

NEWSPAPER COVERAGE OF CAVALRY RAIDERS  
DURING THE AMERICAN CIVIL WAR

by

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## ABSTRACT

During the American Civil War, military actions took place across a vast distance, from southern Pennsylvania to the future state of New Mexico. While a majority of the war was fought in the Eastern Theater, essentially the region east of the Appalachian Mountains, the Western Theater, roughly stretching from the Appalachians to the Mississippi River, saw plenty of action as well. Unlike the Eastern Theater, which saw large armies of infantry repeatedly clash against each other, the Western Theater was more suited to long range cavalry operations. Between 1863 and 1865, several bodies of Union forces pushed into Alabama, doing their part to hinder the Confederate war effort in that state. At the same time, Confederate cavalry raiders were harassing northern troops in Mississippi and Tennessee, hampering their plans to end the rebellion. Southern cavalry forces even pushed into the North, bringing the war to the American Midwest. This research will not only attempt to tell the stories of the men who led these raids and who are oft overlooked in the war's historical narrative, but also fairly closely examine how newspapers of the time wrote about their campaigns, including the many different sets of facts received, unconfirmed rumors and discrepancies being widely reported, and the inability, many times, to see these raids in the larger picture of the war.

## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS AND SYMBOLS

AL/Ala.	Alabama
CA	California
CSS	Confederate States Ship
CT	Connecticut
GA/Ga.	Georgia
Gen.	General
IN/Ind.	Indiana
KY/Ky.	Kentucky
LA	Louisiana
MA	Massachusetts
MS	Mississippi
NC	North Carolina
NH	New Hampshire
OH	Ohio
PA	Pennsylvania
SC	South Carolina
TN/Tenn.	Tennessee

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## INTRODUCTION

He saw Professor Delorffe, the librarian, in earnest conversation with a Yankee officer. Later he learned that the librarian had been pleading to have the library and its treasury of books spared. General Croxton (he was only twenty-seven years old) replied that his orders were to burn the University, all of it, even the books.... The hidden cadet heard the order, "Fire the building!" and he watched in helpless anger as soldiers tossed lighted torches through the doors and windows of the library.<sup>1</sup>

-Kathryn Tucker Windham, "A Sampling of University Hauntings"

During the American Civil War, Union armies regularly pushed deep into the Confederacy, often launching raids far behind the front lines in an attempt to wreck the Confederate war machine and hopefully shorten the war. Some of these raids were attacks on the small number of railroads in the southern states, while others went after military targets such as supply depots, manufacturing centers, and training facilities for Confederate recruits. Like other states in the Deep South, Alabama was not immune to the Union raiders' attacks. Northern forces carried out at least four major raids in the state, leaving portions of Alabama heavily damaged in their wake. The leaders of these forces included Colonel Abel D. Streight, who sought to wreck the railroad hub in Rome, Georgia, while destroying Confederate supplies he found in his path across north Alabama. Another, General Lovell H. Rousseau, was dispatched to sabotage the railroad line between Montgomery, Alabama, and West Point, Georgia. Likewise, General James H. Wilson conducted operations throughout much of the state, but focused his main attacks on Selma and Montgomery. One of Wilson's subordinates, General James T.

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<sup>1</sup> Kathryn Tucker Windham, "A Sampling of University Hauntings," in *Jeffrey's Latest 13: More Alabama Ghosts* (Tuscaloosa, AL: University of Alabama Press, 1982), 91.

Croxton, was sent on a side raid against Tuscaloosa, the University of Alabama, and any remaining southern forces in western Alabama. Clearly, the Union military used raiding forces in its attempts to devastate the Confederate war machine in Alabama during the war, but they were not the only ones to turn to this method of warfare. Confederate raiders were also on the move, doing their part to hinder the Union war effort against the states in rebellion.

Late in 1862, General Earl Van Dorn led a unit of Confederates across northern Mississippi to attack a Union supply train making its way south. The following summer, General John Hunt Morgan and his men crossed the Ohio River, stirring up fear and panic among the citizens of Indiana and Ohio as the Confederates rode across the countryside. Throughout much of 1864, General Nathan Bedford Forrest and his cavalry command stirred up as much trouble as they could for the northern troops, attacking Fort Pillow in Tennessee, then engaging Union troops in Mississippi at Brice's Crossroads and Tupelo. Achieving various levels of success with their operations, these three Confederates made life difficult for the invading northern forces seeking to finish the rebellion once and for all.

While some attention has been paid to the raiders themselves, as well as their assaults across the South and Midwest, not much has been written about northern or southern newspaper coverage of these attacks. This paper will attempt to fill that gap by examining what these publications wrote about the various raids launched against both the Confederate war machine in Alabama and the Union military's support infrastructure throughout the South. More specifically, this paper will attempt to detail how, despite attempts by both Union and Confederate officials to exercise censorship over the press, newspapers on both sides, and even international publications, were able to report news of these raids as quickly and accurately as was possible.

A wide variety of newspapers published in the South, the North, Great Britain, and Ireland were included in this research. Databases containing publications printed between the years 1862 and 1865 were carefully examined, using locations and the commanding officers' names as key search terms. Articles that went in-depth about the raids and campaigns were most likely to be included, though brief dispatches, only one or two sentences in length, were also considered for inclusion if they had been among the first items printed. These early notices may not have contained as much factual information as those printed after more details had been gathered, but having the initial reports was just as important, because they provided an excellent basis for comparison with those articles which appeared later.

#### A Brief History of the Union Raids in Alabama

Situated in the Deep South, Alabama was not the most strategically vital state in the Confederacy. However, it was the location of several key sites for the southern war machine, including the Gulf Coast port of Mobile and the arsenal in Selma. In addition, the state also served as a conduit for supplies traveling via railroad from the Mississippi River to more important locations, such as Atlanta. Relatively isolated from some of the war's early action, Alabama and its military industries began to fall under the threat of Union assaults once the invaders captured much of central and western Tennessee, including Nashville and Memphis. The Union military may not have had the resources to launch massive armies into Alabama to wreck the Confederate war machine there, but it did realize the value in doing what it could with the resources available in the Western Theater. This led them to launch several raids into the state between early 1863 and the end of the war.

In the spring of 1863, Union Colonel Abel D. Streight launched the first northern raid into Alabama, though his ultimate target was not in Alabama. Rather, his main objective was

Rome, Georgia, and the rail hub there that supplied General Braxton Bragg's troops encamped in southeastern Tennessee. Even though Streight's raid's success would come from destroying the railroads in Rome, his forces were under orders to "destroy all depots of supplies of the rebel army, and manufactories of guns, ammunition, equipments, and clothing for their use."<sup>2</sup> Arriving in Tuscumbia, in northwest Alabama, Streight and his Union forces set out across north Alabama on April 26, 1863. While they soon found themselves pursued by Confederate cavalry General Nathan Bedford Forrest and his unit, Streight's men were still able to push across much of North Alabama. By the morning of May 3, Streight and his men were approximately twenty miles from Rome, but were exhausted from an overnight forced march in an attempt to gain some distance from their Confederate pursuers. Forrest and his men caught up to the Union forces that morning and captured the entire raiding army. The Confederates put on a display of force that caused Streight to think he was vastly outnumbered, and that surrender was the only option.<sup>3</sup>

Although the war had begun to turn against the southern cause by the summer of 1864, Confederate forces in the Deep South were still fighting valiantly. As Union General William T. Sherman moved on Atlanta and another Union force planned a thrust south from Memphis to engage Nathan Bedford Forrest in northern Mississippi, Union Major General Lovell H. Rousseau proposed a major raid deep into Alabama. He planned to take part of the Union army occupying Nashville, Tennessee, to launch an assault on the Confederate stronghold and manufacturing center in Selma, Alabama. Rousseau believed such an attack would help bring the war to a quicker conclusion. However, rather than attack Selma, Rousseau's superiors assigned

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<sup>2</sup> James F. Cook, "The 1863 Raid of Abel D. Streight: Why it Failed," *Alabama Review* 22, no. 4 (October 1969), 254-269.

<sup>3</sup> Zed. H. Burns, "Abel D. Streight Encounters Nathan Bedford Forrest," *Journal of Mississippi History* 60, no. 4 (November 1968): 245-259.

him to march with his forces south into Alabama and wreck the railroad lines between the Alabama state capital of Montgomery and the western Georgia city of West Point. Encountering only a handful of Confederates along his route across Alabama, Rousseau managed to reach the railroad lines near Auburn and Opelika without any major incident. Confederate defenders rushed toward Rousseau's forces, but the Union troops destroyed the rail lines relatively unmolested. With Confederates racing toward them from the west, Rousseau and his men marched east to meet up with General William T. Sherman near Marietta, Georgia. Unlike Streight, Rousseau successfully completed his mission to damage the Confederate transportation infrastructure in Alabama.<sup>4</sup>

As the war entered its final days, two more Union forces marched across Alabama, launching a pair of raids against what remained there of the Confederate military. Union Generals James H. Wilson and John T. Croxton left Decatur, Alabama, in late March 1865 and headed south into the heart of the state. Wilson's men marched across much of North Alabama, capturing several cities, such as Jasper, with minimal troop losses. Once northern units arrived in Elyton, site of present-day Birmingham, Wilson divided his forces, sending a body of men under General Croxton southwest, while Wilson led the rest of his troops further south, taking Montevallo, before continuing on to Selma. When the Union raiders arrived on the outskirts of Selma, fighting broke out between Wilson's men and the Confederate defenders of the city. After taking a number of casualties, the Union forces broke through Selma's defenses and captured the city, along with the city's arsenal and manufacturing centers. Wilson then set his sights on the state capital of Montgomery, marching his men eastward. Montgomery was taken without a fight, as the mayor and some of the city's more prominent citizens successfully negotiated a

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<sup>4</sup> Edwin C. Bearss, "Rousseau's Raid on the Montgomery and West Point Railroad," *Alabama Historical Quarterly* 25, nos. 1 & 2 (Spring and Summer 1963): 7-48.

surrender. After Wilson captured both Selma and Montgomery, both of which were major objectives, his final target, Columbus, Georgia, remained. Wilson's forces moved east once again, overrunning the first line of defenses for Columbus in the small Alabama town of Girard. Wilson's men secured one of the bridges across the Chattahoochee River, and captured Columbus on April 17, 1865. The Union troops under General Wilson had succeeded in their mission to wreck some of the Confederate military industry in Alabama, even though it was largely irrelevant, as the surrender at Appomattox Court House had already taken place.<sup>5</sup>

After splitting his men off from Wilson's main body of troops near Elyton, General Croxton led his men in a southwesterly direction, heading toward the city of Tuscaloosa. Early in the morning of April 4, 1865, the Union forces crossed the Black Warrior River from Northport into Tuscaloosa. After a brief skirmish with Confederate cadets training at the University of Alabama, Croxton's men captured both the town and the university, before burning all but four buildings on the university campus. After capturing Tuscaloosa, the northern forces continued marching southwest, moving into Pickens County and engaging a small number of Confederates camped out along the Sipsey River. The Union troops then turned back eastward, attempting to rejoin Wilson's units heading toward Georgia. Once Croxton received word that Wilson had taken Selma and Montgomery and was on his way to Columbus, Croxton led his men toward Talladega. He then pushed through Oxford, Alabama, while a small contingent of his force was sent on a flanking maneuver to capture Jacksonville. Once these eastern Alabama cities had fallen to northern armies, Croxton's men crossed into Georgia, leaving destruction and devastation across central Alabama in their wake.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> James Pickett Jones, *Yankee Blitzkrieg: Wilson's Raid through Alabama and Georgia*, (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 1976), 30-144.

