheridan, Memoirs, II 49-50; Smith, "Recollections," 360.
12. O.R., XLIII, 30-31, 441.
13. Ibid., 442; Kidd, Cavalryman, 397-98.
14. Pond, Shenandoah Valley, 200; Kidd, Cavalryman, 399.
15. Rhodes, Essay, 74; Edward H. McDonald, "McDonald Memoirs," CWT, VI (February, 1968), 42; McDonald commanded a company in Rosser's Laurel Brigade; Pond, Shenandoah Valley, 201.

16. O.R., XLIII, Pt. 1, 31; O.R., XLIII, Pt. 2, 320; Kidd, Cavalryman, 400; Merritt, "Shenandoah Valley," 513; McDonald, "Memoir," 42.
17. O.R., XLIII, Pt. 1, 447; O.R., XLIII, Pt. 2, 320-21; Merritt, "Shenandoah Valley," 513; Kidd, Cavalryman, 401-2; Hagemann, Rebels and Redskins, 284.
18. O.R., XLIII, Pt. 1, 447-48.
19. Ibid., 31, 32, 431.
20. B&L, IV, 530; Joseph P. Cullen, "Cedar Creek," CWT, VIII (December, 1969), 7.
21. Pond, Shenandoah Valley, 224; Stackpole, Sheridan in the Shenandoah, 282.
22. O.R., XLIII, Pt. 1, 443, 448, 491; Hagemann, Rebels and Redskins, 238.
23. O.R., XLIII, Pt. 1, 448-49; Hergesheimer, Sheridan, 237; Kidd, Cavalryman, 413-17, 426; Pond, Shenandoah Valley, 231, 233.
24. Merritt, "Shenandoah Valley," 518; Sheridan, Memoirs, II, 82.
25. Kidd, Cavalryman, 418-19, 422; Monaghan, Custer, 215.
26. Sheridan, Memoirs, II, 88-89.
27. O.R., XLIII, Pt. 1, 450; Rhodes, Essay, 77.
28. O.R., XLIII, Pt. 1, 450-51; Sheridan, Memoirs, II, 90; Emerson, Lowell, 359; Hagemann, Rebels and Redskins, 298.
29. Sheridan, Memoirs, II, 92.
30. New York Herald, Oct. 24, 1864; New York Times, Oct. 24, 1864; Monaghan, Custer, 125, 217; Emerson, Lowell, 363.
31. O.R., XLIII, Pt. 1, 431; Monaghan, Custer, 213.
32. New York Times, Nov. 8, 1864; O.R., XLIII, Pt. 1, 431, 452; Kidd, Cavalryman, 432-33; AG, USA, to Sheridan, Oct. 29, 1864, Sheridan Papers, No. 1, MSS Div. L.C.
33. Sheridan to Grant, Telegram, October 21, 1864, ACP, NA.
34. New York Herald, October 26, 1864; Salem Advocate (Ill.), November 24, 1864.

35. O.R., XLIII, Pt. 2, 679; Wormser, Yellowlegs, 254-55; Virgil Carrington Jones, Ranger Mosby (Chapel Hill, 1944), 231.
36. O.R., XLIII, Pt. 2, 679, 688, 731; Jones, Ranger Mosby, 234, 238.
37. O.R., XLIII, Pt. 2, 672; O.R. XLIII, Pt. 2, 687; G. Price, Fifth Cavalry, 124; Jones, Ranger Mosby, 235, 236, 238.
38. O.R., XLIII, Pt. 2, 730; "John S. Mosby," CWT, IV (Nov. 1965), 53.
39. O.R., XLIII, Pt. 1, 35; Sheridan, Memoirs, II, 99-100; Munson, Reminiscences, 161-64.
40. Sheridan, Memoirs, II, 98, 102; McDonald, "Memoir," 45.
41. O.R., XLIII, Pt. 1, 39, 56-57; Merritt, "Shenandoah Valley," 521; Sheridan, Memoirs, II, 102.
42. O.R., XLIII, Pt. 2, 673; Sheridan to Halleck, Oct. 27, 1864, Sheridan Papers, No. 1, MSS Div. L.C.; Sheridan to Halleck, Jan. 25, 1865; Sheridan to Merritt, Jan. 27, 1865; Sheridan Papers, No. 2, MSS Div. L.C.; Torbert to Merritt, Nov. 10, 1864, War Papers of Gen. Merritt, RG 94, NA.
43. Sheridan to Halleck, Oct. 27, 1864, Sheridan Papers, No. 1, MSS Div., L.C.
44. Van de Water, Glory-Hunter, 88.
45. Sheridan to Merritt, Personal Note, Feb. 15, 1865, Sheridan Papers, No. 2, MSS Div., L.C.; Eben Swift, "Personal Memoranda of Major General Eben Swift, USA Retired," unpublished typescript, Rare Book Room, USMA Library, West Point, 95-96. Hereafter cited as Swift, "Memoranda."

Chapter 7

APPOMATTOX CAMPAIGN

Let the thing be pressed.

--Abraham Lincoln

For Wesley Merritt, the winter of 1864-1865 brought not only the pleasures of winter quarters but increased responsibility. Sheridan anticipated active and arduous campaigning as soon as winter broke. He was not pleased with Torbert's performance as chief-of-cavalry; Torbert had disappointed him by displaying what, to Sheridan, seemed like an inability to conduct any operations requiring much self-reliance. Since Torbert was on leave of absence as the start of Sheridan's spring campaign approached, Sheridan simply did not recall him and appointed Merritt in his place, as chief-of-cavalry of the Army of the Shenandoah.¹

Immediately Merritt began re-equipping and remounting his two cavalry divisions. Regiments which were too depleted in number or in horses were sent back to Sheridan's remount camp in Maryland. Among these, Merritt decided to relieve the Second Cavalry, which had been reduced to a skeleton regiment by constant and severe service. During February, the old Regular dragoons, with whom he had ridden in from Utah during the first summer of war, reluctantly marched down the Valley Pike, having done their duty during the Civil War.

By the end of the month, Merritt had the troopers in splendid condition and in a high state of readiness for whatever move Sheridan wanted to make.²

Sheridan realized that any further activity in the Shenandoah Valley would be a sideshow to the main fighting against Lee's Army of Northern Virginia around Richmond and Petersburg. Accordingly, he planned to take his main force back to join Grant in that theater. Merritt received orders on February 25, to prepare his command to march on the morning of the twenty-seventh for Richmond.³ Sheridan would leave his remaining infantry and Powell's Second Cavalry Division to guard Winchester and West Virginia. The remainder of Sheridan's forces, under Merritt's immediate command, would march up the Valley to Staunton, where Early was reported to be encamped, drive that general from the Valley if he resisted, cross the Blue Ridge, and march southeastward to join Grant, destroying Rebel milling and transport facilities in the process.

Merritt's command consisted of Custer's Third Cavalry Division and Devin's First Cavalry Division, each accompanied by one section, three rifled guns, of horse artillery--9,987 effective men. He also had a train of eight pontoons as well as ambulances, medical and supply wagons, and an extensive pack-mule train. To aid in organizing this force on such short notice, Sheridan assigned some of his own staff officers to Merritt's headquarters, and all was prepared by the time Sheridan designated.⁴

As Merritt led Sheridan's cavalry out of their winter camps, the troopers were in fine shape, but the weather was bad. The Valley and the Blue Ridge were still snow-covered, but several days of rain had started the spring thaw. The roads, especially off the turnpike, were in wretched shape with slush and mud, and the rivers and creeks were running full. Responsibility for detecting any approaching Confederate raiding parties and for finding Early and driving him out of the Valley or defeating him kept Merritt constantly employed. Seventy-five wagons as well as the pack-mules had to be constantly closed up, or else the long column would become unmanageable or vulnerable to the enemy. The pontoon train was used to cross the Shenandoah River on the way toward Staunton, but the troopers had to ford several creeks. It was an altogether miserable expedition. The mud flung up by the horses and wagons plastered the troopers until they were almost unrecognizable. Happily, little enemy resistance was encountered on the march.⁵

Upon Sheridan's approach, Early, with all that remained of his army, about 1500 infantry and a few cavalymen and artillerists, withdrew from Staunton and took up a position west of Waynesboro. While detachments from Devin's division burned commissary and ordnance stores near Staunton on March 2, Merritt sent Custer's division after Early. Custer made quick work of the Battle of Waynesboro. Three of his regiments outflanked the small Confederate force, and almost the entire body of Confederates immediately surrendered. Custer lost

only three or four men, but his resident newspaper reporter, Paul, of the New York Times, who accompanied Custer during the entire expedition, announced the event as a major victory by Custer. Early later remarked that he had not even possessed as many battleflags as Custer claimed to have captured. The last vestiges of armed opposition to the Union forces were now removed from the Shenandoah Valley, however, and Rockfish Gap, between Waynesboro and Charlottesville, was open to the Federals.⁶

Rain fell continually as Merritt led the Union horsemen over the almost-bottomless road across the Blue Ridge and into Charlottesville. His men required two days more to get the wagons over the twenty-mile stretch. After resting the horses one day at Charlottesville, Sheridan divided the command into two raiding columns and departed on a two-week march to White House, on the Pamunkey River, where Grant was to have supplies waiting.

Sheridan accompanied Custer's division as it went toward Lynchburg, destroying the Virginia Central Railroad. Merritt went with Devin as the First Cavalry Division traveled along the James River, destroying the James River Canal with its locks and barges. Both columns destroyed all mills and small factories along their paths as well as considerable amounts of Confederate subsistence and military stores. By March 10, the columns reunited, and Merritt led both divisions northward to the line of the Virginia Central Railroad between Louisa Court House and Frederick's Hall. The

railroad was torn up for miles around both of those places, and the command continued along the South Anna River, burning bridges and mills and skirmishing with enemy detachments guarding the bridges.⁷

The rain continued for sixteen successive days during the expedition, and simply moving through the countryside was a hardship. The stiff yellow clay of the region became soft and, besides hindering the movement of horses, tended to generate the "hoof-rot" disease. Regardless of Merritt's skill and experience in managing horses, a large number of the mounts of the cavalry command were ruined by this disease by the time the troopers reached the supply base at White House on March 18.⁸ The main force marched over 350 miles on the expedition under conditions which even the Confederate cavalry considered impossible. Merritt's men very badly damaged the railroad and completely wrecked the canal, cutting off vital supplies to Lee's besieged army. Over 2,000 Confederate prisoners were captured, and millions of dollars' worth of Rebel property was destroyed. Merritt considered these the "substantial fruits of the expedition" which also "introduced to many of the responsible people of Virginia the stern realities of the wicked war they themselves had sought."⁹

The direct effect of Sheridan's expedition on the Confederate army was significant. Robert E. Lee wrote, on the day before Merritt arrived at White House: "Now I do not see how we can maintain even our small force of cavalry

around Richmond. I have had to send General W. H. F. Lee's division back to Stony Creek . . . cannot provide it with forage."¹⁰ Hereafter, Merritt's men would meet with no resistance from any considerable body of Rebel horsemen.

Merritt spent a week at White House, re-supplying the command and re-shoeing those horses that were still serviceable. Some remounts were waiting at White House, but almost 900 troopers, for whom there were no horses, had to be sent into camp near City Point and were unavailable to Merritt in the upcoming campaign. After having done all that was possible to prepare his cavalry, Merritt led both divisions southward to join the Army of the Potomac, in front of Petersburg, on March 27.¹¹

Throughout the winter, Grant's lines ran in a concentric arc outside of Lee's fortifications, extending to a point south of Petersburg near the junction of the Vaughn Road and Hatcher's Run. Confederate lines extended farther west, with their extreme right flank being guarded by fortifications near the strategic crossroads known as Five Forks. Grant's plan was to extend the Federal lines westward by means of a march of two of his infantry corps and Sheridan's cavalry. These forces would attempt to outflank or attack the Confederate position at Five Forks, forcing Lee to abandon his defensive line around Richmond and Petersburg as the Federals penetrated into his rear and across his last remaining supply routes from Danville and Lynchburg.

Sheridan's cavalry would play a key role in Grant's plan, but Sheridan had to overcome a major obstacle first.

He rode out of the White House encampment with Merritt on March 25, but went ahead to Petersburg, leaving Merritt to transfer the First and Third Cavalry Divisions over the James River. Meanwhile, Sheridan met with Grant, Lincoln, and Sherman. There was a great deal of anxiety felt by all these men over the upcoming operations. The country was growing weary of war. It was imperative that Lincoln's government crush Lee's army finally and quickly. This need for finality and haste gave Sheridan his chance to become one of the three leading architects of final Confederate defeat. Sherman was to advance northward, through the Carolinas, while Grant turned Lee out of his Petersburg lines. Sherman wanted Sheridan to join his army after the initial phase of Grant's campaign was accomplished. This would take "Little Phil" out of the limelight, in his view, and considerable argument convinced Grant that Sheridan should stay with the Army of the Potomac. The decision secured for Sheridan the opportunity to take the leading role in pursuing Lee's army to the death. As his second-in-command, Merritt could only gain by Sheridan's success.¹²

There were less than two weeks left of Civil War in the East, but they were the most frantic of Merritt's career. Sheridan assumed command of the Union cavalry in the Appomattox campaign. Since he was still commander of the Middle Military Division, a separate command from the Army

of the Potomac, he reported directly to Grant rather than to Meade. It was an unusual organizational arrangement, and it gave Sheridan, in effect, an independent army. Since that army was composed entirely of cavalry, it was highly mobile. A better vehicle could scarcely be devised for the decisive, rapid campaign Grant and Sheridan contemplated.

Merritt commanded the First and Third Cavalry Divisions of the Army of the Shenandoah, as chief-of-cavalry. In effect, it was a cavalry corps of approximately 25,000 men, although far fewer were actually present for duty as the campaign started. Sheridan's third division was the Second Cavalry Division of the Army of the Potomac. "Gregg's old division" was now commanded by Major General George Crook. Crook, who had been captured by Confederate guerrillas after leaving Sheridan in the Shenandoah Valley, had been exchanged and was now assigned to the cavalry command opened by Gregg's earlier resignation from the army. Merritt and Crook would later serve together during the Indian Wars, but this would be their first opportunity to cooperate closely. Crook joined Sheridan just as Merritt brought the other two divisions into camp near Petersburg. Crook reported directly to Sheridan, rather than to Merritt, since he was senior to Merritt.¹³

Grant's campaign started on March 29, and its initial stages gave little indication of the whirlwind nature of subsequent operations. Merritt led his two cavalry divisions

westward early in the morning, each trooper carrying five days' rations, thirty pounds of forage, and forty rounds of ammunition on his horse. He commanded 5,700 cavalymen on the expedition; Crook's 3,300 effectives brought Sheridan's total force to 9,000. The rain that had made the expedition from the Shenandoah Valley so difficult and miserable had affected the region southwest of Petersburg also; the roads that Merritt was forced to take in marching around the Federal infantry columns were quagmires. When he moved into bordering field to avoid the worst places in the roads, he found conditions even worse. The surface of fields appeared solid enough, but this was only a crust that would support the weight of a man, but through which the horses and wagons sank. After struggling through this mess for the entire day, Merritt got the troopers only to within one mile of Dinwiddie Court House, an important crossroads on the Boydton Plank Road, now U.S. Highway 1, thirteen miles southwest of Petersburg. The rains, which stopped during the day, began again just as Merritt's men reached their camping area. With no tents or shelter, the troopers spent a miserable, cold night in the mud.¹⁴

Merritt left Custer behind to bring the cavalry's wagons forward. The Third Cavalry Division troopers worked for two days at the exhausting task of corduroying the soggy roads and unloading and reloading the wagons to get them over the worst spots. Meanwhile, Sheridan had occupied Dinwiddie Court House with little trouble as Crook's division

drove the Confederate cavalry pickets from the important crossroads. The cavalry commands of Rosser and W. H. F. "Rooney" Lee, Robert E. Lee's son, were protecting the Confederate western flank, although they were reduced in number and effectiveness by their previous encounters with Sheridan's cavalry and by the difficulty in subsisting their horses. Holding Dinwiddie Court House was imperative if Sheridan was to advance farther in attempting to outflank the Confederate infantry lines, since the roads converging there would allow separated Rebel forces to concentrate and to attack his flank and rear.¹⁵

Sheridan sent Merritt out on the Morning of March 30, to determine the intentions and positions of the enemy infantry reported to be around Five Forks, some five miles north and west of Dinwiddie Court House. Merritt skirmished all day with the enemy pickets. These fell back to strong fortifications along the White Oak Road at Five Forks by evening, revealing their intentions to hold this strong, key, crossroads position. The rain continued throughout the day, and Merritt camped in the mud again after informing Sheridan of the Confederate positions. It was an arduous day's work, with movement almost impossible; it justified Sheridan's faith in Merritt's ability to perform under the worst possible conditions.¹⁶

With Sheridan poised to turn northward and outflank Lee's line, Grant almost called off the campaign. Weather conditions were so bad that infantry cooperating in the

campaign could hardly move or be supplied. Sheridan had to personally dissuade Grant from his course. Cancellation, or even postponement, would bring on a roar of dissatisfaction with the war's progress. Lincoln's insistence on a hasty end to Lee's operations would be disappointed, and Sheridan might be sent to some less important theater. Grant was easily persuaded; Sheridan issued orders to Merritt and Crook for an advance on the morning of March 31. It was a crucial decision for Sheridan. It brought on the Battle of Dinwiddie Court House that day, and the succession of battles and marches which would lead, without interruption, to Appomattox Court House ten days later.

"Little Phil" almost overextended himself during the next day. Although the rains stopped, the condition of the roads and fields kept Merritt from launching his attack until about 9 A.M. Merritt led Devin's division and one of Crook's brigades, under Brigadier General Henry Davies, against the Five Forks position. There was some confusion; the troopers under Merritt and Crook had not previously had any opportunity to cooperate closely. Davies was hesitant to execute orders from Merritt, and the attack of that brigade was retarded. Nevertheless, Merritt personally led a charge against enemy pickets, "under a perfect hail of bullets," and took the strong position with surprising ease.¹⁷

It was easy because General George Pickett, commanding the Confederate infantry around Five Forks, had marched around Merritt's left flank and had driven his soldiers between

Merritt's command and that of Crook, who was supposed to guard Merritt's flank. Merritt was surprised, but fell back toward the east and the Boydton Plank Road, resisting Pickett's advance and extracting Devin and Davies from a dangerous position. The Rebel cavalry, meanwhile, attacked Crook and, with Pickett's men, advanced toward Dinwiddie Court House.¹⁸

Sheridan was in serious trouble. Pickett's infantry had isolated Merritt's command from that of Crook, and Pickett, with about 14,000 veteran soldiers, outnumbered Sheridan's total force considerably. As Crook beat off the Rebel cavalry on his left, Sheridan had a barricaded defensive line thrown up three-quarters of a mile north of Dinwiddie Court House on the road to Five Forks. He hurriedly sent for Merritt to bring Devin and Davies down the Plank Road to his assistance, and he ordered Custer, in Merritt's absence, immediately forward with the Third Cavalry Division, which was still struggling with the wagons in the rear.¹⁹

By 4 P.M., Custer had two of his brigades into Sheridan's defensive line and helped beat back a Confederate attack. Merritt had a more difficult time. Every fourth trooper held his own horse and the horses of three other troopers who were fighting dismounted. This was standard practice, but it taxed the ability of one man to control four horses, especially as Merritt was forced back through thick, muddy woods to the Plank Road. The horses became tangled with themselves and the trees, and it was almost sunset

before Merritt brought his men back to join Sheridan.

The sight that greeted Merritt was dramatic.

Sheridan's staff had directed the construction of barricades from logs and fence rails. Behind this line the dismounted cavalrymen waited for the attack which the Confederate infantry was preparing across the soggy, open fields in their front. Sheridan had his bands playing "Lonigan's Ball" and "Hail Columbia" to encourage the men. Now, with Merritt and Custer and their staffs, he rode along the line. The men cheered enthusiastically, and Custer obtained permission for a mounted charge, under the eye of his chief, by a portion of his division, once the Rebel infantry should charge.

Pickett's men advanced, and Custer raced toward them with a cheer. He had not tested or inquired into the condition of the field over which his men charged, and the horses gradually mired in the mud or fell, short of the Confederates. His position was perilous, but the dismounted line covered his return and turned back Pickett's infantrymen as well. Sheridan's position was saved, but he wrote to Grant that "this force is too strong for us. I will hold on to Dinwiddie Court House until I am compelled to leave."²⁰

During the night, Sheridan's aggressive spirit returned. His opponent, Pickett, was extended beyond the support of any other Confederate infantry forces; although Pickett outnumbered Sheridan, he was vulnerable to an attack by the approaching Federal Fifth Corps, which could isolate him from Lee's line. Between the Fifth Corps and his own

cavalry army, Sheridan expected to annihilate Pickett and to pass beyond and behind the Rebel lines, forcing Lee either to surrender or to evacuate the Richmond and Petersburg positions. It was a plan of enormous magnitude, but rapid execution would result in the defeat not only of Pickett's division but also of the major Confederate army.

Daylight of April 1 brought a thin fog but no rain. Merritt had his two divisions across the road to Five Forks. As soon as the fog lifted enough to see, they pushed the Rebel infantry pickets slowly northward toward the Five Forks defensive line. Pickett, realizing his vulnerability, had retreated, and General Gouverneur K. Warren, commanding the Fifth Corps, was too late in reaching the field to intercept the Confederate infantry. Sheridan was furious at Pickett's escape, but devised a simple plan for defeating him behind the barricades at Five Forks.²¹

Merritt's dismounted troopers would attack the center and right flank of the Confederate line, while Warren's infantrymen would assault the left of Pickett's position and drive the Rebels westward, away from Petersburg, where the cavalry could finish them off. Crook's cavalry division was held in reserve on Merritt's left rear and Sheridan was joined by an additional cavalry force sent by Grant. One of Merritt's future rivals, Brigadier General Ranald S. Mackenzie, brought his cavalry division from the Army of the James into Sheridan's position and was sent around to the east to turn Pickett's left flank or to get in his rear.²²

By 2 P.M., Merritt, by a series of charges, drove the infantry behind the barricades at Five Forks and prepared to assault this log-reinforced position which ran parallel to the White Oak Road along its north side. The position glistened with bayonets as Union troopers approached to within fifty yards and awaited the order to charge. Merritt was ordered to demonstrate against the enemy's right flank as a feint, while Warren prepared to assault the Confederate left flank with his infantry. Warren's assault would be the signal for Merritt to charge the barricades with his whole force in concert with Warren. Merritt demonstrated, but no infantry firing was heard from the Union right. Merritt then used the additional time to rest the troopers and to re-supply them with ammunition. Sheridan was beside himself over Warren's delay, and later that night he relieved Warren from command. Finally, however, about 4 P.M. the Union infantrymen smashed into the Confederate line on Merritt's right.²³

Merritt sent his whole command, almost 5,000 dismounted troopers, firing and shouting, at and over the Rebel breastworks. Merritt was among the first men over the barricades, and in a matter of minutes, his headquarters flag was waving within the works. His men quickly overran an enemy battery and turned it on the fleeing Confederates, while Custer, on the left of Merritt's line, was repulsed in a mounted charge against a small force of Rebel horsemen. As the rout became general, however, Custer attacked again and,

with the rest of Merritt's troopers, pursued the flying Confederates some six miles until stopped by darkness.²⁴

The Battle of Five Forks was as important as any during the Civil War. Pickett's force was ruined; over half of it was captured. So many small-arms were found on the field that they were used to corduroy the bad spots in the nearby roads as Sheridan pushed northward after the broken enemy. Merritt was praised by Sheridan and received his final promotion of the Civil War shortly thereafter for his gallant part in the victory. He was commissioned major general of volunteers--the commission superseding his previous brevet rank.²⁵

The fall of Five Forks made Lee's entire defensive line around Richmond and Petersburg untenable, since both Federal cavalry and infantry now poured northward in his rear, threatening to quickly cut off his last remaining railroad links with the rest of the Confederacy. He would either have to surrender the Army of Northern Virginia soon or immediately retreat westward toward Danville or Lynchburg. During the night of April 2, Lee evacuated his positions and moved his entire army westward along the line of the Appomattox River. Lee's action brought on Sheridan's last and most frantic campaign. With his mobile cavalry army, Sheridan was in an ideal position to head off Lee's retreat and force his defeat or surrender.

Merritt's troopers were, by April 2, almost out of rations, because the supply trains could make only slow

progress along the muddy roads. The ammunition wagons were kept closed up to the command, however, and during the next four days, Merritt and his two divisions, cooperating with the divisions of Crook and Mackenzie, pursued the retreating Confederates northward to the Appomattox River and then westward toward Amelia Court House and Jetersville. Union cavalrymen had sharp skirmishes almost continually, notably at Deep Creek and around Amelia Court House, where Lee concentrated his army. The troopers became weary beyond description with the days of frantic riding and fighting, the lack of supplies, and the demands to move during the night to keep even with Lee's rapidly moving army.

On the night of April 4, Merritt had them in the saddle on thirty-minutes' notice after receiving orders from Sheridan for a rapid march to Jetersville on the Richmond and Danville Railroad. Merritt reached this station by daylight of April 5, blocking Lee's intended movement southward and denying him the use of the line for supplying the Army of Northern Virginia. As Lee moved further west, Sheridan leapfrogged his cavalry divisions over and around one another in a frantic attempt to outrace the Confederates. Union infantry followed Sheridan's troopers to the south, within supporting distance should Lee decide to stop and fight.²⁶

On April 6, Merritt almost succeeded in outrunning Lee's infantrymen. Cooperating with Crook's division, Merritt's two divisions moved parallel with Lee's line of

march and, near Sailor's Creek, struck a weak point in the enemy column, between the corps of Generals James Longstreet and Richard Ewell. The latter officer commanded Lee's rearguard. Custer's division dashed into the Confederate column, capturing and burning over 300 supply wagons and defeating the infantrymen guarding the train. Custer was hard-pressed, however, as two divisions of Ewell's corps arrived to threaten him. Merritt brought Devin's division to Custer's assistance; at the same time Crook's division worked even farther around what had become an isolated Confederate position. Sheridan ordered forward the leading Union infantry divisions from the Sixth Corps, his old command from the Shenandoah Valley campaign, so that in the evening, a magnificent, unified, mounted charge by Merritt's and Crook's cavalry, with an advance by Wright's Sixth Corps, crushed the Confederate line. Some 10,000 prisoners were captured by Sheridan's combined forces, along with six Confederate generals--all of Lee's rearguard and almost one-third of his army.²⁷

Sheridan had the troopers on Lee's trail early the following morning in an effort to stay one step ahead of the Union infantry. Lee crossed to the north side of the Appomattox River at Farmville; Crook, following him, was repulsed in a sharp fight near the river. Merritt and Mackenzie marched rapidly throughout April 7 in an attempt to interpose between Lee's army and Lynchburg, where Lee expected to supply his men.

At mid-day on April 8, as Merritt marched westward with his two divisions, he received a hurried order from Sheridan to push immediately toward Appomattox Court House, twenty-eight miles away. Sheridan, riding with Custer at the head of Merritt's column, galloped ahead with Custer and the Third Cavalry Division. Custer trapped three locomotives and trains loaded with supplies for Lee's approaching army near Appomattox Station. Meanwhile, Merritt raced toward the scene with Devin's First Cavalry Division; arriving just before dark, he dismounted these troopers alongside Custer's men. Merritt's line quickly advanced across the road leading to Lynchburg from Appomattox Court House and drove back Lee's advance infantry elements. Sheridan's hopes were finally realized. His cavalry, under Merritt, blocked the retreat of the Army of Northern Virginia. Although the Union infantry was attacking his rear, Lee could not move during the night as he had previously done, since a force of unknown strength lay across his path. Merritt described the situation:

Night was upon them; tired, dispirited, and starving, they lay at our feet. Their bravest soldiers, their hardiest men, gave way when they heard the noise of battle far in the rear, and the night of despair fell with the night of the 8th of April darkly and terribly on the Army of Northern Virginia.²⁸

It was a night of excitement and intense satisfaction in the Union cavalry camps and headquarters. Sheridan had only to retard Lee's morning advance sufficiently for the nearest Union infantry corps to arrive, and that infantry was moving rapidly forward throughout the night. "Sheridan's

Boys," Merritt, Custer, and Devin, had brought the cavalry to a high state of efficiency. Union troopers were tough, self-reliant, superbly armed and equipped, well-disciplined, and competently led. This was the organization that Sheridan, and before him, Cooke and Buford and Pleasonton, had striven to perfect. Merritt visited Sheridan's headquarters throughout the night as the cavalry commanders planned the best useage of this superb weapon in delivering the final stroke against the Army of Northern Virginia.²⁹

At daylight on April 9, Crook's division relieved Devin's First Cavalry Division on the Lynchburg road. Merritt took Devin's men, along with Custer's, to the far right of the Union line, south of Appomattox Court House and along an extensive ridge overlooking Lee's army, which was encamped in the valley below. Crook was to oppose any Confederate advance toward Lynchburg just enough to slow Lee until the Union infantry arrived. General John B. Gordon's Rebel infantrymen fiercely attacked Crook and pushed him slowly back up the rise at first light. With his headquarters flag planted on the slopes overlooking Appomattox Court House and his entire command mounted, Merritt calmly awaited the command to deliver the final charge against Lee's trains and men.³⁰

The command never came. As solid ranks of Union infantry came through the woods in front of the fighting Confederates, Gordon broke off his attack, and shortly thereafter, sent white flags of truce into the Union lines. A

general cease-fire followed, but it was not universally complied with. Sheridan rode over to Merritt to insure that the cavalry was ready for any eventuality; then he rode to meet Gordon within the Confederate lines. As he did so, he was fired upon and complained to Gordon, who tried unsuccessfully to end the violations. Meanwhile, a small brigade of South Carolina cavalry continued firing on Merritt's troopers as the Union horsemen stood arrayed above them. The Rebel commander declared to Gordon that "I do not care for white flags; South Carolinians never surrender." They did, however; Merritt's patience wore thin at this absurd and dangerous display, and he charged the Rebels and "set things to rights again."³¹

Merritt established a strong line of pickets between the Union and Confederate lines in order to keep the enlisted men and line officers from visiting the enemy camps for any reason. This done, Merritt rode with Grant to meet Sheridan, and afterwards, joined by Custer, he accompanied Sheridan to the McLean house to witness the signing of the surrender agreement by Robert E. Lee.³²

Immediately after the surrender, Grant appointed Merritt, John Gibbon, and Charles Griffin as commissioners to meet with Confederate commissioners in order to draft the details of surrender and parole of the Confederate troops and to superintend the parole procedure which would commence thereafter. Lee assigned Gordon and Longstreet as their opposite numbers, and all five commissioners quickly rode

through the Confederate lines to Longstreet's headquarters and started their work. Merritt was responsible for supervising the parole of the Southern cavalymen. Upon the request of the Confederate cavalry commanders, Merritt recommended to Grant that the same terms earlier granted to officers, that they be allowed to keep their horses, be extended to the enlisted cavalymen also. The arrangement of the surrender details progressed smoothly and rapidly; Gordon remembered that "In all our intercourse with those three Union officers I can recall no expression or word that could possibly wound the sensibility of a confederate."³³

Since the country around Appomattox Court House would not long support such a huge cavalry force, Sheridan ordered his troopers back to Petersburg on the day after the surrender. Merritt stayed behind with his staff to superintend the actual parole of the Rebel cavalymen. By April 12, he rejoined his command, which was proceeding eastward at a leisurely rate. On the road to join Sheridan, Merritt encountered "Rooney" Lee, his late antagonist, who with his staff, his men having almost all deserted, was coming in to surrender. Only one major Confederate army still remained under arms in the East by the time Merritt and Sheridan reached Petersburg on April 18. Sherman was fighting Confederate General Joseph E. Johnston in North Carolina. Sheridan was ordered to move south and assist Sherman in forcing Johnston's surrender.³⁴

Merritt spent the week before the new expedition left in resting and re-equipping his cavalymen. It was a time of relaxation--the first the veteran troopers had enjoyed since breaking up their winter quarters at Winchester in late February. The threat of death was much lessened, and most of the Volunteers began to contemplate the end of their fighting careers. Fortunately, this last expedition proved to be bloodless.

Merritt led them south, toward Danville, on the morning of April 24. The only obstacles were dilapidated and decayed plank roads, especially as they passed their old battlefield at Dinwiddie Court House, and troublesome creeks which required bridging or fording. After four days of this irksome work, Sheridan learned of Johnston's surrender, and they retraced their steps back through Petersburg and Richmond toward a grand review of the Union forces in Washington.³⁵

As Merritt's men marched through Petersburg and Richmond, they were reviewed by the local commanders and by Generals Halleck and Meade, but the local people, with the exception of the Negroes, who "watched with grinning satisfaction," were disinterested. Sheridan left the command as Merritt led it through Petersburg and went on ahead to Washington, where he received new orders that would have an appreciable effect on his and Merritt's further Civil War service. In the meantime, the cavalry marched in easy stages back northward over the old familiar roads of northern

Virginia, past Yellow Tavern and Culpepper and Brandy Station, to the camping sites selected for them near the Potomac, between Alexandria and Washington. Here, they refurbished their equipment and awaited the last great spectacle of the Civil War.³⁶

The Grand Review of the Cavalry Corps was scheduled for May 23, but Sheridan would miss it. He was relieved from command of the Middle Military District and ordered to a new command in the trans-Mississippi region where immediate trouble with the Mexican government and with the still-active Confederate forces of General E. Kirby Smith, in Texas, was anticipated by Grant. It was a cruel blow to Sheridan. He hurriedly devised an organization for his new command, planned his initial operations, wrote his reports of the past campaign, and recommended appropriate promotions for his deserving subordinates. After having asked Merritt whether he wanted to accompany him, Sheridan requested the transfer of both Merritt and Custer to command cavalry columns in his forthcoming Texas campaign; both were assigned to him, effective right after the Grand Review.³⁷

Sheridan also took the time to correct an error that might have adversely affected Merritt's subsequent career. Sheridan had already recommended and secured Merritt's promotion to the commissioned rank of major general of volunteers, and he had done the same for Custer. Now, as Sheridan finished his paperwork at Willard's Hotel in Washington, his officers visited him regularly, and either he, or, more likely,

Merritt, discovered that Custer's commission as major general pre-dated Merritt's. Sheridan had no intention of changing the relative rank positions of the two officers. Before leaving for Texas, Sheridan asked the Secretary of War to change Merritt's date of promotion to April 1, 1865. When Stanton complied, Merritt was again officially Custer's senior, a relationship that continued for the rest of their careers.³⁸

Merritt quickly showed his appreciation. The Cavalry Corps camps were moved from the south bank of the Potomac to near Bladensburg, nearer the starting point for the Grand Review. Crook was the senior officer once Sheridan was relieved from the cavalry command, but Crook, who was not attracted to the pomp and ceremony of military life, left on a leave of absence; thus command of the cavalry fell to Merritt as the next senior officer. In moving to the new encampments, Merritt decided to give the troopers an opportunity to honor Sheridan for the last time. The day before Sheridan was to leave for New Orleans, Merritt led the Union troopers past Willard's Hotel in an unofficial review. Sunday, May 21, was rainy and gloomy, but as 8,000 horsemen, with their bands blaring, passed by their chief's quarters, "Sheridan, surprised and touched, hurried to the balcony of the hotel and received the salute of his corps for the last time."³⁹

For the Grand Review, Merritt and the cavalry had the place of honor. General Meade, with his headquarters staff and escort, led the parade, and the Cavalry Corps

immediately followed. Merritt and his staff, with the Fifth Cavalry as escort, led the horsemen. Next in order came Custer and the Third Cavalry Division, followed by the Second Cavalry Division, under Davies, and the First Cavalry Division, led by Devin. The horse artillery followed Devin in a body.⁴⁰

Promptly at 9 A.M. on May 23, Merritt formed the cavalry along Maryland Avenue, with his own position near the northern entrance to the Capitol. Washington was crowded with visitors from every part of the nation, and thousands of voices shouted and sang as the bands played "When Johnny Comes Marching Home" and "Tramp, Tramp, Tramp, the Boys are Marching." Regiment after regiment of horsemen, hardened in the sun and blood and mud of Virginia, sabers gleaming, moved up Pennsylvania Avenue. The Cavalry Corps required one hour and twenty minutes to pass any given point. In such an enormous mass, it was difficult to recognize any individual except, perhaps, General Merritt. Colonel Tremaine, one of Sheridan's officers, watched from the reviewing stand across from the White House. He noticed a moment of suspense after Meade and the Headquarters staff passed,

. . . and then, with full company front, the magnificent cavalry corps, Sheridan's daring raiders, Sheridan's desperate fighters, wheel into view. The great captain is not with it today. . . . In Sheridan's place, and no less full of fire and fight, rides his favorite lieutenant, Wesley Merritt, worthy successor to such a chief, worthy leader of such a host. Eight thousand sabers strong, the cavalry corps of the Army of the Potomac this day receives a full measure of applause in recompense for all its scouting and marching, its watching and picketing, its raiding and fighting.⁴¹

It was a proud moment for Wesley Merritt as he passed the President and General Grant and other reviewing dignitaries; it was marred by only one incident. Behind Merritt, Custer's division, nattily augmented with bright red neckties, approached the reviewing stand. Suddenly, Custer, the magnificent horseman, "lost control" of his horse, which burst past the reviewing officials, scattering Merritt's staff in its progress, as its rider "heroically" sought to bring the beast under control. Custer succeeded, returned to his place at the head of his division, and with solemn and soldierly bearing, passed the stand for the third time. The crowd screamed Custer's name and shouted with delight, while Merritt, disgusted by the cheap display, led the Union troopers on westward to Washington Circle and back to their camps, where Sheridan's cavalry passed into history, as did Merritt's key role with the Army of the Potomac during the Civil War.⁴²

FOOTNOTES

Chapter 7

1. Sheridan, Memoirs, II, 112; Hagemann, Rebels and Redskins, 312.
2. Smith, "Recollections," 366.
3. Forsythe to Merritt, Feb. 25, 1865, War Papers of Gen. Merritt, RG 94, NA.
4. O.R., XLVI, Pt. 1, 475, 484-85; F.O. 1, 27, 1865, and F.O. 2, Feb. 28, 1865, Cavalry Command, Middle Mil. Div.: Sheridan Papers, No. 2, MSS Div. L.C.
5. Stackpole, Sheridan in the Shenandoah, 385-87.
6. Ibid., 388; O.R., XLVI, Pt. 1, 485-86; Merington, The Custer Story, 137.
7. O.R., XLVI, Pt. 1, 486-87; Pond, Shenandoah Valley, 253; Forsythe to Merritt, March 3, 1862; Forsythe to Merritt, March 14, 1865; F.O. 8, March 11, 1865, and F.O. 9, Cavalry Command, Middle Mil. Div.: Sheridan Papers, No. 2, MSS Div., L.C.
8. O.R., XLVI, Pt. 1, 486.
9. Ibid., 488, F.O. 15, March 18, 1865, Cavalry Command, Middle Mil. Div., Sheridan Papers, No. 2, MSS Div.. L.C.; A. E. Dana, MSS Diary, Copy, Entry for March 19, 1865, Sheridan Papers, No. 75, MSS Div., L.C. Hereafter cited as Dana Diary. Dana was AAG, First Cav. Div. (Devin's), Cavalry Command, Middle Mil. Div.
10. Lee to Breckenridge, March 17, 1865, quoted in Tremaine, Last Hours, 26-27.
11. O.R., XLVI, Pt. 1, 480; Rhodes, Essay, 83, 99.
12. Hergesheimer, Sheridan, 276; Sheridan, Memoirs, II, 125-34.
13. Sheridan, Memoirs, II, 124-25; Tremaine, Last Hours, 16; Rhodes, Essay, 99.
14. Grant, Memoirs, II, 428; Sheridan, Memoirs, II, 137; Sheridan Report, May 16, 1865, Sheridan Papers, No. 80, MSS Div. L.C., 1.

