

Chapter XI

The Battle Of Sutherland Hill

On Thursday, September 18, 1862, Lt. Col. Robert **Martin**, from Muhlenberg County, along with several hundred Confederate soldiers, left Slaughtersville for Owensboro. They moved to Ashbyburg, which is a small town on Green River some six miles from Calhoun. They then began their tedious process of crossing Green River. Two men crossed over in a small boat and stretched a rope across to the other side of the river. They then drew the boat back and forth until all of the men and their supplies were moved to the other side. Some of the horses swam the river as did some of the men.

They entered Daviess County under the cover of darkness and camped three miles from town. The Owensboro Monitor reported **Martin's** army was approximately 850 strong, however, Sgt. James **Munday** said it was about half that size; it was probably somewhere in between. The purpose of this mission was to capture Owensboro and force the surrender of Camp Miller at the Fairgrounds.

Shortly after dawn on Friday, September 19th, Lt. Col. **Martin** would divide his army into three groups. Captain Sam **Taylor** and his company of men would march in a southwest direction to a woods west of the Fairgrounds. Captain Clay **Merriweather's** company would hide in the cover of a cornfield located on the road leading from the Fairgrounds to town, while Major Joseph **Scobee**, a Methodist minister, would command and lead the largest group into Owensboro.

When Major **Scobee** and his men arrived in town, the Owensboro Monitor reported there was much jubilation among those who sympathized with the Confederate Cause. There was cheering, flag waving and food was given to the soldiers. One lady, believed to have recognized Major **Scobee**, shouted, "Thank God, my savior has come!"

Much of this celebrating soon turned to anger when some of the Confederates began firing their weapons, barely missing some of the locals and looting merchants' stores. One merchant, known only as Mr. **Littell**, had all

his saddles and bridles taken. All the gun powder they could find was also confiscated, even that which was stored at the jail. Others began stealing everything that wasn't nailed down until they were restrained by some of their officers. **Scobee** then sent word to Lt. Col. Gabriel **Netter** at Camp Miller, under a flag of truce, to surrender unconditionally. **Netter** was said to have politely refused, turning instead to his men and in a firm voice, replying, "Never till the last man of us lies low in the dust." He then began preparing his young and raw recruits for a counter-attack. **Netter** was a captain in the 26th Kentucky Infantry and served with distinction in that regiment at Shiloh. He had only recently been promoted to Lt. Col. and given the responsibility of organizing the 15th Kentucky Cavalry at the Fairgrounds. His regiment, during this early time period, was less than half strength and was anything but combat ready. A decision, however, had to be made and he believed his only choice was to confront the enemy head on.

Sgt. James **Munday** of Capt. **Merriweather's** 10th Kentucky Cavalry, C.S.A., was one of those hiding in the cornfield off the road leading into town. Quoting from **Munday's** report, "They took up their position and anxiously awaited the beginning of a general attack on the enemy. The suspense did not last for long for soon a group of enemy soldiers came charging down the road. When they got in range we opened fire and several of those in front fell. One of these was Lt. Col. **Netter**, himself, who was shot with a squirrel rifle, fired by Private Jim **Hall**. **Netter** died within seconds after being hit and **Hall** was killed, as well, when **Netter's** men returned fire." **Munday** said the Federals began charging through the cornfield amid shouts and threats of their officers and there was so much shooting that broken stalks of corn caused by balls and bullets from their rifles and muskets were everywhere. In this initial skirmish, it was reported there were seven Union soldiers killed and eleven Confederates.

After Lt. Col. **Netter** had been killed, one brave soul by the name of Hugh **Hale** was said to have swum the Ohio River, contacting Col. J.W. **Crooks** of the 4th Indiana Home Guards at Rockport. **Hale** was said to have told **Crooks** that Owensboro was under siege by Confederate forces and unless help was forthcoming, all would be lost.

Col. **Crooks** immediately began organizing his Home Guard which was composed of farmers, merchants and other area citizens. They came with their personal firearms which included percussion single-shot muzzle loading squirrel rifles, percussion hand guns, muzzle loading double barrel shotguns and perhaps even included some older, outdated flintlocks. There were approximately 300 of these civilian citizens of **Crooks'** Home Guard who joined him on his journey to Owensboro. Lt. Col. C.A. **Wood**, of the 1st Indiana Cavalry camped thirty miles to the north, was also notified of the desperate situation in Daviess County.

When Major **Scobee** was told the Union Army had reinforcements coming, he decided against a military confrontation at that time and by 1:00PM, left town, heading south with his troops. They marched about six miles before stopping to camp for the night. Sgt. **Munday** said that when they took rest it was very necessary to both man and beast. Late that night, he feasted on a small but welcome piece of bread and bacon. This, he stated, was the first he had to eat since noon the day before.

Col. **Crooks** and his civilian army arrived in town within a matter of hours and later that evening, Lt. Col. **Wood** also arrived with his cavalry. With Col. **Netter** now deceased, **Wood** was the ranking officer so he took charge of the Union forces. After some discussion it was decided they should pursue the Confederates, try and locate their overnight camp and force them, if possible, out of the county. **Wood** and his Federals marched most of the night, locating the Rebs early the next morning on a farm near Sutherland. The Union soldiers then began the offensive when Major **Townes** and several members of his cavalry unit charged up one of the lanes and began firing at the Rebs. The Confederates returned fire and the Battle of Sutherland Hill (later known as The Battle of Panther Creek) had begun. When the shooting began, some of the horses became scared and threw their riders to the ground. Others were said to have run in all directions. Col. **Wood** shouted out, "Boys, wheel about that cannon facing the enemy." He lighted his cigar and touched off the first round. The first and second rounds were loaded with canister shot and the third with a solid cannon ball. On the third firing, the combination of the heavy ball and the way it was loaded broke off the cannon's flange and

rendered it useless. The Confederates had no solid cannon balls for their four pounder so they loaded it with musket balls. **Munday** said, "While it blew clouds of minie balls over our heads with a roar each time pleasing, it was not effective."