<sup>6</sup> Jerry Keenan, *Wilson's Cavalry Corps: Union Campaigns in the Western Theatre, October 1864 through Spring 1865*, (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Co., 1998), 203-210.

## A Short History of Confederate Operations

As northern forces continued to march into the South and attempt to force the rebellious states back into the Union, the Confederates used raiding forces as a way to throw some of the Union military pushing deeper into the South off balance. Similar to the quandary faced by the northern armies, there were times when the resources needed might not have been available, and so utilizing cavalry raiders was the best available option to keep the Union columns in check. By going after the northern supply lines stretched across the Southeast, Confederate raiders were able to stymie the invaders, forcing them to withdraw to their main bases of operation and out of action until additional resources might become available to utilize against the southern armies.

By late 1862, Union forces had captured Memphis, Tennessee, and were looking to drive further south in order to take Vicksburg, Mississippi. Doing so would essentially sever the western Confederacy from the rest of the states in rebellion, as it would make crossing the Mississippi River much more difficult. As the troops under Union commander Ulysses S. Grant began their march south out of western Tennessee into Mississippi, the advancing northern army used the Mississippi Central Railroad to transport supplies and equipment from the Union base in Jackson, Tennessee. By December 5, 1862, Grant's forces had reached Oxford, Mississippi, and was preparing to continue pushing south to overwhelm Confederate defenses in the area of Grenada, Mississippi. However, the lines of the Mississippi Central Railroad south of Holly Springs had been damaged, making it difficult to keep supplies regularly flowing to Grant's headquarters at Oxford.<sup>7</sup> Taking approximately 3,500 men on a ride across northern Mississippi, Confederate General Earl Van Dorn and his forces arrived on the outskirts of Holly Springs early on the morning of December 20, 1862. Catching the Union troops stationed in Holly Springs by

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<sup>7</sup> Brandon H. Beck, *Holly Springs: Van Dorn, The CSS Arkansas and the Raid that Saved Vicksburg* (Charleston, SC: The History Press, 2011), 60-68.

surprise, Van Dorn's command took control of the town fairly quickly. Once the northern forces in town were no longer a threat to the Confederate cavalry, Van Dorn and his men began sacking the Union supplies stored in Holly Springs. Some of the smaller, lighter supplies and equipment, such as Union uniforms, were captured and used by the Confederates. Supplies Van Dorn's men could not easily carry were doused in turpentine and burned, including a chain of railroad boxcars, filled with many of the provisions necessary to keep Grant and his men on the march toward Vicksburg.<sup>8</sup> Following his successful raid on the Union supply depot in Holly Springs, Van Dorn led his men north into Tennessee, before turning back and returning to the Confederate defenses near Grenada, presumably to confuse any Union forces that might be pursuing them.<sup>9</sup>

The summer of 1863 has come to be seen as the "high water mark" of the Confederacy, as campaigns such as Gettysburg marked the farthest north that major southern forces were able to push into United States territory. At around the same time as the fighting in Pennsylvania, Confederate General John Hunt Morgan led his cavalymen on what could be considered the biggest raid of his career. Morgan had experience leading cavalry raids for the Confederacy, having moved out on three such campaigns in July and August- October of 1862, as well as December- January of 1862-1863, all of which targeted the Union war effort in eastern Kentucky, including the railroads supplying northern forces in central Tennessee.<sup>10</sup> However, his raid in the summer of 1863 would not only move through Kentucky, but would cross the Ohio River and bring the war to the American Midwest. Despite orders from General Braxton Bragg to operate solely in Kentucky on this fourth raid, Morgan led his men across the Bluegrass State

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<sup>8</sup> Beck, 72-92.

<sup>9</sup> Michael B. Ballard, *The Civil War in Mississippi: Major Campaigns and Battles* (Jackson, MS: University Press of Mississippi, 2011), 112-116.

<sup>10</sup> Edison H. Thomas, *John Hunt Morgan and His Raiders* (Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky, 1985), 34-71.

before using a pair of riverboats to cross into Indiana west of Louisville, Kentucky. Pushing east across Indiana, the Confederate cavalry foraged from local farms and destroyed railroad lines where possible. Morgan briefly considered pushing against Indianapolis, Indiana, but instead continued moving eastward toward Ohio. At the same time, the Home Guard of Indiana was called out, and any man able to wield a weapon was requested to join them to defend the state. As many as 60,000 men answered the call, demonstrating the level of fear this raid had sown in the minds of Hoosiers everywhere. While the raiders spent a majority of their time foraging, including taking a number of recently packed hams from a meat packer in Dupont, Indiana, and damaging various assets of the northern war machine they came across, there were reports of Morgan and his men spirited away whatever they could get their hands on.<sup>11</sup> Being pursued by Union cavalry that had been stationed in northern Kentucky, Morgan and his forces continued pushing eastward, crossing into Ohio by mid-July, and briefly threatened to attack Cincinnati, though the Confederates instead rode further east, looking to cross the Ohio River again and escape into West Virginia. The constant pursuit took its toll on the raiders, who were having to spend virtually all their time on their horses, even going as far as to sleep while in the saddle. Because of the exhaustion brought on by constantly eluding the Union cavalry hot on his tail, Morgan was left little choice but to surrender, which he did near the Ohio town of West Point, on July 26, 1863.<sup>12</sup>

Even after the war had turned against the South in 1864, Confederate leaders such as Nathan Bedford Forrest still fought as hard as they could. Having spent the war operating in the Western Theater, Forrest repeatedly made campaigns throughout the Deep South. In the spring

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<sup>11</sup> Such incidents included the theft of \$5,000 from the county treasury and the jewelry of the local Masonic lodge in Versailles, Indiana.

<sup>12</sup> Thomas, 72-85.

of 1864, Forrest believed Union forces in western Tennessee would be fairly easy to overwhelm, allowing him to take back the region between the Mississippi River and areas closer to Nashville. However, Fort Pillow, a defensive position along the Mississippi north of Memphis taken by northern troops two years earlier, stood between Forrest and this objective. On the morning of April 12, 1864, Forrest's Confederate forces began assaulting the defenses, driving the Union garrison, composed mainly of Tennessee Unionists and black soldiers, back into the fort's innermost positions. Once the outer defense lines had been captured by the southerners, Forrest ordered detachments of sharpshooters forward, including along a position that overlooked the fort's artillery emplacements, allowing the Confederate riflemen to essentially eliminate the Union cannon as an effective force. Having taken the positions of strength around the fort, Forrest sent a message to the garrison's commander requesting the surrender of Fort Pillow's defenders. While this was taking place, Union reinforcements boarded steamers heading upriver to reinforce the garrison, leading the Confederate commander to demand an immediate capitulation. When the fort's commanding officer refused to do so, the Confederates stormed Fort Pillow, shooting anyone in a Union uniform. The events that followed have remained a source of major controversy. Realizing that their position had become untenable, individuals and groups of Union soldiers began to lay down their arms and surrender. However, the Confederates continued to kill members of the garrison, including those attempting to surrender. Subsequent investigations by the United States Congress showed that some of the accounts of a wholesale massacre were somewhat exaggerated, including tales of evacuated women and children being gunned down. On the whole, though, there were enough casualties to demonstrate that there was at least some truth to these stories. Historians continue to debate whether Forrest specifically ordered his men to engage in a mass killing of troops laying down their arms. What is clear is

that, by overrunning the defenders and capturing Fort Pillow, he and his command had won an important victory over Union forces in western Tennessee.<sup>13</sup>

By the late spring and early summer of 1864, Forrest and his men had made their way into northern Mississippi, and were preparing to move against William Tecumseh Sherman as the Union general began his push out of Chattanooga toward Atlanta. Realizing the danger to his supply lines from Forrest, Sherman sent orders to Union officer Samuel Sturgis in Memphis, directing him to move against Forrest in northern Mississippi. This would keep Forrest's Confederates away from the main Union push in Georgia. On June 10, the two armies clashed at Brice's Crossroads near Tishomingo Creek, in northeast Mississippi. Initially, Forrest's men held a defensive position, forcing the Union troops to push the attack, causing them to form a semi-circular deployment against the Confederates. With the Union forces pushed into this formation, Forrest then brought his artillery to bear, before charging into Sturgis's lines, which gave way under the southern assault. The retreating Union troops encountered one serious problem in their withdrawal, as the supply train that had been following them from Memphis had drawn up immediately behind them, leaving the road clogged with wagons. This created havoc for the retreat, and the Confederates used it to their advantage as they pursued the Union troops withdrawing across Mississippi back to Memphis. Once the action at Brice's Crossroads had subsided, Forrest ultimately inflicted serious losses on a larger force, including more than 500 Union troops killed and wounded, approximately 1,600 captured, as well as virtually the entire supply train and all the artillery pieces that Sturgis had been leading from Memphis.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Robert M. Browning, Jr., *Forrest: The Confederacy's Relentless Warrior* (Washington, D.C.: Brassey's, Inc., 2004), 51-58.

<sup>14</sup> Browning, 60-67.

Still seeking to keep Forrest and his men from gaining the advantage, Sherman ordered more Union troops into northern Mississippi to hunt and destroy the Confederates, or, at the very least, keep them in check in the Magnolia State. On July 5, 1864, a new column of Union forces left Tennessee, marching into Mississippi to engage Forrest in battle in the farming regions near Okolona. Reaching the town of Pontotoc on July 11, the initial Union plans were to continue southeast toward Okolona, though the column soon swung due east and pursued a course toward Tupelo. It was near Tupelo on July 14 that the main battle began. In the lead-up to the battle, some of Forrest's men had driven Union skirmishers moving toward Okolona back to Pontotoc, then eastward with the main northern force. Other attacks against the Union column included briefly seizing some of the northern supply train, but the Confederates who captured the wagons were forced to fall back by a subsequent counterattack. Preparing for what he believed was a seemingly inevitable clash with the Confederate forces, Union General Andrew Smith drew his forces up along a ridgeline west of Tupelo, facing in the direction of Pontotoc. At the same time, Forrest, who was having issues with his health, gave Confederate General Stephen Lee command of the Confederate forces moving against Smith's men. With other Union expeditions also menacing the Deep South, including Rousseau's push toward Auburn, the Confederates believed that, though the Union troops held a strong defensive position near Tupelo, it was necessary to do battle here and now, so that the other threats could be dealt with in turn. On the morning of July 14, the Confederates began their push against Smith's lines, but because of poor communication and issues with planning, the southern forces pushed against the northern position in a rather piecemeal fashion, rather than an all-out strike. As the Confederates approached Smith's lines, the Union troops poured heavy fire into the oncoming forces, mowing down many of the attackers. Several vigorous waves of attacks against the ridge were dashed,

leaving the Confederates no choice but to retreat. Shortly after the battle ended, the Union forces began the march back to Tennessee, as Smith claimed his men were running low on ammunition and rations, unable to sustain field operations much longer. While Smith had decimated the Confederates under Forrest and Lee at Tupelo, and had managed to keep them from taking action against Sherman's flank or supply line, Smith was not as successful as Sherman had hoped, because Forrest had survived the battle to fight and command another day.<sup>15</sup>

### Literature Review

In more modern times, historians have examined raids such as these and attempted to understand why some of them succeeded and others failed. These researchers point out a wide variety of factors that went into the ultimate outcome of these operations, including the mounts selected by the raiding forces, certain technological aspects, and even unforeseen factors for which the raiders could not have planned.