139. 15. O.R., XLVI, Pt. 1, 1116; Sheridan, Memoirs, II,
16. O.R., XLVI, Pt. 1, 1116; Wormser, Yellowlegs, 258.
17. Dana Diary, Entry for March 31, 1865, Sheridan Papers, No. 75, MSS Div., L.C.; Sheridan Report, May 16, 1865, Sheridan Papers, No. 80, MSS Div., L.C., 2-3; Swift, "General Wesley Merritt," 834.
18. O.R., XLVI, Pt. 1, 1117.
19. Ibid., 1110; Sheridan, Memoirs, II, 150-51.
20. O.R., XLVI, Pt. 1, 1110; Tremaine, Last Hours, 50-51, 55.
21. O.R., XLVI, Pt. 1, 1117; Sheridan Report, May 16, 1865, Sheridan Papers, No. 80, MSS Div., L.C., 4; Tremaine, Last Hours, 67.
22. Sheridan Report, May 16, 1865, Sheridan Papers, No. 80, MSS Div., L.C., 5.
23. O.R., XLVI, Pt. 1, 1117-18; Sheridan, Memoirs, II, 158-59, 160.
24. Dana Diary, Entry for April 1, 1865, Sheridan Papers, No. 75, MSS Div., L.C.; O.R., XLVI, Pt. 1, 1117-18; Van de Water, Glory-Hunter, 98; Horace Porter, Campaigning with Grant (Bloomington, Ind., 1961), 440.
25. Merritt to AGO, Acceptance Letter, May 18, 1865, ACP, NA; Sheridan to Stanton, April 19, 1865, Sheridan Papers, No. 2, MSS Div., L.C.; Tremaine, Last Hours, 70-71, 76.
26. O.R., XLVI, Pt. 1, 1118-20; O.R., XLVI, Pt. 3, 559; Grant, Memoirs, II, 464; Sheridan, Memoirs, II, 174.
27. Sheridan Report, May 16, 1865, Sheridan Papers, No. 80, MSS Div., L.C., 9; Tremaine, Last Days, 141-42; Rhodes, Essay, 86-87.
28. O.R., XLVI, Pt. 1, 1120-21; Merritt to Sheridan, April 7, 1865, War Papers of Gen. Merritt, RG 94, NA; Grant, Memoirs, II, 465; Fitzhugh Lee to R. E. Lee, April 8, 1865, HQ Papers of Robert Edward Lee, 1855-1878, Lee Family Papers, Archives, Virginia Historical Society, Richmond. Hereafter cited as Lee Papers.
29. Sheridan, Memoirs, II, 191.
30. O.R., XLVI, Pt. 1, 1121; Sheridan, Memoirs, II, 193.

31. John Gibbon, "Personal Recollections of Appomattox," Century Magazine, XIII, 936; Tremaine, Last Hours, 374; Sheridan, Memoirs, II, 196-97.

32. Wesley Merritt, "Note on the Surrender of Lee," Century Magazine, XLIII, 944; Forsythe to Merritt, April 9, 1865, War Papers of Gen. Merritt, RG 94, NA; Porter, Campaigning with Grant, 486.

33. Merritt, "Note on Surrender," 944; Gibbon, "Recollections," 939; Grant, Memoirs, II, 495; John B. Gordon, Reminiscences of the Civil War (New York, 1904), 402.

34. Dana Diary, Entry for April 10, 1865, Sheridan Papers, No. 75, MSS Div., L.C.; Tremaine, Last Hours, 273; Sheridan Report, May 16, 1865, Sheridan Papers, No. 80, MSS Div., L.C., 11.

35. Tremaine, Last Hours, 283, 294-95; F.O. 39 and F.O. 40, Cavalry Company, April 23, 1865, Sheridan Papers, No. 2, MSS Div., L.C.; Sheridan Report, May 16, 1865, Sheridan Papers, No. 80, MSS Div., L.C., 11.

36. Tremaine, Last Hours, 312.

37. G.O. 95, AGO, May 17, 1865, S.O. 249, AGO, May 22, 1865; Sheridan Papers, No. 80, MSS Div., L.C.; Sheridan to Merritt, Confidential Dispatch, May 7, 1865; Rawlins to AGO, May 22, 1865; Sheridan Papers, No. 2, MSS Div., L.C.

38. Sheridan to Stanton, Personal Memorandum, May 20, 1865, ACP, NA.

39. Tremaine, Last Hours, 312-13; Van de Water, Glory-Hunter, 123; AAG, Army of the Potomac to Merritt, May 19, 1865, U. S. Grant Papers, Ser. 5, R 20, MSS Div., L.C.

40. O.R., XLVI, Pt. 3, 1190-91; G.O. 27, Army of the Potomac, May 20, 1865, War Papers of Gen. Merritt, RG 94, NA.

41. Porter, Campaigning with Grant, 506-507; Tremaine, Last Hours, 536-37.

42. Porter, Campaigning with Grant, 506-507; Van de Water, Glory-Hunter, 125-26.

Chapter 8

TEXAS, 1865

If I owned Texas and Hell, I would rent out Texas and live in Hell.

--Philip H. Sheridan

Wesley Merritt missed the general celebrations throughout the North that followed the surrender of Confederate armies in the East. Most Volunteer troopers in the East were mustered out of service as soon as possible and returned home to be honored by parades and other local celebrations. Salem, Illinois, sponsored a huge picnic for the returning local infantry regiment; toast after toast was offered in recognition of these men and of prominent military leaders and patriotism in general. Even though Merritt's father took a prominent part in the event, no mention was made of, nor recognition given to, Merritt, who was undoubtedly the most prominent Civil War participant from Salem. It was just as well; there was honor enough in his real home, the Regular Army.¹

The Regular cavalry regiments were ordered away to the South and West, where serious trouble continued. Sheridan left for the New Orleans headquarters of his new command, the Military Division of the Southwest, a week before Merritt finished disbanding the Army of the Potomac

cavalry. Merritt reached Sheridan's headquarters by June 12, 1865, and was announced as chief-of-cavalry of Sheridan's command. After three days arranging for transportation and troop movements to support his part in the upcoming Texas campaign, Merritt left for Shreveport, Louisiana, concentration point for his new command.²

By the time Merritt and Sheridan reached New Orleans, the Confederate army of General E. Kirby Smith had dispersed. The Louisiana, Arkansas, and Missouri troops surrendered, but the Texas troops simply disbanded and returned home with their arms, to boast that they were not conquered and that they would renew the fight at some future date. Not only did they not feel defeated, but every major Federal effort in Texas during the war had failed, and there was an active disdain for Federal power and Federal will. Control of these former Confederate soldiers was one of Sheridan's, and Merritt's, major problems in the next few months.³

Sheridan had the power and the will to reintroduce the Federal presence to Texas, and he was about to use Merritt to do so. However, there were other serious problems in and about Texas in June of 1865. The Negroes of Texas were still held in slavery. The Emancipation Proclamation of 1863 applied only to areas occupied by Federal forces, so that the freedom of Texas slaves was, at best, theoretical. On June 19, however, Sheridan removed any doubts as to their legal status by issuing, through the District of Texas, Special Orders 3 and 4, which declared

the Negroes in Texas to be free and to have absolute equality of personal and property rights. Sheridan was a genuine believer in the sentiments expressed in these orders and strove, throughout his tenure in Texas, to protect the Freedmen and the Freedmen's Bureau, which was later introduced as the Federal agency responsible for their welfare. The June 19 declaration made little immediate impression on the White Texans. Throughout the summer and fall of 1865, Negroes remained virtual slaves in those areas where Federal authority was not applied. Murder, intimidation, and other outrages were regularly visited upon Freedmen and upon White Unionists by unrepentant Texans who, gradually recognizing the fact of defeat, tended to blame Negroes and loyalists for their troubles.⁴

Both Grant and Sheridan felt another problem was more pressing, however. By summer 1865, the government of Emperor Maximilian had driven the government of the Republic of Mexico and its president, Benito Juarez, from most of northern Mexico along the Rio Grande River. The Imperial government offered sanctuary to and supported colonization schemes for ex-Confederates, who crossed over from Texas in large numbers after the dissolution of the Southern armies. Grant and Sheridan felt that the position these former Rebels would occupy, near the Texas border, and their probable rearming by the Imperial government constituted a threat--that the whole operation was essentially a part of the rebellion which would have to be suppressed before

peace could be assured. Grant wanted to sell surplus arms to the Juarez forces, to send Union officers into Mexico to aid the Republican forces, and, if necessary, to invade Mexico in an anti-Imperialist campaign. Sheridan was enthusiastic over the last alternative and designed his initial Texas operations around it.⁵

Sheridan had approximately 52,000 men, the largest field force he ever commanded, for the Texas campaign. The Twenty-fifth Corps, a Negro infantry unit just arrived from Virginia, was sent along the Gulf coast from Indianola to the Rio Grande, with the bulk of the command being posted along that river to intercept fleeing Confederates and to stop the traffic in arms taking place across the border. The Fourth Corps, another infantry organization, penetrated inland from Indianola to San Antonio. Additional smaller columns pushed up the Rio Grande to Laredo, along the Red River line to the towns of Marshall and Jefferson, and inland from Galveston to Brenham. These troops were under the immediate control of Major General Gordon Granger, who reported to Sheridan.

The mobile striking force and main thrust of Sheridan's campaign, however, consisted of two new cavalry divisions being formed on the Louisiana-Texas border at Shreveport and Alexandria. Merritt and Custer commanded them, under the immediate control of Sheridan. Merritt would march southwestward from Shreveport, through Marshall and Huntsville, to San Antonio. Custer would travel roughly

parallel to Merritt's column, from Alexandria, Louisiana, to Austin. Merritt and Custer were assigned to these divisional commands before Sheridan arrived in New Orleans, but their assignment appeared to be a direct affront to at least one of the capable western cavalry commanders. Major General Benjamin Grierson, who led the famous Mississippi raid in 1863, commanded the cavalry forces at New Orleans and felt that he was unjustly deprived of command of the new divisions in order to make a place for two of Sheridan's "toadies."⁶

Organizing the two cavalry columns proved to be more difficult than either Merritt or Sheridan thought. Cavalry regiments in the Louisiana-Texas-Arkansas region were widely scattered; Sheridan tried to discover the best ones for assignment to the new divisions. He gave priority to shipping the units up the Red River to their concentration points, but it took all the steamers that could be contracted for between Memphis and New Orleans to accomplish the task. When the troopers and their mounts and supplies began to arrive by late June, Merritt found himself commanding about 5,000 men in the First Division, as opposed to approximately 4,500 in Custer's Second Division.⁷

The six regiments which reported to Merritt at his camp near Shreveport were all Volunteer cavalry. They were not the quality of cavalymen to which he was accustomed in the Army of the Potomac. The regiments serving in the trans-Mississippi region never had the opportunity to serve

together extensively, nor did they serve often as complete regiments, since their duty had mainly consisted of guarding small posts in detachments and of skirmishing with equally small Rebel squadrons. No regimental pride had been forged by shared regimental combat. In addition, unlike the eastern armies, no rigorous screening of officers had eliminated those unfit for command. The result was that Merritt had his hands full instilling discipline into these heretofore almost-undisciplined troopers.

One of Merritt's regiments, the Tenth Illinois Cavalry, had a competent colonel, but was much demoralized by its previous experience and by the prospect of further Civil War service. The troopers heard of joyous welcomes being extended to the soldiers returning from the East and saw many western regiments being mustered out of service, starting in June; consequently, they felt much abused. Merritt could sympathize with their position, but he was under increasing pressure from Sheridan to start his division toward San Antonio and had to use them. He made an example of the Tenth Illinois, and by the end of June, as his supplies and mounts arrived, he had his unwilling troopers formed into what Sheridan described as "the finest column of cavalry which has marched during the war."⁸

Custer was having even more trouble than Merritt in his camp near Alexandria. His troopers suffered from the same lack of morale and enthusiasm for further service. Merritt had the ability to "keep the lid from blowing off"

by firm, but reasonable, discipline and by making his officers competently perform their duties. By successive approximation to his ideal efficiency level, he was successful. Custer, on the other hand, demanded instant obedience and performance from the enlisted men while tolerating incompetent officers. In the presence of constant combat, his eastern commands had responded to these harsh and unwise demands since Custer's personal bravery had made up for his otherwise-intolerable harshness. Custer now resorted to flogging and other degrading punishments that were unacceptable to volunteer soldiers at the end of a long war, and his western troopers mutinied. He heavy-handedly suppressed the mutiny, showing great personal courage in the process, but he gained the reputation for senseless repression that followed him throughout his career.⁹

Sheridan considered that the main purpose of Merritt's march was to move a powerful cavalry force to and across the Rio Grande against Maximilian's forces in northern Mexico. He feared that the Imperialists were being reinforced heavily and was most anxious to have Merritt start quickly since Custer was delayed by disciplinary problems. Sheridan sent Merritt a pontoon train for crossing streams on his line of march and for bridging and crossing the Rio Grande should war actually be desired by the Federal government.¹⁰

By the Fourth-of-July, with the pontoon train, supply train, and 5,000 well-mounted and trained cavalrymen, Merritt began his march across Texas. In order to live off the land

as much as possible, Merritt marched his division by regiments, one day apart, and found sufficient forage for the horses enroute. By July 10, the head of his column passed through Marshall, Texas, as the rearguard left Shreveport. His ultimate goal was the Rio Grande, but enroute, Merritt's troopers brought at least a glimpse of the "Terrible Swift Sword" to northeastern Texas. A newspaperman accompanying Merritt's column reported that the march created consternation throughout the region, since it brought the first Federal troops seen there during the Civil War. Merritt kept the men under strict control to prevent any undue conflict with local civilians or with crowds of surly ex-Confederate soldiers along the line of march. He issued circulars to allay the apprehensions of the local people and issued strict orders to prevent pilfering and entry into private homes. Many Negroes, seeing the long column of Federal troopers tried to join the march, but Merritt prohibited it, telling them to remain in the fields working for wages as Sheridan's previous order freeing them had specified. Needless to say, once the Union troopers were gone, the status of the Negroes was essentially unchanged, as no mechanism for their relief was yet at hand.¹¹

Merritt reached San Antonio during the first week of August. Sheridan had been busy making arrangements for his arrival and for supplying and refitting the troopers and horses after the march. The Quartermaster Department was barely able to meet the demands for subsisting the huge

Federal forces in Texas, but by constant attention and pressure, Sheridan provided for his two cavalry columns adequately. While Merritt was enroute to San Antonio, Sheridan's command structure changed. The Military Division of the Southwest was replaced by the Military Division of the Gulf, commanded by Sheridan, and having as one of its sub-components, the Department of Texas. One of Sheridan's favorite infantry officers, Horatio Wright, commander of the old Sixth Corps in the Armies of the Shenandoah and the Potomac, was assigned to the new Texas department. All troops in Texas came under Wright's command except for the cavalry divisions of Merritt and Custer, who still reported directly to Sheridan so that he could use them quickly and efficiently as the occasion might demand. Custer was ordered to report directly to Merritt after the two commanders reached their destinations; however, Merritt was not officially designated as chief-of-cavalry of the Military Division of the Gulf until November.¹²

Sheridan also visited the Rio Grande border to personally evaluate the situation in Mexico. By late August, the Republican government of Juarez had regained much of the territory along the Rio Grande, and Sheridan decided that a strong show of force would end any significant Imperial resistance in northern Mexico. He staged a review of Merritt's cavalry division and the Fourth Corps at San Antonio, then went back to the border posts and towns, inquiring about the best approaches into Mexico, etc.. Rumors of an impending American invasion of Mexico had their desired

effect, and the last vestige of French influence disappeared from the Rio Grande. With it came an end to organized Confederate colonization attempts in Mexico. With the end of any Imperialist threat to Texas, the need for the huge Federal forces in Texas also disappeared.

Merritt's primary function during the late summer and fall was supervising the mustering-out of the Volunteer cavalry troopers in Texas. A sufficient force had to be maintained along the lower Rio Grande to discourage illegal arms traffic and to recover government property carried off by former Confederates, which had been either hidden or sold to the various factions still fighting farther south in Mexico. Merritt brought the troopers back from their posts as they could be spared. The pace was too slow for almost all the Volunteers except the Negro troopers, many of whom hoped to be incorporated into the Regular Army rather than to be mustered out. Merritt was overwhelmed with the volume of individual and group requests for discharge, many of them of a most ingenious nature. His paperwork fell far behind the demands from Sheridan's staff, but by late September, the procedure was under control. Of Sheridan's 52,000-man force, only 12,000 remained by the end of September, and many of these were most impatient to go home.¹⁴

There was a clamor for military protection from the frontier regions of western Texas where some Indian depredations had been reported during the year. Sheridan did not believe them to be very serious and could not have done

much about it if they had been. He had no Regular troops available for Texas; although two regiments were enroute. As soon as these Regulars were equipped and mounted, the remaining Volunteers could be discharged. The Fourth and Sixth Cavalry arrived in New Orleans during late October and were refitted and sent on to Merritt at San Antonio.¹⁵

With such reduced forces, there was no real need for two major generals of cavalry in San Antonio. Sheridan wired Merritt to determine whether Merritt preferred to be transferred to a district command in northeast Texas or to be appointed chief-of-cavalry for the Military Division of the Gulf. Merritt preferred the latter, and was so assigned on November 8. Custer took over immediate command of the remaining cavalry, reporting directly to Wright and the Department of Texas.¹⁶

Merritt remained in San Antonio to supervise the mounting of the Regular cavalry regiments from the vast supply of horses which had been turned in by the discharged Volunteers. In his new position, Merritt also used Federal cavalrymen to support the provisional governor of Texas in supervising activities of the civil court system of the state. Military authorities were not to interfere with the workings of the Texas courts, but when in the judgment of the local military commander or the provisional governor justice was not done, military tribunals could re-try the cases in question.

Through this means, Sheridan attempted to see that at least a minimum of justice was realized by the Freedmen under his jurisdiction and that criminals, especially those involved with the military, were punished. In this connection, Merritt arrested some gamblers in San Antonio who were preying on his troopers. When they were dismissed by the local court, Sheridan simply authorized Merritt to re-arrest them and try them by military court.¹⁷

The onset of winter brought little activity for Merritt in San Antonio. He had time to attend civic meetings in San Antonio, one of which resulted in considerable criticism of Merritt. At a Union League meeting, Merritt was called upon for a speech, but he demurred, claiming to "feel the effects of the wine." He finally gave in, however, and gave a short speech in which he praised the loyal men of Texas and added that, perhaps, he should come down to Texas some day and run for office. One of the soldiers attending the meeting shouted "Damned if you'll get my vote!" Merritt replied that he would rather have the vote of one loyal Texan than the votes of ten abolitionists. Indignant letters were rushed back to some of the "radical" congressmen in Washington, asking for Merritt's dismissal, but nothing came of them. It was a small indiscretion, but one whose sentiments were unpopular with powerful congressmen and with Sheridan; although the latter knew Merritt well enough to ignore the whole incident. It was the last indiscrete public utterance attributed to Merritt until after the Spanish-

American War.¹⁸

By late December, Merritt joined Sheridan at the rather lavish division headquarters in New Orleans. There were many Regular and Volunteer officers made surplus by the end of active operations, not only in Texas, but throughout the North. A reorganization of the Regular Army was under consideration by Congress, but there was, in early 1866, no indication of what direction it would take.

Merritt was still shown as a captain on the rolls of the Second Cavalry, but he held the brevet rank of colonel in the Regular Army as well as major general of volunteers.

In the state of uncertainty which existed at the time, no one knew what value the brevet ranks would have in the future army reorganization. The officer would surely be addressed by his brevet rank and wear its uniform, but its relationship to actual assignment could not be foretold.

In order to give his two favorite subordinates every advantage, Sheridan recommended and secured for Merritt and Custer the rank of brevet major general in the Regular Army.¹⁹

With his last Civil War promotion secured, and with his chief remaining in the important command position at New Orleans, Merritt applied for a leave of absence. Merritt was twenty-nine years old as his Civil War career ended and had been in almost continual combat for the past four years, with little or no chance for any extended relaxation. Custer had been offered service in the Mexican Army,

with high pay, but Merritt had not, and he had no particular plans for the future beyond whatever assignment the "New Army" would bring.

On February 1, 1866, Merritt was mustered out of the Volunteer service and was granted a thirty-day leave of absence, which he soon had extended by sixty days. He had had very little chance to spend any significant part of his past pay, which, for a major general, was \$8,000 per year. Now, virtually a "free man" for the first time since 1855, when he entered West Point, Merritt decided to tour Europe for what became the first of many such trips.²⁰

Wesley Merritt's rise to high rank and responsibility during the Civil War was spectacular, and it was accomplished without any outside influence, entirely on the basis of good fortune, courage, ability, and responsible behavior. He was held in the highest esteem by the war's most demanding commander, Sheridan, and he never failed to meet or exceed Sheridan's expectations. Merritt was as experienced as any American officer at the time in cavalry leadership and combat. His rivalry with Custer had risen to a peak in the Shenandoah Valley and during the Grand Review, but both had worked well together in Texas, and they ended their Civil War careers in the same relative positions they had assumed when both were made brigadier generals in 1863, with Merritt being senior in the same rank. Merritt richly deserved the praise that came his way, and now his three months away from the Army was equally well deserved.

FOOTNOTES

Chapter 8

1. Salem Advocate (Ill.), July 13, 1865; Elizabeth Bacon Custer, Tenting on the Plains: or General Custer in Kansas and Texas, Western Frontier Library, I (Norman, 1971), 34.
2. O.R., XLVIII, Pt. 1, 297; O.R. XLVIII, Pt. 2, 858; Hagemann, Fighting Rebels and Redskins, 7.
3. O.R., XLVIII, Pt. 1, 298.
4. Ibid., Pt. 2, 929, 1035; Robert W. Shook, "The Federal Military in Texas, 1865-1870," TMH, VI, No. 1 (1867), 6, 11-13.
5. O.R., XLVIII, Pt. 2, 1080, 1092; Brown to AAG, MDG, June 2, 1865, Microcopy 619, R 453, NA.
6. Shook, "Federal Military," 6-8; O.R. XLVIII, Pt. 1, 298; S.O. 1, MDG, July 18, 1865, Sheridan Papers, No. 80, MSS Div., L.C.; Benjamin Grierson to Alice Grierson, June 21, 1875, Grierson Collection, Archives, Fort Davis National Historic Site. This letter was first brought to my attention by San Angelo, Texas, Historian, Susan Miles, who has a copy in her collection.
7. O.R., LIII, 602, Carl C. Rister, Border Command: General Phil Sheridan in the West (Norman, 1944), II; Sheridan to Rawlins, June 29, 1865, Sheridan Papers, No. 2, MSS Div., L.C.
8. S.O. 8, June 13, 1865, S.O., MDSW, RG 393, NA; Sheridan to Granger, June 29, 1865, Sheridan Papers, No. 2, MSS Div., L.C.; Byrne to AAG, Cavalry Forces, MDSW, n.d., War Papers of Gen. Merritt, RG 94, NA.
9. Van de Water, Glory-Hunter, 129-33. For other interpretations of the Alexandria Mutiny see: Merrington, Custer, 172-73, E. Custer, Tenting on the Plains, I, 93-98, and ANJ, March 10, 1866.
10. O.R., XLVIII, Pt. 2, 841; Sheridan to Merritt, Confidential Dispatch, July 5, 1865, Sheridan Papers, No. 2, MSS Div., L.C.; AAG, MDSW, to Merritt, June 21, 1865, LS, MDSW, RG 393, NA.
11. Salem Advocate (Ill.), August 3, 1865; Missouri Democrat (St. Louis), July 9, 1865; O.R., XLVIII, Pt. 2, 1073.

12. O.R., XLVIII, Pt. 1, 301; Sheridan to Merritt, July 20, July 29, and Sept. 11, 1865, Sheridan Papers, No. 2, MSS Div., L.C.; G.O. 118, MDSW, June 27, 1865, Sheridan Papers, No. 80, MSS Div., L.C.; G.O. 31, Nov. 11, 1865, G.O., MDG, RG 393, NA; G.O. 1, August 6, 1865, G.O., DT, RG 393, NA.

13. Sheridan, Memoirs, II, 215; O.R., XLVIII, Pt. 1, 299-301; Sheridan to Merritt, Sept. 11 and 20, 1865, Sheridan Papers, No. 3, MSS Div., L.C.

14. O.R., XLVIII, Pt. 2, 1235-36; AAG, MDG, to Merritt, Sept. 25, 1865, LS, MDG, RG 393, NA. The bulk of material in the LS and LR files, DT, deals with requests for discharge and with mustering-out procedures.

15. O.R., XLVIII, Pt. 1, 301-302; Sheridan to Merritt, August 17, 1865; Sheridan to Grant, Nov. 3, 1865; Sheridan Papers, No. 3, MSS Div., L.C.; AAG, MDG, to Merritt, Nov. 6, 1865, TS, MDG, RG 393, NA.

16. S.O. 100, Nov. 8, 1865, S.O., MDG, RG 393, NA; Sheridan to Merritt, Nov. 3, 1865; Sheridan Papers, No. 3, MSS Div., L.C.

17. Forsythe to Merritt, Nov. 15, 1865, Sheridan Papers, No. 3, MSS Div., L.C.

18. ANJ, March 10, 1866. This article was furnished to me by John M. Carroll.

19. Sheridan to Stanton, Letter of Recommendation, December 9, 1865, Sheridan Papers, No. 3, MSS Div., L.C.

20. G.O. 168, USA, Dec. 28, 1865, War Papers of Gen. Merritt, RG 94, NA; S.O. 179, USA, April 19, 1866, Microcopy 744, R 18, NA.

Chapter 9

NINTH CAVALRY

It might as well be understood at once that no distinction will be made in reference to color of soldiers wearing the uniform of the United States.

--Philip H. Sheridan

The Regular army to which Merritt returned in mid-summer of 1866 was about to be reorganized into the form it would retain, essentially unchanged, until the Spanish-American War. The "Act to Increase and Fix the Military Peace Establishment of the United States" was signed into law on July 28. General Grant announced its features to the Army commands on August 1, and immediately a struggle for preferment in obtaining assignments in the new organization started among the Regular and Volunteer officers.¹

In Washington a struggle was building that would determine whether the relatively mild policies of President Andrew Johnson or the tougher policies of the Republican-controlled Congress would define the course of Reconstruction in the defeated South. Regardless of the outcome of this power struggle, a large Regular military force was needed to occupy and patrol the southern states. In addition, the Army's responsibilities for protecting the western frontier were greatly enlarged as new areas were opened to settlement during the Civil War and as transcontinental railroad

construction promised to induce even greater expansion. To meet these demands, the postwar Regular Army was increased from its prewar strength of 18,000 to approximately 54,000 officers and men.²

There were to be forty-five infantry regiments. The five prewar artillery regiments were continued, but the six Regular cavalry regiments were increased to ten. Of the new units created, four infantry regiments and two cavalry regiments were to be composed entirely of Negro enlisted men in recognition of the gallant services performed during the Civil War by almost 200,000 Negro soldiers and sailors.³

Grant commanded the "New Army" as general, while Sherman became lieutenant general and commanded the Division of the Missouri, which included almost all of the western plains frontier. Sheridan was one of five major generals of the line, and there were, additionally, ten brigadier generals, excluding those serving with the various staff corps and departments, whose channels of authority and promotion were separate from those of the line officers. These general officers were assigned according to their seniority in the Regular Army.

In the grades of colonel and below, a different system was in effect. There were many Regular officers to fill the vacancies in the old, as well as new, regiments. There was also a large number of Volunteer officers who wanted to make the Army a career after four years of wartime service. There were obviously fewer positions to fill than there were

applicants. Whether from a genuine fear of a standing army officered by West Pointers, or whether the available positions represented an irresistible opportunity for political patronage, Congress provided that all the original vacancies in the grade of first and second lieutenant would be filled from among the experienced Volunteer officers. In the rank of captain through colonel, half of the appointments were to be from the Volunteers and half from the Regulars. This last stipulation affected Merritt's career significantly and led to a vigorous scramble for appointment among the Regular officers.⁴

The month of August, 1866, was one of anxiety for Merritt, as it was for most of his peers. Instead of one rival for preferment, he now had many. Merritt had attained the highest rank reasonably possible during the war as commissioned major general of volunteers. He was, however, still a captain in the Regular Army. While he was in Europe on leave, Sheridan was active in his behalf; although Sheridan was still highly-placed and influential, so were many other generals and politicians. Grant and Sherman, as numbers one and two in the Army, had enormous influence in making appointments to the available positions. Merritt was not unknown to Grant, who, as recently as June, had seconded Sheridan's recommendation for promotion of Merritt and Custer to brevet major general rank in the Regular Army. Merritt was not one of Grant's "favorites," however. Grant's long service in the western armies before taking command in the East had brought

several young officers to his attention. Similarly, Sherman had favorite officers to recommend and was in a good position to push them.⁵

Merritt's rivals tried different schemes to obtain preferment during August. President Johnson embarked on his famous "swing around the circle" trip intended to present his views and policies on Reconstruction to the nation. Custer, who engaged heavily in partisan politics during the summer and who pinned his hopes for favoritism on Johnson and the National Union Party, accompanied the President on part of the "swing." With characteristic lack of foresight, Custer backed the wrong horse, for Johnson's tour and policies became more and more unpopular. Merritt shied away from any political involvement and stayed in New York City during the month, awaiting news of the upcoming appointments. There, he did attend a dinner at Delmonico's for the presidential party, undoubtedly for the purpose of visibility, since Grant and other notables were also present. Other officers deluged their congressmen with pleas and personal recommendations, but in the end their efforts accomplished little.⁶

Assignment of officers was obviously a combination of seniority and influence, but another factor was present. Assignment to the new Negro regiments, whose officers were all White, was generally considered to be less desirable than assignment to the White regiments. Some officers refused to serve with the Negro regiments and accepted lower rank in White regiments instead. General Eugene A. Carr, a prewar

Regular officer with an outstanding record of Civil War service, refused appointment as lieutenant colonel of one of the new Negro regiments, the Ninth Cavalry, since he did not consider the Negro fit to be a soldier. Carr preferred to be senior major in the Fifth Cavalry, where he would later serve under Merritt.⁷

Grant's influence was felt in the appointment of two young officers with whom Merritt would serve in the postwar Army. With only half of the higher officer positions available to Regulars, the Volunteer officers were often able to secure higher rank in the postwar reorganization than Regular officers who had attained higher Civil War rank. Nelson A. Miles had ably commanded an infantry division in the Army of the Potomac during the final campaigns. He had been breveted major general of Volunteers, and he was a favorite of Grant. Miles had entered the Army from civil life; now Grant recommended and secured for him a colonelcy in one of the new infantry regiments.⁸

Another of Grant's favored young officers, Ranald S. Mackenzie, would become Merritt's chief rival in the postwar Army. Four years Merritt's junior, Mackenzie was a brilliant, irascible young man, who had commanded a cavalry division attached to Sheridan's forces in the Appomattox campaign. Merritt was senior to Mackenzie in both Volunteer and Regular rank, but with favorable recommendation by Sheridan and Grant, Mackenzie was able to outdo Merritt in the scramble for position. Mackenzie was promoted to colonel of one of

the new Negro infantry regiments.⁹

Both George Crook, with whom Merritt had fought in the closing Civil War campaign, and John Gibbon, his old West Point instructor, had attained high wartime rank; furthermore, they were considerably senior to Merritt in the Regular Army. Crook got a lieutenant colonelcy in the infantry, while Gibbon received the last appointment as colonel that was available to Regular officers. In early August, Grant recommended that Merritt be appointed lieutenant colonel of cavalry (White), while Mackenzie was to be major of infantry (Colored). Apparently, Grant changed his mind by September, for when the appointments were announced on the twentieth of that month, Merritt was offered, and accepted, appointment as lieutenant colonel in the Ninth Cavalry.¹⁰

Merritt had done almost nothing in his own behalf since Army reorganization was first rumored. He had been out of the country during most of the year, and after he returned he did very little to gain preferment with the men who made the final decisions. Any political influence his father and brothers might have exerted from Illinois was missing, since they were Democrats. Sheridan's influence apparently extended to securing lieutenant colonelcies for his "boys," Merritt, Custer, and Devin. Custer accepted that rank in the new Seventh Cavalry, while Devin did likewise in the Eighth Cavalry. Whether Merritt overestimated Sheridan's influence, felt that his spectacular Civil War record alone would bring him a colonelcy, or simply believed that the

scramble for rank was undignified, he never revealed. It is certain that he was ambitious for higher rank, and the descent from major general to lieutenant colonel must have been severely disappointing, even though he was the senior cavalry lieutenant colonel and could look forward to promotion when the first vacancy occurred. In any event, no promotion came his way for the next ten years.¹¹

The Ninth Cavalry was assigned to Sheridan's Department of the Gulf for service on the Texas frontier. With no more colonelcies open to Regular officers, Sheridan and Grant arranged the appointment of Edward Hatch to command the Ninth. Hatch was a capable officer with a fine Civil War record. Grant had been impressed with Hatch during the 1863 western campaigns, and Hatch was an old and intimate friend of Sheridan from the early war days when Hatch had helped Sheridan earn his first major promotion. With two experienced and judicious officers such as Hatch and Merritt assigned, Sheridan was anxious to begin recruiting troopers for the regiment. Many of the Colored Volunteer regiments were still serving in the Department of the Gulf in 1866, and Sheridan felt that recruiting "splendid material" from their ranks would be easy. He was authorized to begin immediately, but there were more obstacles to recruiting, organizing, and training a new Negro cavalry regiment than he realized.¹²

All officers appointed to the new cavalry regiments had to qualify physically and professionally before a

Cavalry Examination Board in Washington. Merritt took his examination there in October, before joining his regiment. He was pronounced competent from both standpoints to perform the duties of a cavalry officer and left for New Orleans, arriving in mid-November. With him went one of the Ninth's newly-appointed majors, James F. Wade, son of Ohio's powerful Republican Senator Benjamin Wade. Major Wade had served with cavalry throughout the war, being breveted brigadier general of volunteers, and he was the only field officer of the Ninth Cavalry who had experience serving with Negro troops. Both Wade and another regimental major, Albert P. Morrow, were highly competent, experienced officers and served with distinction in the postwar Army. Morrow had served under Merritt as an officer of Bush's Lancers throughout the war, and Merritt would rely on him for important detachment commands in the future.¹³

Merritt arrived in Louisiana to find the recruiting process in full swing but fast approaching chaos. Hatch had established regimental headquarters in Greenville, near New Orleans, and had started officially accepting five-year enlistments in the Ninth Cavalry in early November as his first officer arrived. Major George A. Forsyth, who had served on both Sheridan's and Merritt's staffs during the war, was charged with establishing the recruiting operation. Recruits were pouring in by the time Merritt joined Hatch and relieved the regimental commander so that he could travel to Washington for examination before the Cavalry Board.¹⁴

Sheridan's hopes for recruiting the Ninth Cavalry from discharged or active Negro Volunteer soldiers were partially subverted by several factors. Many of the Negro Volunteer units were sent back to the East Coast to be mustered out; these men were unavailable to regimental recruiters. Many Volunteer soldiers who otherwise would have enlisted in the Regulars declined to do so, since they were denied any furlough at the time of transfer. In addition, Sheridan was under increasing pressure to re-establish the Texas frontier posts, and his sense of urgency carried over into the recruiting process. In New Orleans, recruiters tended to hastily accept any Negro who volunteered, rather than to choose those of sound physique, intelligence, and experience. Even worse, recruiting stations for the Ninth were established in Kentucky to hasten the process, so that many of the resulting recruits were unskilled in any occupation except rudimentary farming or labor, having just been released from slavery, and were completely uneducated and inexperienced in military affairs. The result was that only about forty-eight percent of the enlisted men of the Ninth Cavalry had any prior service experience and, with it, any regard for discipline.¹⁵

From Kentucky and New Orleans, Negro recruits passed into the regimental camps, but there were few officers to supervise or train them. The requirement that all officers should pass the Cavalry Board examination was theoretically sound, since it provided the mechanism for eliminating incompetent officers; but it significantly delayed many officers

in joining their regiments. In addition, many were given leaves of absence after assignment. The result was that few Ninth Cavalry company officers, lieutenants and captains, were actually available for duty. During the summer and fall, Sheridan and Hatch had temporarily assigned officers from active Negro Volunteer regiments to supervise the recruits until Regular officers reported in sufficient numbers to relieve them. There were never enough, however, to even keep the hundreds of recruits actively employed, much less to train or discipline them.¹⁶

The situation was serious when Merritt arrived, but he was immediately detailed by department headquarters to preside over a Board of Officers appointed to inspect horses for the new commands. He commanded the regiment in Hatch's absence, but had little time for administration. After returning from Washington, Hatch was assigned to command the Post of New Orleans, and he could not apply himself to the Ninth Cavalry either. Some of the Volunteer officers were regularly assigned during the winter of 1866-1867, and Regular officers straggled in; but by March, when the regiment prepared to take the field, only thirteen of the full complement of forty-one officers were on hand.¹⁷

A worse environment for organizing raw recruits into an efficient cavalry regiment can scarcely be imagined. Nearby New Orleans not only offered attractive distractions to men insufficiently employed and supervised, but also offered a refuge to the increasing number of recruits who deserted as

the prospect of frontier service loomed. The company officers were a mixed lot--some excellent, some indifferent or incompetent. Discipline was left to the acting or regular company commander in the absence of field officers; some were brutal in its enforcement without providing compensating justice or instruction. Merritt returned to the regiment in February, but had only a month in which to establish drill in stable care, elementary dismounted maneuvers, and military routine. Anything else would have to wait until the Black troopers reached their frontier posts.¹⁸

The enlisted men of the Ninth Cavalry were typical products of slavery. Only one of the more than 800 troopers could read and write, and he was made regimental sergeant-major. Most were illiterate and superstitious, having had no chance at education. With the exception of those who were former Volunteers, the men were strangers to sanitation and to any but rudimentary eating and hygienic habits; even the former soldiers had only a minimal knowledge of these necessary functions. They had been anxious to enlist, since the Army offered opportunities, even at thirteen dollars per month, which were otherwise unavailable to Negroes in the postwar South. Once instructed and disciplined, the "Buffalo Soldiers" of the Ninth Cavalry and its sister regiment, the Tenth, established records of courage, endurance, and successful combat unexcelled by any other regiments in the Army. Where the White Regulars were generally despised by their civilian opposite numbers, the Black community thought highly of the

Negro soldiers, and a feeling of pride grew within the Ninth Cavalry.¹⁹

Merritt left no record of his feelings toward his Negro troopers at the time. Most army officers were reluctant to serve with Negro troops in the postwar Army, and Merritt had never had any particular affection for, or for that matter any contact with, Negroes, so there is no reason to believe he was overly pleased with his assignment. Nevertheless, Merritt was thoroughly professional, and it is likely that he agreed with Sheridan's determination that no distinction be made because of color in the treatment accorded United States soldiers. His actions in the next few months indicate such an attitude. Merritt later praised the excellence of the Negro soldiers with whom he had served; however, there was little evidence of future excellence as the regiment trained in Louisiana.

Sheridan, meanwhile, had planned to re-establish the frontier posts in Texas as soon as the weather warmed. He had approximately 5,000 troops available for service in Texas and intended to use sixty percent of this force to protect the frontier. He was criticized by frontier Texans for committing too much of his military strength in protecting the Texas Freedmen. By early 1867, murders of Negroes by citizens and law-enforcement officers of Texas were widespread, as were other outrages. In attempting to moderate these offenses, Sheridan has been criticized by Texas historians for pursuing vindictive policies and for showing little sympathy for Texans;

he is guilty if only White Texans are considered. By late February, however, he was prepared to extend Federal protection to frontier settlers who were complaining of his inattention. The irony lay with the fact that while Federal power was needed to protect the lives and property of Negroes in the Texas interior, Negro troopers marched to protect the lives and property of White Texans from the depredations of Indians and Mexicans along the Rio Grande border.²⁰

The great postwar Texas cattle industry had started with a modest drive in 1866, but during the spring and summer of 1867, considerable numbers of cattle were herded northward along the Goodnight Trail, which followed the Pecos River through western Texas. Frontier depredations, which had previously been few in number, increased as the herds attracted predatory bands of American and Mexican Indians and non-Indians. Responding to calls for protection of the stage road connecting San Antonio and El Paso, Sheridan decided to open the road and to protect it with Forts Clark, Stockton, Davis, and Bliss. A large post would be established at Fort Davis, some 475 miles northeast of San Antonio and 200 miles short of Fort Bliss and El Paso. Fort Stockton was located near the Pecos River and the Great Commanche War Trail, which was used by those raiders to pass between northern Mexico and Indian Territory. The Ninth Cavalry was assigned the task of garrisoning Fort Davis and Fort Stockton and actively campaigning against the Indian tribes. Hatch went to Fort Stockton with regimental headquarters and four companies, while Merritt took

six companies to Fort Davis; the remaining companies of the twelve authorized were sent on detached duty to Brownsville.²¹

During March 1867, as Hatch and Merritt were preparing their troopers for the march to the frontier, Congress finally won the struggle with President Johnson over the course of postwar Southern Reconstruction and passed the Reconstruction Act. This affected Sheridan's internal problems by increasing the responsibilities of the military in supervising the civil affairs of Texas, in protecting the Freedmen's Bureau, and in protecting the Freedmen themselves. Sheridan's Department of the Gulf became the Fifth Military District, with the District of Texas as a subdivision. Sheridan remained in command until fall, 1867, when the complaints of outraged and unreconstructed Texans moved President Johnson to transfer him to the Department of the Missouri. Although Merritt would be directly under the District of Texas, as commander of Fort Davis, he would still be serving under Sheridan for the next six months, and it was fortunate that this was so.²²

The Ninth Cavalry boarded steamers at New Orleans during the last week of March, 1867. The city was not loath to see the Negro troopers leave. There had been numerous conflicts between the recruits and civilians. The New Orleans Bee reported assaults and arrests, and Merritt was anxious to separate the men from the source of so much temptation and trouble. Morale was low as the impressionable soldiers told and retold stories of the terrible fate that might befall them in Indian warfare and as they contemplated being stationed

almost 500 miles from civilization. Merritt was overwhelmed with administrative matters, since the few company officers were barely able to control their men, and he had no clerical assistant.²³

On March 29, Merritt disembarked at Indianola, Texas. The weather was cold and wet, and the condition of the roads delayed his march somewhat. Still, he reached San Antonio with five companies on April 4, and passed through to San Pedro Springs, north of the city. During the march, discipline deteriorated even farther. Some of the company officers successfully supervised their men in the camp at San Pedro Springs, but the commander of E Company, Lieutenant Edward M. Heyl, did not. Heyl had exhibited little ability and some brutality as company commander. While still in Louisiana, he had struck one of his men over the head with the flat of his saber, wounding him. Heyl had struck another man in a similar manner since leaving Indianola. On the evening of April 8, after drinking heavily, Heyl assaulted and wounded still another trooper. Merritt was unaware of any of these events, since with over 300 men in camp and only seven company officers, he had to rely on his officers to discipline and control their own companies, while he, as the only field officer, made the necessary arrangements for subsistence supplies and equipment for the march to Fort Davis. He simply had too few dependable officers for the job.²⁴

Heyl was still drunk the following morning and tried to ride down one of his enlisted men for some infraction.