When Col. **Wood** and John **Hicks** were marching up one of the hills, a rifle shot caused **Wood** to fall to the ground. **Hicks** thought he had been killed and remarked to others that he had; **Wood** then jumped up and called out, "No I ain't, kill that damn rebel!"

The Confederates were seasoned veterans, while most of the Federal soldiers had never before fired their weapons in anger. The Union soldiers, however, had one major advantage and that was in their weaponry. The Confederates were using a variety of muzzle loading firearms while some of the Federal cavalry were armed with the new 16 shot Henry repeating rifles. The Henry used a 44 caliber rim fire cartridge and could be fired 16 times in less than a minute. A soldier armed with a Henry had a tremendous advantage over an enemy armed with a single shot muzzle loader. The Rebs would later call it the "Gun you could load on Sunday and shoot all week."

In a letter dated March 3, 1863, R. K. **Williams** and W. W. **Gardner**, of Mayfield, Kentucky, wrote to the New Haven Arms Company praising the Henry rifle. While their letter is slightly exaggerated and believed somewhat inaccurate, here is the text of their statement:

The Henry Rifle is regarded in Kentucky, as the most effective weapon known, and some astonishing things have been accomplished with it; among these we mention one. Whilst the gallant Col. **Netter** was raising his Regiment of Kentucky Volunteers at Owensboro, Kentucky, he sent 15 of his men armed with this rifle on a scout. These men were attacked by 240 Rebel soldiers in an open lane, where there was no timber for shelter and 15 Union soldiers armed with the Henry successfully repulsed and drove from the field the 240 assailants. This unparalleled feat not having been accomplished by any other arm known to us.

(signed) Respectfully
R. K. **Williams**
W. W. **Gardner**

Before the shooting had subsided, Lt. Col. **Martin** and his men left their dead comrades and fled the battlefield. They crossed the Green River and camped at Ashbyburg, "as if in perfect security."

The Owensboro Monitor reported 36 Confederate dead and an estimated 70 wounded. The Union was said to have had 3 killed and 35 wounded.

The Confederate account describing the Battle of Sutherland Hill was somewhat different from that reported by the Owensboro Monitor and its citizens. They stated these forces were not guerillas but regular army. They committed no robberies in Owensboro or in the county anywhere, that they were only about 100 and retreated simply because they ran out of ammunition. They listed but one or two killed and very few wounded.

After the death of Lt. Col. **Netter**, **Q. L. Shanks** of Cloverport, on October 9th, 1862, was promoted to Colonel and his forces were consolidated with the 15th Cavalry in Owensboro. On October 12th, **Shanks** would move his camp to the Barrett farm at Bon Harbor Hills and it would be named Camp James F. Robinson. On December 12, 1862, **Shanks** would break camp and move the regiment to Munfordville, Kentucky.

Chapter XII

Burning, Looting And Killing

There were approximately 100,000 Kentuckians who enlisted in the Union Army, but less than half that amount served in the Confederacy. Some would question why this was, when the loyalties of Kentuckians were believed to be almost equally divided between the two sides. As stated earlier, from April, 1862, until the end of the war, there were no permanent Confederate camps in Kentucky. Those wanting to join the Confederate Army after that time would usually have to travel south to enlist and during this period in our history, this would have been difficult, as well as dangerous. Many of those who were sympathetic

to the Confederate Cause for this reason were prime candidates for those guerilla regiments headed by such notorious outlaws as **William Quantrill**, **William Davison**, **Sue Munday**, **Jake Bennett**, **Henry Magruder** and many others. The North and South were both engaged in guerilla warfare. The original purpose of these small but well trained mobile cavalry units was to infiltrate behind enemy lines and disrupt the enemy's communication systems and supply lines. They would destroy bridges, railroads, ammunition warehouses and anything else militarily that would help disrupt, inconvenience or damage their opponent's ability to make war. All this is understandable and certainly was and is good military policy. Many of these renegade guerilla leaders, however, found it more profitable and much less dangerous to concentrate on civilian, rather than military, targets. Both sides in public criticized these outlaw guerilla renegades, but in private tended to ignore much of their criminal activities.

The Confederate Government in Richmond was even reluctant to call them guerillas. Acting Secretary of War, **Judah Benjamin** said, "Guerilla Companies are not recognized as part of the military organization of the Confederate States and cannot be authorized by this department." The Federal Government in Washington's position was "that any persons identified as a guerilla would be hung as outlaws". These were the official statements; unofficially, much of the burning, looting and terrorizing of the civilian population by these raiding parties and armies were often ignored by both sides.

1863 was a relatively quiet year for Daviess Countians and was, over all, probably the best of any year during the war for our local civilians and business community. Things began to heat up again, however, in late '63 and '64, as the outlaw gangs in the county became more prevalent and active.