In "The 1863 Raid of Abel D. Streight: Why it Failed," James F. Cook attempts to disprove some of the more longstanding theories historians have believed to be true when describing why Forrest was able to take Streight's forces prisoners. Several theories have been put forth as to why Streight was unable to elude Forrest's pursuit and destroy the rail hub in Rome. One was Streight's use of mules, particularly mules that were more sickly and unfit for lengthy travel, rather than horses for transportation during the raid. Other reasons include the superiority of Forrest's cavalry forces over Streight's men and the notion that Forrest figured out that Rome was the target for Streight's raid, rather than simply shadowing the northern troops and making guesses as to their plans. Cook, however, points out that luck and poor Union planning played a critical role in the defeat of Colonel Streight and his raiders. For example,

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<sup>15</sup> John Allan Wyeth, *That Devil Forrest: Life of General Nathan Bedford Forrest* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1959), 375-401.

Cook states that assistance from civilians such as Emma Samson, who guided Forrest's men to a relatively safe crossing of Black Creek near Gadsden, Alabama on May 2, 1863, and John Wisdom, who rode nearly non-stop from Gadsden to Rome to warn of Streight's approach that same day, could not have been planned for by Forrest. Unlike other historians who believe Streight's reluctance to stop and allow his men to rest on the night before their capture by Forrest contributed to their failure, Cook asserts it may not have been a major mistake, as "skirmishing probably would have continued all night with Streight not knowing when Forrest's command might attack...." At the same time, Cook does not completely discount the belief that the use of mules was a costly mistake for the northern forces, as those provided to Streight's men when preparing for the raid were either sickly or untamed.<sup>16</sup>

Raiders such as Rousseau, Wilson, and Croxton were more successful in their missions, some historians have argued, because the overall situation for the Confederacy had dramatically changed. In their book, *Why the South Lost the Civil War*, Richard Beringer, Herman Hattaway, Archer Jones, and William Still, Jr. provide several convincing points for this being the case. On an overall level, these authors restate facts that many historians have argued contributed to the downfall of the Confederate cause, including a lack of industry and population. When looking at the final days of the war, they state that morale among the southern populace was almost non-existent, and manpower to serve in the Confederate army had been heavily depleted, leaving little more than home guard units to defend against Union incursion when the regular Confederate Army was not in the area to fight the northern forces.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> James F. Cook, "The 1863 Raid of Abel D. Streight: Why It Failed," *Alabama Review* 22, no. 4 (October 1969): 254-269.

<sup>17</sup> Richard E. Beringer, Herman Hattaway, Archer Jones, and William N. Still, Jr., *Why the South Lost the Civil War* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 1986), 4-34.

One interesting point regarding how General Earn Van Dorn was able to succeed in his raid on Holly Springs revolved around the number of railroads built in the Confederacy. In his book on Van Dorn and his actions in Mississippi during 1862, Brandon Beck points out that the state had only five main rail lines. These included the Mobile and Ohio Railroad, which ran from Mobile, Alabama, through eastern Mississippi to Corinth, before crossing into Tennessee; the Southern Railroad, which cut across southern Mississippi on an east-west axis from Meridian to Vicksburg, where it crossed the Mississippi River into Louisiana; the Mississippi and Tennessee Railroad, which entered northern Mississippi from Memphis, heading south to Grenada; the Mississippi Central Railroad, connecting Jackson, Tennessee with the northern reaches of Mississippi, including Holly Springs, before linking up with the Mississippi and Tennessee in Grenada; and finally, the New Orleans, Jackson, and Great Northern Railroad, which allowed trains to travel north from New Orleans before terminating in Grenada.<sup>18</sup> Such a seeming abundance of railroads crossing the Magnolia State allowed Grant to believe that the railroads would be able to keep supplies flowing to his army as they pushed on Vicksburg. However, since the Mississippi Central had been damaged south of Oxford, the Union commander had two problems facing his advance. First, he needed alternate ways to move provisions to his troops until the rail lines south of Oxford could be repaired. He also had to find a way to make sure that the transport trains making their way into Mississippi from the supply center in Jackson, Tennessee, were able to reach his men safely, as Grant realized that these trains would have to pass through hostile territory to reach the main Union encampments.<sup>19</sup> It could be argued that, without an effective solution to these problems, Grant's campaign against Vicksburg had a

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<sup>18</sup> Beck, 14.

<sup>19</sup> Beck, 60-68.

relatively high probability of failure. Though historians studying the war have long argued that the limited amount of railroad mileage in the South was a major disadvantage for the Confederates, in the case of Grant's movements toward Vicksburg in late 1862, such a lack of railroad lines worked in favor of the southern forces.

Similar to what Beck pointed out regarding the railroads in Mississippi that seemed to work in favor of Van Dorn during his raid, John Arquilla noted how Forrest was able to take the modern technology the Union was utilizing, and create disadvantages for the northern forces with it. As Arquilla notes, Grant was forced to fall back to Memphis late in 1862, rather than pressing on across Mississippi toward Vicksburg, as Forrest constantly pressed against the railroad lines Grant was using as a supply line, and the telegraph wires allowing Grant to keep in regular communication with his subordinates. Even though Grant's forces successfully captured Vicksburg in the summer of 1863, part of the Union victory had to be credited to the fact that Grant assigned roughly two-thirds of his men to protect the railroads and telegraph lines from Forrest and his troops. Having railroad lines at their disposal allowed the Union to move troops quickly from their garrisons to points where they would be able to effectively fight the Confederates, and telegraph lines meant that communications between commanding officers, or between commanders and those they led, could be relayed that much faster. However, relying too heavily on these technological advantages could leave such an army highly vulnerable if anything should happen to the railroads or telegraphs, as Forrest demonstrated time and again during his campaigns against the Union military.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> John Arquilla, "Rebel Raider: Nathan Bedford Forrest," in *Insurgents, Raiders, and Bandits: How Masters of Irregular Warfare Have Shaped Our World* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 2011), 99-112.

One issue that was not as much of a factor militarily, but more a problem facing the press at the time, was reporters being able to communicate with their respective news headquarters with quickness and accuracy. In *The Media in America*, specifically “The Press and the Civil War,” the authors of the chapter detail how newspaper reporters for both northern and southern newspapers found that they needed to get stories to their respective publishers as quickly as possible, no matter how many errors the narrative contained. At the same time, an even more pressing concern faced the newspaper writers covering the war, the problem of censorship. Both Union and Confederate officials, in an attempt to keep the enemy from learning crucial military information and gaining an advantage from it, tried to censor news stories appearing in publications. Even though censorship attempts on both sides were an overall failure, they led to further use of hearsay, rumors, and exaggerated reports being published as truthful news in both southern and northern newspapers.<sup>21</sup> As this paper will show, with such sources detailing a wide range of truths surrounding these military raids, conflicting reports and narratives that disagreed with one another appearing in the various newspapers of the time was almost a certainty.

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<sup>21</sup> Kathleen Endres and Dianne Bragg, “The Press and the Civil War, 1861-1865,” in *The Media in America: A History*, 9<sup>th</sup> ed., edited by Wm. David Sloan (Northport, AL: Vision Press, 2014), 159-174.

## NEWSPAPERS AND NORTHERN RAIDERS

### Newspaper Reports on the Failed Raid of Abel D. Streight

The *New York Herald* was one of the first newspapers in the North to report on Streight's failure to secure Rome, Georgia. Like much of New York City's population during the war, the *Herald* seemed to take a somewhat nebulous position with regards to the conflict, while realizing that, even if information about events like Streight's raid came from Confederate sources, it was still valuable if little or no information from Union sources was obtainable. This newspaper took a majority of its information about Colonel Streight from articles published in the *Chattanooga Rebel*, along with a small dispatch issued from Union forces in Murfreesboro, Tennessee. When comparing the two different sources used in the *Herald*, two far different stories emerge. According to the Union dispatch, Streight's troops defeated Confederate forces chasing him but were forced to surrender when surrounded by a far larger southern force. On the other hand, the *Chattanooga Rebel* detailed Forrest's pursuit from the southern perspective, explaining how the Confederate cavalymen were a constant harassment for Streight's men during the drive across north Alabama. When describing the surrender as portrayed in the Chattanooga paper, the *Herald* stated that, "The *Rebel* tells the ridiculous stories that only four hundred and forty men were in the fight, and that they captured seventeen hundred...."<sup>22</sup>

Over the next few days after this initial report appeared in the *New York Herald*, a series of articles appeared, all of which contributed more details of Streight's expedition to readers in

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<sup>22</sup> "Our Cavalry [sic] Raids," *The New York Herald*, May 11, 1863.

the North. On May 12, the *Herald* printed Confederate General Braxton Bragg's official report of the action between General Forrest and Colonel Streight. Bragg's report gave a brief overview of the chase across north Alabama. Bragg also included Union casualty figures incurred during various skirmishes during the raid and pursuit, and the general number of Streight's men taken prisoner by Forrest's forces outside Cedar Bluff.<sup>23</sup> Several days later, another article in the *Herald* pulled much of its information from further dispatches sent from Murfreesboro and news stories from the *Chattanooga Rebel*. In addition to a map which laid out Streight's path across Alabama, this article gave an in-depth account of the raid, and also providing approximated troop numbers used by both sides during the northern thrust toward Rome. While providing information about the raid with as much factual information as was available, the article also discussed what many in the Union Army believed was true about Streight's attempted attack. According to the *Herald*, some of the higher-ranking northern commanders believed there was a high chance of Streight and his men falling into Confederate hands, but that, "Had Streight succeeded in his efforts the capture of seventeen hundred men, as now reported, would have been a cheap price to pay for that success."<sup>24</sup> Even though the New York paper published Bragg's report immediately after the failed raid on Rome, which clearly outlined the fact that Streight's forces had been taken prisoner by a much smaller Confederate force, a small dispatch from Ohio, contradicting the southern reports, was published in a late May issue of the newspaper. Sent from the Third Ohio regiment, this dispatch explained that Streight had no

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<sup>23</sup> "Our Raid in Georgia: The Rebel Official Account of the Capture of Col. Streight," *The New York Herald*, May 12, 1863.

<sup>24</sup> "Our Raid Into Georgia: Additional Rebel Accounts of the Operations of Colonel Streight," *The New York Herald*, May 16, 1863.

choice but to surrender, as he was faced by an overwhelming Confederate force situated in an impenetrable position, barring the way to Rome.<sup>25</sup>

Another report written shortly after the conclusion of Streight's attempted raid appeared in the *Daily National Intelligencer* in Washington, D.C. In an article titled "Streight's Cavalry Raid," the paper states that before Colonel Streight launched his assault into Alabama, an infantry force under General Grenville Dodge had pushed into the state from Mississippi as an escort for Colonel Streight's men. It further explained that this infantry push toward Tuscumbia, Alabama, "had put the rebels on the alert, and a cavalry force, under the guerrilla Forrest, was detached from [Confederate General Braxton] Bragg's army to operate against them." According to the article, this initial push under General Dodge was one of the main reasons that Streight failed in his raid. After giving a brief description of the chase across north Alabama, the article admits some confusion as to the specific outcome of the raid, "by far the most dangerous of the recent cavalry raids," detailing that Bragg claimed that Streight's entire force was captured, but that those in the North were unsure if this was true or not.<sup>26</sup>

Streight's raid also attracted attention overseas, with reports of the campaign being published in newspapers across Britain. Two of the first reports appeared in *The Standard* of London and *The Sheffield & Rotherham Independent* in Sheffield, England. The article in *The Standard* ran the full dispatch written by General Bragg, explaining right above Bragg's dispatch that "the following relates to the fighting in Tennessee."<sup>27</sup> Though this explanation may seem confusing, *The Standard* is correct in relating the fighting in central Tennessee to Streight's march toward Rome, as the destruction of the rail lines in northwest Georgia would have

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<sup>25</sup> "The Surrender of Col. Streight's Forces," *The New York Herald*, May 26, 1863.