Merritt had established strict rules regarding horse care; when three of Heyl's men neglected to remove the nosebags from their horses, Heyl, infuriated, got lariats from his tent and had the men suspended by the wrists from a nearby tree with their feet off the ground. That done, Heyl visited a nearby saloon, returning to find that one of his victims had escaped. One of the remaining pair was trying to reach a nearby stump with his feet in order to gain some relief. This enraged Heyl further; he got a pistol, sat down in front of his tent, and started firing at the struggling trooper. Fortunately, he came nowhere near the man, but becoming even more agitated at his own marksmanship, he drew his saber and beat the hanging trooper fourteen or fifteen times, wounding him severely in the side. Merritt was in his own quarters some distance away and heard nothing of the morning's events.²⁵

Heyl's company arrived during this revolting performance. Heyl returned to his tent, but the company orderly sergeant, Harrison Bradford, decided that the angry troopers should not have to suffer Heyl's tyranny any longer. Bradford formed the company and marched them toward Merritt's tent "to see the general." Enroute, the company passed Heyl's tent and that officer rushed out to halt the marching troopers. Heyl exchanged heated words with Sergeant Bradford, then fumbled in his pocket, brought out his pistol and shot Bradford three times. While being shot, the huge sergeant slashed at Heyl with his sabre. Two other officers who had been in Heyl's tent rushed to Heyl's assistance. Bradford killed one

officer with a powerful saber-blow to the head. Ten of the troopers, seeing Bradford attacked, came to his aid, wounding Heyl and the third officer who, in the meantime, killed Bradford with two more pistol shots.²⁶

Merritt, hearing the shouting and gunfire, ran toward the scene, but the troopers who had remained in ranks dispersed along with the participants. Merritt knew nothing of the causes of the outbreak and acted to suppress what he feared might be a general mutiny. He ordered an accompanying captain to form a dependable company to support him, while E Company's first duty sergeant, who had been absent during the preceding activities, assembled that company, disarmed, for roll call. E Company formed quietly, but all participants had fled.²⁷

Merritt immediately sent word of the mutiny to district headquarters in Galveston and to nearby San Antonio, asking that the deserters be apprehended if they approached travelled routes or cities. One participant was quickly captured near camp, but the others remained on the loose for more than a week before being apprehended and imprisoned at San Antonio to await court-martial proceedings.²⁸

Merritt's fast, decisive action deterred any further demonstrations at the San Pedro Springs camp. Starting in June, the prisoners were tried by courts-martial. Two ring-leaders were convicted of mutiny and sentenced to death; however, after review by the Judge Advocate General's Department, the sentences were remitted, and both were

restored to duty. Similarly, the other deserters were briefly imprisoned, then restored to duty after the Ninth Cavalry reached its frontier posts.²⁹

In requesting speedy trials for the mutineers and deserters, Merritt was not blind to the causes of unrest:

Enquiry convinces me that Lt. Heyl . . . is much to blame for cruel not to say brutal treatment of his men . . . so soon as he is able to stand a thorough examination into his conduct it will be made, and I am much deceived if many facts do not come to light which will prove him to have been without good sense or sound judgment.

Curiously, Heyl was never court-martialed or even officially reprimanded for his activities, even though testimony in the cases of the enlisted men proved that Merritt's suspicions were correct. Heyl went back to duty with the regiment after recovering from his wounds and remained with it until 1871, when he transferred to the Fourth Cavalry. Merritt never commented on this anomaly, but apparently the shortage of officers was critical enough to warrant Heyl's retention.³⁰

Even though Merritt handled the uprising in an efficient, firm manner, tempered with understanding of the uneducated and inexperienced condition of the Negro enlisted men, the newspapers printed exaggerated stories of the mutiny and emphasized every crime, no matter how petty, committed by the Ninth Cavalry troopers while they remained near San Antonio. The San Antonio Express, alleged to be the mouth-piece of the "radical" Federal forces, felt that the policy of inducting recently freed Negroes into the military forces, with insufficient officers to control them, was rash. But

rash or not, that was the policy, and Merritt set about training his men as best he could before leaving San Pedro Springs for the frontier.³¹

By mid-April the remaining companies of the Ninth Cavalry began arriving at the San Pedro Springs camp. Hatch joined Merritt there; together they finished resupplying the regiment and organizing the march westward. Merritt commanded the advance column of six companies that would comprise the garrison of Fort Davis. Hatch followed with four companies as far as Fort Stockton. After a month of preparation, the regiment was as ready to march as it was likely to be. Discipline was slightly improved, and the troopers were well-armed, with Spencer Carbines, and well-mounted, thanks to Merritt's influence on the horse inspection board in February.³²

Only last-minute personal details remained. Back from his European trip less than a year, Merritt now applied for a twelve-month leave of absence, with permission to travel overseas. The request was eventually denied by Grant, since no other field officer capable of relieving Merritt had joined the regiment. The reason for such an incredible request is difficult to identify. His recent experience with the regiment may have dampened his ardor for further service with the Ninth Cavalry. Merritt never gave any indication of being overly fond of the isolation and hardships which frontier posts represented. There was no glamour then associated with frontier service, and many officers loathed to part with the comforts and society to be found in the cities on the fringes

of the West. His low rank and small command compared to those of Civil War years may have combined with these other factors to discourage him also. But later events indicate that his most likely reason for requesting the leave was that he had met a lady friend, either on his European trip or before reporting at New Orleans. No other reason explains his persistence in following up this request and in repeating the procedure during the next few years.³³

Whatever his feelings, Merritt led his column out of camp on May 25, for frontier service. The people of San Antonio were pleased that the road to El Paso would be opened and protected, but there was little sorrow shown at departure of the Ninth Cavalry. As the Daily Herald pointed out, the deployment policy was "to station white troops at El Paso and this place [San Antonio], and fill up between with Negroes."³⁴

The 500 mile march with inexperienced troopers was not without incident. The country west and northwest of San Antonio was hot and dry, but not particularly rugged. Merritt was hampered somewhat by contract wagoneers who accompanied the cavalry with supplies and building materials for Fort Davis. He complained of their general shiftlessness and their slow pace, which kept him more than a month on the road. There was also more trouble with the men. As Merritt's column left Fort Clark, the last garrisoned post on the El Paso road, there was a revolt in G Company, which was successfully put down by its commander. Merritt charged ten of the enlisted men with mutiny and put them under close arrest. By

the time the column reached abandoned Camp Hudson on Devil's River, Merritt decided that the Negro enlisted men could not reasonably be expected to act like soldiers or to understand the penalties for not doing so. Merritt restored them to duty with a warning on the seriousness of the charges and an explanation of what he expected their future conduct to be.³⁵

Captain William Bayard, with two companies, preceded Merritt's column to Camp Hudson. Bayard neglected to post guards over his detachment and mismanaged the horses of the command as well; Merritt placed him under arrest for "incapacity to command with judgment." To his other officers, Merritt pointed out that on the frontier, "officers should be anxious to do their men justice but not tolerate wrongdoing." Bayard was ordered to accompany the column to Fort Davis and to await court-martial charges.³⁶

With these personnel problems solved, Merritt decided to leave two companies to guard Camp Hudson until Hatch's column arrived. With four companies Merritt continued toward Fort Davis without further incident except for the loss of two troopers who drowned crossing the Pecos River. Merritt's men were the first Federal troops to garrison the fort since Confederates had burned it during the Civil War. Although the post itself was in ruins, the location was delightful after a month-long march through the dreary grey-green flatlands of western Texas. Located at an altitude of 4700 feet in the Davis Mountains, Fort Davis was one of the most isolated as well as one of the most healthful posts on the Texas frontier.

Nearby canyons were wooded, and a stream of clear, potable water, Limpia Creek, ran near the post and northward through the mountains. The Butterfield and other stage lines had run past Fort Davis before the war; now with the return of Federal troops, traffic between El Paso and San Antonio rapidly increased to prewar levels.³⁷

Merritt's primary responsibility was to protect the road from marauding Indians. The Indians of the region were few in number, but they were formidable guerrilla fighters, masters of hit-and-run, raiding warfare. Comanches and Kiowas from Indian Territory occasionally raided the El Paso-San Antonio road and into Mexico. South of Fort Davis, across the Rio Grande in Mexico, were bands of Seminoles, Lipan Apaches, and Kickapoos that raided into Texas and retreated to refuge across the border. The Kickapoos had been friendly until recently, when they were attacked by Texas Rangers as they were moving across Texas in 1865 to join kinsmen in Mexico; they had become bitter enemies of "Texans," a definition that included anyone in Texas. The Indian groups with whom the Ninth Cavalry would be engaged most often, however, were the Mescalero and Warm Springs Apaches from the mountains of southern New Mexico. None of these Indians raided in large parties, and they could seldom be brought to battle, since they scattered into the vast empty areas of the Southwest rather than fight against unfavorable odds. Merritt was alerted to possible raids along the Pecos River during the summer of 1867, but they did not materialize. In fact, there

was little contact for the Ninth Cavalry during the entire year, and only two men were wounded in action.³⁸

The lack of Indian trouble was fortunate because Merritt was almost overwhelmed by the problems at Fort Davis. Administration of the garrison, training the troopers, and supervising post construction were almost more than one man could manage, no matter how hard he worked at it. To complicate matters, Merritt, along with many of the men, was stricken with a particularly vicious form of dysentery shortly after arriving.³⁹

One administrative problem that affected Merritt as well as the company officers at Fort Davis was a shortage of capable non-commissioned officers. Of all the many reasons officers advanced for disliking service with Negro troops, one was well founded. The enlisted men were almost totally uneducated; only a few could read; scarcely any were able to write even their own names. This meant that the officers had to manage even minute details of company operations. Although non-commissioned officers were appointed, they were such in name only, and it was years before they could function properly. In the meantime, the paperwork load was staggering.

Merritt had similar problems at his level. He had no clerk available and finally had to employ a civilian in the capacity a year after re-opening the post. With his officers detached to supervise various aspects of post construction, on escort duty along the road, and serving on the numerous court-martial details at the post and in San Antonio, Merritt

had scarcely one officer to train and supervise each of the sixty-four man companies. He appealed to district headquarters in July to send more officers, but even though Sheridan and Grant endorsed the urgency of his requests, additional officers were slow in joining the regiment.⁴⁰

Although the first months at Fort Davis were especially hectic, administrative problems occupied most of Merritt's time during the two years he commanded the post. The nearby village of Chihuahua, with a population of some 175 Mexicans and Americans, quickly converted itself into a paradise of recreation. Liquor-sellers and prostitutes moved in, and Merritt had to issue a General Order in July 1867, forbidding the use of liquor except on order of the post surgeon. Merritt had constant trouble over illegal liquor sales with Patrick Murphy, who became the civilian post trader, but there was actually less drunkenness and alcoholism among Negro troopers than among White troops on the frontier. Venereal disease, however, was common, as it was throughout the postwar Army, and there was no antidote and little treatment possible for it.⁴¹

The arrival of post surgeons, first Dr. J. H. McMahon and then Dr. Daniel Weisel, eased Merritt's workload somewhat. Merritt was one of the few post commanders who personally inspected the living quarters, guardhouse, kitchens, and other sanitary facilities used by the enlisted men. Even with this personal attention, barracks were vermin-infested and food was marginal in quality and quantity. The surgeons, acting

more as sanitary officers than in medical roles, were able to offer detailed recommendations for improvement. The disease rate eventually dropped as Merritt approved whatever measures he could. Scurvy swept the post in 1868, killing many of the garrison, and Merritt, on Weisel's recommendation, started two post gardens to provide fresh vegetables for the use of the company kitchens and the hospital. After that, isolated cases of scurvy appeared, but only rarely.⁴²

If supplying the Fort Davis garrison with adequate food was difficult, educating and training former slaves to function as effective cavalrymen was even more so. Legislation that authorized Negro regiments in 1866, provided that a chaplain should be assigned to each Black regiment. This was an unusual measure, since chaplains were normally assigned to individual major posts. The chaplains were to double as school teachers for the enlisted men. If the assumption that the chaplain would have the best interests of the Negroes at heart is granted, Congress' plan to provide elementary education for its new troops was theoretically sound. Unfortunately, the realities of frontier service diluted the theory.⁴³

The Ninth's first chaplain, John C. Jacobi, was stationed with Hatch and regimental headquarters at Fort Stockton, seventy-four miles away from Fort Davis. The regiment was scattered over western Texas at three major posts and on detached service to lesser points. It was almost impossible for the chaplain to visit the regiment's enlisted men on anything like a regular schedule, so it was

impossible to establish a regular system of night school or any other formalized education. Merritt was earnest in his efforts to provide some education for the Negro troopers. Company officers, however, were reluctant to serve as elementary school teachers on an after-hours basis, and the requirements for post construction and military duties precluded establishment of a school until 1868, regardless of the need. White enlisted men were forbidden to act as assistants to the chaplains in a teaching capacity since the Army's policy was to keep the Negro regiments rigidly segregated.⁴⁴

The need for education of Ninth Cavalry enlisted men was especially pressing. Many of the Negroes had been enlisted in Louisiana, and one company commander, Captain George Purington, reported that most of his men spoke only French and consequently needed instruction in English to become even minimally functional. Merritt finally decided to employ a civilian teacher with post funds. The post school commenced in December 1868, with the enlisted men organized into three classes and required to attend every day except Saturday and Sunday. It was the best system that could be devised, since the government was unwilling to realistically provide for its soldiers' education. Unfortunately, the teacher later resigned when the condition of post funds made reduction of his salary necessary.⁴⁵

Although Merritt had to postpone the enlisted men's education upon arrival at Fort Davis, he immediately began their military training. Even the training of the former

Union soldiers was minimal, and the troopers were instructed in such subjects as personal cleanliness, clothes changing, tent ventilation, and latrine location. Merritt instructed company officers in cavalry tactics for one hour each day in his quarters, with the intention that they would, in turn, instruct their non-commissioned officers as often as possible. By mid-1868, after the arrival of a garrison detachment from the Negro Forty-first Infantry, Merritt established a regular daily training period for infantry drill and for mounted and dismounted cavalry drill. For the men's physical training, and also to divert attention from the pleasures of Chihuahua, Merritt established a program of gymnastic exercises with parallel bars, swing rings, etc., and encouraged company officers to supervise their daily use.⁴⁶

Problems of post construction weighed heavily on Merritt also. Officers and men were quartered in tents during the summer of 1867, with their temporary stables located between the tent rows. As some protection from colder weather, Merritt directed that the tents be raised off the ground, banked with adobe bricks, and provided with fireplaces and chimneys. By fall, work on the officers' quarters was under way, and the enlisted quarters soon followed.⁴⁷

Much of the manual labor was done by the troopers, but 166 civilians were working at the post by mid-1868. In all, some 200 civilians were employed by Merritt in reconstructing Fort Davis. He had great difficulty in hiring dependable and skilled men willing to work so far from "civilized" Texas.

Many were incompetent and lazy, qualified only by being otherwise unemployed. Merritt fired some and urgently requested that the quartermaster of the Fifth Military District send a responsible mason to act as foreman of the construction workers, since his personal supervision became impossible as active military operations began in 1868.⁴⁸

Merritt's garrison was engaged in sawing lumber at two steam sawmills set up north of the post. The work was hard, involving very difficult transportation of the lumber back to the post. Work at the pineries and on their roads absorbed much of the garrison's strength and the attention of one of Merritt's officers at all times. Likewise, the enlisted men quarried limestone from nearby mountains for construction of post buildings. All-in-all, the first two years at Fort Davis were years of drudgery for the Ninth Cavalry, with little actual combat to compensate the men or to raise morale.⁴⁹

When Merritt laid out the new Fort Davis in 1867, he planned a model post, with nineteen officers' quarters facing six spacious barracks across the parade ground. By January 1869, four of the limestone officers' quarters, including an almost-luxurious commanding officer's quarters, were completed, and during the year five more, of adobe, were finished. By mid-1869, only two of the adobe barracks were completed, along with a single-ward adobe hospital, a guardhouse, and post headquarters buildings. Fort Davis became, after the work started by Merritt was completed, one of the most desirable

frontier posts. During his tenure there, it was transformed from a ruins into at least a comfortable station. For the bachelor commanding officer it was in fact very comfortable. Merritt moved into his new quarters in 1868 and there displayed the first Christmas tree ever seen at Fort Davis, perhaps an indication that civilization had reached the frontier.⁵⁰

Serious Indian troubles also reached the frontier by 1868. Increasing numbers of cattle were being driven through western Texas and across the border to and from Mexico during that and the previous year. Mescaleros and Kickapoos were drawn to the area, and these bands drove off cattle, killed drovers, and stole stock from wagon trains on the San Antonio-El Paso road. Merritt stationed small detachments at strategic points along the road and assigned soldiers, usually infantrymen, to ride "shotgun" on the stagecoaches which ran twice weekly along the route. Cavalry patrols often escorted the stages and freight contractors, providing the Negro troopers with some military duty as a break from their construction labors. The mail and freight contractors were displeased with Merritt's contribution to their well-being and complained to district headquarters that their stock was still being run off and their men attacked. Merritt replied, however, that the stagecoaches carried too many passengers, with no room left for more than one guard, and that when a cavalry escort was provided, the drivers moved at such a speed that the escort was left behind and the horses were broken down.⁵¹

Merritt sent out dozens of small scouting expeditions, usually after bands of Indians or Mexicans had stolen stock along the road or cattle trails around Fort Davis. The patrols rarely contacted their enemy, but in September 1868, Merritt sent one of his most reliable officers, Lieutenant Patrick Cusack, with "60 good men mounted on picked horses" after a band of Indians that had stolen stock from a wagon train at Fort Stockton. Cusack caught the Mescaleros in the Big Bend region, killed twenty-five, and recovered the stock and two captive Mexican children. It was the most successful Ninth Cavalry exploit to date and raised the spirits of the troopers considerably.⁵²

Merritt's operational problems during 1868 and 1869 centered on the lack of enlisted manpower and reliable detachment commanders. With a huge territory to protect, there were always too few men available at any one post. While some of his company officers rapidly developed into effective leaders, others were incompetent. In July 1868, one officer, Lieutenant James Edgar, was court-martialed and cashiered for drunkenness, cruelty to enlisted men, and "riding through the streets of San Antonio . . . in plain daylight, in an open carriage with common prostitutes." Another lieutenant was under arrest at Fort Davis at the time; one enlisted man later remembered his company's relief at having a new commander assigned who was not undergoing a court-martial.⁵³

By mid-1869 cattle stealing and raiding had increased to the point that Merritt was authorized to organize local

homeguard companies from residents within his jurisdiction and to arm and equip them, if needed to augment the strength of the Regulars. He designated specific points on the Rio Grande where cattle could be inspected in crossing, but still the Negro troopers were too few for the task at hand.⁵⁴

Merritt's official duties at Fort Davis left little time for leisure. The twelve-month leave of absence that he had requested before leaving San Antonio in May 1867, had been rejected before he reached Fort Davis in late June. With plans for the post construction completed and the construction itself under way, and with the men quartered reasonably comfortably for the winter, Merritt applied for a four-month leave of absence, on a surgeon's certificate of ill health, to visit his home in Illinois. Merritt suffered acute dysentery throughout the summer, and Surgeon McMahon declared that Merritt would not be able to resume his duties in less than four months. Merritt was too ill to inspect the command in October. Major Wade arrived to relieve him in command, and Merritt left on sick leave in November. He applied for extensions in January and February, and managed to remain absent until June 1868.⁵⁵

Back in command of the post and the regiment, in Hatch's absence on detached duty, Merritt served on court-martial duty for three months. In January 1869, as he was boarding a moving wagon, Merritt slipped and a wheel rolled over his left arm, breaking it. The young Post Surgeon, Dr. Weisel, set the arm as best he could, but there were

complications, and the injury disabled Merritt for several months and periodically thereafter. By August, Merritt was worried about his arm and wrote to the district headquarters that "my hand and arm are stiff and lame and I despair of recovering the full use of them unless some means and appliances are used which cannot be obtained here." Merritt requested permission to visit Austin to consult with the district medical director on the course of proper treatment for his injury, and he was authorized to do so. On September 3, 1869, Merritt left Fort Davis, never to return.⁵⁶

Merritt could look back on two years of difficulty and valuable achievement. He had played a significant role in the Army's experiment with training Negroes to be soldiers. His judicious treatment of the Ninth Cavalry troopers during the disciplinary troubles of 1867 was exactly the combination of restraint and severity which the situation demanded. By the time Merritt left Fort Davis, the Ninth was not yet an efficient cavalry regiment, but the indispensable basis for excellence was established. Its record of combat was not impressive unless the problems of training, manpower, and post construction are considered. Merritt had not even taken the field due to his administrative load.

More positively, Merritt had contributed to the education of the Negro enlisted men to the greatest extent possible and to their awareness of basic hygiene and sanitation. The regiment responded to this treatment with a desertion rate among the lowest in the Army. Over a twelve-month period in

1867-1868, the Ninth Cavalry had only 48 deserters, while its sister regiment, the Tenth Cavalry, had 147, and Custer's Seventh Cavalry had 456. Only three regiments, two of them Negro infantry units, had fewer. It was a record of which to be proud, and it improved in succeeding years. Several factors contributed to this fine performance. The Texas frontier offered few refuges for Negro deserters, but nearby Mexico did. More importantly, the Army tended to be a career for the Negro troopers while it was often a refuge for the White soldier. But a great deal of the credit may be assigned to both Merritt and Hatch, who treated the former slaves with understanding and justice. Merritt had done as well in an almost-impossible situation as any officer could have done, and in the abstract, he had accomplished much. Whether or not a dashing young cavalry officer could be satisfied with so little action and so much paperwork and abstraction, however, Merritt would have to decide before returning to the Ninth Cavalry.⁵⁷

FOOTNOTES

Chapter 9

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Chapter 10

TEXAS, AGAIN

The majority of ranchers and cowboys in this country are idle, shiftless, and cowardly, with no regard for the truth or for human life.

--Wesley Merritt

Merritt's sick leave turned into a two-year absence from the Texas frontier, although not through any incapacity. Upon receiving Merritt's request for a leave to seek treatment for his hand and arm, Army headquarters assigned him to duty on the "Schofield Board" at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas. Major General John Schofield was to preside over a Board of Officers which would test the present systems of infantry, artillery, and cavalry tactics, forms of command and of drum and bugle signals, and arms and equipment for the Army. The board would recommend any changes in these areas which it felt desirable. The assignment brought Merritt's experience, as the cavalry member of the board, to the fore and gave him a significant voice in formulating the cavalry tactics used by the Army throughout the "Indian Wars." The assignment also provided Merritt with the opportunity to receive adequate medical treatment at Fort Leavenworth and in St. Louis when the board later moved its activities to that city.¹

Merritt was unable to make the trip from Fort Davis by the time the board convened, but he arrived by September 18,

1869. It had been anticipated that the board's operations could be concluded in early 1870, but the necessary experiments and tests took over a year to complete.²

The board members received numerous proposals for tactics changes and for new and modified equipment. From the Ninth Cavalry, two of Merritt's lieutenants submitted changes in horse equipment and a manual of arms for the Spencer Carbine, which was an excellent weapon, but which did not lend itself to military drill. After trials with the latest firearms submitted for Army adoption, the board, with Merritt in agreement, recommended adoption of the single-shot Remington rolling-block rifle for infantry and the same weapon as a carbine for cavalry use. It is curious that Merritt would recommend such an arm after having used the repeating Spencers so effectively during and after the Civil War; no explanation was offered by him or by the board. The Ninth Cavalry had one or two malfunctions in which cartridges in the Spencer magazines were exploded by careless handling, but the increased firepower available to inexperienced troopers would seem to outweigh any such objections. In any event, the Chief of Ordnance overrode the board's recommendations and produced the single-shot Springfield Carbine for cavalry use, and it remained the standard weapon until just before the Spanish-American War. The board similarly recommended adoption of the single-shot Remington pistol over the excellent Smith and Wesson revolver, but both were soon superseded by the Colt revolver of 1872.³

The board considered and recommended adoption of a revised system of infantry tactics submitted by Merritt's former classmate, Emory Upton. Upton was upset over slight changes made to his draft proposals, but his tactics were adopted and remained essentially unchanged until the twentieth century. From active and former cavalymen--including Major Eugene A. Carr of the Fifth Cavalry and the former Volunteer, Baron von Prukelstein, the board received proposals for changes in cavalry tactics. Merritt favored the old single-rank tactics of Philip St. George Cooke used before and during the first half of the Civil War. Custer's Seventh Cavalry at Fort Hays, Kansas, experimented with these tactics and with proposed changes to them and reported that no improvements could be suggested. Accordingly, they were recommended and subsequently adopted by the Army, although Cooke wrote to Merritt protesting the changes. Merritt assured him that the new system was the old Cooke system adopted to conform with the new infantry and artillery systems. These cavalry tactics also remained essentially unchanged throughout the "Indian Wars" period.⁴

By January 1871, Merritt, who had been charged by Schofield with supervising the final draft of the board's report and with having it printed and distributed, finished his task and was relieved from board duty.⁵

In March 1869, Congress had amended the military appropriations act by reducing the number of infantry regiments in the Army from forty-five to twenty-five. The size

of the Army was successively reduced by this and subsequent acts to 25,000 enlisted men, roughly half the size of the immediate-postwar Army. By November 1869, as Merritt worked on the "Schofield Board," the reduction made 509 officers surplus to Army needs, and a system of retirement and proficiency boards, known as "Benzine Boards," was instituted to rid the service of unfit officers and to retire disabled or overage ones. Many officers were apprehensive over their futures; eventually the requisite number was separated from the Army with a year's pay.⁶

When Grant became President in 1868, Sherman moved into the top position, Commanding General of the Army. As lieutenant general, Sheridan took over Sherman's command of the Military Division of the Missouri, comprising all the frontier regions except the Pacific coast and Arizona. With his friend and patron the second-ranking officer in the Army, Merritt was in a secure position in the Ninth Cavalry. While finalizing the board's report, Merritt indicated the only displeasure he ever showed for service with that regiment. In November 1870, he submitted to the Adjutant General of the Army a request for transfer to either the Second or Fifth Cavalry. Even though Merritt was the senior cavalry lieutenant colonel in the Army, no vacancy in the rank of colonel existed for his promotion. Transfers between regiments were only possible by mutual agreement between two officers of similar rank with concurrence of the headquarters of the Army. Nothing came of his request, since few officers would

voluntarily transfer to a Negro regiment.⁷

With no special incentive to rush back to Texas and with his hand and arm injury healed, Merritt applied for and received a leave of absence and left for Europe. Whether Merritt traveled alone cannot be determined. Leaving London, he visited Italy and Austria. He then traveled to Germany where, during May 1871, he married Miss Caroline Warren of Cincinnati, Ohio. No previous correspondence between Wesley Merritt and Caroline Warren survives, so whether or not she was the cause of Merritt's quests for leaves of absence can only be speculation. A handsome, stylish, affable, young woman, apparently from a well-to-do family, Caroline and Wesley Merritt were to have a pleasant twenty-two year marriage. Merritt requested an extension of his leave in June, so that they could continue their "Grand Tour" and return to New York City in September.⁸

Sheridan was in Europe at the same time as the Merritts, and it is likely that they were together there occasionally; however, neither Sheridan nor Merritt mentioned such a meeting. Sheridan arrived back in New York City at about the same time, and Merritt and his old cavalry chief, Alfred Torbert, attended a reunion for Sheridan at the Fifth Avenue Hotel. Custer was also in town, and Merritt introduced him to Caroline and invited him to call on them. It was a pleasant interlude for Merritt, who was becoming increasingly fond of luxury, or at least of good living, before he and Caroline had to leave for Texas and the Ninth Cavalry.⁹

The change of scene was dramatic for the new bride as the Merritts rejoined the regiment at Fort Stockton. If Caroline's reaction was typical, her first view of the post was disheartening. From a distance Fort Stockton looked like a "camp of Mexican carts." The nearest tree was forty miles away, there was no grass to be seen, and the whole landscape had "a grayish appearance." The post actually was not as bad as it looked at first glance. The climate was generally moderate; although there were spectacular exceptions, such as dust storms capable of unroofing buildings and periods of over-100-degree temperatures. The commanding officer's quarters was a large, comfortable, adobe house, still occupied, which was cool enough in summer and warm in winter. For Merritt, the stay at Fort Stockton would be much more pleasant than his tenure at Fort Davis had been.¹⁰

On October 17, Merritt assumed command of Fort Stockton and of the Ninth Cavalry, since Hatch was on detached duty. He had two cavalry companies and two companies from the Twenty-fourth and Twenty-fifth Infantry, the only two Negro infantry regiments left in the Army after the 1869 cutback and resulting consolidation. Discipline in the Negro units had improved steadily in Merritt's absence, as had the experience level of the troopers. They had been employed in the usual frontier occupations of escorting along the El Paso-San Antonio road and scouting "after Indians who were never caught." Fort Stockton had almost no facilities for recreation, and Merritt was there for too short a time to institute

any new programs of education and physical fitness; although he did have a post garden started with seeds donated by the post trader.¹¹

With only two mounted companies, Merritt was unable to protect the road traffic as well as he thought desirable. The five-year enlistments of many troopers were expiring, and company strength was depleted. Merritt requested an additional cavalry company, but it was not forthcoming. Scouts sent southward toward Fort Lancaster and Howard's Wells in January and February, 1872, failed to locate or to bring any raiding Indians to battle, even though depredations along the Rio Grande were increasing in number and severity.¹²

With the locus of depredations shifting southward, there were too few mounted toops along the lower Rio Grande, and Merritt was ordered to shift the Ninth Cavalry in that direction. He planned to transfer regimental headquarters to Fort Clark, 266 miles southeast of Fort Stockton on the lower San Antonio-El Paso road, in order to be nearer the critical region between the Nueces River and the Rio Grande. The move itself was a major expedition, involving as it did all regimental property, the regimental band, and the wives and children of officers and men. On April 16, Merritt led the column, which included two mounted companies, twenty-seven wagons, and two hospital ambulances, cut on the main road to Fort Clark. For those dependents who were making a change of station for the first time, the experience was something of a hardship. For all of them, however, the experience was

unique.¹³

Halfway to Fort Clark, as Merritt's column approached Howard's Wells, the prairie appeared to be on fire. A band of Kiowas and Comanches from Indian Territory had struck a Mexican wagon train at the Wells, overpowered the defenders, and burned the train. Eight of the teamsters were tied to wagon wheels and burned to death while women and children were killed nearby. Merritt halted the column and raced toward the tragic scene with his troopers. They were in time to save two Mexican men who were badly burned and one woman who escaped after having been carried off by the departing raiders.¹⁴

Two of Merritt's officers led troopers after the Indians and stolen stock, while Merritt put the families and wagons into camp nearby. The two companies fought the Kiowas and Comanches until dark, but the men were not prepared for a long fight, and being short of ammunition, they returned to camp. There was nothing for Merritt to do but to continue to Fort Clark after burying the victims and Lieutenant Frederick Vincent who, after being wounded, had remained at the scene of the fight to encourage his inexperienced men and had bled to death.¹⁵

With the Howard's Wells experience fresh in the minds of soldier and dependent alike, Merritt arrived at Fort Clark with his command on the last day of April. Fort Clark was one of the most wretched Texas frontier posts at the time. A healthful climate recommended it, but the facilities and living

conditions were primitive, and Merritt's large command completely overtaxed them. Four companies from the Ninth Cavalry and two from the Twenty-fourth Infantry were assigned to the garrison--over 400 enlisted men and 16 officers. Only two cavalry companies could be quartered in barracks. The rest of the men were assigned to shoddy huts furnished with plain slat bedframes over which each soldier laid his straw-filled, sack mattress. There was no library or facility for recreation except the nearby town of Brackettsville, which consisted of "rum-holes, gambling dens and easy women, mostly Mexican." To have "served at Clark" was nearly the equivalent to honorable mention at the time and indicated that the unfortunate individual had been thoroughly initiated into Army life.¹⁶

For officers and their families, conditions were little better. Officers quarters were cheaply constructed and over-crowded. Here Caroline Merritt got her real introduction to the hardships of frontier life. Post society consisted of gossiping in the evening when cooling Gulf breezes reached the post, band concerts, and weekly dances held in the quarters since there was no other building suitable. Officers could ride and hunt near the post whenever there was spare time, but the pace of active operations precluded much else.¹⁷

For Merritt, his year at Fort Clark was hectic. There was not even an administrative building at the post. The regimental adjutant's office was in a tent and Merritt had

to run the post and the regiment from there and from his quarters. After nine months, he had started construction of two more enlisted men's barracks and new stables and corrals. The Inspector General's Department representative who visited the post in January 1873, found the physical facilities to be entirely inadequate for the number of men assigned, but he felt that the appearance of the troops was as good as was ordinarily found and that the horses, equipment, and arms were in excellent condition.¹⁸

Merritt provided as best he could for continuing the education of his Negro troopers. The regimental chaplain, Manuel Gonzales, a Mexican protestant, was with regimental headquarters at Fort Clark and served as teacher. Room for classes was seldom available at the post, and continuous detachments and expeditions reduced the number of men who could attend. However, by the end of 1872, Gonzales could report that "the colored soldiers, even under all the disadvantages of the present system of education . . . made great improvement." How great was another question, but it was all that was possible even with Merritt's active support.¹⁹

By the time the Ninth Cavalry concentrated along the Rio Grande line, depredations were increasing against livestock herds and isolated ranches and settlements in western Texas. Although the Kickapoos gave some indication of willingness to move back to Indian Territory, local Mexican officials opposed their removal, since they acted as a barrier against Comanche attacks on Mexican villages. Diplomatic talks were

underway to facilitate removal, but in the meantime, the Kickapoos and Lipans, who lived near the Rio Grande in Mexico, continued to raid into Texas. Mexicans joined in the warfare also, and many small groups of Mexicans, adherents of various revolutionary factions, sought refuge on the American side of the border and returned to Mexico on raids. Desperados from interior Texas also sought refuge in the confusion and vastness of the border regions, and in addition, cattle thieves from New Mexico visited Texas and Mexico on business, inducing still further counter-raids by Mexicans and Indians on the stolen herds.²⁰

A concentrated effort by cavalrymen near the border was obviously needed if a semblance of order was to be restored to western Texas. As the senior commander in the region, Merritt was charged with conducting a series of systematic operations against Indians, from Fort McIntosh north to the Pecos River. Other post commanders came under his direction in a constant series of scouts and expeditions that lasted through the rest of 1872 and well into 1873.²¹

Soon after arriving at Fort Clark, Merritt commenced the campaign with patrols and scouts. As usual, these expeditions almost never sighted their quarry, and in August, Merritt was joined by seventeen Seminole Negro-Indian scouts sent to aid his troopers in tracking Mexican and Indian raiders. He enrolled five more of these excellent auxiliaries during the month and continued his operations. During the campaign, no regiment could have done better or tried harder

than the Ninth Cavalry. It was the most discouraging kind of duty--long, hot days unrelieved by actual combat or successful pursuit. Merritt also sent detachments to aid United States Marshals who scoured the region for fugitives and cattle thieves. The constancy of these operations gradually wore down the Negro troopers, but they persisted until a new border policy was devised.²²

In September 1872, Merritt got a short break from duties at Fort Clark. Sheridan, commanding the Military Division of the Missouri from Chicago, and under it, the Department of Texas, sent for Merritt to join him in Chicago. Presumably Sheridan wanted a first-hand account of actual border conditions from Merritt, and it is likely that Merritt acquainted him with the difficulties of campaigning against such elusive enemies in a vast territory. By October, Merritt was back commanding at Fort Clark, and a new operational policy was forthcoming.²³

Merritt's troopers were hindered by being forbidden to cross the Rio Grande into Mexico in pursuit of thieves and raiders. The problem was recognized by department commander, General C. C. Augur, and by spring, 1873, he was ready to try new tactics. Ranald S. Mackenzie and the Fourth Cavalry were ordered to Fort Clark. Through Grant's influence, the able Mackenzie had been first appointed colonel of infantry in the postwar Army reorganization and then had been transferred from the infantry to the cavalry in 1870. This highly irregular transfer between arms of the service

deprived Merritt, as the senior cavalry lieutenant colonel, of promotion and regimental command at that time, and Merritt must have been exasperated to learn that Mackenzie and the Fourth Cavalry would replace him on the Rio Grande frontier.²⁴

On April 11, Merritt met Sheridan and Secretary of War William Belknap as they arrived at Fort Clark to discuss upcoming operations with Merritt and Mackenzie. Mackenzie arrived that same day with his regiment, and Merritt arranged for a review of the Fourth Cavalry the following day in honor of the visiting dignitaries. The Ninth could not participate; it was busy scouting. Following the review, a long conference between Belknap, Sheridan, Mackenzie, and Merritt took place in which Mackenzie was given tacit authority to pursue raiding parties into Mexico. Hopefully, this tactic would convince Mexican Indians that refuge beyond the Rio Grande no longer existed and that border raiding was too costly. The Kickapoos might also be convinced to return to Indian Territory. It was a tactic Merritt's men could have profitably used.²⁵

Historians of the period have tended to infer that Mackenzie's regiment was a more efficient unit than the Ninth Cavalry and that Merritt's Negro troopers were not as effective as they could have been. Mackenzie's Fourth Cavalry was undoubtedly a top-notch outfit by 1873, probably the best regiment in Texas. That they would have fared no better than the Ninth under similar conditions and restrictions is equally probable. Mackenzie had his entire regiment concentrated as

a striking column, where Merritt had been forced to scatter his command in innumerable detachments, and Mackenzie could cross into Mexico where Merritt had been prohibited from doing so. Under these new conditions, Mackenzie was able to mount a raid against Mexican Lipans which killed nineteen Indians and brought in forty women and children as captives. The raid made Mackenzie the hero of the Texas frontier, but accomplished little, and at least half of the Ninth Cavalry remained for two more years engaged in their important, but thankless, scouting along the Rio Grande.²⁶

For Merritt, however, the scene of action shifted northward to Fort Concho. Colonel Hatch returned to the regiment in January 1873, and relieved Merritt of a great deal of administration by resuming regimental command. Merritt left Fort Clark after turning its command over to Mackenzie and reached Fort Concho, at present-day San Angelo, after a two-week march with Caroline and two companies of the Ninth Cavalry.²⁷

Compared to their previous stations, Fort Concho was a pleasant post for the Merritts. The post was overcrowded with officers' families, since six companies were stationed there; but the commanding officer's quarters was well built and comfortable, and it quickly became the center of post social life. Both Caroline and Wesley Merritt had the facilities and time at Fort Concho to entertain in the manner expected of the post commander and his wife.

