

Montevallo Historical Society

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WHEN THE YANKEES CAME A CALLIN'

Submitted by Martin Everse

Montevallo knew they were coming – a looming apocalypse of 9,000 blue-clad horsemen. From the banks of the Tennessee River, Union General James H. Wilson's army had smashed through the Alabama countryside for a week and by the evening of March 29, 1865 had pitched camp along the Cahaba, 10 miles from Montevallo. The following day thick black clouds of smoke to the north and sporadic gunfire harkened their arrival. Montevallo's main event in the American Civil War was at hand.

Captain Charles Hinricks of the 10th Missouri Cavalry scribbled in his diary, "The skirmishing in front was at times pretty brisk. The enemy had fortified the road at places with fence rails from behind which they fired. Drove them without trouble out of a little town called Mount Valley [Montevallo] and encamped." Another Yankee trooper, E. N. Gilpin, wrote, "General Upton, with a detachment and two pieces of artillery, marched rapidly over a rough and broken country toward Montevallo. Eight miles from town our advance encountered the Confederates under General Roddey, fought them into town, and charged them out. Many citizens went with them."

By 9 p.m. the Union troopers had bedded down for the night around the King House where General Emory Upton established his headquarters. Future Alabama historian Mary Gordon Duffee remembered, "I was in Montevallo when the invading army entered. About sunset rolling drums and prancing horses in a long column approached Montevallo. All night we waited, knowing a battle was imminent."

That night and the next few days the Union cavalymen didn't waste much time sleeping. They were hungry and so were their horses. Margaret Butler, a freedwoman, lost all her corn and flour to the ravenous soldiers. She did protest. "I told them I thought it was pretty hard to take the last bit of corn and flour I had, but they said they were obliged to have it." Edmund Moss, a slave, recalled losing his food. "They just come by droves and took off the flour, bacon, sugar, coffee, honey and molasses. They toted it off." At the Perry farm just north of town, "Mounted troopers dashed through the flower gardens decapitating chickens with sabers."

Not all Yankee soldiers were happy with the conduct of the army. Stephen Shipman, a major with a Wisconsin regiment, wrote on the 30th, "I am tonight disgusted with things in this army. The attaches of Head Quarters are permitted to plunder and pillage entirely too much. I am ashamed of it." He was impressed with Montevallo, however. "Here are a fine college building, some five churches and some good looking women and contrary to the prevailing fashion were dressed well."

The morning of March 31st, General Upton sent an Ohio regiment east to destroy the Shelby Iron Works and the 10th Missouri Cavalry southwest to wreck the Bibb Iron Works at Brierfield. As the Missourians returned to town from their foray about noon, the Confederates followed them and attacked. Hinricks related the scene. "We went back to Monte Valley, unsaddled & just as I fixed to take a sweet nap, our pickets 300 strong were driven in. The enemy was bold & thought we were retreating. The unavoidable boots & saddles were again sounded & 10 minutes afterwards, the noses of the Gents of the Confederacy were again turned towards their dear, dear south. About ½ mile from our picket post we found the first dead Reb. The road was strown with guns & sabers & accoutrements of every description."



UNION GENERAL EMORY UPTON

William Gray of the 3rd Iowa was in on the chase. "Well, at 12 o'clock we started for the Rebs. They could not stand our guns that was loaded all the time. Our gun is the Spencer carbine and we load it at the breech with seven balls, then when we want to shoot we throw a lever that throws the ball into the barrel. It is done very quick. This we call 'pumping thunder at the Rebs' or so they thought.

An Indiana newspaper summed up the battle. "At Montevallo – Here the enemy, about 1,000 strong, attacked Gen Upton's advance, and to use an expression, 'got used up,' losing about 60 men; Upton lost 11.

The next day the Yankee cavalry regiments were still passing through Montevallo. George Kryder of the 3rd Ohio remarked, "Had reveille at 4 o'clock, marched at daylight 9 miles to Montevallo, a nice town. Went through about 9 o'clock, came to where they had a skirmish. Seen three dead rebs and lots of [dead] horses." Another Ohioan "saw several dead rebels and horses, fires burning in the woods and some of the dead rebels burnt."

As the invading army continued on toward Selma, Mary Gordon Duffee, with her friend Emmie Bailey, organized a band of women and children to search for wounded and dying southerners. She did not describe what they found.