<sup>26</sup> "Streight's Cavalry Raid," *Daily National Intelligencer*, May 15, 1863.

<sup>27</sup> "America," *The Standard* (London), May 27, 1863.

disrupted the supplies heading to Bragg's forces in Tennessee. That same day, *The Sheffield & Rotherham Independent* also published Bragg's dispatch. Their description of the raid, however, differed from *The Standard*, not realizing the link between fighting near Nashville and the purpose of the raid. Instead, the *Independent* informed its readers that Streight, whom the Sheffield paper incorrectly labeled a general, had launched his raid in conjunction with another raid near Corinth, Mississippi, led by General Grenville Dodge.<sup>28</sup>

While Streight and his troops were mentioned in a couple of articles regarding prisoner exchanges between the two sides in *The Times* of London, the most prominent piece in *The Times* which discussed the Union cavalry officer came in a letter to the editor. Signed, "A Confederate," this letter attacked William Seward, U.S. Secretary of State, and his statements regarding the great fortune the Union had in claiming to have captured approximately 36,000 prisoners during recent fighting at Vicksburg, Mississippi, and Port Hudson, Louisiana. The author of the letter reminds readers that, while many Confederates were indeed captured after these battles, Streight and his 1,500 men were among an estimated 43,000 Union prisoners in the South. According to "A Confederate," this leaves those in the North little to celebrate, as he claims, even with Seward's inflated numbers, there were more Union prisoners than Confederate ones, thus giving the South one more advantage in the war.<sup>29</sup> The numbers given by "A Confederate" may or may not be entirely accurate, but, given that his most likely goal was to demonstrate southern superiority over the Union enemy in order to sway British public opinion to favor intervening on behalf of the Confederate cause, it was necessary to claim the numbers given in the letter, exaggerated though they may be.

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<sup>28</sup> "Capture of Gen. Streight's Cavalry," *The Sheffield & Rotherham Independent*, May 27, 1863.

<sup>29</sup> "A Confederate," letter to the editor, *The Times* (London), September 10, 1863.

Domestically, little more was said about Streight after his capture, though the *Daily National Intelligencer* reported that he, along with his subordinate officers, had been moved to a prison in Richmond in late September 1863.<sup>30</sup> Several months later, the *Daily National Intelligencer* reported that Colonel Streight, along with a few other Union officers being held prisoner, had escaped from Libby Prison in Richmond. Sneaking across the Virginia countryside, they managed to reach the Potomac River, gained passage on a passing steamer as it traveled upriver, and safely arrived in Washington, D.C. on the last day of February 1864, the whole experience taking “twelve days in getting from Richmond to the Potomac.”<sup>31</sup>

Despite the serious discrepancies seen in the newspapers’ coverage of Streight’s raid, namely the size of Forrest’s command opposing the northern troops, the campaign received its fair share of attention. Given that major events in the war were beginning to unfold at about the same time, including the Battle of Chancellorsville, Virginia, and the Siege of Vicksburg, Mississippi, the space given to news of Streight’s raid demonstrated that newspapers in both the North and the South realized that his campaign across Alabama was of at least some importance in the overall narrative of the war.

#### News Accounts of Rousseau’s Attack on Alabama Railroads

After Lovell Rousseau and his men were able to wreck the Montgomery and West Point railroad line near Auburn and Opelika in the summer of 1864, news articles detailing his successes appeared in both southern and northern publications, giving readers thirsty for the latest war news coverage information about this raid, even though news of Sherman’s push toward Atlanta was perhaps the most headline-grabbing military campaign of the summer.

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<sup>30</sup> “Col. Streight’s Command,” *Daily National Intelligencer*, September 26, 1863.

<sup>31</sup> “Col. Streight Safe in Washington,” *Daily National Intelligencer*, March 1, 1864.

One of the first southern publications to carry news of Rousseau's raid on the railroads in eastern Alabama was the *Chattanooga Daily Gazette*. To an extent, the *Daily Gazette* came across as being slightly pro-Union, a stance not uncommon in eastern Tennessee, though this appears to have been relatively muted in order to keep any pro-Confederate citizens placated. The July 26, 1864, edition's lengthy article gave great detail as to the overall movements of the Union force as they drove south into Alabama and wrecked the railroad, then riding parallel to the Chattahoochee River before crossing into Georgia and linking up with Sherman's force in Marietta. In addition to providing a chronicle of events surrounding the attack, the article listed specific supplies and equipment that the northern troops had either captured or destroyed along the way. Not only did the listings include important military supplies, such as a locomotive destroyed and several hundred mules captured, it also noted that Rousseau's forces had freed approximately 300 slaves near Talladega, and had destroyed an estimated 20,000 pounds of bacon. The article then delved into the writer's thoughts about the attack, stating that, "This raid in many respects is the most remarkable of the war, for secrecy... and results it exceeds anything heretofore attempted by our cavalry." The article also noted how amazing it was that Rousseau was able to succeed so well in his assault, which also seeming to criticize the Confederates Rousseau encountered along the way.

That so large a force could penetrate the enemy's country one hundred and nine miles in the rear of [Confederate General Joseph] Johnston's army, destroy the only Railroad that connects that army and the western portion of the Confederacy, and return with but a loss of not more than twelve men and one officer, is almost beyond the "prospect of believe [sic]."<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> "Gen. Rousseau's Great Raid," *Chattanooga Daily Gazette*, July 26, 1864.

This article concluded in a way most interesting with regards to a southern newspaper. It seems to praise Rousseau for his overall bravery and leadership, suggesting that these are the qualities that assisted most in his victory in central Alabama.<sup>33</sup>

Another southern newspaper writing about the raid in central Alabama was the *Richmond Whig*. Despite much of the July 27, 1864, edition of the *Whig* giving major coverage to the fighting near Atlanta and the latest from action across the state of Virginia, a small section gave Richmond readers important information about Rousseau's attack. The article reported that the raid was mostly carried out by units comprised predominantly of renegade Union sympathizers from Kentucky and Tennessee.<sup>34</sup> This information ran in both correlation and contrast with facts from the *Chattanooga Daily Gazette*, which confirmed that men from Tennessee and Kentucky were part of Rousseau's force. However, when listing the units under Rousseau's command, the *Daily Gazette* reported that his raiders were comprised of the 5<sup>th</sup> Iowa, 8<sup>th</sup> Indiana, 9<sup>th</sup> Ohio, 4<sup>th</sup> Tennessee, and 2<sup>nd</sup> Kentucky Regiments.<sup>35</sup> Another point of possible conflicting reports between the *Whig* and the *Daily Gazette* revolved around accounts of enslaved African-Americans joining the Union raiders. According to the *Whig*, "Citizens along the route of the raid report but little destruction of private property, and the loss of but few negroes. It appears that the latter were not encouraged to follow the command, furnishing quite an exception to the general conduct of the enemy."<sup>36</sup>

Presenting a somewhat different story from the *Whig* and the *Daily Gazette* was the *Daily Picayune* of New Orleans, Louisiana, which used a number of other southern newspapers as sources of information for its article on Rousseau's raid. According to the *Daily Picayune*, not

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> "The Raid on the Montgomery, Ala., and West Point Railroad," *Richmond Whig*, July 27, 1864.

<sup>35</sup> "Gen. Rousseau's Great Raid," *Chattanooga Daily Gazette*, July 26, 1864.

<sup>36</sup> "The Raid on the Montgomery, Ala., and West Point Railroad," *Richmond Whig*, July 27, 1864.

only did the Union forces burn the rail depot at Talladega on their march south to wreak havoc on the rail lines east of Montgomery, but threatened to attack Montgomery itself. In response to news of the potential northern advance against the Alabama state capital, Montgomery's male citizens grabbed weapons, formed into groups, and prepared to defend their homes. However, the *Daily Picayune* reported that Rousseau instead turned east, escaping a Confederate pursuit as the Union raiders moved to link up with Sherman's troops in Georgia.<sup>37</sup>

One of the first reports of Rousseau's raid to appear in northern papers was published in the *Daily National Intelligencer*, in late July 1864, shortly after the raid had left Alabama in the direction of Atlanta. Contained within a report updating readers as to Sherman's repeated attacks against Confederate forces defending Atlanta, the *Daily National Intelligencer* proclaimed that,

Gen. Rousseau, at the head of a splendid column of raiders, has captured Montgomery, the capital of Alabama, and penetrated the country east and west of it, cutting the railroad at Opelika, that being the junction of the Atlanta and West Point and Columbus railroads.... The cutting of these communications leaves but one avenue by which the rebels can escape from Atlanta, namely, the road to Macon.<sup>38</sup>

The following day, the *Daily National Intelligencer* further elaborated on Rousseau's raid into Alabama, confirming that this major rail artery had been severed. The article then stated that, in addition to the railroad lines being cut, telegraph lines in the vicinity of the wrecked railroads had been destroyed as well, a fact corroborated by both dispatches from Sherman's headquarters and acknowledgement from Confederate sources that telegraph communications between Atlanta and Montgomery had been suspended.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> "Important from Georgia," *The Daily Picayune*, July 30, 1864.

<sup>38</sup> "Atlanta Not Yet Occupied," *Daily National Intelligencer*, July 26, 1864.

<sup>39</sup> "Cavalry Operations of Sherman's Army," *Daily National Intelligencer*, July 27, 1864.

Further northern coverage of the assault against the Montgomery and West Point Railroad came from *The Daily Palladium* in New Haven, Connecticut. Its article added further details of the destruction brought about by General Rousseau, including, “At Tylocuga [sic]<sup>40</sup> he destroyed two large storehouses filled with nitre, together with their depot; also the large iron works were fired, the furnace and the melting pit being destroyed.” In addition to giving a chronicle of the path the raiders took across Alabama, *The Daily Palladium* also provided an approximated count of casualties suffered by both sides during various skirmishes during the raid and a listing of captured Confederate supplies that were burned by Rousseau’s forces, including 450 bales of cotton, 500 pounds of tobacco, and 200 pounds of bacon, contrary to the 20,000 pounds listed as destroyed in the *Chattanooga Daily Gazette*.<sup>41</sup>

Yet another northern publication that provided its readers with relatively pertinent information was the *Milwaukee Daily Sentinel* in Wisconsin. The August 1, 1864 edition of the paper placed a lengthy article about the raid on the front page, written by a soldier in the 5<sup>th</sup> Iowa regiment. Rather than give a relatively brief overall account of the attack, the article published was instead a day-by-day chronicle of the movement of Rousseau’s forces, beginning with their departure from Decatur on July 10 until they joined up with Sherman’s main body of troops near Marietta. While the soldier’s account contains few pieces of numerical information, his account of the march across Alabama and Georgia was still of tremendous value to those far from the action, helping them to more easily understand how impressive of an undertaking Rousseau’s raid really was.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> The author of this article most likely meant Talladega for two reasons. First, there was an iron furnace located near Talladega, in addition to a supply depot within the city. Second, there has never been a city in Alabama with the name of Tylocuga.

<sup>41</sup> “Rousseau’s Expedition,” *The Daily Palladium* (New Haven, CT), July 28, 1864.

<sup>42</sup> “Rousseau’s Raid,” *Milwaukee Sentinel*, August 1, 1864.