For Merritt post administration still absorbed most of his duty hours, but he was assisted by the presence of another field officer, either Major Morrow of the Ninth Cavalry or another major from either the Tenth Cavalry or Eleventh Infantry, the other regiments represented in the garrison. He could concentrate on administration and could occasionally take the field in person, since the types of operational problems he encountered at Fort Concho differed from those of the Rio Grande frontier.²⁸

Fort Concho was one of the line of posts engaged in protecting the northwestern frontier from depredations of Kiowas and Comanches who were raiding from Indian Territory. The westernmost of the line of posts, including Fort Concho and Fort Stockton, some 170 miles southwest, were also in contact with Mescaleros from New Mexico. Indian troubles were only a part of the troopers' responsibilities, however, since gangs of cattle rustlers and other outlaws infested Texas also. The rapid growth of the Texas cattle industry attracted Indian and non-Indian predators in increasing numbers as Merritt prepared to send out his first scouts and patrols from Fort Concho in May 1873.²⁹

Even though Merritt had a full complement of cavalry under his command, he was short of officers since he kept detachments constantly out on scouting, mail escorting, and cattle-herd escorting expeditions. During the year he commanded Fort Concho, Merritt sent out twenty-eight major scouts of from five to twenty days' duration as well as many more of

lesser length. Most were hot, tiring, discouraging patrols, devoid of observable results, which the troopers had experienced throughout their long tour of duty in Texas. Many of the operations resulted from exaggerated reports of Indian depredations by area ranchers and herders who wanted Army protection whether or not they were actually or seriously threatened. Merritt was aware of this problem, but he was unable to deal with it. He endorsed the report of one of his best officers, Lieutenant Patrick Cusack, who had just returned from one of these needless expeditions, by pointing out that "although there are honorable exceptions, the majority of ranchers and cowboys in this country are idle, shiftless and cowardly, with no regard for the truth nor for human life, except as far as they are personally interested."³⁰

Actually, there were very few fatalities to humans in the region guarded by Fort Concho during 1873 and early 1874. One spectacular exception was the murder by Indians of a Mrs. Williams and her two children at their home near Woods Creek, Texas. The woman was shot when she resisted being carried away, one child was hanged from a tree, and her baby was thrown into a nearby fire from which it was pushed by the dying mother only to succumb to the burn injuries two weeks later. Such attacks, rare as they were, kept the countryside alarmed and the troopers constantly employed.³¹

At about the same time as the Williams massacre, Merritt had the ticklish duty of protecting a large group of Potawatomi and Kickapoo Indians who had at last decided to

return to Indian Territory. With the local people thoroughly aroused, Merritt had to carefully escort his recent antagonists in order to prevent any incident that might discourage the rest of the apprehensive Kickapoos from returning.³²

For the first time Merritt was able to personally accompany scouts from a Texas post, and he took full advantage of what to him was an opportunity, even if it was more of a drudgery to his officers and men. Some of the hardship, at least concerning rations, was removed by Caroline, who packed delicacies for him to take along. Her efforts were subverted, however, on one expedition, when the commissary officer of the expedition forgot the mess chest filled with Merritt's favorite luxury rations. The lieutenant's fate is unrecorded, but he probably survived, since Merritt was able to resupply his larder from that of one of his other lieutenants stationed on outpost duty along his line of march.³³

Merritt supervised construction of buildings and facilities around the post during his tenure at Fort Concho and was busy with, but not overburdened by, his regular administrative duties. He and Caroline had no children, and they both became very partial to one of the children of the garrison, Florestine "Birdie" Cooper. Birdie later became a novelist, writing of her girlhood adventures on the frontier. At Fort Concho, she accompanied the Merritts on long walks near the post and later recorded her impressions of the social life of the Merritts and other post families.³⁴

For the men hiking and riding as well as fishing and hunting were popular. While some of the women participated in the former activities, weddings and weekly dances at the post were more popular. One of the ladies, Mrs. Gasman, gave a "candy-pull" in her quarters, inviting all the officers and ladies then at the post. Merritt attended with Caroline, and as the party progressed, he "got the surprise of his life. Mrs. Gasman had smashed a huge wad of soft, hot molasses on the top of his head."³⁵

As Christmas of 1873 approached, so many officers were absent on detached duty that the Merritts decided to have a Christmas tree in their home for all the children of the garrison rather than have each family, overcrowded as they were, attempt a separate celebration. The slender, dignified commanding officer dressed as Santa Claus and passed out presents for the children. Birdie Cooper was surprised by a big doll Merritt handed down to her and by a silk scarf which Caroline had brought from Paris two years earlier.³⁶

If Fort Concho social life was pleasant for garrison families, social life for the enlisted men was less so. Typically, there were few facilities for the men's recreation on the post. Merritt oversaw the establishment of a post library, through the post chaplain, by early 1874, and the post chaplain held religious services in a barracks room each Sunday. Neither was popular compared to the attractions of San Angelo, just across the Concho River from the post. In 1873-1874, the town was a series of bars and brothels that

served not only the soldiers but "Mexicans, outlaws, and other frontier characters." No lady or child from Fort Concho visited the place except with a soldier escort, and even then visits were rare since only one store, Veck's, located in a dugout building, was open for mercantile business. The soldiers enjoyed it, however, and kept the guardhouse well occupied as a result. Chaplain Norman Badger reported that "the moral condition of the troops . . . is not favorable, as usual."³⁷

Also not favorable was the treatment accorded the Negro troopers at Fort Concho. Four of the six companies stationed there were "Buffalo Soldiers" of the Ninth and Tenth Cavalry. The other two were from the White Eleventh Infantry. Although during Merritt's term as commanding officer there were no major racial incidents, the White troops did not like serving with Negroes, and there is no indication that the Negro troopers felt improved by having the White soldiers nearby.³⁸

Local Texans were less than enthusiastic at the arrival of armed Negro soldiers in their midst. However, the need for protection and for the business of the Black troopers, moderated their attitudes to the extent that an uneasy truce existed, and the facilities, such as they were, of the nearby town were available. Actually, the frontier already had "niggers," in the forms of Indians, Chinese, and Mexicans, all of whom were lower on the contemporary social scale than Negroes, so the accommodation was not unusual.³⁹

The post chaplain conducted classes not only for the garrison children, but, in the absence of the regimental chaplains, for the Negro troopers as well. Adequate facilities existed at Fort Concho for these schools, and Merritt supported the chaplain's work wholeheartedly. No Negro chaplain was appointed to the Ninth Cavalry until 1884, but Badger seems to have tried to do his best for the troopers. He gave instruction four hours each weekday, but schoolbooks ordered in September 1873, were a long time arriving, and without them he felt much of his instruction was ineffectual.⁴⁰

Aside from his official duties in Texas, Merritt also engaged in a bit of nepotism during 1873 and 1874. Upon recommendation and after successfully passing a qualifying examination, officers could be appointed in the Regular Army from civil life. Merritt's youngest brother, Charles W. Merritt, applied for appointment as second lieutenant during the fall of 1872. Wesley Merritt recommended him as having "no bad habits." Charles did poorly on the written examination, however, and in an exchange of letters concerning his brother's performance, Merritt assured the Adjutant General of the Army that Charles needed to "refresh his memory" and could pass a second examination or a board of examiners. In any event, the board of examiners which reviewed young Merritt included James W. Forsyth, Sheridan's chief-of-staff, and Michael V. Sheridan, younger brother and aide to the lieutenant general. Both were Merritt's close friends, and

Charles Merritt was appointed second lieutenant in the Ninth Cavalry.⁴¹

In December 1873, Lieutenant Merritt arrived at Fort Concho to stay with his brother and Caroline for a few months. Wesley Merritt had requested that his brother be assigned to temporary duty at Fort Concho rather than continue on to his assigned post, Fort Davis. Apparently Merritt wanted to introduce the lieutenant to military life and to give him some training under his own tutelage before turning him loose on the Ninth Cavalry. In any event, young Merritt was a guest at the Merritt's quarters until the following spring, much to the annoyance of the commanding officer at Fort Davis. The Merritts left Texas shortly after Charles joined his company at Fort Davis and never saw him again.⁴²

Lieutenant Merritt's subsequent career was tragic in the extreme. He participated in the Apache campaigns of the Ninth Cavalry after the regiment was transferred to New Mexico and apparently performed satisfactorily. In late 1877, however, signs of unusual behavior appeared. Corporal John Rogers, of the Ninth Cavalry, complained that Lieutenant Merritt had made repeated attempts to enter his wife's sleeping quarters at night and requested an investigation. Apparently there was a suspicion that no action would be taken if the request was sent through channels, so the complaint went directly to Sherman, the Commanding General. Sherman sent the complaint back down to Sheridan, as the responsible commander. No record exists of any further

action being taken.⁴³

Charles Merritt's erratic behavior continued while the Ninth participated in "Victorio's War" in southern and western New Mexico. He was charged with being drunk on duty numerous times, with neglect of duty in the face of the enemy, and with conduct unbecoming an officer for being drunk and disorderly in the bars and streets of Santa Fe while awaiting court-martial on the first two charges. Lieutenant Merritt was found guilty on all but one specification. Sherman approved the sentences of the court, and young Merritt was dismissed from the service on November 26, 1879. Two weeks later, in Santa Fe, he killed himself. Many of the Merritt family later blamed Wesley Merritt for not having saved his brother, and the incident became something of a family scandal, but Merritt was apparently unaware of the proceedings and was isolated from the outside world at the time of the court-martial, being engaged on a campaign against Ute Indians in the mountains of Colorado.⁴⁴

This trouble was well in the future, however, as Merritt prepared to leave Texas in May 1874. He applied for an eight-month leave of absence in April, but was authorized only thirty days with permission to apply for an extension. Major Albert P. Morrow relieved Merritt in mid-May, and Colonel Benjamin Grierson, famed commander of the Tenth Cavalry, later replaced Merritt at Fort Concho. Meanwhile, the Merritts packed their belongings, except for a heavy piano that Grierson bought, and left Texas for the last time.

They were in Cincinnati visiting Caroline's family for a month; then Merritt requested and received permission for overseas travel and an additional eight months' leave. They probably traveled through Europe again before returning to more "civilized" duty early in 1875.⁴⁵

Merritt's service with the Negro troopers of the Ninth Cavalry was at an end. He had conscientiously tried to train them as efficient soldiers and to provide a semblance of elementary education under almost-impossible conditions. To a surprising degree he had succeeded. When Hatch took the regiment to New Mexico for more arduous duty after Merritt left, the regiment performed magnificently. The Santa Fe Daily New Mexican declared that "the people of this territory are proud of the Ninth Cavalry . . . as brave and efficient soldiers as can be found in the service." Whether or not Merritt considered his efforts successful and what he felt at the time about service with the Negroes, he never divulged. Later in his career, however, he felt that he had been honored to serve with such a fine regiment.⁴⁶

Merritt's military operations along the Rio Grande frontier had not been spectacular. With the available manpower and with the restrictions placed on his operations, Merritt had done the best job possible. With concentrated force, and without restrictions against entering Mexico, Mackenzie did score a spectacular success, and he did eclipse Merritt's reputation as an "Indian fighter." To those who

understood the conditions of border warfare in Texas, however, Merritt's performance was entirely successful, and one of those people who understood was Philip H. Sheridan.⁴⁷

FOOTNOTES

Chapter 10

1. G.O. 60, HQ USA, August 6, 1869, Microcopy 619, R 682, NA.
2. Schofield to AGO, Sept. 16 and 18, 1869; Schofield to Sherman, Jan. 25, 1870: Microcopy 619, R 682, NA.
3. Cooney to Merritt, Dec. 16, 1869; Carroll to Merritt, Dec. 4, 1869: Microcopy 619, R 685, NA; Report of Schofield Board, June 10, 1870, Microcopy 619, R 682, NA; Hunter, "A Negro Trooper of the Ninth Cavalry," 9.
4. Upton to AGO, July 11, 1873; Merritt Memorandum, Nov. 13, 1870; Custer to Merritt, August 13, 1870; Cooke to AGO, Feb. 10, 1871; Cooke to S of W, Dec. 16, 1871; G.O. 6, HQ USA, July 17, 1873: Microcopy 619, R 685, NA; Weigley, History of U.S. Army, 275-76.
5. Merritt to AGO, Nov. 15, 1870, and Jan. 11, 1871; Sherman to S of W, Nov. 1, 1870: Microcopy 619, R 685, NA.
6. S of W, Annual Report for 1869, 26; Utley, Frontier Regulars, 16.
7. Merritt to AGO, Memorandum, Nov. 11, 1870, ACP, NA.
8. Merritt to AGO, March 1, and May 1, 1871, ACP, NA; AGO to AAG, DT, June 9, 1871, LR. Regis., DT, RG 393, NA; Reynolds to AGO, June 10, 1871, LS, DT, RG 393, NA; Monaghan, Custer, 333; B. Johnson, Merritt and Indian Wars, 6.
9. Sheridan, Memoirs, II, 453; Monaghan, Custer, 323; D. A. Kinsley, Favor the Bold: Custer the Indian Fighter (New York, 1968), 130.
10. Zenas R. Bliss, "Reminiscences of Zenas R. Bliss," MSS, Archives, MHRC, Carlisle Barracks, 149-50. Hereafter cited as Bliss, "Reminiscences."
11. Ibid., 163; Post Returns, Ft. Stockton, October, 1871, RG 393, NA; Merritt to AAG, DT, Oct. 19, 1871; ADJ., Ft. Stockton, to Friedlander, Jan. 1, 1872: LS, Ft. Stockton, RG 393, NA.
12. Merritt to AAAG, DT, Special Report, Feb. 14, 1872, LS, Ft. Stockton, RG 393, NA; Reports of Persons Killed or Captured by Indians, First Quarter, 1872, DT, RG 393, NA;

12. (Continued)

Post Returns, Ft. Stockton, Nov., 1871, Jan. and Feb., 1872, RG 393, NA; Reports of Scouts and Expeditions, First Quarter, 1872, Ft. Stockton, RG 393, NA.

13. US, Congress, House, Exec. Doc. No. 39, 42nd Cong., 3rd Sess., VII, 39-41; Merritt to AAAG, DT, April 11, 1872, LS, Ft. Stockton, RG 393, NA.

14. Bliss, "Reminiscences," 141-42; Leckie, Buffalo Soldiers, 102.

15. Leckie, Buffalo Soldiers, 102.

16. C. C. Bateman, "Ft. Clark, Texas," in Histories of Army Posts (Governor's Island, N.Y., n.d.), 18; "Journal of William Paulding," MSS, William and Grace Paulding Papers, Archives, MHRC, Carlisle Barracks, 23. Hereafter cited as Paulding, "Journal."

17. Paulding, "Journal," 21; Walter C. Conway, ed., "Colonel Edmund Schriver's Inspector-General's Report on Military Posts in Texas, Nov., 1872 - Jan., 1873," SWHQ, LXVII (April, 1964), 579. Hereafter cited as "I.G. Report."

18. "I.G. Report," 563, 579-80.

19. Foner, Blacks and the Military, 58.

20. Report of the Grand Jury of Hidalgo County, Texas, Spring Term, 1872, Microcopy 666, R 55, NA; Augur to AAG, MDM, Annual Report for 1872, Microcopy 666, R 99, NA; US, Congress, House, Report No. 701, Appendix B, 45th Cong., 2nd Sess., III, 204, 210-11; Ernest Wallace, "Ranald S. Mackenzie on the Texas Frontier," The Museum Journal, VII-VIII (1963-1964), 95.

21. Augur to AAG, MDM, Annual Report for 1872, Microcopy 666, 1299, NA; AAAG, DT, to Commanding Officer, Ft. Duncan, June 4, 1872, LS, DT, RG 393, NA.

22. Post Returns, Ft. Clark, June, 1872-March, 1873, RG 393, NA; Valois to Post Adj., Ft. Clark, Jan. 24, 1873; Merritt to AAAG, DT, Feb. 3, 1873; Augur to Merritt, Jan. 6, 1873: "Indian File," DT, RG 393, NA; Kenneth Wiggins Porter, "The Seminole Negro--Indian Scouts, 1870-1881," SWHQ, LV (Jan., 1952), 358-77.

23. Post Returns, Ft. Clark, Sept.-Oct., 1872, RG 393, NA; Augur to Sheridan, August 26, 1872, LS, DT, RG 393, NA.

24. US, Congress, House, Exec. Doc. No. 1, 41st Cong., 2nd Sess., III, 93; Ibid., Exec. Doc. No. 257, 43rd Cong., 1st Sess., XVII, 13; Nohl, "Bad Hand," 79.

25. A. M. Gibson, The Kickapoos: Lords of the Middle Border (Norman, 1963), 238; Nohl, "Bad Hand," 80; Haley, Fort Concho, 208; Post Returns, Ft. Clark, April, 1873, RG 393, NA.

26. For details of Mackenzie's operations in Texas see: Wallace, "Mackenzie on Texas Frontier;" Nohl, "Bad Hand;" Ernest Wallace, "Prompt in the Saddle," TMH, IV, No. 3 (1971); and Robert G. Carter, On the Border with Mackenzie (Washington, 1935).

27. Post Returns, Ft. Clark, Jan. 1873; Post Returns, Ft. Concho, April-May, 1873: RG 393, NA; Merritt to AAG, DT, May 2, 1873, LR. Regis., DT, RG 393, NA.

28. Post Returns, Ft. Concho, May, 1873, RG 393, NA.

29. Ibid.

30. Merritt to Commanding Officer, D and E Companies, 9 Cav., April 17, 1874, LS, Ft. Concho, RG 393, NA; Cooney to Adj., Ft. Concho, June 20, 1873; Merritt, Endorsement on Cusack to Cooney, April 30, 1874; Reports of Scouts, 1873-1874, Ft. Concho, RG 393, NA; Morrison to Post ADJ., Ft. Concho, July 7, 1873, "Misc. File," No. 264, RG 94, NA.

31. Cooney to Post Adj., Ft. Concho, Sept. 16, 1873; "Indian File," DT, RG 393, NA.

32. Haley, Fort Concho, 211-12.

33. Post Surgeon's Report, Ft. Concho, March, 1874, Archives, Ft. Concho Restoration, San Angelo.

34. Merritt to Buchanan, Feb. 14, 1874; Merritt to Taylor, Jan. 6, 1874: L.S., Ft. Concho, RG 393, NA; Buchanan to Adj., Ft. Concho, Oct. 3, 73; MacClermond to Adj., Ft. Concho, Dec. 29, 1873: LR. Regis., Ft. Concho, RG 393, NA; Barbara E. Fisher, "Forrestine Cooper Hooker's Notes and Memoirs on Army Life in the West, 1871-1876," (unpublished Master's thesis, University of Arizona, 1963), 122. Hereafter cited as Fisher, "Hooker's Memoirs."

35. Haley, Fort Concho, 325; Fisher, "Hooker's Memoirs," 119.

36. Fisher, "Hooker's Memoirs," 122-24.

37. Ibid.; Post Chaplain's Report, Ft. Concho, Oct., 1873, and Feb., 1874, Archives, Ft. Concho Restoration, San Angelo; Medical History of Post, Ft. Concho; March and April, 1873, RG 94, NA.

38. Paulding, "Journal," 41; Post Returns, Ft. Concho, May, 1873, RG 393, NA.

39. Foner, Blacks and the Military, 56-58.

40. Post Chaplain's Report, Ft. Concho, Feb., 1874, Archives, Ft. Concho Restoration, San Angelo; White, "Melting Pot," 255; Haley, Ft. Concho, 314-15.

41. C. W. Merritt to S of W, Nov. 15, 1872; AG, USA, to Merritt, Personal Letter, Sept. 10, 1873; Merritt to AGO, Recommendation, Nov. 29, 1872; Merritt to AG, USA, Sept. 21, 1873; C. W. Merritt to AGO, Oct. 15, 1873; C. W. Merritt to M. V. Sheridan, August 29, 1873; ACP, C. W. Merritt, RG 94; NA.

42. Russell to Augur, Dec. 1, 1873; AAG, DT, to Commanding Officer, I Company, 9 Cav., April 10, 1874; LS, DT, RG 393, NA; Commanding Officer, Ft. Davis, to AAG, DT, Jan. 17, 1874; Hatch to AAG, DT, March 28, 1874 LR. Regis., DT, RG 393, NA.

43. AGO Memorandum filed with 3502 ACP 73; Sherman to Sheridan, Dec. 14, 1874; ACP, C. W. Merritt, RG 94, NA.

44. G.C.M.O. 80, Nov. 8, 1879, ACP, C. W. Merritt, RG 94, NA; Joseph D. Merritt, "The Merritt Family," 1; Dan L. Thrapp, The Conquest of Apacheria (Norman, 1967), 180; W.O.W., Feb. 13, 1929, 10.

45. Post Returns, Ft. Concho, May, 1874, RG 393, NA; Merritt to AGO, June 1, 1874, ACP, NA; AGO to Augur, April 25, 1874, LS, DT, RG 393, NA; AGO to AAG, DT, June 11, 1874, LR. Regis., DT, RG 393, NA; Morrow to AAG, DT, Jan. 23, 1875, Microcopy 666, "Red River War Papers," NA.

46. Daily New Mexican (Santa Fe), Nov. 29, 1879; Steward, Colored Regulars, 38.

47. Sheridan, Annual Report for 1874, Microcopy 666, R 184, NA.

Chapter 11

THE NORTHERN PLAINS

Where were we going? What was expected? None knew behind the silent horseman at the head of the column.

--Captain Charles King

When Merritt left Texas in the spring of 1874, the Army's concerted effort to apply Grant's "Peace Policy" to the hostile tribes of Indian Territory and northwestern Texas, notably the Kiowas, Comanches, and Cheyennes, was about to begin. By permitting the various bands of these tribes no refuge except on their designated reservations in Indian Territory, the several campaigns which constituted the "Red River War" finally brought hostilities on the southern plains to an effective conclusion.

When Merritt returned from leave of absence in January, final operations on the southern plains were imminent. Sheridan asked the Secretary of War to assign Merritt to duty on the headquarters staff of the Military Division of the Missouri, and it was done. The Merritts settled in Chicago for a temporary tour of duty that turned into a year-and-a-half assignment. Merritt was appointed Special Cavalry Inspector of the division and acted in that capacity and also as Sheridan's personal investigator and trouble-shooter.¹

The "Red River War" made large demands on cavalry and quartermaster horses on the southern plains, and Merritt was active in inspecting replacement animals for the units engaged in active operations. Sheridan also used Merritt to inspect the readiness status of various cavalry units within the division. In May Merritt traveled to Fort Lyon, Colorado, on such an inspection of the Sixth Cavalry.²

Sheridan not only used his influence to have Merritt assigned to his staff, but he also worked to have Merritt promoted to colonel during the spring of 1875. Many colonels in the postwar Army were more figureheads than actual regimental commanders. Many were officers of long pre-Civil War experience and were too old by 1875 to take the field or to command effectively. Sheridan was interested in moving younger, more vigorous officers into command of more of his regiments as actual field operations, such as those on the southern plains, became more common.

One of these older officers was Colonel William Emory, commanding the Fifth Cavalry. With a distinguished career extending back to the Mexican War, Emory was too old to command his regiment in the field, regardless of his past services. On Sheridan's behalf, Senator John A. Logan introduced a bill in Congress to retire Emory, so that Merritt, the senior cavalry lieutenant colonel, could be promoted to command of Emory's regiment. Custer was also very interested in Merritt's promotion since he was next in line for promotion after Merritt. He and Merritt corresponded on the

subject during the spring, but Logan's bill failed, and President Grant needed a more urgent reason to retire Emory by executive action than existed in 1875.³

In December, Merritt was sent to Missoula, Montana Territory, to investigate and make recommendations on establishment of a small military post at nearby Hell Gate. The trip through the snow to Missoula was not easily accomplished; mid-winter Montana held few charms for Merritt and his investigation, which was scarcely more than a formality, was brief. Both John Gibbon and Alfred Terry, district and department commanders respectively, under whose military jurisdictions Hell Gate fell, could see no military need for a post near Missoula. Montana's Congressional delegate, Martin Maginnis, could see plenty of need, however, as could the territorial governor. They claimed that local settlers needed protection from the Nez Perce Indians, a peaceable, partially-Christianized tribe from nearby Idaho. The Secretary of War thought their claims sounded reasonable, and Merritt recommended establishment of the one-company post in the Bitterroot Valley south of Missoula that was started in 1877.⁴

When Merritt returned to Sheridan's Chicago headquarters in mid-March, frivolous problems like the Hell Gate post had been replaced by serious military preparations and operations. The "Peace Policy" was being applied to the Indians of the northern plains, notably the Northern Cheyennes and the Sioux. After having guaranteed the western half of present-day South Dakota and the Powder River country lying

between the Black Hills and the Big Horn Mountains to the Sioux by treaty, the Federal government had tried to purchase the Black Hills from them during 1875. A year previous, Custer had led an expedition through the "sacred" region and had reported it to be rich in gold deposits. A gold rush to the Black Hills resulted, and the Army was used in an attempt to expel the White intruders. The attempt caused a furor of reaction and resulted in the unsuccessful attempt to purchase the Black Hills. The "Peace Policy" offered the Indians the alternatives of being settled on designated nearby reservations either peacefully or forceably.

There were Indians on the northern plains who objected to this policy and were willing and able to back up their objections. All Indians who had not come into the several agencies along the Missouri River and in northern Nebraska by January 31, 1876, were considered to be "hostile," while those who did come in would be fed and properly cared for. Several notable and capable men led the "hostile" bands, among them Crazy Horse, the Ogalalla Sioux war leader, and Sitting Bull, the Hunkpapa Sioux medicine man.

In March 1876, General George Crook, commanding the Department of the Platte, led an unsuccessful winter campaign against "hostile" Sioux in the Powder River country of northern Wyoming and southern Montana. His military effort was intended to enforce one of the alternatives provided by the "Peace Policy." However, for those Indians who had decided, for whatever reason, to come into the agencies peacefully,

life was far from pleasant. At Red Cloud Agency, near Fort Robinson in northwest Nebraska, the agent reported a huge deficiency of subsistence supplies for the Indians there. Many were on the brink of starvation, and many were leaving the agency to find food. Congress was asked for an appropriation of \$225,000 to make good this deficiency. On February 3, 1876, Congress passed a resolution calling for an investigation of the state of affairs at Red Cloud Agency and of the need for a deficiency appropriation. Since the Interior Department, whose Indian Bureau ran the agencies, was unlikely to conduct an objective investigation, the military was given the job.⁵

Sheridan assigned the investigation to Merritt, and by early March, Merritt was at Red Cloud interviewing the agent and his employees and trying to make sense out of the bookkeeping procedures there. Merritt was at the agency less than a week and wrote his report on the train returning to Chicago.

He found no actual chicanery on the part of the Indian agent or agency employees, although he reported that the Indian Bureau in Washington must know more than the agent would or could tell him about the causes of the deficiency. But whatever the cause, the deficiency was real, and the Indians at the agency had to be supplied if they were not to leave and join the "hostile" bands in the North. The problem of accurately counting the number of dependent Indians was acknowledged by Merritt, as was the incredibly inept system

of estimating needs and ordering supplies. Erring on the liberal side in estimating the actual deficiency, Merritt recommended that approximately \$157,000 be appropriated for the Red Cloud deficiency. In April, Congress appropriated \$150,000, but the Indian Bureau's procurement system was so bad that Indians at Red Cloud Agency were still starving and leaving the agency because of lack of subsistence as late as July.⁶

Sheridan's headquarters was busy with preparations for a new campaign against the "hostile" Sioux and Cheyennes when Merritt returned. A three-pronged campaign was planned for late spring. Gibbon would advance from the vicinity of Bozeman, Montana, toward the Powder River country of southern Montana. Terry, commanding the Department of Dakota, would march toward the same point with a large force, including the entire Seventh Cavalry regiment, while Crook, with troops from his Department of the Platte, would thrust northward. The "hostiles" would be trapped by these three powerful converging columns and would be defeated if they resisted. Nobody knew how many Indians could be expected to oppose the Army in the campaign, but by June, large numbers of Sioux had left the Nebraska and Dakota agencies--some forced to do so by the scanty supplies provided and some with the intention of joining Crazy Horse and Sitting Bull.

Sheridan sent Merritt back to Red Cloud Agency to determine the temper of the Indians still there and to report back to him the true conditions at the agency. By June 3,

Merritt was at Fort Laramie on his way to the potential trouble spot. There he learned that eight companies of the Fifth Cavalry had arrived by rail at Cheyenne, for duty at or near Red Cloud Agency. Merritt reported to Sheridan, who had in the meantime arrived at Fort Laramie, that "the feeling among the Indians left at the agency is not good. The Fifth Cavalry is not here too soon."⁷

Sheridan sent the Fifth Cavalry scouting between Red Cloud and the expected theater of operations, since he realized that news from that region would likely excite more of the young men from the agencies to join the "hostiles." Merritt and Sheridan returned to Chicago by rail, only to find that on June 17, Crook had been repulsed by a strong Sioux and Cheyenne war party on Rosebud Creek, in southern Montana.

For more than a month, Sheridan had been trying to convince President Grant to retire Colonel Emory so that Merritt could be promoted to the colonelcy of the Fifth Cavalry. Sheridan wanted his reliable young officers in field command now that active operations were under way. Grant still hesitated, but Sherman, on Sheridan's behalf, pressed the point, and Emory was ordered retired as of July 1, 1876. The experience with Mackenzie on the southern plains had been successful; now Sheridan gave Merritt his chance on the northern plains. Merritt immediately left for Fort Laramie and joined his command on the first of July, the day his appointment as colonel of the Fifth Cavalry became

effective.⁸

Merritt's new command was probably the finest cavalry regiment in the Army, even considering Mackenzie's Fourth Cavalry. The Fifth was no stranger to Merritt, nor he to many of its officers and men. The regiment had fought in the Reserve Brigade under Merritt throughout the Civil War. After the postwar reorganization, the regiment had served continuously in Kansas, Nebraska, and Colorado, then with Crook in his Apache campaign in Arizona. Its record of combat could not be equaled in the Army, and it had just been transferred from the hardships of Arizona back to the comparative calm of Kansas when it was ordered north to support Crook in the 1876 campaign.⁹

Throughout its postwar operations, the Fifth Cavalry had been commanded by Eugene A. Carr, first as senior major, then as its lieutenant colonel. After a distinguished Civil War career, Carr had declined service with Negroes, and with it the rank of lieutenant colonel in the Ninth Cavalry. Merritt accepted the position, and Carr now found himself Merritt's subordinate. It was a terrible disappointment to Carr. Carr had led the Fifth through the battle at Summitt Springs in 1869 and through the hardest imaginable campaigns in Arizona. He was the soul of the regiment and had built within it an unequaled esprit-de-corps. The "Dandy Fifth" was renowned throughout the Army, and Merritt was fortunate to command such an efficient, veteran regiment.¹⁰

When Merritt arrived at Cheyenne, he found a telegram from Sheridan waiting for him, with the information that Carr had the regiment waiting for him on the South Cheyenne River, north of Fort Laramie. He also found that the guide sent to accompany him to the regiment was none other than William F. Cody, "Buffalo Bill," the more-or-less official head scout of the Fifth Cavalry. Cody was modestly attired in a velvet theatrical outfit from his Wild West Show that undoubtedly raised doubts in Merritt's mind as to his usefulness. Merritt came to value Cody's abilities, notwithstanding the show-business atmosphere that surrounded him, and eventually considered him the most reliable scout on the northern plains. Merritt arranged for additional supplies to be forwarded to the command in the field and left with Cody for the camp of the Fifth Cavalry.¹¹

Carr was less than pleased to see Cody and Merritt ride into camp. He looked upon Merritt's arrival as an humiliation and thought it curious that the government should teach new officers--Terry, Crook, and Merritt--how to fight the Indians of the northern plains when there were officers like himself who already knew how. It was an ungracious sentiment, which ignored the extensive experience of Crook and Merritt, and it set the tone of his and Merritt's relationship for some time to come. Carr was upset over the fact that Merritt actually assumed field command, not that Merritt had been promoted, since that promotion was made on the basis of seniority. As a result, Carr's attitude was one of politeness and correctness

rather than of enthusiasm.¹²

Merritt was too busy to worry about Carr's feelings. In addition to regimental command, Merritt took over from Carr command of the District of the Black Hills, a subordinate unit of Crook's department. In this capacity, Merritt was responsible for protection of the settlers and inhabitants of the district against Indian depredations. The district command had little significance, however, beyond giving him further reason to patrol the region northwest of the Red Cloud and Spotted Tail agencies, across the main train between those locations and the Powder River country. Merritt wasted no time in putting the regiment into motion scouting the region.¹³

While Merritt was joining his new regiment, Crook, after the fight on Rosebud Creek, retreated to a good defensive position in the foothills of the Big Horn Mountains. There, he hunted and fished and waited for reinforcements which he assumed Sheridan would send him. Crook believed the "hostiles" outnumbered him three to one in fighting men. Since Crook had some 1100 troops, this was an absurd evaluation, but Crook, nevertheless, was amazingly inert for three weeks. During that time Custer took the Seventh Cavalry into the region north of Crook and, on June 25, was killed on the Little Big Horn with half of his command.¹⁴

Communications with and coordination of the several field commands became very difficult for Sheridan. Terry and Gibbon had united their columns along the Yellowstone River.

A message from them had to be sent by courier to the nearest telegraph station in Montana, from which place it was wired to Sheridan in Chicago. Crook was even more isolated in his Big Horn camp. He had to send couriers into Fort Fetterman with any communication for either Sheridan or Merritt. From Fort Fetterman, the message was telegraphed to Chicago or, if it was for Merritt, to Fort Laramie. Merritt was within two to four days' ride by courier from Fort Laramie. Obviously, a considerable delay occurred in communication between any of these commanders, and events began to occur rapidly enough that communications lagged significantly behind events.

Merritt intended marching northwestward toward the Powder River country, but he was halted by Sheridan, who worried that news of the Custer disaster would excite Indians at Red Cloud Agency and would result in an exodus of warriors to join the "hostile" bands. On July 7, Merritt received a dispatch confirming the results of Custer's last fight. He immediately realized that Crook would probably order the Fifth Cavalry to join the Department of the Platte column in the field. Merritt moved nearer Fort Laramie, through which such a movement would take place, and awaited word from Crook or Sheridan. On the same day, Sheridan, amazed that Crook had not ordered Merritt to join him, authorized Crook to do so if he thought it prudent to have reinforcements before moving against the Sioux and Cheyenne warriors believed to be still concentrated near the Big Horn River in Montana.¹⁵

Merritt resumed his movement toward Fort Laramie with the regiment, having been advised by the commanding officer of Fort Robinson that there was no disposition on the part of Indians from Red Cloud Agency to leave for the Powder River Country. That officer soon changed his mind, however, and felt that matters at the agency were uncertain because the Indians there had not been supplied with any rations of beef and had only corn and flour to eat. Supplies for which Merritt had recommended appropriations back in March still were unavailable; their absence, along with encouragement lent by news of the Army's defeat by Crazy Horse and Sitting Bull, brought on Merritt's first major action of the 1876 campaign.¹⁶

Sheridan, advised of the unrest at the agency, thought Merritt should remain within striking distance of Red Cloud in case trouble broke out there. Halting his march toward Fort Laramie, Merritt sent Major Thaddeus Stanton, a paymaster on Sheridan's staff, but now attached to the regiment, to the Agency to observe the situation first-hand. At noon on July 15, Merritt received a hurried dispatch from Stanton. Approximately 800 Cheyennes and some Sioux were leaving for the North either that day or the next. Merritt hurried off a dispatch to Sheridan with the information that he was moving north to intercept these Indians. The courier was hardly gone when another courier from Fort Laramie rode into Merritt's camp on Rawhide Creek. Sheridan, on information three or four days old, had changed his mind and had ordered Merritt

to join Crook as soon as possible.¹⁷

Merritt did not hesitate long in resolving his dilemma. To continue toward Fort Laramie would allow this huge force to reach the "hostile" camps in Montana. To attack the departing Cheyennes directly from his position southwest of the agency would simply drive them out and hasten their departure. Merritt would have to estimate their time of arrival at some point on the trail between the agencies and the Powder River country, circle around them, and arrive at the chosen point ahead of the Cheyennes. It was a perfect example of Merritt's decisiveness and experienced responsibility in command. He sent the courier back to Fort Laramie with word for Sheridan that information of which the general was unaware indicated that he should attempt to intercept the Cheyennes. If Sheridan disapproved, he could recall Merritt, but no time could be lost waiting for approval. Sheridan did approve, but Merritt and the Fifth Cavalry were already headed for the Cheyennes by that time.¹⁸

Merritt decided to strike the Indians where the main trail northwest from Red Cloud Agency crossed an insignificant tributary of the South Cheyenne River, War Bonnet Creek. The Cheyennes had thirty-five miles to march in reaching the crossing, but they moved slowly, having women and children along. Merritt had to travel some eighty-five miles on a roundabout march to reach the same point. Within an hour of writing his last dispatch to Sheridan, "the silent horseman at the head of the column" led the Fifth Cavalry northwestward on a forced

march which would become one of the most famous episodes in the regiment's history.¹⁹

The march to War Bonnet Creek required all Merritt's skill and experience in horse management. The horses had to be rested, fed, and turned out to graze just enough to allow the regiment to reach its destination in fighting trim. By 10 P.M. on July 15, Merritt called a halt, having traveled thirty-five miles since early afternoon. Merritt's quartermaster brought the supply wagons into camp about midnight, and Merritt had the men up by 3 A.M. A quick breakfast of coffee and bacon for the troopers and oats for the horses, and the Fifth Cavalry saddled up for another fifty-mile march to War Bonnet Creek. Buffalo Bill, who had been influenced by long years of campaigning with Carr and by Carr's criticisms of Merritt's experience and abilities, was impressed by Merritt's management of the march, the hallmark of an expert cavalry leader. By 8 P.M., Merritt reached the trail crossing. No large parties had passed; he had beaten the Cheyennes.²⁰

Eighty-five miles in thirty-one hours; it was a magnificent effort, and it paid great dividends. At daylight, after having rolled himself in a blanket for a few hours of sleep under a convenient cottonwood tree, Merritt had his troopers in the saddle, ready to advance toward Red Cloud Agency. Just then the vanguard of the Cheyenne column, seven well-mounted warriors, came into view. As Merritt hid the mounted troopers behind nearby bluffs, the leading Indians pursued two couriers

who were attempting to locate the Fifth Cavalry. Merritt, lying on a commanding ridge, held his horsemen in check until both pursuers and pursued approached, then sent his troopers forward in a pounding charge. One warrior, dropping on his horse's side, sent a bullet whizzing past Merritt's cheek.²¹

The leading warriors fell back before the troopers and warned those coming behind. Abandoning camp equipment and personal belongings, the Cheyennes reached the refuge offered by the agency before the cavalrymen could catch them. Only one warrior was killed. The sub-chief Yellow Hand was killed and scalped, apparently by Cody, in the first rush. The fight itself was insignificant in magnitude, but the incident became famous when Cody developed a new act around it during his theatrical tour the following winter. The crowds screamed with delight as Buffalo Bill brought forth "the scalp" and proclaimed it to be "the first scalp for Custer." There was considerable controversy over who had actually slain the Cheyenne, but it made little difference, and Merritt never even mentioned the incident in his report of the fight.²²

It was a significant victory, one of the very few that year, but since it was almost bloodless, it did not appear as immediately impressive as it later did. Merritt had prevented hundreds of Cheyennes from reinforcing the "hostiles" in the Powder River country. Few Indians thereafter left the agencies for the North since Merritt's tactics had greatly impressed them. When the Fifth Cavalry had moved south toward Fort Laramie a week earlier, the northwest trail had seemed to be

open, but instead, almost an entire cavalry regiment was directly across it. The Cheyennes involved were astonished at the sight of Merritt's men charging down on them out of a seemingly empty prairie. Those not involved were restrained from further adventures by the thought that the regiment, after leaving Red Cloud, might still be waiting somewhere to the northwest. Merritt had beaten the Cheyenne band with the Indians' own tactics of rapid movement, concealment, and ambush, without losing a man.²³

Merritt had no time to waste at Red Cloud. He reported his operations to Sheridan and received Crook's instructions to march to his assistance with the eight companies Merritt commanded. After giving the troopers two hours to eat, Merritt led them out of the agency on the afternoon of July 18, enroute to join Crook via Fort Laramie and Fort Fetterman. On the march, he requested that the remaining four companies of the Fifth Cavalry be sent from the Department of the Missouri to join him. The column reached Fort Laramie on the twenty-first, and there Merritt found dispatches from Sheridan assuring him of support for his recent operations and urging him to hasten to Crook's aid as fast as the condition of the horses would allow.²⁴

Caroline Merritt had also wired Sheridan to find out what news he had from her husband. Merritt had taken the field so quickly that he had not written to her. There were rumors of disasters of every description flying about after the Custer fight, and Caroline wrote: "I am almost crazy--

such news." Sheridan assured her that Merritt was fine and passed her concern on to Merritt at Fort Laramie.²⁵

Caroline was not the only person anxious over Merritt's whereabouts. Crook was fretting in his camp over Merritt's delay. Crook knew nothing of the War Bonnet fight for some time. He wrote Sheridan that he intended "to move out after the hostiles as soon as Merritt gets here with the Fifth." Crook feared that the grass would be too parched or would be burned by the Indians, and that the horses of the upcoming expedition could not be grazed on the march. These were reasonable fears from his point of view, and his statement that "I find myself immeasurably embarrassed by the delay of Merritt's column," was reasonable also as long as he was ignorant of the state of affairs at the agencies. Afterwards, his statements sound more like he was looking for a scapegoat for his own inertia.²⁶

Merritt understood Crook's anxiety and hurried to join him as rapidly as possible. Merritt left Fort Laramie after two days spent arranging for supplies and remounts to meet him at Fort Fetterman, the jumping-off place for the Big Horn Mountains. Two days of marching brought the Fifth Cavalry to Fort Fetterman on July 25. Although there were some personnel problems, Merritt was well pleased with his new regiment, and they were in high spirits after their accomplishments of the past three weeks. A New York Times reporter described the regiment's arrival at Fort Fetterman: "They came in during the morning and a pretty sight it was. . .