On August 3, the *Milwaukee Sentinel* published another article about Rousseau and the raid into Alabama. This article focused less on the raid itself and more on the man leading it, spending much of its length providing readers with a brief biography of the Union general from Kentucky. In addition to a biography of Rousseau, the article also praised many of the qualities that he possessed, which the *Milwaukee Sentinel* suggested led to his raid being a success. These included claims that Rousseau had the ability to see through deceptions, among other things, which allowed him to be able to lead his men across Alabama without being forced to fight a major engagement against Confederate forces along the way.<sup>43</sup>

A northern publication that catered predominantly to the black population of Philadelphia, *The Christian Recorder*, printed its own article about the attacks in eastern Alabama. *The Christian Recorder* claimed that not only did Rousseau successfully destroy the rail lines near Auburn and Opelika, but had also downed telegraph lines between Talladega and Opelika. The *Recorder* reinforced these statements with information gathered from southern newspapers, which stated that telegraph service between Montgomery and Atlanta had been suspended, and a train scheduled to arrive in West Point, Georgia, from Montgomery had not reached its destination, suggesting that the tracks were unusable.<sup>44</sup>

*The New York Herald* published a pair of articles in late July 1864, giving its readers massive amounts of information about the attack on rail lines in eastern Alabama. The first article explained how Rousseau had initially proposed to conduct his raid against Selma, but was rejected by his superiors. Instead, General Sherman ordered Rousseau to wreck the railroads in eastern Alabama, as doing so would sever lines of communication between Montgomery and Georgia. The article then goes into great detail, listing which units Rousseau led across Alabama,

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<sup>43</sup> "Rousseau's Great Raid," *Milwaukee Sentinel*, August 3, 1864.

<sup>44</sup> "Rousseau's Raid," *The Christian Recorder*, July 30, 1864.

specific sites, namely bridges, along the route to the railroads that would be important to the attack's success, and locations of stations along the railroad between Montgomery and the Georgia border. When this article was published, however, it admitted that the last word received from the Union column was that it had left Decatur on its way to the Opelika area.<sup>45</sup> The following week, the *Herald* ran another article about Rousseau's raid, though it was within a larger article discussing the latest events from Atlanta. This article proclaimed the raid to be, "a grand success, for he has effectually destroyed the Atlanta and Mobile line...." It also extracted information from southern publications to back up the article, including a dispatch from a Montgomery newspaper, chronicling how the Alabama capital was thrown into an uproar from the news of northern raiders near Opelika.<sup>46</sup>

Internationally, Rousseau's raid attracted attention from newspapers in England and Scotland. As part of a larger article on Sherman's attacks against Atlanta, *The Liverpool Mercury* informed readers that "Sherman had despatched a cavalry expedition, under General Rousseau, against the southern communications of Atlanta."<sup>47</sup> The *Daily News* of London printed that, "The lines between Atlanta and both Augusta and Montgomery have been cut." This article continued on, explaining that Rousseau's raid was responsible for the loss of lines to Montgomery, and proclaiming that his raid into Alabama was the most remarkable attack carried out during the war.<sup>48</sup> *The Caledonian Mercury* of Edinburgh, Scotland, published its own article about the raid, using information gathered from the *New York World*. Similar to the news printed in the July 26 edition of the *Daily National Intelligencer*, *The Caledonian Mercury* also stated that Rousseau and his forces had captured Montgomery, in addition to cutting the railroads connecting it to

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<sup>45</sup> "Sherman," *The New York Herald*, July 23, 1864.

<sup>46</sup> "Sherman," *The New York Herald*, July 30, 1864.

<sup>47</sup> "The Attack on Atlanta," *The Liverpool Mercury*, August 5, 1864.

<sup>48</sup> "America," *Daily News* (London), August 8, 1864.

Georgia. The *Mercury* included in its article information about one of Rousseau's potential lines of march once the destruction of the rail lines was complete, explaining that, "In this event, however, he was instructed to cut his way through to Pensacola, and thence by steamers to New Orleans."<sup>49</sup>

While a number of papers reported on Rousseau's campaign in Alabama, with some even daring to consider it the most impressive raid launched by either side during the war, he was not given large amounts of attention by either the northern or southern press. While this is understandable, given the fact that a series of major battles was being fought around Atlanta at the same time, not giving Rousseau as much news coverage as Sherman is to understate his importance during the Atlanta campaign. If Rousseau had failed and the railroad had remained active, vital supplies may have reached the Georgia capital, perhaps giving its defenders a greater chance to hold out against the northern advance. For the most part, newspapers of the time did not fully grasp this connection, with the most common link between Rousseau in Alabama and Sherman near Atlanta simply being that Rousseau would lead his raiders into Georgia to link up with Sherman's main force following the raid. Instead, a majority of the publications saw the raid as merely another Union attack on the Confederate transportation and communication infrastructure in Alabama.

#### Croxtton and the Attack on Tuscaloosa in the News

Even though the American Civil War officially ended with Robert E. Lee's surrender to Ulysses S. Grant at Appomattox Court House on April 9, 1865, news reports of skirmishes and battles occurring during the final days of the war were reported as quickly as they arrived. While

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<sup>49</sup> "The War in America," *The Caledonian Mercury*, August 9, 1864. "In this event" refers to the fact that Pensacola would be the location Rousseau and his forces would head for should Confederate troops in eastern Alabama or western Georgia prevent him from linking up with Sherman near Atlanta.

these reports appeared in the past tense when printed, the writing seemed to suggest that the war was still being fought, despite a majority of Confederate forces having already laid down their arms for the last time. John Croxton's attack on Tuscaloosa was no exception to this when dispatches of the skirmish were printed in southern and foreign newspapers.

One of the major southern news outlets to provide reports of the fighting in Tuscaloosa and at the University of Alabama was the *New Orleans Times*. While New Orleans was under Union occupation, newspapers in the city, like the *Times*, predominantly held a pro-Union stance, an understandable position given which side was in control. On April 16, the Louisiana newspaper printed an account of the attack on Tuscaloosa and further fighting in west Alabama, using information that had first appeared in a pair of newspapers from Mobile, Alabama, the *Mobile Register* and the *Mobile Advertiser and News*. The story stated that 1,500 Union troops had entered the city and burned several buildings, but spared the university, before engaging Confederates along the Sipsey River, who managed to drive Croxton and his men back to Tuscaloosa.<sup>50</sup> In the same issue of the *New Orleans Times*, another article, again using information pulled from Mobile newspapers, stated that, "Col. Woodruff, who arrived here from Tuscaloosa, confirms in substance the report sent you about the capture of that place." This second article reported that a number of horses and slaves that had been captured by the northern forces had been retaken by the Confederates, as well as some of Croxton's baggage. Adding that the Union raiders appeared to be moving in the direction of Columbus, Georgia, the second report detailed that the northern troops numbered approximately 2,400, contradicting the first dispatch published in the *Times*.<sup>51</sup> However, the *New Orleans Times* published a small correction

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<sup>50</sup> "From Mobile Papers," *New Orleans Times*, April 16, 1865.

<sup>51</sup> "From Mobile Papers," *New Orleans Times*, April 16, 1865. In this quote, the location given by the Mobile paper, "here," is actually the town of Gainesville, Alabama. Like a number of other southern newspapers,

on May 17, reporting that Croxton had indeed burned buildings on the campus of the University of Alabama, specifically the library and lyceum.<sup>52</sup>

One international report of the fighting between Croxton's raiders and Confederate forces in Tuscaloosa was published at the end of April in the *Bermuda Royal Gazette*. Among reports of the final days of fighting between Lee and Grant in Virginia and Lee's subsequent surrender, the *Bermuda Royal Gazette* published a report obtained from New York that stated, "A battle was recently fought near Tuscaloosa, Ala., between the Federal Cavalry force under Wilson and the rebel Forrest. The latter was defeated with heavy loss including many prisoners."<sup>53</sup> This gave the residents of the Atlantic island's capital city of Hamilton some details about the final days of the war in Alabama, even though it contained a number of factual errors.<sup>54</sup> Another international report of the fall of Tuscaloosa was published in late April 1865 in *The Leeds Mercury* in England. Like a number of other British papers printing a large report about the final days of the Confederacy and General Lee's surrender, the *Mercury* informed its readers that, "Wilson's cavalry is reported to have defeated Forrest's army near Tuscaloosa."<sup>55</sup>

Even though the war was winding down, Croxton's raid on Tuscaloosa and skirmishing with the Home Guard along the Sipsey River received little press attention on either side of the

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the *Register* and the *Advertiser and News* had fled their home city as the Yankees advanced in that direction. By this point in the war, they had settled in Gainesville, a town along the Tombigbee River, southwest of Tuscaloosa.

<sup>52</sup> "Summary of News," *New Orleans Times*, May 17, 1865.

<sup>53</sup> "Surrender of Lee and His Army," *Bermuda Royal Gazette*, April 25, 1865.

<sup>54</sup> Some of these errors include listing the commanding officers during the fighting in Tuscaloosa as Wilson for the Union and Forrest for the Confederacy. When the skirmish near the University of Alabama occurred, Wilson was busy occupying Selma, while Forrest was attempting to rally any units he could to form a defense against the next movement of Wilson's raid. The information stating that heavy casualties were suffered in Tuscaloosa is also incorrect. While relatively heavy casualties were suffered on both sides during the Union assault on Selma, contemporary accounts written about the fighting in Tuscaloosa provide a casualty total of between twenty-four and twenty-six killed and wounded, approximately twenty-three of which were inflicted on Croxton's raiders by University cadets.

<sup>55</sup> "Latest News: America," *The Leeds Mercury*, April 24, 1865.

conflict. Confederate units across the South were laying down their arms on a daily basis, but there were events taking place on an even larger scale elsewhere. These included the surrender at Appomattox Court House, Virginia, Sherman's march through the Carolinas toward Virginia and Grant's army, and the larger raid in Alabama being conducted by General Wilson. Less than two weeks after the fighting in Tuscaloosa, President Abraham Lincoln's assassination became the single most important news story, with the hunt for his killer dominating front pages across the country. However, Croxton was not completely ignored either, so the general public was still able to obtain important information about his attack against Tuscaloosa and the cadet training facility that the University of Alabama had become during the war.

#### Dispatches from Wilson's Drive Across Alabama

Unlike coverage of Croxton's raid, newspapers at the end of the war contained a plethora of articles providing information about General Wilson's 1865 campaign in Alabama. Seeing as how Wilson's push on Selma and Montgomery was a larger affair than Croxton's attack on Tuscaloosa, it only makes sense that Wilson received more press attention than his subordinate.

The first articles discussing Wilson's raid appeared in newspapers before his mission was complete and, in one instance, before the raid even began in late March. The *Milwaukee Sentinel* ran an article on March 4, using correspondence sent to the *New York Times*, letting readers know that Union forces were preparing to mount an assault on the Deep South. This story listed Selma, along with Montgomery, Mobile, and Cahawba, Alabama, as some of the raid's key targets. Columbus, Georgia was also named as an objective city.<sup>56</sup> On March 28, 1865, the *Chattanooga Daily Gazette* informed its readers that Union forces under Wilson's command had arrived in Eastport, Mississippi, and was suggesting that these troops would head into Alabama.

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<sup>56</sup> "The War in the Southwest: II. The Capture of Cahawba, Selma, and Montgomery, Ala., and Columbus, Ga.," *Milwaukee Sentinel*, March 4, 1865.

This piece, one of the first southern publications to publish any information about the raid, also listed approximations of Confederate troop numbers stationed in Alabama and western Georgia that were ready to repulse any potential northern attacks.<sup>57</sup> Two days later, the March 30 issue of the *Milwaukee Sentinel* included a report received from Nashville, Tennessee, detailing how Wilson and his troops had been preparing for an extended campaign across Alabama, which, according to the article, was being conducted at that particular time so as to aid a Union assault on Mobile. This article also insinuated that Montgomery and Selma would be two key objectives for Wilson's forces, as well as possibly entering Georgia to "give that state another taste of the consequences of treason and rebellion."<sup>58</sup> A third early report speculating on the direction of Wilson's raid was published in the *Daily National Intelligencer* of April 7, 1865. This brief article, sent from Union headquarters near the Alabama town of Russellville, explained that the main objectives of the raid were Selma, Montgomery, and Mobile, though it also listed being en route to Tuscaloosa when the military dispatch was initially written in late March. In addition to stating the target locations for this campaign, the report also explained how the forces involved were divided up into smaller divisions and listed these divisional commanders.<sup>59</sup>

Once the raid had completed its main objectives, further articles about the assault were written, these giving great detail as to what occurred during the march. One of the earliest accounts of the completed raid came from the *Milwaukee Sentinel* published on April 15, 1865. Taking much of its information from the *Vicksburg [MS] Herald*, the *Sentinel* informed its readers that a battle had taken place in and around Selma, and that Nathan Bedford Forrest, who had been in command of Selma's defenses, escaped capture by Wilson's men. After taking the

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<sup>57</sup> "General Wilson on the War Path," *Chattanooga Daily Gazette*, March 28, 1865.

<sup>58</sup> "Important Army Movements," *Milwaukee Sentinel*, March 30, 1865.

<sup>59</sup> "Affairs in Alabama," *Daily National Intelligencer*, April 7, 1865.

city, the article stated that the arsenal was burned, though the explosions from these burning buildings caused large portions of the city to catch fire as well.<sup>60</sup> The April 15 edition of the *Milwaukee Sentinel* also ran a small dispatch of correspondence, received from south Alabama, explaining that, “General Wilson’s command of cavalry has marched on Selma and captured it, with twenty-three pieces of artillery, machinery, ammunition and much Government property.”<sup>61</sup> Though one of the first complete reports of the raid in the *Milwaukee Sentinel* came on April 15, one of the first pieces of information was published in the *Sentinel* on April 11, 1865, when it relayed a story from an Illinois merchant. This man had conversed with a Confederate soldier, who informed the merchant that Selma had been captured and burned by northern troops.<sup>62</sup> Another early report came from a publication in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, the *North American and United States Gazette*. Using a report first received by the *Cincinnati Gazette* from one of their correspondents in Mobile, the *North American and United States Gazette* provided the citizens of Philadelphia with a relatively in-depth history of the raid, beginning with Wilson and his forces’ March 20 departure from Eastport, Mississippi, and heading into Alabama toward Selma. After fighting a couple of small skirmishes along the way, the newspaper reported that Selma was captured by northern troops on April 2, and that Montgomery surrendered on April 3. The article also suggested that, because of the fall of Selma and Montgomery and the inability of Forrest to stop Wilson from completing his objectives, “the whole thing is up in Alabama.”<sup>63</sup>

Internationally, *The Times* of London published a report received from the United States, explaining that Wilson reported capturing Selma on April 2, as well as an unconfirmed rumor

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<sup>60</sup> “Important from Alabama,” *Milwaukee Sentinel*, April 15, 1865.

<sup>61</sup> “From Mobile,” *Milwaukee Sentinel*, April 15, 1865.

<sup>62</sup> “The Alabama Cavalry Expedition,” *Milwaukee Sentinel*, April 11, 1865.

<sup>63</sup> “Gen. Wilson’s Expedition through Alabama,” *North American and United States Gazette*, April 20, 1865.

that he had also taken Montgomery shortly thereafter.<sup>64</sup> Another newspaper from Great Britain, *The Bradford Observer*, from Bradford, England, printed a dispatch on April 20 that General Wilson had reached Russellville, Alabama, and was ready to proceed on to Selma, Montgomery, and Columbus.<sup>65</sup>

After official reports from the Union Army had been released, creating a highly accurate account of Wilson's expedition, several more articles appeared in northern newspapers, chronicling the raid with more clarity and fewer contradictions. These articles included a report in the April 24, 1865, edition of *The Daily Cleveland Herald*, which used a dispatch sent from a reporter from *The New York Herald*. A majority of this article was, as the first paragraph of the article stated, "the... account of the place and its defenses." The description provided put forth the notion that Selma's defenses had been as strong and extensive as Atlanta's, defending one of the Confederacy's more important cities.<sup>66</sup> The same report ran on April 29 in the *Milwaukee Sentinel*, letting Wisconsinites picture for themselves, "two lines of earthworks reaching from bank to bank of the Alabama River, and forming a semi circle around the town....The front line of the works was protected by a row of palisades some six feet high and sharp at the top...."<sup>67</sup> On May 9, 1865, the *Milwaukee Sentinel* published one of the most complete reports of Wilson's expedition to appear in northern newspapers. This article, written by a correspondent of the *New York Herald*, gave a blow-by-blow account of Wilson's movements across Alabama, from their first movements into the state, all the way to the fall of Macon. It also provided, as best as it could, casualty figures and numbers of Confederate forces encountered, as well as a total number

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<sup>64</sup> "Latest Intelligence: America," *The Times* (London), April 24, 1865.

<sup>65</sup> "Latest News: America," *The Bradford Observer*, April 20, 1865.

<sup>66</sup> "The Capture of Selma," *The Daily Cleveland Herald*, April 24, 1865.

<sup>67</sup> "The Capture of Selma," *Milwaukee Sentinel*, April 29, 1865.

of southern supplies and equipment captured or destroyed while marching.<sup>68</sup> A condensed version of this report appeared in *The Cleveland Herald* over the course of two issues, both parts of which focused more on numerical figures than on a blow-by-blow chronicle of the campaign. These numbers included, “two rolling mills and foundries, two magazines, one locomotive, sixty-three cars, five steamboats, captured on the river, near the Wetumpa Nitre Works. The rebels burned 5,000 bales of cotton before evacuating.”<sup>69</sup> The following day, the rest of the report added that “2400 prisoners and 32 pieces of artillery in line, besides over 70 pieces in the arsenal,” were captured at Selma, while adding another estimated 2,000 Confederate soldiers taken prisoner at Columbus.<sup>70</sup> The *Daily National Intelligencer* ran their own “complete” account of the expedition in early May 1865, which contained a relatively brief blow-by-blow of every troop movement during the raid, while also providing numbers of troops involved in fighting, prisoners taken, and supplies captured or destroyed. The article claimed that, at Selma, “2,700 [prisoners] were taken. There, our forces found 32 guns in the fortifications...and 73 others in the arsenal.” It was estimated that Confederate forces destroyed between 30,000 and 90,000 bales of cotton in Montgomery before the capital surrendered, though at least 100,000 bales were captured during the fall of Columbus, along with, “The entire garrison [of Columbus], numbering over three hundred, were captured, and their commander, Gen. Taylor, killed.”<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>68</sup> “Wilson’s Great Raid,” *Milwaukee Sentinel*, May 9, 1865.

<sup>69</sup> “Telegraphic: Gen. Wilson’s Raid,” *The Cleveland Herald*, May 4, 1865. While the production facility may indeed have been called the Wetumpa Nitre Works, it is also quite possible that this was a misspelling of Wetumpka, a small town on the Coosa River approximately 15 miles northeast of Montgomery. However, following the author’s conversation with a member of the Elmore County Historical Society, it was understood that Wilson’s men never reached the town of Wetumpka, though they did indeed capture five riverboats along the Coosa River between Montgomery and Wetumpka. As such, a definitive location for the Wetumpa Nitre Works remains elusive, though the sketchy evidence available could place it along the river between Montgomery and Wetumpka.

<sup>70</sup> “Telegraphic: More About Gen. Wilson’s Raid,” *The Cleveland Herald*, May 5, 1865.

<sup>71</sup> “The Great Raid,” *Daily National Intelligencer*, May 6, 1865.

When dealing with specific battles fought between Wilson's men and the scraped-up Confederate defense units, a multitude of articles were written about the Union assault on Selma. From southern newspapers, one of the first to report that Selma might have fallen to Wilson's raiders was the *New Orleans Times*, which seemed to lament that Forrest's men were unable to halt the northern advance, and that, despite the best efforts to defend Selma, "The Yankees may yet be whipped, but the property cannot be restored."<sup>72</sup> *The Daily Chronicle & Sentinel* of Augusta, Georgia, reported in the May 2, 1865 edition of the paper that Selma had fallen, despite the best efforts of General Forrest to hold the line with the few forces available to him. The newspaper also provided a count of casualties suffered during the fighting, stating that over 1,000 of Wilson's men were either killed or wounded, in contrast to around 200 Confederate dead and wounded, though it attributes this to the fact that Wilson's men were on open ground, while the Confederate defenders were entrenched.<sup>73</sup> In addition to the articles chronicling the events of the battle, the *Montgomery Daily Mail* published a listing of casualties suffered by the Confederate defenders of Selma, even going so far as list the specific wounds inflicted on those being treated in hospitals in the city.<sup>74</sup>

Northern papers also carried numerous reports about the fall of Selma. *The Liberator*, William Lloyd Garrison's abolitionist paper, published a small dispatch on April 21, 1865, received from military sources, stating that Selma had fallen to Major General George Thomas, while General Gordon Granger captured Montgomery.<sup>75</sup> Several days later, *The Liberator* added further information, explaining that, despite having fortifications on par with those that had surrounded Atlanta, Selma was captured by Wilson's forces, "and over two thousand prisoners

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<sup>72</sup> "Highly Important from Mobile," *The New Orleans Times*, April 11, 1865.

<sup>73</sup> "The First Fall of Selma," *Daily Chronicle & Sentinel*, May 2, 1865.

<sup>74</sup> "List of Casualties at Selma," *Montgomery Daily Mail*, April 21, 1865.

<sup>75</sup> "The Capture of Mobile and Selama [sic]," *The Liberator*, April 21, 1865.

and one hundred were secured.... All the arsenals, naval iron works, magazines, and Government buildings... were destroyed.”<sup>76</sup> *The Daily National Intelligencer*, on April 13, published an official war bulletin from Huntsville, giving its readers notice that Selma and Montgomery had been captured, while incorrectly reporting that Confederate Generals Forrest and Phillip Roddy had been taken prisoner at Selma.<sup>77</sup> The same bulletin appeared in the *Weekly Vincennes Gazette* in Indiana on April 15, though it added further comments, namely that, though no direct message had been received directly from Major General Thomas, there seemed to be no reason to not believe the report.<sup>78</sup> Another bulletin appeared in the same edition of the *Weekly Vincennes Gazette*, signed by Secretary of War Edwin Stanton, informing readers, very briefly, that Selma had indeed been captured, as reported by Major General Thomas.<sup>79</sup> *The Daily Palladium* of New Haven, Connecticut, carried similar bulletins to those in the *Weekly Vincennes Gazette*, adding to the report that Selma had fallen and Forrest and Roddy were prisoners of war, “Our men dismounted and charged the intrenchments [sic] and carried all before them.”<sup>80</sup>

While Montgomery fell into Wilson’s hands without a fight, northern newspapers still carried dispatches from military sources confirming the capture of the Alabama capital. *The New York Herald*, on April 13, published an article using information received from Major General George Thomas in Huntsville, Alabama. This dispatch claimed that, after the fall of Selma, Montgomery had surrendered, and, incorrectly, Confederate General Forrest had been taken prisoner. The article, interestingly, stated that, “although he [Major General Thomas] has received no confirmation direct from General Wilson, he is inclined to believe these reports.”<sup>81</sup>

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<sup>76</sup> “The Capture of Selma, Ala.,” *The Liberator*, April 28, 1865.

<sup>77</sup> “Official War Bulletins,” *Daily National Intelligencer*, April 13, 1865.