They came along in thorough fighting trim, flanking parties out, and videttes, too. . . . None presented such a thorough fighting look as the 5th regiment."²⁷

Merritt had some problems with his line officers during the month's operations. Several were overly intemperate. One lieutenant sent in his resignation after Merritt caught him drinking as officer of the guard. Merritt let him stay with the regiment on a promise of sobriety that lasted little over a month, and the man was then dismissed. Another lieutenant was under arrest for fighting. After leaving Fort Fetterman, Merritt started to tighten up on discipline within the regiment. Some grumbling resulted, especially from the officers, upon whom his wrath fell most heavily.²⁸

Carr was foremost among those who felt abused. Still unable to reconcile himself to being second-in-command to a vigorous, younger colonel, Carr was correct in his behavior but was of little help to Merritt during the march. Carr complained to his wife about the location of his tent in camp, about Merritt's style of marching and grazing the horses, and about Merritt's report of the War Bonnet fight, which Carr thought was exaggerated, although it was actually quite modest. When Merritt discussed the condition of the wagon teams with Carr, the latter declared that "it was not my funeral." Carr thought seriously of asking for a transfer at Fort Laramie, but reconsidered and continued with the regiment.²⁹

Merritt's march north from Fort Fetterman was without particular incident. He sent two companies to Red Cloud

Agency and Fort Robinson and was joined by two additional companies enroute, bringing regimental strength to 535 officers and men--a potent striking force. At Fort Fetterman three newspaper reporters joined the column, and Merritt took along seventy-six recruits for the Second and Third Cavalry, whose forces were serving with Crook's command. In addition, he brought sixty spare horses and an abundance of ammunition. Merritt reached Crook's command on August 3, fifty-six days after Crook had fought on Rosebud Creek, amidst general rejoicing by Crook's men as "this famous regiment filed in sight."³⁰

The impressive sight induced at least two observers to look more closely at the column's leader. The Chicago Tribune reporter, John Finerty, was in Crook's party and described Merritt as "quite tall, rather spare and nearly beardless. He had a florid complexion, keen eyes of grayish hue, and small but comely and resolute features." Merritt had recently turned forty, but Captain John Bourke, Crook's aide, himself only thirty, described Merritt as "a very young man. . . . He was blessed with a powerful physique, and seemed to be specially well adapted to undergo any measure of fatigue and privation that might befall him." Merritt's "hair and eyes are dark and the tint of his complexion ruddy. In his speech he has a scarcely perceptible impediment. His manners are very soldierly, but cordial."³¹

Merritt would need these personal qualities during the next several months, since the upcoming Big Horn and Yellowstone

expedition was characterized by fatigue and privation. Terry and Crook had agreed to advance toward one another as soon as Merritt arrived and to mount a joint campaign against the "hostiles" who they believed were still encamped in the region of southern Montana between the Big Horn Mountains and the Yellowstone River. Crook immediately began organizing his part of the campaign. He had approximately 2,000 men, including Merritt's ten companies of the Fifth Cavalry, the entire Third Cavalry, commanded by its lieutenant colonel, William B. Royall, and a three-company battalion from the Second Cavalry, Merritt's old Civil War regiment. A battalion of infantry also accompanied Crook's forces.³²

After an organization council on August 4, Merritt was announced as chief-of-cavalry, while command of the Fifth reverted to Carr, raising that officer's spirits somewhat. Royall commanded his own Third regiment and the battalion of the Second Cavalry. Merritt organized the cavalry into six battalions and had the troopers strip themselves of all unnecessary gear in preparation for the opening of "the campaign to avenge Custer" the following morning.³³

Crook took no wagons, only pack-mules, for greater mobility. Troops carried only four days' rations, one blanket and overcoat on the saddles, and a hundred rounds of carbine ammunition. It looked like the start of an auspicious campaign, but the Big Horn and Yellowstone campaign, or "Mud March," accomplished little except to earn for Crook the hearty disgust of many of his veteran officers and soldiers.

Merritt's horses were in poor condition to start an 800-mile expedition. Crook had allowed no time for the Fifth's mounts to recuperate from their march from Red Cloud, although they were in better shape than Royall's horses, which had been very scantily supplied and under-grazed, since the Indians had burned the surrounding grasslands as Crook had feared. Most of Merritt's attention during the campaign was directed toward conserving the horses and supervising the march discipline of the cavalrymen.³⁴

The hot summer weather lasted only a few days, then turned cold and rainy, conditions which made life miserable for officers and men without bedding or shelter. After marching down the valley of the Rosebud, Crook's column joined Terry's on August 10, only to discover that the "hostile" Indians had split up into small bands and that these bands had scattered throughout the vast region east of the Rosebud. Terry and Crook were at a loss as to what to do next, but the two columns turned northeastward and marched for a week, occasionally sighting small Indian bands that disappeared whenever pursued.

Terry's supply boat met the commands on the Yellowstone River. Unable to decide on any policy of united action, Terry and Crook decided to split their columns once again, with Crook scouting south and east from the Yellowstone while Terry remained on its northern bank. The troopers were soaked and miserably cold as they camped along the river awaiting further orders.

Merritt's temper was not improved by the wretched weather or by the slack camp discipline he observed in the Third Cavalry. He "chewed out" Royall for not properly supervising the camp, much to the delight of junior officers and to the disgust of Royall and Carr. Carr had a constant string of complaints, some legitimate. He felt the inactivity was a disgrace and that "Cody and I know how we could have found and whipped these Indians." Cody soon departed for the East, however, leaving Carr alone with his dissatisfaction. Carr's irritation increased as he found many of the Fifth Cavalry officers becoming impressed with their stern colonel as the march continued. Carr's disaffection was such that he approached Royall to discuss their switching regiments, a necessary arrangement before any transfer could take place. Royall asked how much Carr would pay him and finally offered to take \$2,000 to agree, the price no doubt having risen since Royall's run-in with Merritt.³⁵

On August 26, Crook finally moved. The command moved eastward in good weather for a few days. Merritt had the troopers walk a great deal and lead their horses, which were fast becoming worn out as the second phase of Crook's expedition proceeded. Merritt always walked with the cavalymen whenever he ordered them to do so--an old custom which conscientious officers observed. Only a few distant Indians were sighted by September 5, when Crook arrived at Heart River, some 200 miles due north of the Black Hills, almost out of rations and disappointed that his efforts had been unsuccessful.

Crook felt that the "hostiles" were encamped between the Heart River position and the Black Hills and decided to march south, sending ahead for supplies to meet him enroute, and eating the horses when rations ran out.³⁶

Merritt took the occasion to send dispatches back to Sheridan, assuring him that the cavalry was in good shape, but that the horses were worn. He also wrote Caroline assuring her that he was fine and describing the expedition's progress. These last-minute dispatches went with Crook's communications to Fort Abraham Lincoln, Dakota Territory, shortly before the march continued. The column moved out in pouring rain, which turned the prairie into an adhesive mud, tiring horses and dispiriting men. As the troopers became more and more weary and hungry, they tended to become apathetic and inattentive to their mounts, which needed every attention possible in order to survive. Horses began to drop from exhaustion and hunger. By September 7, with rations gone, Merritt issued orders for three horses to be shot each night in each battalion. The horses, like their riders, were almost scarecrows, and provided minimal rations at best, even after the troopers became accustomed to the fare.³⁷

The situation was becoming serious as well as miserable by September 7, and that evening Crook and Merritt sent Captain Anson Mills, of the Third Cavalry, with 150 picked men and a pack-train, ahead toward Deadwood City, on the northern edge of the Black Hills. Mills was to hurry supplies back to the starving column and to attack any Indian villages

he might encounter. On the morning of September 9, Mills encountered and attacked the village of the Sioux chief, American Horse. Mills was at Slim Buttes, seventeen miles south of the main command, when Crook and Merritt learned of the fight. They rushed ahead with the best-mounted men, while Carr sorted out the unfit men and horses and brought up the main column to relieve Mills by noon. The successful attack on the village was mainly a Third Cavalry affair, but some action remained for Merritt and the Fifth.³⁸

During the afternoon, Sioux reinforcements, reportedly led by Crazy Horse himself, attacked the command. It was a noisy, but not particularly sanguinary, fight. Merritt commanded part of the field, a large amphitheater bordered by shelved and timbered buttes, while Crook commanded another sector. Dismounted, the Fifth Cavalry attacked the Sioux who were firing from the trees. The Sioux then attacked mounted, riding along the line of cavalry in the best Hollywood style, but night ended the fight as Crazy Horse withdrew.³⁹

The fight accomplished little except to kill American Horse and to capture some women and children from his camp. Considerable dried meat was found in the captured village; it provided a decent meal for the hungry men and officers on the night of the fight and for the wounded on the subsequent march. Crook headed south the following morning, while the Fifth Cavalry, acting as rearguard, skirmished with a few Indians and killed five in what turned out to be the last attack on Crook's column. Merritt ordered all the captive

women and children released as the village was evacuated.⁴⁰

The rest of the journey toward the Black Hills was, if anything, even more miserable than before, with the column being burdened by wounded men in addition. The misery was short-lived, however, for on September 15, supplies from the Black Hills mining camps reached Crook's command, and the worst of the campaign was ended. The weary troopers went into camp near the Belle Fourche River, on the north edge of the mountains. Here Crook received orders from Sheridan to join him at Fort Laramie in order to plan the establishment of a winter garrison in the Powder River country. Accordingly, Crook left the Big Horn and Yellowstone expedition, turning over command to Merritt on September 14.⁴¹

Merritt led the column south through the Black Hills by easy marches. Camp was established near Custer City, and a hospital was established in that town for Merritt's wounded. The weather turned into a beautiful Indian summer, and Merritt rested the men and horses over a three-week period. On October 12, he received some replacement horses and some 400 recruits for his and the other cavalry regiments. Along with the Fifth Cavalry recruits came a new officer for the regiment, Lieutenant Eben Swift, who would shortly become Merritt's adjutant and who would remain with Merritt for many years and in many different commands.⁴²

Merritt had also had more conflict with Carr since leaving the Yellowstone River. Even though Carr commanded the regiment for the duration of Crook's, and now Merritt's,

campaign, Merritt still was the actual commander. Carr and Merritt disagreed over appointment of a regimental sergeant-major, and Carr complained about Merritt's horse management skills--an odd area in which to look for fault. Carr found fault with Merritt in other curious matters as well. To his wife, Carr wrote that "the doctor is very much worried by General Merritt's boyish freaks, as he calls them. General Merritt yesterday went through the hospital and ordered socks and blankets to be purchased for the patients." Carr's attitude did not augur well for their relations once Merritt resumed command of the regiment.⁴³

With his command in reasonably good shape once more, Merritt led them out of the Custer City camp on October 14, for a ten-day scout along the Cheyenne River as far as Rapid Creek and then back to Fort Robinson, where an outbreak was feared at nearby Red Cloud Agency. The trouble was contained before Merritt arrived, and Crook formally disbanded the Big Horn and Yellowstone expedition on October 24.⁴⁴

On Sherman's recommendation, Mackenzie and the Fourth Cavalry had been sent to the northern plains while Crook's expedition was being organized during the summer. Mackenzie had relieved Merritt as commander of the District of the Black Hills, and his regiment had operated around Red Cloud and Fort Robinson since arriving. Two of Merritt's companies also were near Fort Robinson, building quarters and escorting supply trains. Merritt attached them to the rest of the regiment and awaited news of the next move in the Army's

campaign against the Sioux and Cheyennes. Before that news came, however, the Fifth Cavalry was ordered to Fort D. A. Russell, near Cheyenne, and to posts along the line of the Union Pacific railroad.⁴⁵

The regiment made the march to their posts without Merritt. Shortly after arriving at Fort Robinson, Merritt received a telegram from Sheridan to come to division headquarters in Chicago. Merritt arrived on the first of November. There he was reunited with Caroline, who had traveled with her parents through the East in Merritt's absence. What business Merritt and Sheridan conducted can only be imagined. They undoubtedly discussed the upcoming winter operations against the "hostiles." They also probably discussed the details of Merritt's operations on War Bonnet Creek and Crook's feelings about them. The trip got Merritt back to "civilization" for a short time, but he and Caroline returned to Fort D. A. Russell in November, rejoining regimental headquarters at that post.⁴⁶

The 1876 Sioux campaign had been an unusual one for Merritt, but he had performed admirably; its aftermath was even stranger. The country was incensed that no real punishment had been dealt the Indians responsible for Custer's disaster. Crook's campaign was very nearly a failure, and it seemed such to many newspapers and politicians in particular. Criticism was heaped upon Crook. In fact, Crook's performance had been amazingly inept, especially when his brilliant record fighting and administering the Apaches in

Arizona was considered. His insistence on waiting fifty-six days for reinforcements even though he had a powerful force in the Big Horn encampment was almost inexplicable. He sought to explain it by blaming Merritt and Sheridan for delaying the start of his campaign. His insistence on campaigning with an extensive column of troops when he had fought small Indian bands in Arizona with small, mobile detachments and with Indian guides and scouts, was also uncharacteristic.

By January 1877, Crook, or an intimate subordinate, "leaked" information to major newspapers which indicated that Merritt and Sheridan were to blame for failure of the Big Horn and Yellowstone expedition. Sheridan was furious and wrote directly to Crook, quoting the articles and relating the sequence of events motivating Merritt and Sheridan during the preceding summer. Sheridan supported Merritt's actions completely and praised his promptness in joining Crook and his accomplishment at the War Bonnet fight in preventing reinforcement of the "hostile" forces. "Little Phil" assured Crook that he "would be sorry to learn that the author [of the articles] is an officer of the Army, or that the statements . . . were semi-officially authorized." Sheridan further decried the tendency of some officers toward "lampooning of their brother officers and ignorant criticisms of their superiors, in the newspapers."⁴⁷

After a season of severe campaigning, the Fifth Cavalry went into garrison, while Mackenzie's fresh regiment attacked the Cheyenne village of Dull Knife in November in one of the

most decisive operations of the year. Mackenzie's victory, with others the following spring, brought Crazy Horse and most of the "hostile" Sioux and Cheyennes into the agencies during 1877, effectively ending the Army's operations against these tribes. Merritt's part in the campaign had been expertly carried out. Sheridan's faith in him had been shown by the forced promotion to colonel, while Merritt, by decisive and vigorous independent action and by hard, but necessary, duty under Crook, had fulfilled Sheridan's expectations once more. A winter in garrison would be a welcome change for both Merritts, and Wesley Merritt could forget the "Mud March." His regiment did not forget, however. Charles King, later a noted novelist of Army life and Merritt's present adjutant, composed a song in honor of their year's work:

But 'twas out upon the Yellowstone,
We had the damdest time.
Faith, we made the trip with Rosebud George,
Six months without a dime.
We campaigned in the sage brush,
the ditches and the mud,
And we never saw an onion, or a turnip, or a spud.⁴⁸

FOOTNOTES

Chapter 11

1. Sheridan to Belknap, Jan. 30, 1875, LS, MDM, RG 393, NA; Belknap to AGO, July 6, 1875, ACP, NA.
2. S.O. 53, MDM, May 15, 1875, ACP, NA.
3. Sheridan to Logan, March 1, 1875; Belknap to Sheridan, March 3, 1875: Sheridan Papers, No. 13, MSS Div., L.C.; Custer to Merritt, Jan. 15, 1875, Sheridan Papers, No. 14, MSS Div., L.C.
4. AAG, MDM, to Merritt, Dec. 31, 1875, LS, MDM, RG 393, NA; Merritt Report, Feb. 8, 1876, LR, MDM, RG 393, NA; Terry to Sheridan, April 1, 1875; Maginnis to Sheridan, March 22, 1875; Sheridan to Terry, May 15, 1877: Special File, Hell Gate, Montana, MDM, RG 393, NA; Merrill J. Mattes, Indians, Infants and Infantry: Andrew and Elisabeth Burt on the Frontier (Denver, 1960), 262.
5. Sheridan, Supplemental Report to Annual Report for 1878, Sheridan Papers, No. 87, MSS Div., L.C.
6. AAG, MDM, to Merritt, March 6, 1876, LS, MDM, RG 393, NA; Sheridan to AAG, MDM, Feb. 15, 1876; Merritt to AAG, MDM, March 12, 1876; Merritt Report, March 17, 1876; Merritt to Sheridan, June 7, 1876: L.R., MDM, RG 393, NA.
7. Sheridan to Merritt, June 3, 1876; Merritt to AAG, MDM, June 3, 1876, LS, MDM, RG 393, NA; Merritt to Sheridan, June 9, 1876, LR, MDM, RG 393, NA.
8. Sherman to Sheridan, May 5, 1876, LR, MDM, RG 393, NA; ANJ, July 8, 1876; Sherman to Merritt, June 21, 1876, ACP, NA; Charles King, Campaigning with Crook, Western Frontier Library (Norman, 1964), 18.
9. Eben Swift, "The Fifth Regiment of Cavalry," in Rodenbough and Haskin, Army of U.S., 226-28.
10. J. King, War Eagle, 77, 136.
11. Sheridan to Merritt, June 26, 1876, LS, MDM, RG 393, NA; Merritt to AAG, MDM, June 27, 1876, Special File, Yellowstone Expedition, 1876, MDM, RG 393, NA; Don Russell, The Lives and Legends of Buffalo Bill (Norman, 1960), 325.

12. Carr to Mary Carr, July 3, 1876, in Mary Carr, "Memories of Brevet Major General Eugene A. Carr," Typescript, Carr Family Papers, in possession of Mr. and Mrs. Don Van Solen, Santa Fe, 123-24. Hereafter cited as "Memories;" J. King, War Eagle, 158-59.
13. M. W. Sheridan to AAAG, DP, June 25, 1876, LS, MDM, RG 393, NA; Russell, Buffalo Bill, 220.
14. Crook to AAG, MDM, July 12, 1876, "Sioux War Papers," Microcopy 666, R 271, NA. For details of Crook's activities see: John F. Finerty, War-Path and Bivouac (Norman, 1961) and John G. Bourke, On the Border with Crook (Chicago, 1891).
15. Merritt to Sheridan, July 5, 1876; Sheridan to Crook, July 7, 1876: Special File, Yellowstone Expedition, 1876, MDM, RG 393, NA; AAG, MDM, to Merritt, July 6, 1876, LS, MDM, RG 393, NA. For detailed narrative of the War Bonnet fight and the Big Horn and Yellowstone Expedition see C. King, Campaigning with Crook.
16. Sheridan to Merritt, July 13, 1876, LS, MDM, RG 393, NA; Merritt to AAG, MDM, July 12, 1876, Letterbook, 5 Cav., RG 391, NA.
17. Sheridan to Merritt, July 14, 1876, LS, MDM, RG 393, NA; Merritt to AAG, MDM, July 15, 1876, Letterbook, 5 Cav., RG 391, NA.
18. C. King, Campaigning with Crook, 27; Sheridan to Merritt, July 15, 1876, LS, MDM, RG 393, NA; Merritt to AAG, MDM, July 15, 1876, Letterbook, 5 Cav., RG 391, NA.
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20. Merritt Report, July 18, 1876, Letterbook, 5 Cav., RG 391, NA; C. King, Campaigning with Crook, 25-27; William F. Cody, True Tales of the Plains (New York, 1908), 204-205.
21. C. King, Campaigning with Crook, 30, 33-35.
22. Merritt Report, July 18, 1876, Letterbook, 5 Cav., RG 391, NA; Russell, Buffalo Bill, 228-29; Chris Madsen, "Chris Madsen Finds the Spot," W.O.W., Nov. 30, and Dec. 30, 1934; Jules Greene, "The Death of Yellow Hand," W.O.W., Sept. 30, 1929.
23. C. King, Campaigning with Crook, 35.

24. Merritt to Sheridan, Jan. 29, 1877; Pope to Sheridan, July 17, 1876: Special File, Sioux Wars--1876, MDM, RG 393, NA; Sheridan to Merritt, July 19 and 22, 1876, LS, MDM, RG 393, NA; Sheridan to Sherman, July 14, 1876, "Sioux War Papers," Microcopy 666, R 271, NA.

25. Caroline Merritt to Sheridan, July 6, 1876, LR, MDM, RG 393, NA; Sheridan to Caroline Merritt, July 6, 1876, LS, MDM, RG 393, NA.

26. Crook to Sheridan, July 22, 1876, Special File, Sioux Wars--1876, MDM, RG 393, NA; Martin F. Schmitt, ed., General George Crook, His Autobiography (Norman, 1946), 200.

27. ANJ, August 12, 1876.

28. Carr to Mary Carr, July 11, 1876, "Memories," 126; King to Upshaw, August 17, 1876, Letterbook, 5 Cav., RG 391; NA.

29. Carr to Mary Carr, July 12, 14, 21, 24, and 28, 1876, "Memories"; J. King, War Eagle, 162.

30. G. Price, Fifth Cavalry, 157; Schmitt, Crook, 200; Bourke, On the Border with Crook, 344, 346; Chicago Tribune, August 4, 1876.

31. Finerty, War-Path and Bivouac, 234; Bourke, On the Border with Crook, 844; Diary of John Gregory Bourke, VII, Entry for August 2, 1876, copy in Coronado Room, Library, University of New Mexico, Albuquerque.

32. Crook to Sheridan, August 4, 1876, "Sioux War Papers," Microcopy 666, R 273, NA.

33. Carr to Mary Carr, August 8, 1876, "Memories"; C. King, Campaigning with Crook, 50-53.

34. C. King, Campaigning with Crook, 54; Mattes, Indians, Infants and Infantry, 222.

35. Carr to Mary Carr, August 9, 26, and 30, 1876, "Memories"; Russell, Buffalo Bill, 246-47; Swift, "Memoranda," 98.

36. Carr to Mary Carr, August 26, 1876, "Memories"; Bourke, On the Border with Crook, 366; Finerty, War-Path and Bivouac, 275-76.

37. Charles King, Address before O.I.W., Feb. 26, 1921, O.I.W. Collection, Archives, MHRC, Carlisle Barracks; Sheridan to AAG, MDM, Sept. 17, 1876; Merritt to AAG, MDM, Sept. 5, 1876, LR, MDM, RG 393, NA; Schmitt, Crook, 210-11.

38. G. Price, Fifth Cavalry, 164; Anson Mills, My Story (Washington, 1918), 166.

39. Mills, My Story, 428-31; Finerty, War-Path and Bivouac, 294; Crook Report, Sept. 16, 1876, "Sioux War Papers," Microcopy 666, R 271, NA.

40. Carr Report, Sept. 15, 1876, Microcopy 666, R 313, NA; Finerty, War-Path and Bivouac, 300-301.

41. Sheridan to Crook, Sept. 8, 1876, "Sioux War Papers," Microcopy 666, R 273, NA.

42. Swift, "Memoranda," 70; AAG, MDM, to Sheridan, Oct. 5, 1876, LS, MDM, RG 393, NA.

43. Carr to Mary Carr, Sept. 7 and 25, and Oct. 1, 1876, "Memories."

44. Swift, "Memoranda," 71; Crook Report, Oct. 30, 1876, "Sioux War Papers," Microcopy 666, R 279, NA.

45. Post Returns, Ft. Robinson, Sept.-Oct., 1876, RG 393, NA; AAG, DP, to AAG, MDM, August 11, 1876, Special File, Sioux Wars--1876, MDM, RG 393, NA.

46. Carr to Mary Carr, Oct. 4, 1876, "Memories"; AAG, MDM, to Merritt, Oct. 29, 1876; AAG, MDM, to Crook, Nov. 1, 1876: LS, MDM, RG 393, NA.

47. Sheridan to Crook, Jan. 30, 1877, Sheridan Papers, No. 41, MSS Div., L.C.

48. Swift, "Memoranda," 71; Nohl, "Bad Hand," 168.

Chapter 12

UTE TROUBLES

We knew that neither man nor beast would be spared when General Merritt started to the rescue.

--Captain James S. Payne

Wesley and Caroline Merritt returned in mid-November 1876, to the post that would be their home until early 1880. Those years, with only a few exceptions, were peaceful years on the northern plains, and life at Fort D. A. Russell was the most agreeable they had yet experienced on the frontier.

Fort D. A. Russell was located near Cheyenne Depot, the large Quartermaster installation on the Union Pacific railroad. The proximity to reliable transportation and to the depot made Fort D. A. Russell probably the best-supplied frontier post and one of the most comfortable during good weather. Memories of the Fifth Cavalry often included allusions to "days of song and dance at Fort D. A. Russell." During Merritt's tenure at the post, officers' quarters were relatively new and consisted of substantial frame buildings fronting on a broad parade ground.¹

The climate, however, was terrible. Warm, although not unpleasantly so, in the summer, the post was subjected to winter blizzards such as the Merritts had not experienced. The post surgeon described one of these storms, which lasted

two days and was so violent that snow was driven through cracks in the buildings, so that two to three feet of snow had to be shoveled out of some of the quarters. The post hospital was inundated, with attendants barely able to reach patients. Communications within the post were impossible for two days due to fifteen to thirty-five-foot drifts. Besides making life miserable for officers and men and their families, military duty was almost impossible during winter months. Even caring for the cavalry horses was often difficult with snow banked up to the eaves of houses and troopers having to dig their way into the stables.²

Time hung heavily on the hands of Merritt's troopers during the winter and during periods of inactivity. He became known as a harsh disciplinarian at Fort D. A. Russell although it is not obvious that Merritt was any harsher than any other commander of a large garrison with relatively few officers to supervise the men. Merritt typically had six of his companies and one or two infantry companies, more than 600 enlisted men, at the post, with fewer than twenty officers. Desertion was little problem during the winter, between three and seven such cases per month being typical. If winter desertion was not a problem, drunkenness and lack of discipline were occasionally serious. On one notable payday, almost a hundred men were in the guardhouse at once. Much of Merritt's time was accordingly taken up with court-martial duty, as was that of the garrison's officers.³

As soon as spring arrived, the "snowbirds," men who enlisted in order to spend a reasonably comfortable winter at government expense, but who were intent on some other destination, deserted for nearby gold strikes or some other attraction, and the desertion rate rose, then fell again to winter levels. Warm weather, with active military duty to keep the troopers occupied, accounted for the low average desertion rate within the Fifth Cavalry, along, perhaps, with its commander's harshness.⁴

Rather than have Lieutenant Colonel Carr at Fort D. A. Russell, where he would feel unhappy, Merritt sent Carr and four companies to garrison Fort McPherson, a major post on the Union Pacific line east of the town of North Platte, Nebraska. Carr was pleased with the arrangement since he was at least a post commander again. He and Merritt never became friendly, although they worked well enough together once they left the Black Hills. Carr served through the spring of 1879 under Merritt; then he was promoted to colonel of the Sixth Cavalry and left for Arizona, where he continued his distinguished career.⁵

Labor troubles broke out during the summer of 1877, and Merritt and Carr played minor roles in the Army's involvement. During the "railroad strikes" in Chicago and Omaha, troops were used to suppress the strikers and to prevent the spread of violence. On July 27, Merritt was ordered to Omaha with two cavalry companies. He assumed command of Omaha Barracks and of the troops there. With this force, he guarded

quartermaster stores and other military property against anticipated vandalism by the strikers. Carr took three companies to Chicago on essentially the same mission. Neither Merritt nor Carr had any conflict with strikers since the critical period had passed by the time they arrived, and Merritt withdrew all his and Carr's men during the first week of August to resume garrison duty.⁶

In 1877 the Fifth Cavalry did much marching, but saw no real action. In May, Merritt sent five companies from Fort D. A. Russell on a three-month scout through the Powder River country and the Little Big Horn battle site in southern Montana. In late August this detachment was suddenly ordered to join Merritt and F Company on the Stinking Water (Shoshone River), south of Yellowstone National Park.

The Nez Perce Indians from Idaho, led by the capable chiefs Joseph and Looking Glass, were conducting their remarkable march toward refuge in Canada. By August 1877, they had fought successful rearguard actions against Generals Howard and Gibbon and had reached Yellowstone Park, still pursued by the outwitted Army forces. Sheridan planned to block their escape from the park by stationing all available troops at the passes through which such a large body of Indians, encumbered by their families, would have to exit. Merritt was ordered to concentrate his companies from Fort D. A. Russell south of Yellowstone Park, since the Nez Perce were rumored to be headed for the Wind River Shoshone Indian Reservation.⁷

Merritt picked up a hundred Shoshone scouts at Camp Brown, on the reservation, then rendezvoused with his companies from the Big Horn region on September 18, at the Stinking Water, near present-day Cody, Wyoming. Almost immediately Merritt received a dispatch notifying him that the Nez Perce had escaped to the northeast, through the pass near Clark's Fork of the Yellowstone River. Colonel Samuel Sturgis, commanding the Seventh Cavalry, displayed the ability that had won him notice at the Civil War Battle of Brice's Crossroads. Sturgis was charged with guarding the Clark's Fork pass, but was decoyed away long enough for the entire Indian column to pass. Merritt took his command toward the escape route, but found only a cold trail and some of Sturgis' abandoned horses. He turned back after four days toward Camp Brown. The weather had turned cold and rainy and the troopers spent more than a month wet to the skin on the return march. Merritt brought the column back into Fort D. A. Russell on October 25, after a miserable, fruitless campaign.⁸

Merritt sent three companies to the Ross Fork Indian Agency, near Fort Hall, Idaho, in January 1878, to prosecute the "Bannock War." No trouble ensued, and the troopers were back at Fort D. A. Russell within three weeks. During January, also, Merritt made a change in his regimental staff which brought the young Lieutenant Swift to the position of adjutant, a much-coveted job that carried extra pay and prestige.

Charles King had been regimental adjutant throughout most of the time Merritt had been with the Fifth Cavalry.

Some undisclosed violation caused Merritt to have King arrested and replaced by Swift. King had been severely wounded earlier in Arizona, and in 1879, he was retired from the service and began his literary career. Swift claimed that there was a connection between Merritt's action and King's dismissal, and the claim is plausible. Whatever the cause, Merritt lost one excellent adjutant and gained another. Swift would serve with Merritt for many years and would write a eulogy upon Merritt's death.⁹

By May 1878, Merritt was tired of winter quarters and accompanied two companies of the regiment on a five-month scouting expedition throughout the Big Horn Country and the Wind River Reservation. The scout was a leisurely affair with time for hunting and fishing as well as for training new recruits and for settling disputes on the reservation. By early October, Merritt returned, and he and Caroline left for two months of leave in the East.¹⁰

Whether or not Merritt knew what his next temporary duty would be is not clear. He may have taken leave of absence knowing that he was to be a member of the Reno Court of Inquiry, convening in Chicago in January 1879, or he may have been assigned to that duty because he was already in or near Chicago. Whatever the reason, Merritt became one of three members of the Court along with Colonel John H. King of the Ninth Infantry, and Lieutenant Colonel William B. Royall of the Third Cavalry, with whom he had locked horns during Crook's "Mud March."¹¹

Major Marcus A. Reno, Custer's second-in-command at the Little Big Horn fight, was widely blamed for having brought on that disaster to the Seventh Cavalry. Reno requested a Court of Inquiry to examine his conduct during the fight, with a view to exonerating him. The President granted his request, and the "Reno Court" convened at the Palmer House in Chicago on January 13.

For a month, the Court, presided over by King, took the testimony of twenty-three witnesses from among surviving officers and men of the Seventh Cavalry. The inquiry broadened into an investigation of the manner in which the battle was fought, and its proceedings remain a major source of information for historians. The Court's activities were closely followed in the newspapers by those who hoped that Reno's damnation would clear Custer's name of any possible blame. Similarly, Custer's detractors hoped for Reno's exoneration. Custer's widow, Elizabeth, felt that Merritt's presence on the Court would see justice done to her husband's memory, but she changed her mind when the Court's opinion was announced in mid-February.¹²

The Court found that Reno's failure to continue the advance of his battalion of the Seventh Cavalry and his subsequent retreat and defensive attitude were justified under the circumstances, even if they were not brilliantly executed. The Court felt that "while subordinates, in some instances, did more for the safety of the command by brilliant displays of courage than did Major Reno, there was nothing in his

conduct which requires animadversion from this Court." No further proceedings were recommended in the case.¹³

The verdict pleased almost nobody. Merritt did not like to "make waves" and felt that the whole idea of a public look at the Army's "dirty linen" could only harm the Army. He suspected that many witnesses had not told the "whole truth" in an attempt to uphold the honor of the Seventh Cavalry. On the basis of the evidence, however, Merritt felt the Court's decision was warranted.¹⁴

Elizabeth Custer was crushed by the verdict, and she blamed Merritt, as her husband's old rival. Merritt's part in the decision was also attacked by Frederick Whittaker, author of a recent biography of Custer. Whittaker pictured the Court's action as almost "a complete and scientific whitewash." He claimed that "ladies of pleasure" had been sent from Sheridan's headquarters to influence witnesses in Reno's favor and that the old Custer-Merritt rivalry was influential on the Court members. Whittaker's vehemence was almost certainly part of a publicity dodge to promote increased sales of his book. Although it is doubtful that Merritt mourned long over Custer's fate, he certainly did nothing and said nothing to belittle Custer's memory thereafter. Merritt, in fact, intimated to adjutant Swift that he would have liked to have received testimony more adverse to Reno. Merritt felt the Court had "damned Reno with faint praise." Merritt was the most discrete of men, and he never thereafter wrote or said more on the subject.¹⁵

Unpleasant reminders of the Reno Court continued for years. Elizabeth Custer, in 1882, attempted to have an equestrian statue of Custer removed from West Point and to have it replaced with the one which is there now. Her attempts were ignored for years, and she blamed Merritt, even though he had not the slightest interest in the type of monument for Custer's grave. With the Court's adjournment in February 1879, however, the Merritts left their quarters at the Palmer House and returned to less luxurious ones at Fort D. A. Russell.¹⁶

Merritt entered into customary garrison duties of inspections, administration, and training after returning to Wyoming, but the routine was broken in October 1879, with the announcement of an uprising among the White River Utes in western Colorado. These Utes occupied a reservation on the White River that was attractive to the White settlers of Colorado despite its remoteness and ruggedness. The historic pattern of Indian removal was about to be repeated in Colorado. The government guaranteed historic or treaty lands to Indians so long as they were not desired by White settlers. Once the lands became desirable for mining, agriculture, or stock-raising, the resident Indians had the choice of moving to a less-desirable territory either peacefully or, after unsuccessful combat with the Army, by force.

The Southern Utes had tentatively agreed to move to a new reservation in southern Colorado, but the White River Utes refused. Their disaffection was compounded by the

agent at White River, Nathan C. Meeker, who attempted, with little tact, to convert the White River band into "good Christian farmers." By September 1879, Meeker felt seriously threatened by the agency Indians and requested military assistance. John Pope, commanding the Department of the Missouri, under whose jurisdiction the White River Agency fell, had only one cavalry company patrolling in central Colorado and requested that troops from Crook's Department of the Platte assist agent Meeker since they were actually closer than were Pope's men.¹⁷

Crook sent Major Thomas Thornburgh, with three cavalry companies (two of them from Merritt's Fifth Cavalry) and an infantry company, almost 200 men, to Meeker's relief. On September 29, Thornburgh was ambushed at Milk Creek, twenty miles north of White River Agency. At the same time Meeker and his agency employees were killed by the Utes, and Meeker's wife and daughter and three other women and children were carried off by the Indians. In the ambush Thornburgh and ten men were killed and twenty-three were wounded, including the senior surviving officer, Captain John S. Payne, one of Merritt's officers, and the expedition's surgeon.¹⁸

Payne formed a defensive position by placing the expedition's wagons in a circle near Milk Creek, into which the survivors retreated. Barricades of supply boxes, saddles, and equipment strengthened the fortification as did the horses and mules, all of which were killed or wounded by besieging Utes. After dark, Payne sent out couriers for assistance

and with the information that he had rations enough to last only through October 4, five days away. One of these couriers reached Rawlins, Wyoming, the nearest telegraph station on the Union Pacific railroad, the following evening. Another contacted the cavalry company sent by Pope to patrol near the Agency.¹⁹

Captain Francis S. Dodge of the Ninth Cavalry, Merritt's old regiment, marched rapidly to Payne's assistance and rushed into his defensive fortification early on October 2. The Negro troopers never looked so good. Their arrival cheered the besieged men, but with limited rations, they were in as bad a predicament as Payne's troops. Casualties increased as the Utes maintained a heavy fire on the soldiers; they killed most of Dodge's horses as well.²⁰

Merritt was sick in his quarters at Fort D. A. Russell when the startling news was received by wire. He was dressed and organizing a rescue party almost immediately. Fragmentary news came in that huge numbers of wounded were with Payne, that all his horses were killed, and that his rations were low. In addition, the Southern Utes were thought to be joining the White River Utes. Merritt had the largest cavalry force within striking distance of the beleaguered force, and Crook quickly telegraphed him to prepare and to command a rescue party. Post headquarters was a scene of frantic activity as Merritt prepared the four cavalry companies at Fort D. A. Russell for a rapid movement. He planned to concentrate his forces at Rawlins, 170 miles north of Payne's position and

200 miles west of Cheyenne on the Union Pacific line.²¹

Fort Fred Steele was near Rawlins, and from that post Merritt ordered five infantry companies to meet his cavalry at Rawlins. The tracks between Cheyenne and Rawlins were cleared of traffic, and the Union Pacific management rushed enough trains into Cheyenne Depot to transport Merritt's troopers, with their horses and equipment, to Rawlins. Merritt hurriedly arranged for supplies and wagons to be sent to his concentration point, and for additional troops, both infantry and cavalry, from as far away as Fort Snelling, Minnesota, to follow his column as soon as they could be gathered. In four hours from the time the news first reached Fort D. A. Russell, Merritt had all this arranged and boarded the train, with his four cavalry companies, for Rawlins.²²

At five in the morning of October 2, Merritt arrived at Rawlins. Dodge was just riding into Payne's fortification at the same time. Payne's men had endured two complete days of siege with only one wounded medical officer to attend the forty-two other wounded men. Even if they could slightly extend their rations by eating the putrifying horse and mule meat that reinforced their position, they were surrounded by a superior force that could not be resisted indefinitely. The situation was critical, and the nation's attention was focused on Merritt's attempt to rescue his men and the captive women and children.²³

Eben Swift, Merritt's regimental adjutant, was assigned as adjutant of the White River expedition and supervised loading of the pack-train which would accompany the column. Crook, a connoisseur of fine mules, sent specially selected pack-mules to Rawlins for Merritt's use. Merritt meanwhile made last-minute arrangements for a continuing supply system to support his expedition once it engaged the Utes and for forwarding the expected reinforcements.²⁴

With 170 miles to march, Merritt had to solve a serious problem. He had only about 200 cavalymen with him and could not wait for more to arrive. The five infantry companies, about 150 men, would be needed if the Utes were as strong as reported. No infantry could march that far in time to save Payne's command; it was barely possible the cavalry could. With the pack-train available for transporting supplies, Merritt loaded the foot soldiers into spring wagons pulled by good teams and led the column south out of Rawlins by 11 A.M., only six hours after his arrival.²⁵

All Merritt's years of experience command and organizing cavalry marches were focused on this campaign, and his expertise in conducting forced marches was never put to better use. The old cavalry adage, "forty miles a day on beans and hay," indicated what could normally be expected from a day's cavalry march. At that rate, the trip would require more than four days, and Payne's men would likely be dead by that time. Merritt had to very carefully balance the need for speed and the necessity to conserve his horses.

The route led over the continental divide into the rugged mountains of the west slope of the Rocky Mountains, past present-day Craig, Colorado. All day, October 2 and 3, the column advanced. After camping for the night, Merritt had the troopers in the saddle and the soldiers in their wagons at dawn of October 4. Again he marched all day and continued through the night.