<sup>78</sup> “Headquarters,” *Weekly Vincennes Gazette*, April 15, 1865.

<sup>79</sup> “Reported Capture of Selma,” *Weekly Vincennes Gazette*, April 15, 1865.

<sup>80</sup> “More Successes,” *The Daily Palladium*, April 12, 1865.

<sup>81</sup> “The Situation,” *The New York Herald*, April 13, 1865.

This was fully confirmed on April 21, when the *Herald* published the latest reports from the Deep South, stating that, along with Selma and Montgomery, Eufala, Alabama and Columbus, Georgia had been captured by Wilson's force after heavy fighting against Confederate forces led by Forrest, which contradicted part of the April 13 report.<sup>82</sup>

In April 1865, the *Montgomery* [AL] *Daily Mail* was one of the first southern newspapers to report on the fighting between Wilson's raiders and the Confederates defending Columbus, Georgia. In the first issue of the *Daily Mail* to be published after Wilson's forces had left the Alabama capital, the front page headline screamed out, "Fall of Columbus! Capture of New Bridge! General Stampede in the City!" According to the article, information regarding the Battle of Columbus was garnered from a Confederate officer from Montgomery who had escaped from Wilson's men after being captured during the battle. The officer, a Lieutenant Goldthwaite, detailed how the Union troops attacked swiftly, leaving defenders holding the only remaining bridge across the Chattahoochee to abandon their position before setting fire to the bridge to prevent immediate attacks on Columbus. In addition to capturing Confederate soldiers who had been holding defensive lines on the Alabama side of the Chattahoochee River, Goldthwaite's report estimated "that only two hundred of the troops defending the place escaped," thus suggesting that the remaining defenders had been taken prisoner by the Union raiders. The article also stated that several buildings scattered across Columbus had been burned, and a stampede of citizens took place as the Union forces advanced, engaging with Confederate defenders. His report concluded by explaining that, even though there was no concrete

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<sup>82</sup> "The Situation," *The New York Herald*, April 21, 1865.

information about where Wilson would lead his men following the fall of Columbus, Macon, Georgia was the most likely target for the Union troops.<sup>83</sup>

Another Confederate newspaper that reported on Wilson's assault on Columbus was Augusta, Georgia's, *Daily Chronicle & Sentinel*. Before the fighting along the Chattahoochee began, the Augusta paper re-printed a proclamation that had been issued by the Governor of Georgia, Joseph Brown, calling all Confederate militia to form and head for Columbus immediately to defend the city. It also warned that those who would not heed this call would be reported to the proper authorities, despite this pulling farmers away from their fields "at this important period but the movements of the enemy leaves me no other alternative."<sup>84</sup> After the fighting had concluded, a small dispatch ran in a late April 1865 issue of the *Daily Chronicle & Sentinel*, informing readers that virtually every factory and warehouse in Columbus had been destroyed by Wilson's forces, along with a small handful of shops and businesses. The dispatch also reported that, even though no residences had been destroyed by the Union troops, "many residences were entered and some plundering was committed- all of which we believe was contrary to orders."<sup>85</sup> In the North, *The Daily National Intelligencer*, on April 26, 1865, reported that West Point, Columbus, and Macon, Georgia had all fallen into Union hands, despite the efforts of the Georgia militia Governor Brown called up to defend the state.<sup>86</sup>

Seeing as how the war was winding down, with fewer and fewer campaigns to report on, it seems no surprise that Wilson's raid garnered as much attention as it did. With Lee's surrender, action in Virginia virtually ceased, leaving only Wilson's raid and Sherman's push

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<sup>83</sup> "Fall of Columbus!," *Montgomery Daily Mail*, April 21, 1865.

<sup>84</sup> "A Proclamation From Gov. Brown," *Daily Chronicle & Sentinel*, April 16, 1865.

<sup>85</sup> "From Columbus," *Daily Chronicle & Sentinel*, April 29, 1865.

<sup>86</sup> "From Georgia," *Daily National Intelligencer*, April 26, 1865. Macon, Georgia, fell to Wilson's men on April 20, 1865, less than a week before this article appeared in the Washington, D.C. newspaper.

against Joe Johnston in the Carolinas as the main military campaigns still being conducted. In addition, because Wilson had so many objectives along the path of his expedition, the need to provide their readers with plenty of information about military engagements in the Deep South was a key reason for wanting to give the raid the attention it received. Also, some readers may have been fascinated to see that there was fighting taking place in more distant locations past the war's "official end."

## CONFEDERATE RAIDERS IN THE PRESS

### Earl Van Dorn and the Raid on Holly Springs

The Confederate attack led by Earl Van Dorn on the Yankee equipment stored at Holly Springs, Mississippi, on December 20, 1862, was instrumental in halting Grant's push on Vicksburg. As such, it seems fairly certain that newspapers would want to give their readers the best reports possible about the raid, as to better understand how such an attack could grind an entire campaign to a virtual halt.

One of the first northern news reports on the raid on Grant's supply center in northern Mississippi came from Ohio's *The Daily Cleveland Herald* on the day after Christmas, less than a week after the fighting at Holly Springs. The Cleveland paper obtained information that only about 800 Union troops remained in Holly Springs, as a large contingent had been sent north to protect northern positions along the main southbound supply and communication route. The *Herald* also described how the Confederates were able to catch the Union troops in town completely by surprise. The dispatch claimed that "pickets were stationed three miles out on all the roads, but the rebels seem to have come in between the roads, and as the pickets made no alarm [of Van Dorn's approach], and when first heard of the enemy were in town firing at our sleeping men." Casualty wise, the *Herald* noted that approximately 200 were killed during the raid, another 150 were taken prisoner, and many of the rest managed to escape the Confederate cavalry.<sup>87</sup>

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<sup>87</sup> "Telegraphic: Wednesday Night's Report," *The Daily Cleveland Herald*, December 26, 1862.

Another report appeared in the *Daily National Intelligencer*, which suggested heavier losses in manpower than what the Cleveland paper claimed to be true. The Washington publication concurred that Van Dorn's raiders gained the element of surprise by not riding along the roads into Holly Springs, and thus not alarming the sentry posts stationed outside the town. The *Intelligencer* also agreed with the *Herald* regarding the number of dead and wounded during the raid, pegging that total around 200. However, while the *Herald* informed its readers that 150 Union soldiers had been taken prisoner by the Confederates, the *Intelligencer* claimed that these 150 were, in fact, the number of Union troops who escaped capture. Instead, the Washington paper noted that "the number taken is given at from one to two thousand." In addition, the *Intelligencer* added information that was missing from the *Herald*, namely a tally of what had been destroyed by the Confederates in the raid. This included "4,000 bales of cotton, 225 wagons, and about half a million dollars' worth of Government stores." The Washington publication realized how serious this attack had been when it mentioned that Grant and his men would have to discontinue their push south in order to find a new way to be resupplied. The *Intelligencer* suggested that he might move toward the Mississippi River near Friars Point, Mississippi, for such a refit to occur.<sup>88</sup> A slightly different count of supply losses appeared in the *Milwaukee Sentinel* on the same day. Instead of 4,000 bales of cotton destroyed, as the *Intelligencer* claimed, the *Sentinel* reported that only 3,000 had been lost. At the same time, the Milwaukee paper tallied a higher total of military supplies burned by the Confederates, approximately \$1,500,000 in all, compared to \$500,000 noted in Washington. Despite these conflicting reports, the *Milwaukee Sentinel* seemed to understand, like many other northern newspapers, that this had been a critical blow to Grant's campaign in Mississippi.<sup>89</sup>

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<sup>88</sup> "The Rebel Capture of Holly Springs," *Daily National Intelligencer*, December 30, 1862.

<sup>89</sup> "From Cairo and Below," *Milwaukee Sentinel*, December 30, 1862.

On New Year's Day 1863, the *Milwaukee Sentinel* followed up its article from December 30 with one of the most detailed accounts of the raid to appear in any newspaper in the Union. It described how a small Union cavalry detachment was ordered to be sent eastward from Holly Springs to search for Van Dorn's column, but somehow the recon force never left the town. As the Confederates surged into Holly Springs, past the oblivious guards, the Union troops there were caught without any warning, "surrounded by thousands of armed men, and forced to surrender without firing a shot." The *Sentinel* noted that there were some northern soldiers, not captured in the initial rush, who briefly attempted to fight back against Van Dorn's raiders before surrendering, "*But by far the greater portion never had theirs [arms] in their hands that morning* (emphasis theirs)." At the same time, a number of the Confederate cavalry went after the supplies stored in Holly Springs, going after "the depot buildings, machine shops, locomotives, and cars, &c....." The article described further movements by Van Dorn and his men against Union forces in northern Mississippi, though it did not contain many of the specific details as to total losses in both men and equipment that had been published the day before. Not having this information made it harder to understand just how much damage had been done to the Union supply train on its march to Vicksburg, though the article was effective at relating the overall story of the raid on Holly Springs.<sup>90</sup>

On January 5, the *Daily Evening Bulletin* of San Francisco, California, provided its readers a set of reports concerning the outcome of Van Dorn's raid in northern Mississippi. In the first article, the dispatches received noted that "Col. Murphy, who commanded [the Union troops] at Holly Springs at the time of the rebel attack, has been placed under arrest under a charge of misconduct and sent to Memphis." Further news out of the region noted that Grant had

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<sup>90</sup> "From West Tennessee," *Milwaukee Sentinel*, January 1, 1863.

set up a headquarters in the town of Abbeville, suggesting that he was falling back toward the main Union base of operations in Memphis.<sup>91</sup> The other major information received on the West Coast, arriving from Washington D.C., was a dispatch sent by Grant himself. According to this communication, one of the groups pursuing Van Dorn and his raiders had engaged the Confederates in a battle, possibly near Lexington, Tennessee. During this engagement, forces under Union General Jeremiah Sullivan “whipped them badly, capturing 6 pieces of artillery, and a large number of horses and prisoners. Van Dorn’s forces were repulsed at every point, with a heavy loss.” If this report was indeed true, then Union forces had succeeded in exacting some retribution for the raid in northern Mississippi, though it still did not restore the supplies and equipment that had been lost at Holly Springs.<sup>92</sup>

A brief, yet still relatively detailed, account of the raid on Holly Springs was published in the January 15 issue of the *Farmers’ Cabinet* of Amherst, New Hampshire. Its article claimed that, in the several hours Van Dorn spent in the Mississippi town, he discovered and subsequently destroyed approximately \$2,000,000 in Union supplies and war material, as well as nearly 2,000 bales of cotton, which the *Farmers’ Cabinet* listed as being private property. The New Hampshire publication also printed a fascinating tale of how some of the Union troops in Holly Springs managed to escape capture by the Confederate cavalry. According to the report from St. Louis used by the *Farmers’ Cabinet*, when a group of men from an Illinois regiment were told to surrender, “they made reply by dashing upon the enemy’s forces and nobly cutting their way out. Not a more gallant deed has been done during the war.” While this claim ran

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<sup>91</sup> “The Eastern News,” *Daily Evening Bulletin*, January 5, 1863. While the San Francisco newspaper listed the town as Abberville, it is fairly certain that this was a misspelling of Abbeville, a small town north of Oxford, Mississippi. As this would place Grant along the railroad line that connected Oxford with Holly Springs and other points north being used by the Union troops, Abbeville would be a fairly wise choice for where to set up a base of operations. That, and the fact that there is not a town in Mississippi called Abberville.