Merritt met a wounded civilian whose companions requested medical assistance, but sympathy for the victim waned when he was found to be lying on a pile of cartridges, which he had been trading to the Indians. Merritt encountered other civilians fleeing northward, but one old prospector was unimpressed with the imminent Indian trouble, and leading a solitary pack-mule loaded with mining paraphernalia, he continued into the mountains, dreaming of gold mines and big strikes. After dark, the march was slowed by the ruggedness of the road and by the confusion inherent in a marching cavalry column. The infantry wagons fell behind in the darkness despite Merritt's attempts to keep them closed up on the horsemen, but the troopers moved ahead, hoping that their comrades were still alive.²⁶

After five days fighting off Ute attacks and being continually fired upon, Payne's men had not given up hope. Payne later wrote that "we had great faith in our early deliverance, for we knew that neither man nor beast would be spared when General Merritt started to the rescue." Merritt approached Payne's supposed position in the early hours of

October 5, his anxiety much increased by finding the charred remains of an agency supply wagon that had followed Thornburgh's command southward and had been attacked. Nearby were the stiff remains of teamsters. Merritt continued cautiously, waiting for the first light of dawn.²⁷

The Fifth Cavalry had adopted one of the standard bugle calls as its sign of recognition so that detachments would not accidentally fire on one another during battle.

Payne described the situation in the evening of October 4:

Believing it just possible for General Merritt to reach us the next morning, and knowing that, if possible, come he would, I directed one of my trumpeters to be on the alert for the expected signal. And so it was. Just as the first gray of the dawn appeared, our listening ears caught the sound of "officers' call" breaking the silence of the morning.²⁸

It was one of the most dramatic moments in Merritt's career. Payne returned the signal, and with his troopers pounding behind him, Merritt came into the rifle pits and fortifications at a dead run.

The scene beggared description. Brave men wept, and it was touching to see the gallant fellows hovering around to get a look at the general whose name had been on their lips for days, and who, as they heard from their comrades just arrived, had risen from a bed of sickness to make a march unparalleled in military annals.²⁹

Merritt threw his rescuing forces against the Utes who had massed nearby, but the Indians scattered and offered no further opposition. With the rescue of Payne's men accomplished, Merritt organized his command for a campaign against the White River Utes. The balance of the campaign was, however, anticlimactic. The Secretary of War, Sherman, Sheridan,

and Crook all supported Merritt completely and fed reinforcements into Rawlins and southward at an unprecedented rate. After camping a week at Milk Creek, Merritt, with some 700 men, advanced to the White River Agency to find it completely destroyed. The command buried the bodies of Meeker and the agency employees killed on September 29. On the morning of October 15, Merritt, reinforced by four more cavalry companies, advanced toward Grand River seeking the Utes, but he was intercepted by a courier with the information that the Interior Department, through Ouray, a noted Ute Chief, was negotiating with the Indians for release of the women and children captives and for punishment of guilty Utes.³⁰

Merritt's forces increased until he had 1168 men in camp at White River, a force too large to be supplied during the approaching winter. He halted the forwarding of any more troops, awaiting the outcome of negotiations. On October 23, the captives were released and returned to Interior Department agents; the "Ute troubles" were essentially over. The Southern Utes were settled on their reservation in southern Colorado, while the White River Utes were moved to the Uintah Reservation in Utah. Merritt left a detachment of infantry and cavalry at the agency site for the winter and during the following spring and summer. After arranging for their subsistence and reasonable comfort, he returned to Rawlins and then to Fort D. A. Russell by late November.³¹

His exploits were followed closely by the nation, and it was as close as he ever came to being a national hero.

Within the Army, he was lavishly praised by his superiors. Crook warmly praised "a march almost without example for rapidity of movement and excellent management, for which General Merritt and all who participated are entitled to the highest commendation." Sheridan was enormously pleased with "this admirable officer, [who] with characteristic order and judgment, accomplished the unprecedented march . . . relieving his distressed comrades a full day earlier than it was thought possible." It was Merritt's last and finest Indian campaign, and the last time he actually led troops into action.³²

Life in the Department of the Platte was comparatively peaceful during late 1879 and 1880. Merritt was engaged in routine post administration and for the first three months of 1880 as a member of a general court-martial sitting at nearby Cheyenne. In April the Fifth Cavalry received orders for a change of station. Merritt, with regimental headquarters and band and six companies, left Fort D. A. Russell for Fort Laramie, ninety miles north. The Third Cavalry relieved Merritt's men on the twenty-ninth, and Merritt's troopers and families reached their new post on May 2, 1880. Although nearby Cheyenne Depot made Fort D. A. Russell a convenient post, the town of Cheyenne was a source of trouble not only for the soldiers, but for the garrison families. In January and February a scarlet fever epidemic in Cheyenne spread and threatened the post's children, so the move to the more remote Fort Laramie was welcomed.³³

Fort Laramie would be the last frontier post for Wesley and Caroline Merritt. Its history extended back into the era of the western fur trade, but this oldest of the northern plains posts was, by 1880, far from being a primitive hardship post. Located along the Laramie River near its mouth on the North Platte River, and astride the old Platte River Road or "Oregon Trail," Fort Laramie offered adequate facilities for education of the post's children and for an active social life for the families. Post gardens supplemented supplies shipped in from Cheyenne. Fort Laramie had been the center of activity during the 1876 Sioux campaigns, but with no serious disturbances during the early 1880's, garrison life was reasonably pleasant, with harsh winter weather being the only enemy.³⁴

The Merritts lived in an older frame commanding officer's quarters until August 1881, when they moved into new lime-grout, mansard-roofed quarters which Merritt ordered constructed, along with additional officers' quarters, on the southwest corner of the parade ground. Here he and Caroline lived comfortably for almost a year. With few field operations, Merritt had some trouble with drunkenness among officers and enlisted men. As a partial remedy, he inaugurated a formalized training and drill schedule. He personally led each cavalry battalion in mounted and dismounted drill each week. He ordered that evening retreat parades be held in full-dress, and in what was probably a fruitless attempt to give the garrison ceremonies a proper military appearance,

Merritt demanded that pets not be permitted to run loose on the parade ground "if their owners care to preserve their dogs."³⁵

The Army was also beginning to emphasize marksmanship training for its infantry and cavalry soldiers. Until the early 1880's a man could enlist, serve his five years, and be discharged without ever having fired his rifle, carbine, or pistol. There were obvious exceptions, but the condition was not uncommon, and the general level of marksmanship, especially with the hard-kicking Springfield Carbine, was very low. Merritt took an active interest in marksmanship programs and competitions, ordering the latest targets and equipment from the ordnance stores at Cheyenne Depot.³⁶

In September 1880, a break from post routine occurred. Merritt was subpoenaed as a witness in the "Warren Court," underway in New York City. Gouverneur K. Warren had commanded the Federal Fifth Corps alongside Merritt's cavalry corps at the Battle of Five Forks in April 1865. Immediately after that battle, for a lack of promptness and ability in prosecuting the attack, Sheridan had relieved Warren from command. Warren attempted to have a Court of Inquiry examine his actions and Sheridan's allegations, but he was not successful until late 1879, when President Rutherford B. Hayes authorized the "Warren Court."³⁷

After initial testimony, Sheridan felt, rightly or wrongly, that the real purpose of the inquiry was to whitewash Warren at Sheridan's expense. Sheridan then submitted a list

of officers he wanted as witnesses on his behalf, including Merritt and Mackenzie, who had operated under Sheridan during the Five Forks fight, though not in Merritt's corps. Merritt left for New York City in late September for a month's detached service with the Court.³⁸

Sheridan claimed that Warren's delay and apathy caused Merritt to halt the hitherto successful cavalry attack in order to wait for Warren's infantry assault to commence. Warren claimed that Merritt's cavalry force was not seriously engaged with Confederate forces, either on the day of the battle of Five Forks or on the preceding day, when the fight at Dinwiddie Court House took place. The claim was indefensible, as Warren's counsel partially conceded, and as Merritt's testimony showed. Merritt's testimony was brief. He remembered that he met with both Sheridan and Warren before Warren's attack and that Sheridan seemed to be "impatient, restless, and anxious." Merritt described Warren as being, at the time, "reluctant, quiet, and uninterested in what was about to go on; he did not seem impressed with what might possibly be the results of the day."³⁹

Warren was not pleased with the results. The Court, and Sherman, in reviewing the findings, decided that it was impossible for Warren to have fulfilled all of Sheridan's expectations, but that Sheridan was perfectly justified, under the circumstances, in removing Warren. Otherwise, Sherman felt, field commanders would be denied the freedom of action which was necessary to insure victories.⁴⁰

Merritt spent another year of routine garrison duty after returning from "Warren Court" duty. By 1881 Merritt had been a colonel for five years and began what was a six-year drive for promotion to the rank of brigadier general. In November, he and Caroline left Fort Laramie for a three-month leave of absence. They spent most of the time at the Fifth Avenue Hotel in New York City, but without a doubt, Merritt also met with Sheridan, in Chicago, over Merritt's possible promotion.

A vacancy existed in the grade of brigadier general of the line, and Sheridan's recommendation would be important. Mackenzie was considerably senior to Merritt as colonel, although seniority was not the sole basis on which promotion to general rank was made. Sheridan could not have been displeased with Merritt's recent combat record, nor could he have been displeased with Mackenzie's. Sheridan apparently felt that everything else being equal, seniority should influence promotion, and he recommended Mackenzie for brigadier general over Merritt. Mackenzie was subsequently promoted to that rank in October 1882. Two years later Mackenzie was declared insane and was retired from the service to die shortly thereafter, in 1889.⁴¹

Even though he failed of promotion, and he could not have been too disappointed since it was the first time under consideration, Merritt received a desirable and prestigious transfer. In mid-1882, Apache troubles were increasing in Arizona, and Crook was ordered to command that department.

Oliver O. Howard, Superintendent at West Point, replaced Crook in command of the Department of the Platte, and Merritt was ordered to West Point as Superintendent of the United States Military Academy. He was to relieve Howard by September 1; to do so, he and Caroline left Fort Laramie on August 5, for the East.⁴²

For Merritt, the Indian Wars were over. When he next returned to the West, a "frontier" could hardly be defined. In Texas and on the northern plains, Merritt had experienced all the hardships and frustrations that the Army endured in a war without identifiable policy and with meager forces spread over vast distances. In Texas, Merritt had been eclipsed by Mackenzie's exploits. During the Sioux and Cheyenne campaign of 1876, Merritt had spectacular success on his own, but was submerged as part of Crook's generally unsatisfactory operations. In the White River campaign, however, Merritt had the opportunity to display his skill and decisiveness to the Army and to the nation. It was a spectacular success and the last real Indian campaign on the northern plains, except for the disastrous Wounded Knee conflict, still well in the future. Merritt's reputation as a fighting commander emerged from the Indian Wars as it had from the Civil War--prudent, dashing, successful.

FOOTNOTES

Chapter 12

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2. Medical History of Post, Ft. D. A. Russell, March, 1878, RG 94, NA; Swift, "Memoranda," 73.
3. Post Returns, Ft. D. A. Russell, Jan.-March, 1877, and Jan.-Feb., 1878, RG 393, NA; Swift, "Memoranda," 73.
4. Post Returns, Ft. D. A. Russell, April-July, 1877, and March-August, 1879, RG 393, NA.
5. New York Times, Sept. 17, 1881; Chicago Tribune, Sept. 4, 1881, J. King, War Eagle, 189.
6. AAG, DP, to Merritt, July 27, 1877, and August 3, 1877, LS, DP, RG 393, NA; J. King, War Eagle, 186.
7. Sheridan to AGO, August 4, 1877, "Nez Perce Papers," Microcopy 666, R 337, NA.
8. Ibid., Sept. 25, 1877; Swift, "Memoranda," 75; Homer W. Wheeler, "Indians and Other Reminiscences," MSS, RG 391, NA, 50; Post Returns, Ft. D. A. Russell, Oct., 1877, RG 393, NA.
9. Swift, "Memoranda," 76-78.
10. Ibid., 77-79; Post Returns, Ft. D. A. Russell, Nov., 1878, -Jan., 1879, RG 393, NA.
11. S.O. 255, AGO, Nov. 25, 1878, Abstract of the Official Record of Proceedings of the Reno Court of Inquiry, Microcopy 592, R 1, NA. Hereafter cited as Abstract.
12. Abstract, V; Monaghan, Custer, 399.
13. G.O. 17, AGO, March 11, 1879, Report of Court of Inquiry, "Reno Court," Microcopy 619, R 530, NA.
14. Monaghan, Custer, 400; W. A. Graham, The Custer Myth: A Source Book of Custeriana (Harrisburg, Pa., 1953), 337.
15. B. Johnson, Merritt and Indian Wars, 8; Monaghan, Custer, 400; Graham, Custer Myth, 326-28, 329-32.

16. Elizabeth Custer to Sherman, Oct. 15, 1882, quoted in Monaghan, Custer, 403; Merritt to Cullum, Jan. 15, 1879, Merritt File, Special Collections, USMA Library, West Point.
17. Schmitt, Crook, 226-27; Pope to AAG, MDM, Sept. 18, 1879, Special File, Box 21, RG 393, NA; W.O.W., Sept. 30, 1928.
18. Elmer R. Burkey, "The Thornburgh Battle with the Utes on Milk Creek," Colorado Magazine, XIII, No. 1 (1936), 106.
19. Ibid., 107; Wesley Merritt, "Three Indian Campaigns," Harpers New Monthly Magazine, LXXX (April, 1890), 733.
20. J. S. Payne, "The Campaign against the Utes," The United Service, II (Jan., 1880), 126-27; Foner, Blacks and the Military, 54.
21. Merritt, "Three Indian Campaigns," 732-33.
22. Ibid., 733; L. D. Greene, "The White River Campaign," Typescript, O.I.W. Collection, Archives, MHRC, Carlisle Barracks, 3.
23. Swift, "Memoranda," 83; Utley, Frontier Regulars, 346-47.
24. Crook to Merritt, Dec. 28, 1879, LS, DP, RG 393, NA; Swift, "Memoranda," 83-84.
25. Merritt, "Three Indian Campaigns," 733.
26. Ibid., 736; Swift, "Memoranda," 84-85.
27. Payne, "Campaign against Utes," 128; Merritt, "Three Indian Campaigns," 737.
28. Payne, "Campaign against Utes," 128.
29. Ibid.; Swift, "Memoranda," 86.
30. S of W to Sheridan, Oct. 2, 1879; Sherman to Sheridan, Oct. 2, 1879: Special File, White River Troubles--1879, MDM, RG 393, NA; Sherman to Sheridan, Oct. 13, 1879; Stanley, Southern Ute Agent, to S of W, endorsed by Ouray, Oct. 12, 1879: Special File, Box 21, RG 393, NA.
31. Crook to AAG, MDM, Oct. 23, 1879, Special File, White River Troubles--1879, MDM, RG 393, NA; Merritt to Crook, Oct. 24, 1879, Special File, Box 21, RG 393, NA; Paul

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i. Wellman, The Indian Wars of the West (Garden City, N.Y., 1934), 223; G. Price, Fifth Cavalry, 174-75; W.O.W., Feb. 25, 1925, and Oct. 22, 1929.

32. S of W, Annual Report for 1880, quoted in B. Johnson, Merritt and Indian Wars, 9; Chicago Inter-Ocean, Oct. 9, 1879; ANJ, Dec. 12, 1879; Sheridan, Memoirs, II, 536-37.

33. Post Returns, Ft. D. A. Russell, Jan.-April, 1880, RG 393, NA; Medical History of Post, Ft. D. A. Russell, Jan.-April, 1880, RG 94, NA; Post Returns, Ft. Laramie, May, 1880, RG 393, NA; Schmitt, Crook, 230.

34. Circulars, June 5, 1880, and Sept. 23, 1881, Circulars and Memoranda, Ft. Laramie, RG 393, NA.

35. Ibid., June 21, 1880, and Jan. 30 and May 11, 1882; Merritt to Judge Advocate, DP, May 13, 1881, LS, Ft. Laramie; Letter, B. William Henry, Ft. Laramie National Historic Site, to Alberts, Nov. 11, 1974.

36. Merritt to AAG, DP, Dec. 22, 1880; Merritt to Ordnance Officer, Cheyenne Depot, July 19, 1880: LS, Ft. Laramie, RG 393, NA; Charles Hatfield, "Observations on Palo Duro Fight," MSS, O.I.W. Collection, Archives, MHRC, Carlisle Barracks.

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39. Report of JAG, USA, July 11, 1882; Merritt Testimony, M. V. Sheridan Testimony: "Proceedings--Warren Court."

40. Sherman Endorsement, "Proceedings--Warren Court."

41. S.O. 111, DP, Oct. 31, 1881; Merritt to AGO, Nov. 4, 1881: ACP, NA; Merritt to AAG, DP, Jan. 19, 1882, LR. Regis., DP, RG 393, NA; Sheridan to Robert Lincoln, Dec. 8, 1881, Sheridan Papers, No. 42, MSS Div., L.C.; Wallace, "Mackenzie on Texas Frontier," 4.

42. Post Returns, Ft. Laramie, August, 1882, RG 393, NA; S of W to Merritt, August 23, 1882, ACP, NA; AAG, DP, to Crook, July 14, 1882, LS, DP, RG 393, NA; AAG, MDM, to AAG, DP, July 17, 1882, LR. Regis., DP, RG 393, NA.

Chapter 13

WEST POINT AND INDIAN TERRITORY

The days of the Indian Wars were over . . . we must fit ourselves for war with civilized peoples.

--Major General Hugh L. Scott

The fifteen-year period from 1865 to 1880 has been described as "the Army's Dark Ages." During that period the Army fought most of its "Indian Wars," and while the campaigns and actions of the time were often interesting and entertaining, especially to newspaper and magazine readers far from the frontier, their effect on the Army was stultifying.¹

With the Regular forces spread over the frontier from Canada to Mexico, most officers spent a great deal of their careers at small, isolated posts. There, drilling and commanding small units and processing the almost overwhelming amount of required paperwork tended to limit an officer's intellectual horizons to the limits of his post. Few were able to spare the time or to muster enough ambition to read or write about professional problems, much less to think about future directions the Army's officer education and training should take. The frontier officers were often tough, competent, guerrilla-style fighters, but they were just as often barely familiar with the military state-of-the-art as indicated by

European armies.

Knowledge of the European cadre-reserve manpower systems and of the Prussian general staff concept was of little direct value during the "Indian Wars." In addition, many officers who had come up through the ranks or entered the officer corps during the Civil War had little regard for formal military education and felt that they had "graduated from the school of war."²

For fighting the kind of war in which the Army was engaged during the "dark ages," that was a satisfactory philosophy, but that kind of warfare was almost ended by 1880. There was no way in which the American Indians could successfully resist the Army for long, no matter how clever or courageous their resistance. Perceptive officers could see that the Army needed to make significant changes, but the absence of any realistic external threat to the United States during the 1880's and most of the 1890's, made change difficult.

Merritt was not the leading thinker of the Army; that title would probably go either to General Sherman or to Merritt's classmate, Emory Upton. He was, however, an ardent advocate of the need to change from a frontier police force to a modern, well-trained and well-equipped, professional Army, on the European model. Upton applied himself to studying more abstract phases of change than did Merritt. Upton was interested in civilian-military relationships, in national mobilization schemes, and in the Army's command

structure. In contrast, Merritt was more of an applied thinker. He was interested in changes which could and should be brought about by Army officers themselves, working internally to improve their knowledge of new equipment and techniques and to upgrade the educational level of the officer corps.³

That Merritt was not dulled by the postwar years was due to his own personal abilities and, to some extent, to good fortune. He had a keen mind, which he was forced to exercise continuously throughout the Civil War as his responsibilities rapidly increased to corps-level command. His postwar duties demanded considerable mental effort as well. Merritt was fortunate in having enough rank while on the frontier to live in a less-hectic environment than most officers enjoyed. As post commander, he and Caroline had adequate quarters, with room for books and without the disturbance that young children would have brought. He had a reasonable amount of time for study and for the professional writing he started in 1880. The Merritts also had adequate funds, from Wesley's pay and from Caroline's family, for extensive travel. Their trips throughout Europe broadened Merritt's views well beyond the limits of any post, and it is doubtful if there was a more cosmopolitan officer in the Army, especially among active line commanders.

Merritt brought his interest in change to West Point, and after his five-year tenure as Superintendent, he continued that interest in his next command. West Point had been a

departmental command, with a general officer at its head, until 1882, when Merritt, a colonel, was assigned as Superintendent. The change was made for economic reasons, since excess personnel and paperwork needed to support a department headquarters could be eliminated when the institution functioned as a post command. The change was beneficial for Merritt since his command structure was simplified and his own views could be more directly instituted.⁴

West Point discipline, which was so severe during Merritt's cadet days, was reasonably slack during the 1870's. Merritt's immediate predecessor, Oliver O. Howard, was not interested in tightening discipline. Howard had what for the time was a radically progressive attitude. He tried to relieve the "overpressure" of the West Point demerit system and felt that better results would be obtained by trusting the young men than by the traditional "system of terror." Whether or not he was correct, he never found out, since he was unable to effect any significant change during his tenure. His attitude, however, may easily have contributed to lowering the general level of discipline. Howard was also criticized for banning smoking and for declaring the mildest oaths profane, much to the cadets' disgust.

Merritt reinstated "damn," and he also reinstated the old emphasis on discipline. Much grumbling among the cadets developed as their lives were more strictly controlled, but Merritt gained a reputation for being fair as well as strict. He consistently resisted pressures from Congressmen to extend

special privileges to constituent cadets, and he accorded similar treatment to members of the Board of Visitors, the committee of civilians that annually reported on the Academy's operations. Cadet Charles D. Rhodes declared that "for over four years the regulations have been getting more and more strict. . . . However, the old 'Supe' is a pretty fair man, I think, and every inch a soldier."⁶

Merritt was displeased with several Academy customs that seemed to be prejudicial to good order and discipline. The practice of "hazing" underclassmen flourished whenever superintendents did not actively suppress it. Merritt believed that "the best means of maintaining discipline in any organization is the certainty of a summary punishment, just but severe, in all cases of intentional offense." He applied that maxim to "hazing" by determining that "the authorities here will indulge in no half-hearted measures to detect the offenders."⁷

Particularly disturbing to Merritt was a tradition known as the "rush." After completing two years of study, a cadet class was allowed a furlough over the summer months. This furlough class returned in late August and was met on the Plain at West Point by upperclassmen who rushed forward to meet them in a wild scramble of tossing caps, tussling, and tearing clothes. Merritt felt the custom had become an abuse which "set at defiance for a short period all order and military discipline," and which failed to maintain the dignity of the Corps of Cadets.⁸

In August 1886, Merritt forbade the "rush" and had orders published clearly stating the fact. A large group of First Classmen, however, disobeyed the order, and the customary tumult followed. Merritt had the names of participants taken and telegraphed the Secretary of War for authority to summarily dismiss the thirty-two cadets, since the Superintendent's authority did not extend to such drastic action. His request was denied, and he later realized that his initial reaction was too severe. Merritt convened a court-martial for the six cadet officers involved. Although the six were found guilty of insubordination, the members of the court recommended clemency. Merritt agreed with them that a less-severe punishment than dismissal would serve the ends of discipline, but few of the involved cadets agreed that the punishment was much less severe.⁹

Merritt demoted the cadet officers who participated, and he confined them and almost the whole First Class, thirty-two cadets in all, to their barracks, the barracks area, and the gymnasium for the entire year until they graduated the following summer. Merritt felt the punishment "scarcely commensurate with the gravity of the offense." The Class of 1887, however, disagreed and spent a miserable final term at West Point.¹⁰

Disciplinary problems were actually a small part of Merritt's duties as Superintendent. He quickly became the dominant figure in dealing with curriculum, and it was in this area that he was able to make at least a small change

which broadened the educational experiences of cadets during and after his tenure.¹¹

Merritt was well-read in military history, and within seven months of assuming the superintendency, he proposed that history instruction be increased. In effect, from 1861 to 1882 there was no history taught at West Point. The Chaplain gave a weekly lecture in the combined fields of geography, history, and ethics. The curriculum provided a narrowly technical education, even more narrow than during Merritt's cadet days. The faculty Academic Board agreed with the Superintendent's proposal, and Merritt recommended that an assistant professor of history be detailed to the Academy.¹²

It was a small contribution toward directing the future officers' views outward from the United States and from the frontier. Beginning in 1883, the expanded course used Swinton's Outlines of the World's History and Labberton's Historical Atlas for a one-semester survey of world history. This was not much more than Merritt's prewar Ethics course covered, but it was progress compared to the "dark ages."¹³

Much of Merritt's time as Superintendent was absorbed in mundane chores such as corresponding with cadets' families to reassure them of their sons' well-being or to explain failures. One lady in Georgia wrote to Merritt saying that she would like to enter her wayward daughter at West Point since she had heard such flattering accounts of the discipline there. Merritt got a good laugh from reading the request at his next officers' meeting, but his response to

her is unrecorded.¹⁴

The Merritts' social life at West Point fairly sparkled. Caroline entertained almost constantly. Old Army acquaintances, like former cavalryman James Wilson, visited the Academy, as did many foreign dignitaries, and Merritt provided them with a hospitable tour of the facility. Mark Twain was a frequent visitor at West Point and was often a guest at the Merritts' home. He liked to roam around the post, joking and visiting with cadets. His home was in nearby Hartford, Connecticut, and Caroline Merritt was apparently acquainted with him before she and Wesley were married. Most of their visitors, however, were of a more official nature.¹⁵

Merritt instituted a formal graduation ceremony in order to make the departing young men feel more like officers and gentlemen, rather than just letting them leave, as had been the previous custom. The President, Secretary of War, Commanding General of the Army, and other dignitaries, including members of the Board of Visitors, were invited to attend and speak. He quickly found that he had to limit their speaking time, but in general, it was a good innovation and one which brought Merritt into immediate contact with men who could affect his future career, as well as providing a good "send-off" for the graduates. Both Presidents Chester A. Arthur and Grover Cleveland attended the ceremonies and stayed with the Merritts while at the post. The Secretary of War was another frequent visitor, but most pleasant of all, the Merritts were now near enough to entertain the

Sheridans. "Little Phil" had married several years previous, and he and Mrs. Sheridan were frequent houseguests at the Merritts' West Point quarters and in turn entertained Wesley and Caroline lavishly.¹⁶

During Merritt's tenure at West Point, several events within the Army's command structure served to affect his future. In 1882, Congress enacted compulsory retirement at age sixty-four. In an Army of superannuated officers, this was bound to open more opportunities for advancement to younger officers. Sherman retired in 1883, and his position as commanding general was filled by Sheridan. An ambitious colonel could hardly be in a better position than having his best friend and patron in command of the Army. Starting in 1885, when General C. C. Augur retired, Merritt persistently worked for promotion to the rank of brigadier general.

Generals with whom Merritt had served during and since the Civil War supported his claim to the vacancy created by Augur's retirement. From Arizona, Crook wrote of Merritt's "efficiency, zeal, and ability," shown during Crook's command of the Department of the Platte, and of his "intelligence, energy, tact, and skill," shown over twenty years of postwar service. General Winfield S. Hancock "took great pleasure" in endorsing Merritt's request for promotion since Hancock considered him "an officer of great merit." Sheridan pursued the matter vigorously, writing directly to the President, who would make the selection. Sheridan believed Merritt to be fitted for the vacant position because

of "long military experience, intelligence, moral and social qualities and standing. . . . He is sufficiently young to make an active, serviceable officer, and will not be retired so soon after his appointment as to destroy his usefulness." The last point was strongly in Merritt's favor, but Cleveland chose John Gibbon as his new brigadier general.¹⁷

Cleveland was strongly inclined to follow the dictates of seniority in making appointments to the rank of brigadier general and in promoting to major general, even though he was not obliged to do so. There were obvious advantages, but also many disadvantages, in recognizing seniority. The few opportunities for promotion before 1882, clogged higher ranks with officers physically unable to perform field duty or to serve effectively due to age. In 1886, Merritt was only fifty years old, while all the colonels senior to him were considerably older. Moreover, only the provisions limiting the number of Regular officers to receive colonelcies in the postwar reorganization of 1866, kept Merritt from being next-senior after Gibbon, who had just been promoted.¹⁸

When Hancock died and John Pope retired in early 1886, two vacancies in the rank of brigadier general were created as Howard and Alfred Terry took their places. Orlando Willcox and Thomas Ruger were the senior colonels, but Sheridan recommended Merritt and Ruger for the two positions, again pointing out Merritt's relative youth and that Willcox was sixty-three years old and would be retired in less than a year if appointed.

Merritt received considerable additional support for promotion. Friends such as Jonathan B. Latrobe, and former comrades-in-arms, like Horatio C. King, wrote the President on Merritt's behalf. Fitzhugh Lee, Merritt's former Confederate opponent, then Governor of Virginia, wrote of his abilities as a soldier and as West Point Superintendent. Congressman W. R. Morrison, of Illinois, pointed out to Secretary of War William Endicott that Merritt's family was "democratic stock of the oldest--and best."¹⁹

Again, as in 1885, Cleveland appointed the two senior colonels, Willcox and Ruger, in October of 1886. This time Merritt was very disappointed, even though he did not show it publicly. Caroline wrote to Mrs. Eben Swift that they had expected Willcox' appointment, but her letter betrayed her disappointment. The feeling was short-lived because Willcox retired the following April and this time Sheridan's and Merritt's efforts paid off. On April 16, 1887, Merritt was appointed brigadier general in the Regular Army.²⁰

At West Point the Merritts were elated. Merritt attended chapel in his new epaulettes, sash, and brigadier's stars. He was described as looking dignified and stunning and with being "in the best of humors." Congratulations poured in, including an especially welcome one from Merritt's old commander, Philip St. George Cooke. There were also loud grumbles from those colonels, including Hatch and Grierson, over whose heads Merritt had been jumped for promotion.²¹

As a brigadier general, Merritt was entitled to departmental command. Sheridan felt that Merritt's experience and abilities best qualified him for one of the western departments and recommended assignment to the Department of the Missouri, which included the states of Missouri, Kansas, and Colorado as well as Indian Territory. In preparation for his transfer to this new command, Merritt requested that Eben Swift, his former regimental adjutant, be assigned as his aide. Swift joined Merritt at West Point and accompanied him to the new headquarters.²²

Merritt's five-year superintendency at West Point was a pleasant period for both Wesley and Caroline. He had spent considerable time working for his own promotion, but he had reversed the trend toward slack discipline that the Academy was experiencing under his predecessors. He was also able to introduce the expanded history course in a limited, but progressive, attempt to graduate junior officers who could function outside the limits of frontier warfare. With these accomplishments behind him, Merritt left for Fort Leavenworth, his new headquarters, and assumed command of the Department of the Missouri on July 5, 1887.

Fort Leavenworth, in 1887, was not the frontier post of former years. The Merritts found clubs, libraries, billiard halls, schools, stores, churches, and theaters, and a glittering social life that was the envy of nearby Kansas City. The department commander's quarters was a handsome house on the post in which the Merritts quickly joined the rounds of

receptions, balls, and fashionable parties. General and Mrs. Sheridan visited the post after the Merritts settled in and were honored by Wesley and Caroline with an evening reception. General Schofield and the Secretary of War were also houseguests at Fort Leavenworth. Caroline gave musicals and literary entertainments in their home, to which the staff officers and their wives were often invited, sometimes to their intense boredom. Whether Merritt enjoyed such fare is not known, although he could probably tolerate most of it.²³

Operationally Merritt's attention focused on Indian Territory. There, the situation was significantly different than it had been when he was last concerned with the southern plains. By 1887, Merritt's patrols and scouting expeditions concentrated on expelling intruders from Indian lands, on supervising the cattle drives from Texas, which had to follow rigidly-defined trails in crossing Indian lands, and in pursuing and attempting to apprehend outlaws who were committing depredations on the extensive Indian cattle herds. For a year and a half Merritt's men engaged in such activities, but Merritt generally remained at Fort Leavenworth where life was comfortable and where events which would affect the future of the cavalry arm and of the Army were transpiring.²⁴

Before his retirement in 1883, Sherman laid the foundations for the Army's system of post-graduate officer education. He founded the School of Application for Infantry and Cavalry at Fort Leavenworth in 1881, a school Merritt had advocated two years earlier. Sherman had previously supported

the Engineering School of Application and the Artillery School at Fortress Monroe, Virginia. These institutions were vehicles for providing more than the narrow, technical instruction young officers encountered at West Point or at their garrison stations. Lieutenants from each cavalry regiment were regularly assigned to the Cavalry School at Fort Leavenworth so that its teachings could gradually be disseminated throughout the service. From early emphasis on tactical instruction, the Fort Leavenworth schools gradually grew and were transformed into the General Service and Staff College, providing a genuine post-graduate education.²⁵

After Sherman's retirement, Sheridan was little interested in promoting the schools system, but many officers, including Merritt, saw great value in them, especially as the likelihood of further "Indian Wars" faded. From his own experience Merritt knew that good study and personal habits learned at West Point were often wrecked by lax discipline and apathy at a young officer's first station. He recommended additional post-graduate courses for the service schools, and he urged that recent West Point graduates be required to attend soon after graduation in order to minimize the pernicious effects of immediate, extended isolation at small posts. Merritt felt that the service schools could then provide a level of professional proficiency the equal of any Army in the world. Reaching that level would take longer than he realized, but Merritt was a whole-hearted supporter of taking additional steps to professionalize the

officer corps.²⁶

Sherman had also supported other means of raising the level of expertise within the Army. Professional associations and journals supplemented service schools by providing forums and mechanisms for exchanging and testing ideas and studies developed at the schools and through individual study. General Hancock founded the Military Service Institution in 1878 as the first of the professional associations. Its monthly journal, and The United Service, established shortly thereafter, sought to promote writings and discussions in military history and military science. Merritt contributed extensively to both of these journals from their inception through the decade of the 1880's.²⁷

In the fall of 1887, a group of cavalry officers at Fort Leavenworth, including Lieutenants Otto Hein and Eben Swift and Major George B. Sanford, met with Merritt to discuss formation of a professional association for the cavalry service. Merritt was enthusiastic, and they drew up and adopted by-laws and constitution for the United States Cavalry Association. Its objectives were "professional unity and improvement by correspondence and discussion; reading, translation, and publication of professional essays; and generally the advancement of the cavalry service." Merritt was elected as the Association's first president.²⁸

Merritt chaired meetings at Fort Leavenworth whenever possible and contributed to the lively discussions. Within a month he was working on a paper or article on "marching

cavalry" and wrote to Cooke for any details Cooke might have on the long march both had made from Utah into Fort Leavenworth in 1861. The Association expanded as the founders mailed descriptive circulars to every active cavalry officer. By spring 1888, they were ready to publish the first issue of the Journal of the United States Cavalry Association. From that time the Association and the Journal prospered and met the objectives their founders established. The organization continues to the present time as the United States Armor Association. His part in founding the Association was one of Merritt's significant contributions to needed change in the Army.²⁹

For Merritt, the summer of 1888 brought a sad duty. Sheridan died on the fifth of August. Merritt was one of the pallbearers, along with Sherman, Augur, Secretary of War Endicott, and Marshall Field of Chicago, a close friend of Sheridan, and later of Merritt. Many of Sheridan's subordinates, Crook, Pope, and Grierson among them, disliked him intensely, and he reciprocated their feelings. For Merritt, however, Sheridan was always a friend--probably his closest friend. From the days when they fought together during the Civil War, Sheridan never lost confidence in Merritt and never criticized any action Merritt took. Likewise, there is no evidence of Merritt's ever having criticized Sheridan either publicly or privately or of their ever having disagreed. It was a unique relationship, probably the most important of Merritt's life.³⁰

The funeral in Washington, however, was the occasion for a great reunion of the old Cavalry Corps. After the funeral Merritt was invited to a lavish dinner given by former general Charles Fitzhugh, and the next evening he and Swift were guests at the home of Michael Sheridan, where the two old friends entertained Swift with reminiscences of the "old days."³¹

John Schofield, who had been commanding the Military Division of the Missouri at Chicago, replaced Sheridan in command of the Army. Crook replaced Schofield and thus became Merritt's immediate superior once more. Schofield was a firm supporter of the progressive steps that were initiated under Sherman and continued during Sheridan's tenure. Merritt congratulated him upon assuming command, and their relations during the next seven years were generally friendly.³²

Back in the Department of the Missouri, Merritt's attention during 1889 focused on Indian Territory. A strip of land known as Oklahoma, comprised roughly of present-day Oklahoma County and lands running northward from it, almost two million acres, was closed to either White or Indian settlement. A constant agitation by "boomers," persons interested in profiting through land speculation and various agricultural and townsite development schemes, finally resulted in congressional action. President Benjamin Harrison declared, pursuant to an act of Congress, that the territory would be opened to settlement at noon on April 22, 1889. A north-south spur of the Santa Fe Railroad ran through the strip, and the site for

the territory's city was designated near Oklahoma Station, a depot on this line.³³

After news of the opening was announced, throngs of interested people gathered on the borders of the territory, vieing for advantageous positions from which to rush into Oklahoma. Merritt's troops were constantly busy patrolling the boundaries to prevent illegal entry and expelling "sooners," people who entered early. Merritt issued a detailed circular in January defining exactly what actions his troops were to take in enforcing the laws and what those laws were. For the military, supervising the opening of a frontier territory to settlement was a new experience. Great tact and delicate handling were needed, as was firm, but just, law enforcement.³⁴

As April 22 approached, Merritt's soldiers were astonishingly successful in clearing the region of "sooners." Merritt had the name of each violator taken and promised that no person so recorded would be allowed to file claims in Oklahoma. It was a simple policy, and most prospective settlers were persuaded that the wise course of action was to wait for the official opening. The troops had to use force against a few determined "sooners," but no bloodshed occurred during the time Merritt prepared for the "rush." On April 21, Merritt issued last-minute instructions to his men, emphasizing the need for forbearance before resorting to force and the need for maintaining the peace. The military was to act in conjunction with United States Marshals and their

deputies in executing warrants, making arrests, or quelling riots. An additional duty fell to the soldiers. Introduction of liquor into Indian lands adjoining Oklahoma was illegal, and Merritt felt that one group of "settlers" was mainly interested in establishing distilleries and liquor distribution systems aimed at Indian Territory. He warned the troops to be especially vigilant in preventing illegal liquor traffic.³⁵

On the day before the "rush," Merritt also distributed to the waiting settlers a circular that described the roles of the troops in protecting government property and the mails and in guarding the people from lawlessness and disorder. Thus, Merritt took every precaution possible to prevent conflict between settlers and between settlers and troops in the Oklahoma district. He ordered additional troops to the small towns of Kingfisher and Guthrie, where government land offices were established to register claims. With everything planned, Merritt came down from Fort Leavenworth with his aide and staff officers to personally supervise the opening. It was a far cry from the "Mud March." He had a special railroad car with dining facilities and positioned himself in this "field headquarters" at Oklahoma Station to await the great day.³⁶

At noon on April 22, soldiers stationed along Oklahoma borders fired their guns to signal the official start of the "rush," and a wave of humanity hurried to stake out claims in the "promised land." From north and south trains sped toward

Oklahoma Station, where townsite development and claims were thought to be the most lucrative speculations. On horseback, by foot, by buggy and wagon, thousands of land-hungry settlers, and others who planned to live off the settlers, filled the territory. The trains coming from Chickasaw lands south of Oklahoma arrived at the depot first, and eager claimants leaped and rolled off before the train stopped, then raced about pounding stakes and claiming plots, often those that others had already staked.³⁷

By nightfall some 12,000 people had arrived at the city site near Oklahoma Station, and city streets were already laid out by factions who were interested in quickly developing and controlling the "instant" town. Throughout the territory, settlement was essentially completed by the end of the first day. Merritt was amazed and reported that:

In the morning the territory was an unbroken solitude. In the evening it swarmed with thousands of people; farms were being ploughed, and the streets of cities were laid out and marked by constructions which, if they were not massive, afforded shelter.³⁸

Although a great many of the new settlers came to engage in confidence rackets, claim-jumping, liquor-selling, and gambling, the presence of Merritt's troops on the scene, prepared to maintain the peace, kept violence to a remarkable minimum. The troops had entire charge of the city from April 22 to May 6, since the two deputy marshals there were completely unable to cope with the huge number of people. Five days after the "rush," a settlers' meeting elected a temporary mayor and city recorder and organized the city government

of Oklahoma City. The faction that discovered itself left out of this new city government quickly coalesced into a dissatisfied "opposition party," planting the seeds of future local unrest.³⁹

With events proceeding so peacefully, Merritt decided that he was not needed "at the front," and returned to his Fort Leavenworth headquarters. In field command in Oklahoma, Merritt left Colonel James Wade, who had succeeded Merritt at the head of the Fifth Cavalry, and who had been Merritt's trusted subordinate in the Ninth Cavalry. Wade appointed a provost-martial for Oklahoma City and sent a patrol of from five to fourteen men into town daily until August, on the request of the mayor and city government who were otherwise unable to maintain the peace. Wade reduced his city patrols from August to October, after which date they were no longer required.⁴⁰

The troops at Oklahoma City had a thankless task. The mayor's adherents and the opposition faction, picturesquely known as "Seminoles" and "Kickapoos" respectively, quarrelled constantly. The "Kickapoos" attempted to hold elections throughout the summer and fall of 1889 in order to oust the "Seminoles" from power. Troops responded to requests of the duly-elected officials to suppress these elections, and they were heavily criticized for doing so by the opposition faction. Wade's soldiers also closed down gambling houses and arrested or expelled gamblers from Oklahoma City as a necessary means of maintaining order. Everyone interested in the gambling

business naturally complained loudly of the actions. Bootleggers also thrived in the city and, as Merritt had feared, extended their operations into nearby Indian lands. Suppression of their businesses brought dissatisfaction with the military role in Oklahoma.⁴¹

Some of Merritt's officers were arrested and sued in the performance of these duties, but an Inspector General's report on their conduct showed the extreme delicacy of their positions, interposed between two local political factions. Merritt endorsed the report and commented that "if any other course had been pursued there would have been quite as much complaint and possibly more cause of it."⁴²

Merritt kept troops in Oklahoma Territory, as the region was designated in 1890, to counter any trouble that might arise over selection of Guthrie or Oklahoma City as the territorial capital. They were not needed, and Merritt suspected they were primarily desired for the money their presence brought to the local economy. Troops also engaged in suppressing the liquor trade and in expelling intruders from Indian Territory over the next four years. Settlement of Oklahoma inspired a rapid increase in illegal entry into and settlement on nearby lands of the Chickasaws, Potawatomis, and Cherokees. Many intruders expected the remaining Indian lands, especially the Cherokee Outlet north of Oklahoma along the Kansas border, to be opened to settlement. Cattlemen, especially, violated a presidential proclamation banning illegal use of the Cherokee Outlet

during 1890, and Merritt had patrols constantly in the area to prohibit these incursions. The problem was not solved completely until 1893, when the Cherokees were separated from their last "unused" lands, and the Outlet was opened to the biggest land rush yet.⁴³

Merritt was pleased with the results of his careful planning and its moderate execution. He pointed out that "the people have been protected from violence, and no case of bloodshed has occurred which might not have occurred under the best civil government anywhere." Schofield endorsed Merritt's comments, adding that "I think it a subject of congratulations that the service was performed so well and with so few mistakes."⁴⁴

Merritt's efforts during 1889 were not restricted to civil affairs in Oklahoma. State-of-the-art military practice in European armies included large-scale warfare simulation maneuvers, or "war games," on the Prussian model. The combined arms of service exercised together, providing practice for both field forces and commanders and exposing flaws in planning, equipment, and execution. Merritt was convinced that most American Army officers were woefully ignorant of the theoretical side of modern warfare. Even the few who read extensively in professional journals and studied European military progress had little or no chance to apply their learning since the Army was dispersed in small garrisons. Very few officers had experience commanding or even participating in regiment-size operations. Those who had

such experience generally had received it during the Civil War, twenty-five years previous. Schfield made some effort to concentrate regiments after he took command of the Army, and he recognized, as did Merritt, the need to transition from a frontier police force to a "modern" army.⁴⁵

With the troops of an entire department at his disposal, Merritt planned the first large-scale "war game" exercise ever conducted by the U.S. Army. Companies from two cavalry regiments, the Fifth and Seventh, and from the Seventh, Tenth, Thirteenth, and Eighteenth infantry regiments, as well as two artillery batteries and a medical detachment, including a complete field hospital, were ordered to participate. Merritt planned to have these troops concentrate near Chilocco Creek in extreme northern Indian Territory, south of Arkansas City, Kansas. The exercise area was located in gently-rolling hill country between the Arkansas River and present U.S. Highway 77, and it afforded a diversified topography for Merritt's maneuvers.⁴⁶

Merritt planned to begin the "war game" on September 23, and he had considerable trouble in assuring Schofield and the Interior Department that his troops, scattered temporarily throughout the Oklahoma district and Indian Territory, could safely be withdrawn for the maneuvers. By early September, however, all were marching toward Chilocco Creek, some from as far away as Colorado. Merritt saw great benefit in having the units march as on a campaign, even though the Santa Fe Railroad ran near the encampment site. By

September 22, his exercise force, almost 1700 officers and men, had arrived and awaited "the Bloody War of 1889."⁴⁷

Merritt made extensive preparations for the exercise. He prepared and printed for each officer a handbook that contained the principles of "modern" army operations. These were distributed to the officers before the maneuvers began. Merritt's aide, Eben Swift, temporarily assigned as engineer officer, prepared large-scale maps for distribution. Merritt induced the Santa Fe Railroad to extend a spur line near his camp, and there he located his quartermaster depot and supply dump. Merritt also had wells dug and cased along the line so that the troops would not have to rely on surface water. Water was piped to points accessible to the troops, thus providing some practice in field sanitary engineering during the maneuvers. With this preliminary work completed, Merritt left Fort Leavenworth on the twenty-first for his field headquarters, which he slyly named "Camp Schofield."⁴⁸

For the exercise, Merritt organized his foot soldiers as an infantry division. The cavalry simulated a mounted brigade cooperating with the infantry troops, both being supported by the two artillery batteries. Merritt acted as the infantry division commander as well as the senior officer present, in order to sharpen his own field command skills, which had not been exercised in ten years.⁴⁹

For a week, Merritt's men practiced specified tactics, including mounted and dismounted cavalry charges in battalion-size operations. Merritt had his artillery practice with

live ammunition at special targets--a rare experience for the gunners. Training in proper use of outposts and patrols continued, while cavalry detachments, secretly instructed to act as "enemy" forces, attacked Merritt's combined "army" and greatly increased interest in the games by providing an element of surprise and realism. At the end of the first week, Merritt held a general critique of the training. He returned reports from each subordinate commander with comments and criticisms, observing that "experience at Camp Schofield had apparently demonstrated the fact that nothing is more likely to advance the interests of instruction, than provision for public comment on the daily operations."⁵⁰

Merritt was pleased with the interest shown by the officers and men. Exercises during the following week and a half consisted of advance guard and security guard drills, a review of the command, which permitted Merritt to observe the marching and appearance of the troops, and full-scale "battles" emphasizing coordination between the three arms of service. Communication exercises with heliograph and flag signals proved only partially successful, the former being too sensitive for field use and the latter less reliable than mounted couriers. During this period Merritt also had his infantry and cavalry officers march their men over measured courses at varying rates in order to determine the most efficient speeds at which these arms could travel.⁵¹

Although he planned on three full weeks of maneuvers, Merritt decided to end the exercise after two and a half

weeks due to approaching cold weather for which the men were not equipped. He held a concluding critique with the officers and provided a written analysis of the maneuver, including detailed comments on the actions of each force. After a final review, the troops were paid and each unit marched away from Chilocco Creek. Merritt believed that "the departure of the troops to their stations, while still full of enthusiasm and interest in the subject, would be followed by study and preparation during the winter, on the part of the officers, for the exercises of another year."⁵²

Although "war games" became common during the twentieth century, they were almost unknown in America at the time, and Merritt's maneuvers were widely studied within the Army. Many of his junior officers at Chilocco Creek later became senior commanders during the Spanish-American War and the First World War, and he provided their first experience with "modern" warfare. Both Eben Swift and Hugh Scott became major generals, and Scott felt the experience "had the salutary effect of awakening a good many of us to the fact that the days of the Indian Wars were over and that we must fit ourselves for war with civilized peoples." Scott began to study "civilized" warfare intensively as a result. That was exactly the response Merritt hoped for, and the Chilocco Creek exercises must be recognized as not only the first step, but a highly successful first step, toward modernizing the Army's training.⁵³

Back at Fort Leavenworth, Merritt returned to the problems of patrolling Indian Territory and to conflict with Colonel Alexander McCook, who commanded the Infantry and Cavalry School located on the post. Merritt felt that he should have authority to directly command personnel assigned to the school since it fell within the Department of the Missouri. The division of authority was not that straightforward, however, and McCook resisted Merritt's attempts to order his troops or to otherwise control school activities. In this McCook was sustained by the Adjutant General's Office in Washington, much to Merritt's irritation. To make matters worse, McCook was promoted to brigadier general in July 1890, and Fort Leavenworth was not big enough for two general officers.⁵⁴

Merritt read in the newspapers where his department would be reorganized and where he would be replaced by McCook. He wrote Schofield, testily objecting to such a move. Schofield assured him none was contemplated and scolded Merritt for having a "chip on his shoulder." Merritt apologized, but recommended that department headquarters be transferred. The largest city in the department was St. Louis, and perhaps Merritt's fondness for comfortable urban living prompted him to choose that city for his new headquarters. Schofield approved the transfer, and the Merritts, along with the headquarters staff and their families, moved to St. Louis in July 1890.⁵⁵

Merritt commanded from St. Louis for only one year. Shortly after arriving, he realized that Swift was unhappy being stationed with his family in a large city, so he allowed Swift to rejoin the Fifth Cavalry in Indian Territory. It was the end of a close and pleasant relationship with the young officer, the only one Merritt ever really had with a subordinate, and he highly commended Swift for his work as adjutant and aide.⁵⁶

During the winter of 1890-1891, the last recognizable spark of the Indian Wars came to life at Wounded Knee, Dakota Territory. The fight there took place in the Department of the Platte, and Merritt took no direct part in it. He forwarded troops from his district to Nelson A. Miles, who was conducting the operations. Miles had replaced Crook as commander of the Military Division of the Missouri, upon Crook's death in 1890. Merritt was critical of Miles' handling of the incident compared to what he felt Crook's reaction would have been, and he thought Miles' strange desire to be President was a significant factor. Merritt was uncomfortable sending troops away from his department since he felt that he had similar potential problems with the "wilder" tribes of Indian Territory. The messianic movement which led to Wounded Knee did in fact have some influence in Merritt's department. Merritt planned to disarm the Indians near Fort Sill, Indian Territory, but he was dissuaded by Captain Hugh Scott, who was on the spot and recommended that no action be taken. Merritt took the advice of his subordinate and allowed

the movement to fall of its own accord.⁵⁷

In St. Louis Caroline Merritt began a long series of illnesses which seriously weakened her. Merritt took her east for specialized medical treatment and for a change of climate. An extended period of convalescence was prescribed, and Merritt arranged for Caroline to stay at a resort hotel in Connecticut while he returned to St. Louis in June 1891. There he found that, probably because of Caroline's condition, he had been transferred to command of the Department of Dakota, with headquarters in St. Paul, Minnesota.⁵⁸

Merritt's accomplishments in the Department of Missouri were significant and certainly recommended his skill as a civil administrator and as a progressive military commander. His handling of the opening of Oklahoma was a model of well-planned, moderate use of the military in civil affairs. His Chilocco Creek maneuver was a relatively small, but very important, first step, for which he was commended and respected among the growing ranks of progressive Army officers. With these successes behind him, Merritt looked forward to his new command, and just possibly, to rapid promotion to major general.

FOOTNOTES

Chapter 13

1. William A. Ganoe, The History of the United States Army (New York, 1924), Chapter 9; Brown, "Social Attitudes," 50; Weigley, History of U.S. Army, 272; Utley, Frontier Regulars, 23.

2. Jerry M. Cooper, "The Army and Civil Disorder: Federal Military Intervention in American Labor Disputes, 1877-1900," (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Univ. of Wisc., 1971), 49.

3. Wesley Merritt, "Important Improvements in the Art of War in the Last Twenty Years and Their Probable Effect on Future Military Operations," JMSI, IV (Mar.-Dec., 1883), 172-187; Weigley, History of U.S. Army, 273-81; Cooper, "Civil Disorder," 57.

4. Howard, Autobiography, II, 467.

5. Ibid., 490-91; Swift, "Memoranda," 47-48; John A. Carpenter, Sword and Olive Branch, Oliver Otis Howard (Pittsburg, 1964), 277; Cornelius DeWitt Willcox, "On the Edge, Personal Recollections of an American Officer," Typescript, Special Collections, USMA Library, West Point. Willcox was a member of USMA class of 1885.

6. Merritt to Sewell, June 24, 1884; Merritt to Maginnis, January 14, 1885: Superintendent's Letterbook, No. 6, Archives, USMA Library, West Point; Merritt to Russel, May 25, 1887, Ibid., No. 7; Entry for April 24, 1887, Charles D. Rhodes, "Intimate Letters of a West Point Cadet--An Epic in Blank Verse of the Class of 1889, USMA," Archives, MHRC, Carlisle Barracks; Willcox, "Personal Recollections," 11, 54.

7. Merritt Report, Oct. 3, 1883, in S of W, Annual Report for 1883, Archives, USMA Library, West Point.

8. Merritt to AGO, Sept. 14, 1886, Superintendent's Letterbook, No. 7, Archives, USMA Library, West Point; Stephen E. Ambrose, Duty, Honor, Country, A History of West Point (Baltimore, 1966), 220.

9. Order No. 90, August 27, 1886, Order Book, U.S. Corps of Cadets, Archives, USMA Library, West Point; Merritt to AGO, Sept. 17, 1886, Superintendent's Letterbook, No. 7, Archives, USMA Library, West Point.

10. Adjutant's Order No. 147, August 31, 1886; No. 159, Sept. 16, 1886; Post Orders, USMA, No. 11, Archives, USMA Library, West Point; Charles Gerhardt, "Memoirs," MSS, Archives, MHRC, Carlisle Barracks, 11. Gerhardt was a member of USMA class of 1887.
11. Willcox, "Personal Recollections," 96.
12. Merritt to AGO, March 15 and 22, 1883, Superintendent's Letterbook, No. 6, Archives, USMA Library, West Point.
13. Brown, "Social Attitudes," 23.
14. Willcox, "Personal Recollections," 91.
15. Rhodes, "Intimate Letters," Entry for May 1, 1887; Ambrose, Duty, Honor, Country, 220; Sherman to Merritt, Oct. 10, 1883, Microcopy 857, R 9, NA; Merritt to Wilson, May 22, 1883, James H. Wilson Papers, No. 17, MSS Div., L.C.
16. Sherman to Merritt, March 7, 1883, Microcopy 857, R 8, NA; Sheridan to Merritt, June 8, 1887, Microcopy 857, R 10, NA; Merritt to Cleveland, May 1, 1885; Cleveland to Merritt, May 21, 1885; Grover Cleveland Papers, MSS Div., L.C.; Merritt to Arthur, April 22, 1884, Chester A. Arthur Papers, Ser. 1, R 2, MSS Div., L.C.; Sheridan to Merritt, Jan. 8, and June 7, 1886, Sheridan Papers, No. 84, MSS Div., L.C.
17. Crook to S of W, March 8, 1885; Hancock to Merritt, March 9, 1885; Sheridan to Cleveland, June 24, 1885; Merritt to Cleveland, July 1, 1885: ACP, NA.
18. Public Ledger (Philadelphia), Feb. 15, 1886.
19. Ibid.; Latrobe to Cleveland, August 10, 1886; King to Cleveland, Feb. 27, 1886; Lee to Cleveland, Jan. 25, 1886; Morrison to Endicott, March 13, 1886: ACP, NA; Sheridan to Endicott, Feb. 17, 1886, Sheridan Papers, No. 44, MSS Div., L.C.; B. Johnson, Merritt and Indian Wars, 9; V. Johnson, Unregimented General, 227.
20. Susie Swift to Eben Swift, Oct. 21, 1886, Eben Swift Papers, Main Series, Archives, MHRC, Carlisle Barracks; Merritt to Schofield, April 5, 1887, Schofield Papers, Merritt File, MSS Div., L.C.
21. Robert Grierson to Mrs. Grierson, April 25, 1887, Grierson Collection, Archives, Ft. Davis National Historic Site; Rhodes, "Intimate Letters," Entry for April 24, 1887; Merritt to Cooke, Dec. 13, 1887, Cooke Family Papers, Archives, Virginia Historical Society, Richmond.

22. Sheridan to Cleveland, April 19, 1887, Microcopy 857, R 10, NA; Swift, "Memoranda," 95.

23. Merritt to Schofield, April 5, 1889, Schofield Papers, Merritt File, MSS Div., L.C.; ANJ, March 12, 1887; E. R. Hagemann, ed., Fighting Rebels and Redskins: Experiences in Army Life of Colonel George B. Sanford, 1861-1897 (Norman, 1969), 73, 75-76; O. L. Hein, Memories of Long Ago (New York, 1925), 146.

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47. Shirk, "Chilocco Creek," 241; Merritt to Schofield, July 20, 1889, Microcopy 666, R 484, NA; Hugh Lennox Scott, Some Memories of a Soldier (New York, 1928), 136.
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50. Ibid., 242, 245-46.
51. Ibid., 243-45, 247, 253-54, 256.
52. Ibid., 254-55.

53. Swift, "Memoranda," 99-100; Scott, Memories, 136-145.

54. Heitman, Register, I, 659; AGO to Merritt, Sept. 2, 1889, Microcopy 857, R 11, NA.

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58. Merritt to Schofield, Personal Letter, May 29, 1891, Schofield Papers, No. 41, MSS Div., L.C.; AGO to Schofield, June 26, 1891, ACP, NA.

Chapter 14

INDUSTRIAL WARFARE

Strikes are deplorable, and so are their causes. All men who engage in them hope for a time when better social relations will make them as unnecessary as any other form of warfare will some day be.

--Clarence Darrow

By the time Merritt assumed command of the Department of Dakota in July 1891, the troubles at Wounded Knee were over. Thereafter, only minor Indian-related incidents occurred within the department. Some unrest at the Tongue River Reservation in Montana resulted from agitation by the Cheyenne holy man, Walks Nights. Assured of fair treatment, however, Walks Nights submitted to military authorities there and was quickly released, the action preventing any conflict between Indians and Whites in the region.¹

Merritt unexpectedly returned to the East in late July as Caroline's condition worsened. He moved her to New York City to be nearer medical specialists, and by September she was sufficiently convalescent to return with him to their new quarters at St. Paul. Caroline apparently suffered from Nephritis, or Bright's disease, a kidney defect which invalided her periodically.²

Over the winter Merritt finished writing his part of The Armies of Today: A Description of the Armies of the

Leading Nations at the Present Time, which he co-authored with the British and French military leaders, Garnet Wolseley and T. Janier. Merritt surveyed the organization, equipment, training and tactics of the American Army, comparing those facets with European practice. It was a significant contribution to military literature of the period. The book was the culmination of considerable writing Merritt had done while stationed at West Point and at Fort Leavenworth. He wrote a lengthy article entitled, "Sheridan in the Shenandoah Valley" for Battles and Leaders of the Civil War in 1887, and he contributed two articles for Harper's New Monthly Magazine in 1890.

One of these articles, "Three Indian Campaigns," described Merritt's philosophy toward "war-making against Indians," debunking the notion that the Indians fought because of any "inherited animosities dating from the time of the Pilgrim Fathers," or that there was any "gratitude for kind usage shown to his ancestors or to himself." Merritt also described the 1878 campaign against the Northern Cheyennes of Dull Knife and Little Wolf, Crook's first Arizona campaign against Apaches, and his own 1879 Ute campaign.³

The second Harper's article was an extensive discourse on "The Army of the United States." In it he described the organization and operations of the different arms and departments of the Army, emphasizing several non-combatant corps--the Engineers, Hospital Corps, Ordnance

Department, and the departments of the Adjutant General, Inspector General, and Judge Advocate General. Merritt also addressed himself to use of the Army as a national police and to the Army's relationship with the militia. He agreed with Upton's belief that citizen soldiers were necessary as a "second line" in any major war, but that at least a year was required for their proficiency, and that a strong, well-trained Regular force was absolutely necessary for national security. The authorized Regular Army strength was woefully inadequate to meet this contingency, in Merritt's opinion. In this he was firmly in the mainstream of military thought during the 1890's.⁴

Much of the material for "The Army of the United States" went into The Armies of Today, which Harper and Brothers published in 1893. Altogether, Merritt had nine articles published in addition to this book. Most were in professional journals and contributed, especially in the early days of those journals, to their usefulness and success. If the total number of works seems small, it was at least significantly more than most of Merritt's contemporaries produced.

At St. Paul, Merritt involved himself with a veterans' organization, The Military Order of the Loyal Legion of the United States, and became its Minnesota commander. He used his position to invite Schofield and other dignitaries to speak before the group's reunions and meetings. His attention was diverted throughout most of 1892 and 1893, however, by Caroline's illness, which reappeared during the spring of

1892. Merritt again took her to New York City for treatment, then on a three-week vacation to Fortress Monroe, Virginia, where the warmer climate was pleasant even if it did not affect any real cure.⁵

By late April they were back in St. Paul for little more than a year. There, on June 12, 1893, Caroline Merritt died of "chronic diffuse nephritis," at the age of forty-four. She and Wesley had experienced the hardships of frontier service, as well as the comfort that higher command brought, during their twenty-two years of marriage. Without children, Merritt was alone at the age of fifty-seven as he buried Caroline in the cemetery at West Point.⁶

Merritt was not without friends in St. Paul. Sheridan's younger brother, Michael V. Sheridan, an old and valued companion, joined Merritt there as assistant adjutant general of the Department of Dakota. With an experienced officer to watch over departmental affairs, Merritt decided that a change of scenery was desirable and applied for a four-month leave of absence to travel around the Mediterranean, stopping off in Europe on his return. For companionship, he invited his aide, Lieutenant Samuel D. Sturgis, to accompany him on the tour. They left in February 1894, and when they returned in mid-May, Merritt was in much better spirits than he had been since Caroline's death.⁷

His good spirits would be needed, for the troops of Merritt's department were about to be used in the most controversial campaign of his career. The economic depression

of 1893-1894, one of the most acute in the nation's history, threw millions of workingmen out of employment and reduced the wages of millions more below a subsistence level. In desperation, labor, organized and unorganized, struck back with its weapons of industrial warfare. The Federal government countered with military force.

The Army was used in labor disputes for the first time on a national scale in 1877. Merritt participated only peripherally by protecting government property at Omaha, but other military units of the National Guard and the Regular Army were used extensively. Federal forces not only restored order, they acted as strike-breakers, protecting private property and non-striking workers as well as government property. The National Guard's performance was particularly dismal. Its units were almost completely unreliable. Some refused to serve, some broke up and joined the strikers, while other units were bloodthirsty and nearly uncontrollable. In stark contrast, the Regulars were perfectly disciplined and fired no shots in anger, their mere presence serving to suppress any temptations to oppose them.⁸

For the Army, there were several significant results of the 1877 involvement. There was much criticism of the Army's role. Army units were used by United States Marshals and other law enforcement officers as a Posse Comitatus, in effect, as assistant marshals or deputies. In 1878 Congress reacted to this criticism by prohibiting use of the Regular Army as a Posse Comitatus. Thereafter, its units would act

only by direction of superior military commanders and could assist civil authorities only after all available resources had been exhausted. Army officers generally welcomed this measure since it clarified their channels of authority.⁹

Many Army officers saw participation in labor conflicts and anti-riot duties as an opportunity to provide a rationale for increased appropriations and manpower authorizations. With no apparent foreign enemies the Army was often hard-pressed to justify its size and very existence. Emory Upton was such an opportunist and proposed a military policy which concentrated on the danger of civil strife rather than on foreign invasion. Merritt was impressed with the efficiency of the Regular Army during the 1877 and subsequent labor troubles. His feelings were probably more typical of most officers' than were Upton's. He felt that if a force was needed to maintain the national peace, the Regular Army was the instrument the Federal government should use for the purpose. It neither wavered before threats nor was influenced by issues, and it engaged in no insubordinate violence. The Army was a reliable weapon for such service--in effect a national police--and Merritt felt that use of the Army minimized disorder and bloodshed by quickly ending any conflict. Such a result was not only efficient, it was more humane as well, in his opinion.¹⁰

This was an appealing argument so long as the Army remained neutral in its attitudes and responsive to the needs of the nation rather than to the needs of classes or factions.

Unfortunately, it was not neutral, and such an expectation was unreasonable. The Army reflected American society, and military officers were products of a system that favored property rights over individual rights and economic progress over social progress. The labor movement was much better organized by 1894 than it had ever been, and it therefore posed a much greater threat to the existing economic system than it had in 1877. Foreign-born workers comprised a sizeable percentage of organized labor, and their presence, along with the rhetoric of class warfare, disturbed many Army officers. The threat of dissolution of American society seemed real to many officers, and they viewed the Army as a bulwark against radicalism and class conflict. Some officers, like the bellicose Miles, relished the opportunity to confront the disorderly, foreign rabble, while most, like Merritt, were prepared to execute any actions their superiors ordered.¹¹

The seriousness of labor-capital conflicts escalated during the 1890's as economic woes afflicted employers and employees and as labor pressed its case in a more organized manner than ever before. By that time, the ranks of labor also included a true proletariat from the West--farmers, railroad workers, and miners--and these highly individualistic men added a volatile element to the industrial workers of the Mid-west and East.¹²

Merritt's first involvement with labor strife during the 1890's came a year after he assumed command of the Department of Dakota. His department included the states of

Wisconsin, Minnesota, Montana, South Dakota, and North Dakota. He sent troops into northern Idaho during the summer of 1892, to suppress violence by miners against railroad facilities in that region. Merritt's soldiers at Fort Missoula, Montana, were closer to the scene than were troops from the Department of the Columbia, which was responsible for Idaho. His involvement was minimal, and the troops were used only to guard men arrested by civil authorities.¹³

By the spring of 1894, however, as Merritt returned from his Mediterranean trip, serious industrial conflict was imminent. Two major transcontinental railroads passed through Merritt's department. The Northern Pacific ran east and west through southern Montana, and the Great Northern paralleled it through northern Montana. The Northern Pacific became the focus of Merritt's attention for several months after his return. That railroad, like many others throughout the nation, was bankrupt and had been placed in receivership by Federal courts. This Federal interest was the pretext for employing the military in protecting the interests of the railroads' receivers.

The same economic depression that bankrupted railroads threw millions of workers out of work throughout the West, and their discontent resulted in the "industrial army," or "Coxeyite," movement during April and May. These desperate men tried to organize a march on Washington, D.C., in the belief that Congress would redress their grievances once the extent of their desperation was demonstrated. The "Coxeyites"

attempted to travel eastward by foot and by demanding free railroad transportation, and when this was refused, they often stole locomotives and whole trains to aid their journeys. United States Marshals were unable to stop the practice and successfully appealed to President Cleveland for Army assistance.¹⁴

Schofield, in authorizing Merritt to intervene on behalf of the railroad managers or receivers, was concerned that Army forces not act as a Posse Comitatus. He emphasized that only orders from higher military authority, in Merritt's case either Miles in Chicago or Schofield himself, should be obeyed. Federal forces were to protect railroad property, but the policy toward "Coxeyites" was somewhat ambiguous. If arrested for interfering with railroad operations or for property destruction, they were to be held for disposition by United States courts. Schofield pointed out that movement of these parties was not itself a crime, and that the "industrial army" could legally come and go as it pleased. However, "it is also generally desired to prevent, as far as may lawfully be done, the drift of unemployed and lawless persons toward the East."¹⁵

By late May, large numbers of "Coxeyites" gathered along the line of the Northern Pacific in western Montana. They stole several trains and ran them eastward until Merritt's garrison at Fort Keogh tore up the track near that post. The "industrial army" then took the trains westward once more, pursued by troops over the rebuilt line. Little or no violence

occurred, however. The "Coxeyites" never fired on the soldiers or resisted arrest, and by late June, the movement faded away as disillusion replaced whatever hopes they had. Merritt withdrew his detachment from tunnel and bridge guard duty, leaving only one detachment at Helena at the direction of the Secretary of War.¹⁶

Merritt thought the labor problems were ended and planned an extensive August hunting trip to the St. Mary's Lakes region of present-day Glacier National Park. He invited a friend, Frank Thomson, vice-president of the Pennsylvania Railroad, and his sons, to join the party. Merritt's plans were disrupted, however, by the biggest industrial conflict of the year, the Pullman Strike and widespread railroad strikes resulting from it.¹⁷

Eugene A. Debs' American Railway Union (ARU) decided to strike against the Illinois-based Pullman Corporation in May 1894. ARU membership included many Pullman shop employees as well as railroad workers throughout the western states, and in order to make this strike more effective, the union also declared a boycott of Pullman cars if the company refused to redress its workers' grievances by June 26. Pullman refused, and ARU members declared their intentions not to handle any trains which included Pullman cars. In the midst of a depression, the ARU action might not have had the support of other railroad brotherhoods except for actions of the Federal Courts.

The ARU boycott was not directed at the railroads, but railroad workers' wages had been drastically cut earlier in the year by receivers of bankrupt lines who were essentially the managers of those lines. When Northern Pacific workers threatened to strike, the line's receivers requested and received injunctions from various Federal Courts forbidding any interference, including strikes, with operations of the line. An extraordinary interpretation of the Sherman Anti-Trust Law of 1890 thus made continuation of rail traffic a Federal affair and provided the rationale for using the Army to maintain that traffic. On lines not in receivership, the pretext was that strikes would interfere with interstate commerce and with the mails.¹⁸

The June 26 boycott affected Merritt immediately. His detachment at Helena, commanded by Major Emerson H. Liscum, was isolated there, since ARU men refused to handle trains with Pullman car attached, and since Northern Pacific management refused to leave Pullman cars off. The strikers had no actual conflict with the Helena detachment and it was in no danger; however, Merritt authorized Liscum to provide firemen, switchmen, and brakemen from among the troops to assist Northern Pacific engineers in moving the detachment back to its station at Fort Keogh. Merritt was not authorized during the early days of the boycott and strike to protect the regular railroad traffic, so he warned Liscum "not to confound instructions for protection of your own troops and government property . . . with instructions which cover the ordinary

traffic of the road." The detachment commander was also to require "the most discrete conduct of all your officers and men, so that there may be no conflict."¹⁹

Merritt subsequently left Liscum's detachment at Helena as sympathy for the strikers grew there and as the Northern Pacific decided to open the line by running a train through from St. Paul to break the strike. Merritt was partially responsible for this decision since he reported to the Secretary of War and to Schofield that closure of the Northern Pacific prevented payment of his troops and supply of the posts on and near the line in southern Montana. Northern posts, and the Helena detachment, could be supplied, though with difficulty, by the Great Northern Railroad, which had no Pullman contract and was not in receivership. Since the United States Marshal at Helena declared himself unable to protect the first Northern Pacific train when it should come through, the Secretary of War authorized Merritt to provide adequate protection.²⁰

Merritt ordered additional troops from within the Department of Dakota to take up stations along the Northern Pacific line in eastern Montana. The first train, escorted by two infantry companies, left St. Paul on the night of July 6 and encountered no obstruction, although Merritt reported "considerable feeling met with in Montana, but no violence." Strikers had burned the railway bridge over Hell Gate River, near Missoula in western Montana, so an east-bound train was run to that point from Idaho to meet the

westbound train. By June 12, both met at the burnt bridge, transferred passengers, and retraced their routes.²¹

Merritt, at his St. Paul headquarters, was mistaken in believing that there was no violence connected with running the first train through Montana. At Livingston, a major point on the Northern Pacific, a large mob attacked the non-union train crews and had to be dispersed with gun butts and bayonets. The guard's commanding officer struck an ARU official over the head with his sword during the melee, and strong protests resulted. The Governor of Montana appealed to Cleveland for action against the officer and troops, and Schofield passed the demand on to Merritt for an investigation. Merritt sent a staff officer to Livingston to take testimony from soldiers and strikers alike. By August 6 Merritt reported to Schofield that, while his officer should have used more acceptable language to the mob, the use of force was justifiable. With that report the incident was closed, and no other reports of significant violence reached Merritt.²²

Merritt had ten cavalry and nine infantry companies, over a thousand men and officers, with which to protect the line of the Northern Pacific once it was opened. The Hell Gate bridge was quickly replaced, and other through trains, fully protected, began to move. The service, which was fitful at first, became more regular by mid-July. Merritt stationed small military detachments at all bridges and tunnels along the railroad since there were reported attempts to destroy these vulnerable structures and again tie up service. To

replace striking employees, the Northern Pacific brought in non-union replacement crews from the East, and Merritt's men rode as train-guards as far west as Idaho, where troops from the Department of the Columbia relieved them.²³

Merritt maintained this pattern of protection through July and retained the bridge and tunnel guards through August. By July 21, he could report that "the situation of the Northern Pacific has constantly improved." He ordered opening of the branch line to Butte, and observed that "some of the strikers there have gone to work, that a majority will depart and seek employment on other roads, that some have joined the Coxey tramps." By September, operations in the department were back to normal, and Merritt was able to proceed with his hunting expedition to northern Montana.²⁴

Merritt's part in settling the industrial strife within his department was straightforward and moderate. He followed orders and showed no enthusiasm for conflict with strikers. In fact, he took every possible precaution to prevent violence and experienced a minimum as a result. In Chicago and in other affected departments, considerable bloodshed and property damage resulted. The Regular Army generally behaved in the orderly, responsible manner that had been expected of it. The National Guard units generally behaved unreliably, serving to confirm the desirability of using the Regulars as a national police in future industrial warfare. The Army, however, came under severe criticism from organized labor for its lack of neutrality in protecting

the interests of one side in the disputes against the interests of the other. While labor lost heavily in 1894, its voice became stronger rather than weaker, and its attacks on Army appropriations, and Army interests in general, increased throughout the balance of the decade.²⁵

Like most senior officers, Merritt looked upon strike and riot duty simply as maintenance of law and order. He was not necessarily anti-labor, but there is little doubt that his sympathies were with railroad management. In this attitude he was again typical. General officers tended to relate to their civilian counterparts and found their company, whether on hunting trips or around the city-based headquarters, pleasant and comfortable. Such preferences were almost inevitable, given the prevailing levels of social awareness, and they cannot realistically be judged by later sets of social values.²⁶

By late 1894, Merritt was again administering the routine matters within his department. He supported and coordinated the Lyceum program, which provided a means for professional officer education through writing and delivering papers and through discussion groups at his scattered posts. Departmental command also entailed considerable ceremonial duty. In 1892, Merritt and his personal staff participated in ceremonies at the "Columbian Celebration" in Chicago, as did Schofield and other general officers. With all his troops back in their garrisons, Merritt ordered each post to conduct a ten-day practice march during autumn, the cavalry to be

accompanied by pack-trains in order to keep the troopers familiar with that supply system.²⁷

The new year, 1895, brought new interests for Merritt. He decided that mid-winter would be a good time to tour the Southwest and southern California, and after having obtained permission for such a trip from Schofield and the Secretary of War, Merritt left for six weeks of warm relaxation. Before leaving, however, he corresponded extensively with Schofield about possible promotion to the rank of major general and congratulated the Army commander on his own promotion to lieutenant general. Merritt asked Schofield to use his "good offices" in Merritt's behalf since a vacancy in the grade of major general would open in April with the retirement of General McCook.²⁸

Upon returning from his vacation, Merritt became anxious about his promotion since he had heard nothing from Schofield for some time. Merritt wrote to the Secretary of War, pointing out that he was the senior brigadier general, and formally applying for appointment as major general "lest silence on my part should be misconstrued." Congressman William M. Springer, of Illinois, also contacted the Secretary on Merritt's behalf, claiming to have known "General Merritt and his family for 25 or 30 years . . . his family is among the most noted in our state, all Democrats and supporters of this Administration." Schofield assured Merritt that he was recommended for the next vacancy and advised him not to worry. It was good advice, for on April 25, 1895, Merritt was

appointed major general in the Regular Army at the age of fifty-eight.²⁹

Merritt was delighted with promotion to what was at the time the highest rank in the Army, since Congress had decided that Schofield would be the last officer to hold the rank of lieutenant general. He was also pleased with his transfer to Chicago as commander of the Department of the Missouri. Schofield retired in September, and his place as Commanding General of the Army was taken by Nelson A. Miles. A game of military "musical chairs" followed as Thomas Ruger took Miles' former command of the Department of the East at Governor's Island, New York, and Merritt moved into Ruger's place at Chicago. Merritt's new command, although called a department, was in fact the former Military Division of the Missouri, Sheridan's and Schofield's old division. Despite the nomenclature, the Department still controlled all the trans-Mississippi West except for the Pacific Coast.³⁰

The same year also brought the death of Philip St. George Cooke, and Merritt wrote an article for the Journal of the United States Cavalry Association in June of that year, memorializing his old cavalry chief and praising his long record of successful service. Merritt had kept in touch with Cooke since they parted during the Civil War, and he had written to Cooke that "I have always considered that I owed much of my success as a soldier to your early teaching, practically and theoretically."³¹

With no active operations, administration of the department was little trouble for Merritt. He supervised consolidation of posts within his command, closing unneeded ones like Fort Mackinac, Michigan, and expanding others like Fort Riley, Kansas. Care of Indians within the department came under his jurisdiction also. Many Apaches were still held as prisoners of war at Fort Sill, Indian Territory, and Merritt emphasized to officers at that post the necessity for monitoring cattle and subsistence supplies provided by contractors to fill Indian allotment agreements. Merritt also traveled extensively throughout the department, inspecting posts and garrisons. He again chose mid-winter to tour the southwestern stations. During January and February, 1897, he inspected his old Texas posts near San Antonio, then continued through New Mexico and Arizona in a private car provided by the Chicago and Eastern Illinois Railroad. It was a far cry from his first tour of western Texas with the Ninth Cavalry in 1867.³²

Merritt came to regard Chicago as his "home" while commanding from that city. Most of his family still lived nearby, and he grew closer to them during the 1890's. He was especially fond of his youngest sister, Emily O. Chance, and entertained Emily and her daughter Neone at the "Columbian Celebration." Merritt had become somewhat "prudish" by that time, and chided Neone about dress fashions of the day. Chicago duty also brought Merritt into direct contact with many of the wealthy civic and business leaders

of the city. He was often a houseguest of the Potter Palmers, who gave magnificent balls and receptions in Merritt's honor at their home. Merritt already knew Marshall Field from early service with Sheridan in Chicago, and through Field, who was a director of the Pullman Corporation, Merritt met and became very close to Norman Williams, a leading business figure in Chicago. Williams was one of three founders of Pullman, serving as its chief counsel; he was also instrumental in founding Western Electric and the Chicago Telephone Company. Merritt often stayed at the Williams' suburban mansion, and he became quite fond of their daughter Laura, a bright and agreeable young woman in her mid-twenties.³³

Merritt's tenure at Chicago was the most pleasant service he ever had. In early 1897, he accepted command of the Regular troops participating in President William McKinley's inaugural parade in Washington. He took his staff with him for what was to be his last ceremonial duty with the Department of the Missouri. Merritt was sixty years old, considerably younger than most of the other major generals, who were beginning to retire at an increasing rate. Thomas Ruger, commanding the Department of the East, retired, and Merritt replaced him in that command in April 1897.³⁴

Even more than had been the case at Chicago, duty at Governor's Island consisted of administrative and ceremonial routine. By late spring Merritt tired of it; he applied and received permission for a two-month overseas leave of absence and left for Europe. Traveling alone would have been highly

uncharacteristic, and it is probable that Laura Williams
either accompanied him or met him there.³⁵

FOOTNOTES

Chapter 14

1. Schofield to Merritt, Jan. 10 and 11, 1892; Merritt Report, Jan. 5, 1892: Microcopy 857, R 11, NA; AAAG, DD, to Commanding Officer, First Cav. Det. on Tongue River, July 25, 1891, LS, DD, RG 393, NA; Merritt Report, 1893, in S of W, Annual Report for 1893, 27.
2. Brown to Andrews, July 24, 1891, LS, DD, RG 393, NA; Merritt to Schofield, Sept. 21, 1891, Schofield Papers, No. 41; MSS Div., L.C.; Schofield to Merritt, Sept. 24, 1891, Schofield Papers, No. 62, MSS Div., L.C.
3. Merritt, "Three Indian Campaigns," 720.
4. Wesley Merritt, "The Army of the United States," Harper's New Monthly Magazine, LXXX (March, 1890), 508-509; B. Johnson, Merritt and Indian Wars, 4.
5. Merritt to Cooke, May 7, 1892, Cooke Family Papers, Archives, Virginia Historical Society, Richmond; Merritt to Schofield, April 14, 1892, Schofield Papers, No. 41, MSS Div., L.C.; Merritt to Schofield, April 25, 1893, Schofield Papers, No. 30, MSS Div., L.C.
6. Pension Records, Wesley Merritt, NA.
7. Merritt to AGO, Feb. 3, and May 11, 1894; M. V. Sheridan to Merritt, May 11, 1894: L.S., DD, RG 393, NA; Merritt to Schofield, Nov. 28, 1893, Schofield Papers, No. 41, MSS Div., L.C.; S.O. 11, AGO, Jan. 13, 1894; Schofield to Merritt, Dec. 4, 1893: ACP, NA.
8. For a thorough history of the 1894 labor conflict, see Almont Lindsey, The Pullman Strike (Chicago, 1942). For the Army's part in that and other labor conflicts, see Cooper, "Civil Disorder."
9. Cooper, "Civil Disorder," 136.
10. Ibid., 60, 382; Merritt, "Army of the United States," 507-508.
11. Cooper, "Civil Disorder," 61, 384, 409; Brown, "Social Attitudes," 253-57.
12. Cooper, "Civil Disorder," 165, 170, 383.

13. Merritt to AGO, July 12, 13, and 18, 1892, Benjamin Harrison Papers, Ser. 1, R 36, MSS Div., L.C.
14. Lindsey, Pullman Strike, 12-13.
15. Schofield to Merritt, May 23, 1894, Microcopy 857, R 11, NA.
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Chapter 15

SPANISH-AMERICAN WAR

.....
 Underneath the starry flag,
 We'll civilize 'em with a Krag.

--Popular tune of the late 1890's

If Merritt thought his days of active field command were over, he was mistaken. As war with Spain approached, rumors of possible attack and invasion by the Spanish Navy spread throughout the East Coast. Merritt left on an inspection tour of coastal installations in the Department of the East as soon as he returned from Europe. By early April, he reported on conditions of his heavy artillery emplacements, searchlight systems, and ammunition handling capabilities and on proposals for new coastal defense installations that were subsequently constructed and manned in response to a Congressional Act of March 1897. Merritt also placed the department's Regular infantry troops in readiness to move whenever the War Department should direct it. Congress declared war with Spain on April 25, 1898, and Merritt received confidential information from the Adjutant General's Office that a "hostile" battle fleet had been sighted off Newfoundland, heading toward the East Coast. Merritt was instructed to be alert and ready to open hostilities.¹

All such rumors proved to be false, and the coastal fortifications never fired a shot in anger, but Merritt's key role in the five-month war with Spain soon became known. By May 1898, with retirement and deaths thinning the ranks of senior major generals, Merritt was the second-ranking officer in the United States Army after Miles. The McKinley administration considered that the proposed Caribbean expedition, which would defeat Spanish power in Cuba and Puerto Rico and occupy those islands, would be the main effort of the Spanish-American War. On the far side of the globe, however, events transpired that greatly expanded America's ambitions and led to a second major theater of operations. On May 1, Commodore George Dewey led the Navy's Asiatic Squadron in an attack against a small and weak Spanish naval force guarding Manila, capital of the Spanish-controlled Philippines. Dewey's intention was to divert the Spanish Navy from the Caribbean, but the attack was unexpectedly decisive. Dewey controlled Manila Bay and informed Washington that he could take Manila itself at any time if he had the troops to occupy it.²

President McKinley's policy and goals in prosecution of the Spanish-American War can best be described as flexible. His initial interest in acquiring a modest empire in the Caribbean expanded to match and eventually exceed the possibilities indicated by Dewey's success. By May 11, McKinley had decided to send a large land force, some 10,000 men, to capture and hold Manila and perhaps a large part of the

Philippine Archipelago. Since Miles intended to command the Caribbean effort, on May 12 Merritt was assigned to command the Manila expedition.³

In order to plan his expedition, Merritt met with the President and Miles and found little agreement on objectives for the Philippines force. McKinley probably had not really decided whether or not only Manila or all or part of the island group should be captured and occupied. Miles expected Merritt to hold only the city, but Merritt envisioned occupation of the entire archipelago. They disagreed over the size of Merritt's force as a result, Merritt arguing that his men would be fighting 7,000 miles from home against an acclimated army of 10,000 to 20,000 men. The argument was ultimately unnecessary since McKinley called up so many Volunteer units to augment Regular strength that most activated men were not even used during the short war.⁴

By the end of May, Merritt's force was set at 20,000 men, and he argued for a large percentage of Regulars since reliability would be of far more concern to his relatively isolated command than it would be to forces in nearby Cuba, which could easily be reinforced from Florida. He managed to secure assignment of about 5,000 Regulars to stiffen his Volunteers. These troops poured into Camp Merritt, their concentration and training point near San Francisco, over half arriving by the end of the month and the rest during June.⁵

Merritt's second-in-command, Brigadier General Elwell S. Otis, arrived before Merritt and supervised the logistical buildup and training program. Merritt spent a hectic week at his Governor's Island headquarters, locating and arranging for assignment of units and officers he particularly wanted included in the Manila expedition; then he turned over command of the Department of the East and left for San Francisco. His new command had been designated as the Department of the Pacific, with jurisdiction over the Phillipine Islands, but the military force for Merritt's expedition was organized as the Eighth Corps in accordance with the system applied to other expeditions being readied and trained in the East.⁶

Merritt's most serious problem at San Francisco was overseas transportation. The Navy was completely unprepared to either carry or escort an expedition to the Philippines. No troop transports existed, and Merritt's quartermaster department worked feverishly to charter a sufficient number of American commercial ships. Merritt placed Otis in charge of obtaining and modifying the chartered vessels for troop transport duties. Reluctant ship owners were threatened with seizure unless they cooperated, and Otis' crews installed bunks, galleys, and sanitary facilities along with either refrigerator equipment for fresh meat or deck pens for livestock. By May 25, Otis had three ships, the Australia, the City of Peking, and the City of Sidney, prepared, and Merritt sent off 2,500 troops under Brigadier General Thomas Anderson as his first expeditionary detachment.⁷

While his officers procured and converted additional shipping, Merritt organized a supporting command under Major General Henry Merriam, commander of the Department of California, to train and administer his troops. As equipment arrived, Merritt's men drilled and engaged in simulated battle exercises. Merritt meanwhile set up an intelligence bureau at his Palace Hotel headquarters. He obtained all the maps and books on the Philippine Islands that he could locate, and he asked the War Department to have Dewey forward any intelligence the Navy could gather on Spanish forces and dispositions, possible artillery opposition, and climatic conditions. Communications with Dewey were slow since the submarine telegraph cable to Manila had been cut, but Dewey provided the information as did American business men who had lived and worked in the Philippines. The former American consul at Manila was also helpful in supplying reliable information on Spanish strength. With these data, Merritt could intelligently plan for his men's shelter and clothing needs as well as for his projected assault on Manila.⁸

The Army had no summer uniforms for issue to troops in tropical or hot climates. Most soldiers fought through the Caribbean campaigns in blue wool uniforms little changed from Civil War days. Some experiments with khaki and canvas clothing had been conducted, but American firms were unable to manufacture khaki uniforms at the time, and light canvas or duck trousers were the nearest thing to a summer uniform that was available. Merritt procured them for his troops,

along with an ample supply of tropical underclothing and mosquito bars. He also purchased portable water distilleries and steam-driven pumping systems to supply the camps around Manila. There were not enough of the modern, bolt-action, Krag repeating rifles for all his troops, so Merritt had to equip some Volunteer units with out-dated, single-shot Springfield rifles from Indian-fighting days. For artillery support he took an assortment of light field guns, Hotchkiss mountain guns, and Gatlings, with sufficient ammunition for these and for the soldiers' small-arms.⁹

On June 15, Merritt dispatched his second detachment, 3,586 men under Brigadier General Francis V. Greene, on the ships China, Zealandia, Colon, and Senator. Merritt was worried about sending unescorted troopships across the Pacific since enough time had elapsed to allow the Spaniards to move warships into the area and since rumor placed one Spanish fleet approaching the Philippines from Suez. The Navy, however, had no man-of-war available that was fast enough or that had sufficient range to escort Merritt's vessels, so he was forced to take the chance and send them as rapidly as possible, without intermediate stopovers, to Manila Bay and the protection of Dewey's guns. In the event, no Spanish naval opposition appeared.¹⁰

Merritt planned to accompany the third detachment himself, but he was delayed by last-minute paperwork and by procurement of additional ships. The troops at Camp Merritt were anxious to sail for the Philippines, and Merritt had

some trouble with minor law violations by the men, although very little considering the large number still in camp. He was also advised of the possible presence of Spanish spies around the camp, but none were ever identified. By late June, six more troopships were ready, and Merritt loaded 4847 officers and men aboard as his third detachment. The force was commanded by Brigadier General Arthur MacArthur, and Merritt accompanied it, with his staff and several newspaper correspondents, aboard the steamer Newport. Merritt saw five of the ships off on the twenty-seventh, then left San Francisco two days later on the Newport.¹¹

After the war, the Army was heavily criticized for its unpreparedness, confusion, and seeming incompetence. Much of the criticism stemmed from heavy losses due to illness encountered by American troops in the Caribbean and within the United States. Much of it also originated with the first Caribbean expedition, which had as its objective the conquest of Cuba. Miles had overall command in the Caribbean, but the Fifth Corps, commanded by General William R. Shafter, was the spearhead of Miles' operation. Typical of the senior Regular officers of the late 1890's, Shafter was without previous experience in command of such a large force, some 25,000 men. He had campaigned in Texas and the West during the Indian Wars, but he was not competent commanding more than a regiment. His organization of the Cuba expedition was nearly a fiasco. He had inadequate loading facilities and used little system in assembling his force

for the voyage to Santiago. Supplies were simply piled into the ships at random, men and needed equipment were left behind in the haste and confusion of embarkation, and Shafter's base at Tampa presented a spectacle of congestion and mismanagement.¹²

Merritt's management provided a stark contrast. His troops received the maximum amount of training possible and were as well-equipped as Merritt's insistent demands could make them. The troops, including Volunteers, were well disciplined and healthy from constant care and exercise and were eager to be on their way to Manila. Merritt's quartermaster and commissary officers supervised loading of the ships. Supplies were loaded in reverse order, those likely to be needed first being loaded last, in a preview of standard procedures developed during the twentieth century. Correct ammunition accompanied the weapons, and each detachment Merritt sent out was self-sufficient in having signal and medical units incorporated. The ships were thoroughly prepared for the 7,000-mile voyage, and the troops experienced a minimum of discomfort, and no major health problem, enroute. It was a thoroughly professional job, and "the contrast demonstrated the importance of the strong hand of an experienced commander. Major General Shafter's ineptness at Tampa was in direct contrast to the skills of . . . Merritt at San Francisco."¹³

Spirits of the troops were high during the month-long voyage across the Pacific. Young Americans were as eager for war as were young Europeans less than two decades later when

millions marched happily away to the First World War. Enroute, Merritt organized a series of lectures by himself and by other officers on military subjects in which each was expert. Francis Millet, artist and war correspondent for the London Times, related his experiences during the recent Russo-Turkish War, and time passed pleasantly enough for officers and men while Merritt planned his operations before Manila.¹⁴

Merritt's operations were complicated by the presence of a Filipino Insurgent force under the young European-educated leader of the recently-proclaimed Philippine Republic, Emilio Aguinaldo. Native Filipinos had battled Spaniards for two years, and Dewey had supported Aguinaldo and his Insurgents since the naval battle of the preceding May. With arms captured from Spanish arsenals, Aguinaldo's guerrilla army cleared most of the Island of Luzon, on which Manila stood, and laid siege to the city by June 1898. His 12,000 native troops equaled the number of Spanish defenders, but Aguinaldo was not strong enough to storm the city, and he remained around it as Merritt arrived to assume overall command of the American land forces. Aguinaldo thought the Americans had come to assist the Filipinos in gaining their independence from the hated Spanish, and he was some time discovering his error.¹⁵

Dewey avoided any combined operations with the Insurgents and refused to recognize Aguinaldo's government, on instructions from Washington. McKinley had not determined on the course to be taken in the Philippines, but political commitments to the Filipinos were undesirable until American

policy developed. Merritt arrived with the President's orders not to ally himself with the Insurgents since American occupation of the islands was contemplated and "the powers of the military occupant are absolute and supreme and immediately operate upon the political condition of the inhabitants." With American forces occupying the Philippines and controlling the islands through military government, American negotiators would be free to demand either all or part, or none, of the Philippines from the defeated Spanish government. Merritt's problem, therefore, was to defeat the Spanish forces within Manila without allowing any participation by Aguinaldo's men. Once in command of the city, the Insurgents, as claimants to a legitimate Philippine government, could be ignored or negotiated away, and Merritt would essentially control the entire island group. Time was of the essence, however, since the Insurgents might oppose Merritt's efforts if given time to consider their implications.¹⁶

Merritt conferred with Dewey aboard the flagship Olympia soon after arriving in Manila Bay, and both agreed to attack Manila as soon as careful preparations could be made. Merritt's forces established Camp Dewey, their main base of operations, south of Manila, and the men and supplies were concentrated there by the first of August. Merritt needed to clear away the Insurgent forces between Camp Dewey and the city in preparation for his attack, so he sent General Greene to persuade the Filipino commander of that sector to shift his troops farther east. Greene was

successful, and the maneuver avoided any contact between Merritt and Aguinaldo that might have been construed as recognition or cooperation. Merritt organized his forces into a division, under Anderson, with two brigades, commanded by Greene and MacArthur. Merritt remained in overall command from his headquarters aboard one of the transports in Manila Bay.¹⁷

The city of Manila, on the eastern shore of Manila Bay, was divided by the Pasig River. Spanish forces occupied and defended the old walled city just south of the river. Surrounding the "old city" were suburbs north of the river and adjacent to the walls south of the Pasig. The surrounding terrain was flat and swampy, and the American troops were hampered by torrential rains that fell during the summer. The walled city was indefensible against a well-armed fleet in Manila Bay, a condition apparent to the Spanish commander, General Fermin Jaudenes. Jaudenes was essentially helpless and had no refuge outside the walls for the families and non-combatants of his garrison. The Spaniards feared surrender to the Filipinos, whose retaliation for past Spanish atrocities was certain, and Jaudenes sought a reasonable alternative.

On August 7, Merritt and Dewey opened secret negotiations with Jaudenes through the Belgian consul, Edouard Andre. Jaudenes could not surrender without a show of opposition, but he agreed to fight only for his outer defensive lines and blockhouses and not to defend the walled city itself or use its heavy artillery. In return, the Americans were not to

shell the city and were to keep the Filipinos out of the attack. Since the latter condition was one of Merritt's intentions anyway, he and Dewey agreed, and there followed the almost-bloodless Battle of Manila.¹⁸

Merritt did not disclose the arrangements with Jaudenes to his field officers and planned a genuine attack on the south side of Manila in the event Spanish forces failed to surrender as expected. Greene's and MacArthur's brigades were in position near the southern suburbs by August 13 and were eager for the assault. At 9:30 A.M. on that day, Dewey moved his ships closer inshore and opened fire on the outer lines of the Spanish defensive system. Merritt's soldiers attacked after preliminary bombardment and routed the defenders. A second line soon gave way also, and after an hour of fighting, in which the Americans lost five killed and forty-four wounded, Jaudenes hoisted the white flag of surrender.¹⁹

Merritt immediately sent a waiting detachment of Oregon Volunteers into the city to guard public buildings and to disarm Spanish soldiers. The detachment hoisted the American flag on the walls as Greene's and MacArthur's troops rushed around the "old city" and into the surrounding suburbs to interpose between the city and the Filipino siege lines. They were generally successful, although some Insurgent units rushed into the suburbs as the Americans attacked. By night-fall Merritt's men occupied a semi-circular line around Manila, surrounded by Filipinos who were angry but too confused by events to attack the Americans.²⁰

Jaudenes signed formal articles of capitulation the following day, August 14, but unknown to any of the combatants, Spain, after sueing for peace in mid-July, had signed a protocol enjoining a cease-fire on all fronts. McKinley cabled the news to Merritt and Dewey on August 12, the day before the Battle of Manila, but since the cable between Hong Kong and Manila was unrepaired, the news did not reach them until August 16. The battle had been unnecessary since Spain agreed to American occupation of the city and bay of Manila. The future of the Philippines would be decided at a formal peace conference in Paris.²¹

Merritt quickly brought order out of the chaos within Manila. He distributed previously printed proclamations, in English, Spanish, and Tagalog, that assured the Spaniards and Filipinos of the Americans' peaceful intentions and that inaugurated military government for Manila and its suburbs. With this action Merritt became Military Governor of Manila and came ashore to occupy the luxurious Secretary's Palace as his headquarters. Merritt issued general orders to his forces praising their combat success and enjoining good behavior and reminding them that they had not come as "despoilers and oppressors, but simply as the instruments of a strong, free government whose purposes are beneficent and which has declared itself in this war, the champion of those oppressed by Spanish mis-rule."²²

Merritt also got the men into better quarters than their pup tents, raised on bamboo platforms, provided. The

American soldiers occupied former Spanish barracks, public buildings, and the extensive city warehouses, which were generally empty due to the preceding isolation of Manila by the Insurgents and by Dewey. He appointed MacArthur provost-martial of Manila, and city government quickly stabilized.

Merritt was sixty-two years old during his tenure as Military Governor and quite dignified in appearance and manner. A California Volunteer of his expedition described Merritt's life-style and the troops' feelings about their commander:

General Merritt went by today in regal splendor. He was in a coach of the style of the middle ages, with liveried postilions. Grandmother Merritt has a profound regard for such undemocratic conveyances, think we.²³

Regardless of such sentiments, Merritt's troops were fortunate that their commander had managed the campaign so well. With their partial tropical uniforms, good shelter, and adequate food, they were much better off than the soldiers of the various Caribbean campaigns. Merritt's men experienced a very low rate of sickness, and deaths from combat were minimal due to the pre-planned Spanish surrender. With his objective so easily achieved, Merritt had reason to be proud of his expedition leadership. President McKinley was pleased with the performance of Merritt and the Eighth Corps and wired his sincere thanks and congratulations on August 21.²⁴

Merritt exchanged letters with Aguinaldo in mid-August in which the Insurgent leader recognized Merritt's authority in Manila and agreed to withdraw slightly from the

Americans' front. Merritt believed there was some reason for concern over the Insurgents' future behavior, but he thought the leaders would be able to prevent serious disturbances "as they are sufficiently intelligent and educated to know that to antagonize the United States would be to destroy their only chance of future political improvement." Merritt was too optimistic, but by late August he felt the war was over.²⁵

Merritt's tenure as Military Governor was short-lived. He was, for some reason, anxious to return to the United States; he wrote the Adjutant General soon after the Battle of Manila, requesting early relief. Shortly thereafter he received notice from Washington that the peace conference at Paris would commence on October 1, and requesting that he recommend some officer who was familiar with conditions in the Philippines to attend the conference as military advisor. Merritt naturally recommended himself. The President approved his recommendation and ordered Merritt to Paris. On August 28, Merritt thanked McKinley for the "highly satisfactory order" and turned over command of the Department of the Pacific and the Eighth Corps to General Otis. Two days later, Merritt boarded the steamship China, enroute to Paris by way of Suez.²⁶

President McKinley's delegates to the Paris Peace Conference were charged with determining the status of Cuba and the Philippine Islands. McKinley favored the idea of American expansion into the Pacific for commercial and

military reasons, and he appointed a commission whose majority agreed with his views. The extent of expansion, especially as it applied to the Philippines, was still undecided, however, when talks with Spanish delegates opened on October 1. The American commissioners awaited Merritt's arrival to begin serious negotiations concerning Pacific territories since he had first-hand knowledge of the desirability of the Philippines as an American colony and was, in addition, bringing Dewey's assessment of the same subject.²⁷

Merritt arrived in Paris on October 3, and checked into the L'Athenee Hotel. There he met informally with delegates, and then, during the following weeks, he attended their formal sessions. Both expansionist and anti-expansionist commissioners were interested in his views and testimony on the Philippines. Merritt claimed that the Filipinos were "a kindly, courteous, grateful, tractable people, eager for United States protection or for annexation," but that there was much dissatisfaction with large land holdings and with political interference by the Catholic Church. He recommended that the "friars" be "driven out of the country." Merritt's favorable impression of the Filipinos surprised many of the delegates. Just how Merritt formed such an impression is unclear since he had met very few Filipinos at Manila, and those with whom he corresponded were not eager for either protection or annexation. Merritt gave further testimony that native troops could be raised on Luzon to defend the Island and that the country would generate sufficient revenue to pay

for the expenses of administration.²⁸

Merritt did not specifically recommend retention of the entire archipelago, although he was opposed to relinquishing any conquests and considered that the Island of Luzon had been conquered along with Manila, its controlling city. The Filipino Insurgents installed a committee in London to protest American take-over and to discredit Merritt's testimony. Their chairman, Francisco Madrigal, wrote to McKinley and to the American delegates, objecting to paternalistic expressions of "this decrepit man" and to his "insulting" descriptions of the assistance rendered by his allies before Manila. Their anger and disappointment were understandable, but Merritt had not insulted their efforts; he simply kept the Insurgent forces from sharing in the victory, exactly as he was instructed to do by McKinley.²⁹

Admiral Dewey's recommendations disappointed the American delegates greatly. His public stature and naval expertise made his opinion exceptionally valuable. The commissioners needed to know whether he favored retention of only a coaling station, a part of the archipelago, or the entire Philippines group. His dispatch was evasive on the point, and the commissioners attempted, during the course of the peace conference, to sound him out more fully by cable. Merritt confided to Whitelaw Reid, one of the expansionist delegates, that Dewey was interested in being a presidential candidate in the 1900 elections and had no intention of declaring himself on such a controversial subject as colonial

expansion without being forced to do so.³⁰

Merritt remained, with his staff, at the call of the American delegation throughout October and November, advising them on technical matters such as removal or retention of Spanish field and coastal artillery batteries. Merritt's main interest was not directed toward the peace convention during October, however, and his activities probably explain his desire to be relieved from the Manila command. Laura Williams came to London to meet Merritt, and there, on October 24, they were married. Apparently Laura did not agree with the Filipinos' description of Merritt as a "descrepit man." Merritt was then sixty-two years of age, but he was vigorous and in fine health. Laura was twenty-seven, wealthy, vivacious and pretty, and fond of travel. A newspaper described her as being "well known in many of the larger American cities, as well as in the summer resorts both here and abroad."³¹

The Merritts' honeymoon in London was marred by Laura's illness. She contracted Typhoid fever in early November, and Merritt stayed there with her. By mid-month, Laura was starting to improve slowly, and Merritt reported satisfactory progress to the Secretary of War and to the Adjutant General, both close friends who had inquired. By early December Laura had nearly recovered and could sit up. Merritt received instructions to return to Washington as soon as he was released by the peace commissioners, and after obtaining that release and travel expenses, he and Laura sailed for New York City, where they arrived and took up residence at

the Waldorf on December 19.³²

For Merritt, the Spanish-American War was over, but serious fighting in the Philippines had not even started. Hostilities broke out the following February between American and Filipino forces on Luzon and started a vicious guerrilla war that lasted until 1902. America's betrayal of Filipino hopes for independence was not, in retrospect, one of its finest hours. At the time, however, there was great popular support for overseas expansion, and the Army was one of the tools of expansion. Merritt's Philippine expedition was a model of professional management, considering the state of American military science. His victory, being almost bloodless, seemed less heroic than those of the bungled Caribbean campaigns, but it was at least as significant. Merritt was the most successful major general during the Spanish-American War, and he was one of the few to emerge afterwards with his professional reputation enhanced.

The Philippine campaign was Merritt's last field command, but he had one last role to play as a result of the Spanish-American War. Criticism of the excessively high rate of sickness, the number of deaths due to sickness, and of the generally inept handling of Caribbean operations, led to a search for scapegoats. Both Miles, as Commanding General, and Secretary of War Russell Alger were blamed and in turn blamed each other. Miles also attempted to deflect a good deal of criticism onto the Army's Commissary General, Charles P. Eagen. Miles charged Eagan with corruption and neglect of

duty in supplying unsatisfactory and allegedly poisonous food to the soldiers.³³

In countering Miles' charges, Eagan was incautious enough to publicly attack Miles as a liar. In the face of this public insubordination, Alger, who loathed Miles, was forced to arrange Eagan's court-martial. Merritt came down to Washington to act as president of the court. In February 1899, Eagan was found guilty of conduct unbecoming an officer and conduct prejudicial to good order and discipline, but the court recommended leniency, and Eagan was suspended until his retirement. Two months later a civilian investigating committee found Miles deficient in judgment concerning food supply, and the Secretary of War urged President McKinley to remove Miles from command. McKinley refused to make Miles a martyr and simply ignored him. The Secretary was scarcely more effective than Miles, and McKinley pressured him into resigning in August 1899. Alger's replacement as Secretary of War was Elihu Root, the most effective incumbent for many years and the father of twentieth century Army reform.³⁴

After his court-martial duties, Merritt resumed command of the Department of the East, and he and Laura moved to Governor's Island for less than a year. With retirement mandatory at age sixty-four, Merritt was blocked from ever attaining the top Army command. Miles was younger than Merritt, and barring Miles' death or removal from command, Merritt would be forced to retire before Miles. Some hope flickered as McKinley considered removing Miles but died with

his refusal to do so. It was a severe disappointment to Merritt after such a long and successful Army career.

Merritt's duties within the department were minimal. He prepared Regular regiments for duty in the newly-kindled Philippine Insurrection and forwarded them as replacements for Volunteer units that had accompanied him to Manila a year earlier. Professional activities still attracted Merritt, and he became senior vice-president of the Military Service Institution, presiding over its meetings at New York City. He and Laura were socially active, not only with her New York friends, but with President and Mrs. McKinley and other Washington friends.³⁵

Merritt was in demand as a civic club guest and speaker, although he was not a good orator and disliked any extensive public speaking. At one dinner in early 1900, he claimed that "whenever I make a speech, I generally succeed in saying something foolish and then I'm generally quoted wrong in the newspapers." He went ahead, anyhow, to speak on the need for an enlarged modern Army, a controversial topic in postwar military and political circles. He was criticized by opponents of such expansion and was reported to the Adjutant General. However, it is unlikely that the criticism bothered Merritt greatly in view of his approaching retirement.³⁶

Before retiring, Merritt also used his influence to help his nephew, William Eaton Merritt, of Springfield, Illinois, secure appointment to West Point. His intervention

was successful, and Cadet Merritt graduated in 1905.³⁷

By early 1900, Merritt's friends started concerted drives to secure for him some special recognition of his long and successful career. Merritt very much desired promotion to the rank of lieutenant general upon his retirement. Several friends wrote the President in order to secure the promotion for Merritt. James Hill, President of the Great Northern Railroad, and an admirer of Merritt since the days of the 1894 railroad strikes, was especially insistent. That grade had been abolished by law, however, and McKinley had no authority to retire officers at higher ranks than they held at the time of retirement. Except for recommending that Congress pass enabling legislation to permit such retirement promotions, the President was unable to help. Merritt refused to go to Washington to lobby for the promotion which he considered he thoroughly deserved, and nothing came of his friends' solicitations.³⁸

Daniel Butterfield, former chief-of-staff of the Army of the Potomac, headed an extensive campaign to secure the Medal of Honor for Merritt, for gallantry at the Battle of Brandy Station during the Civil War. Retroactive presentation of this award was not unusual, and Butterfield presented a detailed résumé of Merritt's actions during that battle and attached memorials and testimony from many of Merritt's former cavalymen and fellow officers. Butterfield made repeated efforts to secure approval from the Secretary of War, but he was unsuccessful.³⁹

With these last disappointments, Merritt decided to apply for a leave of absence to run to his official retirement date, his sixty-fourth birthday, June 16, 1900. He and Laura planned to travel through Europe, and his forty-five-year career ended without special fanfare as Merritt relinquished command of the Department of the East and left for a three-month vacation. The Merritts were back in the United States by September for the wedding of General Grant's granddaughter. Merritt attended in full-dress uniform by request since Julia Grant's new husband was an officer of the Russian Guards Cavalry. It was the first of many social events in which Merritt participated during the first years of his ten-year retirement.⁴⁰

The Merritts lived in Washington, D.C., after their return from Europe. Their home at 1622 Rhode Island Avenue was the scene of many reunions with old Army friends and social acquaintances. They visited New York City often, and there they were tendered a very enjoyable banquet, again by Army friends, in the spring of 1901.⁴¹

Merritt retained an active interest in Army affairs after retirement. After having been the first president of the United States Cavalry Association in 1887, he once again served in that capacity during 1902 and helped to revitalize the association's Journal. Merritt also maintained his interest and participation in the Military Service Institution, attending meetings and commenting in its Journal on occasion.⁴²

One of the necessary reforms Elihu Root intended to incorporate into the Army command structure was the institution of a general staff system to replace the long-outmoded commanding general-department head system that had been preserved from before the Civil War. Progressive military leaders had long supported such a change, and to Root the inept Spanish-American War performance clearly indicated the need for this modernization. Miles opposed the change, but he was scheduled for retirement in 1903. Root contacted both Merritt and Schofield and arranged for them to testify before the congressional committee considering the bill to create a general staff. Merritt testified in favor of the bill in April 1902, as did Schofield. After passage, the new system went into effect a week after Miles' retirement and formed the basis of the twentieth century Army command structure.⁴³

Although the Merritts traveled to Europe two more times during the decade, Wesley's interests turned more and more toward his family. His favorite sister, Emily O. Chance, lived with her daughter and grandchildren, the Hobbses, in a spacious home at Mount Vernon, Illinois. Merritt was a grandfather figure to the young Hobbs children and visited them often. They called him "Uncle Wesley" and visited him occasionally in Washington. On one such visit, Merritt took his grandniece, Neone Hobbs, and grandnephew, Gordon Chance, to Buffalo Bill's Wild West Show, which was playing in Washington at the time. Cody was delighted to see the old commander of the Fifth Cavalry again and introduced him to the crowd, then

drove the children around the arena on top of his stagecoach, for the ride of their lives.⁴⁴

After his seventieth birthday in 1906, Merritt's health began to decline, and although he maintained a dignified and impressive look and demeanor, he grew increasingly senile. On visits to Illinois, he was accompanied by his nurse, a Miss Hall, who was devoted to him and remained with him at the Merritt home in Washington and at various spas in Virginia, where Merritt sought an improvement in his health.⁴⁵

At one of these resorts, Natural Bridge, Virginia, on December 3, 1910, "this magnificent soldier" lost his last battle. Merritt succumbed to arterio sclerosis at age seventy-four. He had expressed a desire to be buried beside his first wife, Caroline, at West Point, and Laura made the necessary arrangements. Messages of sympathy poured into her Washington home from soldiers and business and social friends. Robert Lincoln, the former Secretary of War, sent a personal railroad car to St. Louis for the use of Merritt's family in traveling to West Point. Wesley's brother, Thomas Emmet, and sister, Emily, along with his grandniece, Neone Hobbs, and other family members were detained by a blizzard and reached West Point late on December 6 for the funeral. There Laura Merritt and her mother, Mrs. Norman Williams, and Eben Swift, Merritt's friend and former aide, joined them in attending the impressive burial ceremony held by lantern-light.⁴⁶

Laura, although she became part of the Merritt family late in Wesley's life, was devoted not only to her husband,

but to his family as well. She provided an impressive, black marble monument for the graves of Wesley and Caroline Merritt at West Point and continued to help Wesley's brothers and relatives financially whenever they needed assistance thereafter. Laura Merritt also contributed \$10,000 in Wesley's memory to a national fund to provide leisure-time activities for enlisted men--an early-day U.S.O. Laura remarried in 1924, again to an Army officer, Wilbur Wilder.⁴⁷

Merritt left little tangible legacy to his family. His sister, Emily, kept his sword, sash, and belt as mementos, and his modest real estate holdings in St. Louis were divided among surviving brothers and sister and nieces and nephews. His legacy to the Army, however, was great.⁴⁸

FOOTNOTES

Chapter 15

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25. Merritt Report, 45; Correspondence, 760, 813-27.
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29. Reid Diary, 54, 191; Madrigal to McKinley, n.d., ACP, NA.
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31. Ibid., 177-79; Undated picture of Laura Williams and engagement announcement, copy in author's collection; Pension Records, Wesley Merritt, NA.
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41. Hein, Memories of Long Ago, 279.

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45. Swope Interview, August 11, 1974; Diary of Emily O. Chance, Entry for Dec. 24, 1910, Swope Collection, Northbrook, Illinois.

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CONCLUSION

Merritt's career differed significantly from those of his fellow officers of the late nineteenth century. A forty-five year career of continuous service was not unknown, but it was rare. Even more unusual was the fact that Merritt's long career included three of the country's major wars--the Civil War, the Indian Wars, and the Spanish-American War. Miles and Shafter were the only other officers who could claim similar service. The fact that Merritt served as major general in the first and last wars of his career meant that he had the opportunity of contributing significantly to the prosecution and resolution of those wars and that he could apply extensive Civil War experience to problems encountered during intervening years of service.

Merritt's Civil War career was unusual for its rapid promotion and unrelieved success. His early staff duties prepared him for the administrative responsibilities incident to later high command. Even though he was modest in proclaiming his own abilities, Merritt never hesitated to seize an opportunity to display his leadership talents in battle. He was considered by other eastern cavalry officers to be one of the most intelligent leaders in the Cavalry Corps, and he was able to consistently balance conflicting demands for impetuosity and prudence to produce cavalry victories such as those

at Cold Harbor and Winchester.

Merritt emerged from the Civil War as one of its most renowned Union cavalymen. As Custer's commander, he gave that officer every possible opportunity for spectacular action and praised Custer's successes without reservation. As Custer's rival, Merritt engaged in no juvenile attempts to detract from Custer's reputation in order to enhance his own. As a result, Custer was much better known to the nation as a whole than was Merritt, although Sheridan considered Merritt his ablest and most reliable subordinate. James H. Wilson emerged from the war with an excellent reputation as a horseman, but he did not remain long in the postwar Army; so a rigorous comparison of his and Merritt's careers is not possible. Mackenzie's Civil War career was spectacular, but considerably shorter than Merritt's in high command. Nevertheless, Mackenzie impressed Grant deeply, and Grant's patronage later promoted Mackenzie's fortunes. Other young generals, including Emory Upton and Nelson A. Miles, made their reputations as infantry leaders, and although they were Merritt's contemporaries, he had not served with them; so their relative abilities are not directly comparable.

That he was so highly regarded by Sheridan, one of the war's most demanding commanders, argues strongly for Merritt's pre-eminence among these renowned young Federal officers. If Confederates are included, Fitzhugh Lee would certainly be added to the list of successful young cavalymen who survived the war. Lee and Merritt shared many personal

and professional characteristics. Both were zealous in caring for and subsisting their troopers, to the extent such supply was possible, and their styles of cavalry fighting were remarkably similar. The comparison emerged intact from the Spanish-American War. Not only was Merritt the most successful major general during that conflict, but Fitzhugh Lee, readmitted to the Army mainly for political reasons, demonstrated that he had lost none of his military competence during thirty-five years of civilian life.

Although denied high rank in the postwar Army by congressional prejudice against Regular officers, Merritt's Indian Wars career was marked by years of competent but unspectacular service in Texas, followed by notable action on the northern plains. Along with Grierson, Merritt was probably more responsible than any other officer for success of the Army's experiment in training uneducated and unskilled Negroes as efficient cavalrymen. He combined understanding and interest in their welfare with Regular discipline and brought his Black troopers to the point where Hatch could lead them toward one of the finest reputations in the Army.

By the early 1880's, Merritt was probably the most experienced cavalry leader in the Army in terms of years of high-ranking service in that arm. Many of Merritt's contemporaries were content to resist or ignore further change after conclusion of the Indian Wars and rested on honors won during the preceding two decades. Both Sheridan and Miles fell into this category. While Sheridan competently

administered his increasingly responsible commands and undoubtedly boosted Merritt's career, he looked nostalgically backward rather than to the future. Similarly, Miles, once he attained high command, contributed little or nothing to Army progress, and in addition he lacked Sheridan's administrative abilities. A few officers, however, perceived the need to transform the Army into a modern institution. Merritt was one of these few, and he was one of a more select group that actually conceived and implemented change.

As Superintendent at West Point, Merritt made minor curriculum changes to broaden the cadets' interests, but he was mainly remembered there as a strict disciplinarian. In this Merritt was probably regressive since there is no indication that graduates who experienced his discipline performed any differently than did others who studied under less-severe regimes. John J. Pershing was a cadet under Merritt, but many officers who were later prominent with Pershing in the Spanish-American War and the First World War, Eben Swift and Hugh Scott among them, graduated under different circumstances and performed well during long careers.

Merritt made his most significant contributions to Army professionalism and modernization after leaving West Point. Emory Upton proposed organizational changes that essentially subordinated Volunteer and National Guard interests to a strengthened Regular Army. In the 1880's and 1890's, with no potential foreign enemies, the nation, and Congress, would not support such a proposal. Merritt was a practical

progressive and concentrated on changes the Army could and should make internally to modernize itself. In this his thinking was very much like Schofield's, and the two officers worked harmoniously during the latter's tenure as Commanding General.

Merritt contributed a relatively large number of articles to professional journals, most of which dealt with Army modernization. He helped found the United States Cavalry Association and its journal and supported both long after his own retirement. Upon attaining departmental command, he not only supervised the opening of Oklahoma Territory, he conceived, organized and commanded the first modern "war game" exercise ever conducted by the U.S. Army.

Merritt was innovative in his writings also. While many officers contributed reminiscences and memoirs to the military literature of the late nineteenth century, Merritt was more creative and co-authored The Armies of Today, which served to place the U.S. Army into perspective within the western military world and to indicate reforms needed to make the American Army the equal of any within that world. He was not able to introduce all the reforms he advocated, but during the last fifteen years of the century, no officer contributed more to the transition from frontier police force to modern Army than Wesley Merritt.

Merritt was as successful in his last war as in his first. While his contemporaries, Miles and Shafter, performed poorly at best, Merritt's strong leadership of the Philippine

campaign was a model of thoughtful preparation and careful execution. Merritt commanded the first American expeditionary force to fight on the far side of the globe, isolated from any possibility of rapid reinforcement, and in an environment never before encountered by American troops. At the age of sixty-two, he was quite capable of solving the new and challenging problems of transportation, logistics, and diplomacy arising from overseas warfare. His performance contrasted sharply with that of other senior officers, and Merritt ended his active career on the same note of success that characterized his first major leadership roles. He was the most successful major general of the Spanish-American War.

If Merritt's career was unique in its length, progressiveness, and success, Merritt himself was equally atypical. His heady Civil War promotions failed to change his natural reserve. Merritt's reports praised his subordinates lavishly and modestly reported his own actions. This habit, cultivated during the Civil War, was retained throughout his life. Dignified and quiet by nature, Merritt appeared aloof and sometimes cold in his official capacities, but he was companionable and affable with his few close friends. Merritt never sought publicity for its own sake, as Custer did, or for professional advancement, as Miles consistently did. As a result, at any particular stage of his career, Merritt was often little known outside the Army.

Merritt was, however, ambitious within the Army. He took no undue advantage of his close relationship with

Sheridan, and their friendship was genuine; Merritt was perfectly willing, however, to benefit from Sheridan's position and patronage. An officer of lesser ability could reasonably be described as Sheridan's "crony" or "stooge." Merritt, however, combined such extraordinary capacity with Sheridan's patronage that his accomplishments and promotions were obviously attributable to his own abilities.

Merritt's ambition and ability finally brought him to the position of second-ranking officer in the U.S. Army, behind a younger, but much less capable man, Nelson A. Miles. The congressional action that placed many Civil War Volunteer officers ahead of capable Regular officers in the postwar reorganization finally denied Merritt the opportunity of displaying his abilities in command of the Army.

But even without reaching top command, Merritt's achievements and personality stand out from his contemporaries. His personal demeanor and his consistent success make his career seem almost too good to be true. Nevertheless, Eben Swift's observation that Merritt never missed an opportunity or made a mistake comes astoundingly near the truth and is even more impressive when the length of Merritt's career and the changes it underwent are considered. Few indeed could look back on a life as active, successful, and significant as Wesley Merritt's.

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CURRICULUM VITAE

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In 1969, Alberts resigned from Sandia Laboratory to pursue a graduate program in History at the University of New Mexico. His M.A. in U.S. History was awarded in 1972, and his Ph.D. followed in 1975. Alberts' major doctoral field was the American West, and he had additional study fields in Military History, European History, and Early American History. During his graduate studies, he served as graduate teaching assistant and participated in Phi Alpha Theta activities, reading professional papers at several conferences. Dr. Alberts holds a secondary teaching certificate in addition to his teaching experience in the U.S. Navy and at Sandia Laboratory and the University of New Mexico.