<sup>92</sup> “To-day’s Despatches,” *Daily Evening Bulletin*, January 5, 1863.

counter to the information being printed in both northern and southern newspapers, noting how the surprise attack by Van Dorn had elicited a fairly quick surrender, the story of these men could have been a way for those despairing over the losses at Holly Springs to believe that it had not been a complete pushover victory for the Confederates.<sup>93</sup>

Among newspapers in the South, Alabama's *Mobile Advertiser and Register* was among the first to break the news of the Confederate victory at Holly Springs. On Christmas Day 1862, the paper printed a brief dispatch received from Grenada, Mississippi, breaking this important news. The news from Mississippi provided the Mobile paper's readers with the joyous news that

Gen. Van Dorn's attack upon Holly Springs was made at daylight on Monday last, and was a complete success, with the loss of only about 15 men on our side. The enemy's killed and wounded, besides the prisoners already reported, are estimated at 400. Four trains and \$1,500,000 of army stores were destroyed. Gen. Grant barely escaped capture.<sup>94</sup>

While the information received from Grenada was not an extensive report, there was enough in the dispatch to allow the *Advertiser and Register* to present a fairly clear initial picture of the recent events in northern Mississippi.<sup>95</sup>

A more detailed dispatch from Mississippi appeared on the front page of the *Daily Richmond Examiner* that same day. In the report contained in the *Advertiser and Register*, 400 Union soldiers were killed and wounded at Holly Springs, in addition to those taken prisoner. It was in the front page story from Richmond where a more detailed count of the Union forces captured was mentioned. According to the communication, which had also come from Grenada, approximately 1,500 Federal troops had been detained during Van Dorn's raid, while large quantities of supplies stored in Holly Springs were also destroyed, though the Confederates took

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<sup>93</sup> "The Fighting Near Murfreesboro," *Farmers' Cabinet*, January 15, 1863.

<sup>94</sup> "News by Telegraph," *Mobile Advertiser and Register*, December 25, 1862.

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*

some northern weapons. The *Examiner* noted that another raid had taken place along the Union line of movement toward Vicksburg, and with these two attacks, “Yankee communication with Grant’s army has been entirely cut off. At last accounts Grant was ‘skedaddling’ as fast as possible.” This positive news from Mississippi gave the people of the Confederate capital one more reason to be joyous on that Christmas Day.<sup>96</sup>

Following his success against the northern troops at Holly Springs, Van Dorn rode north into Tennessee to shake any Union forces that might be pursuing him. This led to some interesting speculation among southern newspapers, including the *Mobile Advertiser and Register*. According to the December 28, 1862, edition of the paper, reports were trickling in that Van Dorn had linked up with Nathan Bedford Forrest, then operating in western Tennessee, and the two had moved against Memphis. Not only that, but these reports claimed that the combined forces of the two cavalry commanders had succeeded in their attack on Memphis, destroying some of the Union supplies and equipment there.<sup>97</sup> Another report given to the Mobile paper contradicted at least a portion of the first dispatch, in that Memphis had not been attacked, but that Van Dorn was in the area, and had gone as far as to demand the surrender of northern forces stationed in the city. Whether or not these communications turned out to be true, both of them appeared to reflect what some southerners may have hoped would occur, in that Van Dorn would follow up his destruction of the Union supply depot in Holly Springs with a quick thrust against one of the main bases of operations for the Union military in the Western Theater, severely hampering the northern ability to conduct campaigns in the region for the time being.<sup>98</sup>

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<sup>96</sup> “Telegraphic News,” *Daily Richmond Examiner*, December 25, 1862.

<sup>97</sup> “News by Telegraph,” *Mobile Advertiser and Register*, December 28, 1862.

<sup>98</sup> “Later From Memphis,” *Mobile Advertiser and Register*, December 28, 1862.

While this may have been hoped for, the *Daily Richmond Examiner* reported that accounts of Van Dorn and Forrest in Memphis were not true. The *Examiner* began with an updated total on the equipment destroyed by the Confederates during their raid in northern Mississippi, which included scores of weapons and approximately \$3,000,000 worth of other supplies. The information confirmed that there had been a Confederate attack on Memphis, but it was conducted by partisan rangers. “Van Dorn did not go in the vicinity of Memphis, as it was too strongly fortified and garrisoned....” At the same time, the *Examiner* suggested that there was no real truth to the rumor of Van Dorn and Forrest linking up in western Tennessee, though Forrest had also been busy doing as much damage as he could to the railroad lines in Tennessee. This news may not have been what many in the South had hoped to hear, but reading about the large amount of Union supplies that had either been taken or destroyed certainly had a positive impact on the Confederate population and its morale.<sup>99</sup>

The *Mobile Advertiser and Register* printed more information about the raid on Holly Springs, along with more rumors that were hoped to be true, as a bright way to ring in the new year of 1863. In its description of the raid on January 1, the newspaper mentioned that Van Dorn’s push into the city had caught Union forces completely off guard, and that the entire body of Federal troops had surrendered to Van Dorn’s command. The Confederates spiked five cannons, in addition to the weapons, ammunition, and other supplies they destroyed. The Mobile paper proclaimed the raid to be a great success, though it seemed to lament that Grant had not been taken prisoner during the encounter as well, having “left twelve or fifteen hours before for Jackson, saving his abolition hide by some tall walking.” Another dispatch printed immediately beneath this main body of writing included the rumor that a Union army paymaster had been

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<sup>99</sup> “Telegraphic News: The War in the Southwest,” *Daily Richmond Examiner*, December 30, 1862.

captured among the military forces at Holly Springs, carrying with him approximately \$3,000,000. Even if this bit of hearsay was proven to be untrue later on, the communication reported that Grant and the main body of troops that had been moving toward Vicksburg were having to retrace their steps across Mississippi, retreating back to Corinth. The report in the *Advertiser and Register* was unsure what caused this sudden shift in movement among the Union forces, though it was suggested that Van Dorn's raid had played a role.<sup>100</sup>

Grant's retreat back to Memphis was further confirmed in *The Daily Picayune*. On January 3, the New Orleans paper explained that, from the best information the *Picayune* had been able to obtain, Grant's men were encamped somewhere near Oxford, Mississippi. This suggested to them that Van Dorn had achieved a great success by raiding Holly Springs, cutting both the supply and communication lines for the Union forces in Mississippi. The *Picayune* also advanced the notion that, "Should Van Dorn and Forrest continue successful in the rear of the Federal army, as at Holly Springs, necessity will soon compel an evacuation of North Mississippi, and this retreat, we believe, will only end when he [Grant] reaches supplies at Memphis." The New Orleans publication claimed this to be an exciting series of events, and informed its readers that the hope was more news of this sort would soon reach the Crescent City, giving them even more reason to cheer, albeit away from the Union troops occupying New Orleans, for the Confederates under Van Dorn's command.<sup>101</sup>

While some southern papers were attempting to keep up with Grant's return to Memphis, others continued to chronicle the growing number of details being received regarding the raid into Holly Springs before Christmas. One such report came from the *Richmond Daily Examiner*.

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<sup>100</sup> "The Capture of Holly Springs," *Mobile Advertiser and Register*, January 1, 1863.

<sup>101</sup> "Further News," *The Daily Picayune*, January 3, 1863.

Using the Mississippi newspaper, the *Grenada Appeal*, as the source of its information, the *Daily Examiner* claimed that approximately 1,700 Union troops had been taken prisoner during the raid, and that the total amount of supplies destroyed by the Confederate cavalry was at least \$1,500,000 worth of equipment. In addition, “Several railroad trains, and all the shipping facilities found, were also destroyed.” The Richmond paper also specifically noted, “Van Dorn destroyed all that fell into his hands.” Included in the article printed in the *Daily Examiner* was the same information carried in the New Orleans publication, that Grant had returned to Oxford, as well as a report that claimed Van Dorn and his men had, after leaving Holly Springs, attacked the town of Grand Junction, Tennessee, inflicting further damage on the Union military there.<sup>102</sup>

While the *Milwaukee Sentinel* had printed one of the best descriptions of the raid on Holly Springs of any northern paper, the *Daily Morning News* of Savannah, Georgia, did the same for southern papers on January 10, 1863, presenting a highly detailed account from the Confederate perspective. This report began by explaining that 2,700 southern cavalymen had set out for the Union supply depot, having been equipped “with fifteen days’ rations... and a bottle of turpentine and box of matches each, to enable them the more perfectly to carry out their work of destruction upon Abolition property.” The account also mentioned of a body of Union raiders wrecking the Mobile and Ohio Railroad in the general vicinity of Van Dorn’s line of march. Possibly fearing that attacking that band might compromise the surprise the Confederates had, Van Dorn’s men let the Union forces be, continuing their circuitous route toward Holly Springs. As had been recounted in a number of other articles written on the raid, the Confederates avoided the northern sentries guarding the main routes into town, and thus swept into Holly Springs without any warning being given to the main encampments of troops there. It described how, as

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<sup>102</sup> “Affairs in the Southwest,” *Richmond Daily Examiner*, January 5, 1863.

Van Dorn's men went riding into the midst of the sleeping Union forces, the northerners hurriedly exited their tents, many of whom realized a quick surrender was the best course of action. "The surprised camp surrendered 1,800 men and 150 commissioned officers, who were immediately paroled." Following this action, the article then went on to describe, in great detail, the destruction of the Union supplies stored in town. Of all the news stories being written in the multiple outlets reporting on the raid, the *Morning News* had the most complete inventory of the equipment torched by Van Dorn's men. Even though it claimed this was only an estimated count, the Savannah paper still provided extremely detailed numbers of what the flames consumed, including,

1,800,000 fixed cartridges and other ordnance stores, valued at \$1,500,000, including 5,000 rifles and 2,000 revolvers. 100,000 suits of clothing and other quartermaster stores, valued at \$500,000; 5,000 barrels flour and other commissary stores, valued at \$300,000. \$1,000,000 worth of medical stores, for which invoices to that amount were exhibited, and 1,000 bales of cotton and \$600,000 worth of sutlers' stores!<sup>103</sup>

The *Morning News* asserted that, since the equipment and supplies were stored in such copious quantities throughout a number of buildings in Holly Springs, they were torched as well. Removing what was inside the buildings would have been a rather lengthy and arduous process, costing Van Dorn's men precious time needed to successfully escape from any pursuing Union forces. Further actions across the city, the paper reported, led to the destruction of a railroad train. Perhaps just as valuable to the Confederates as the supplies, General Grant's personal effects were captured in the raid as well. While the information received continued on, describing more of the march across northern Mississippi and southern Tennessee, it was this

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<sup>103</sup> "Letter from Mississippi," *Daily Morning News*, January 10, 1863.

detailed report of what was put to the torch at Holly Springs that made for such an engrossing tale of a crucial victory against the invading Union armies.<sup>104</sup>

The *Daily Morning News*, in printing a dispatch received from Mississippi, added credibility to the belief that the Holly Springs raid had seriously hamstrung Grant's ability to move against Vicksburg and to wage war throughout Mississippi in general. According to the *Jackson [MS] Appeal*, reprinted in the Savannah paper, "The progress of the enemy in this section of the State seems not only to have been checked, but we have reason to believe he has fallen back to most of the positions he originally held on the line of the Charleston railroad."<sup>105</sup> This dispatch coupled well with a report that had been published two days earlier, received from a Cincinnati newspaper. As stated in the reprinted article, the main body of Union troops Grant commanded had fallen back to positions north of the Tallahatchie River, which was essentially a statement from the northern commander that his plan had failed. The communication also claimed that any serious attempted thrust by the Union troops through Mississippi against Jackson and Vicksburg "can not be accomplished without a larger force than is at present under his command, to keep open his lines of communication."<sup>106</sup>

Despite the great deal of damage Van Dorn and his raiders caused at Holly Springs, Union troops began working to repair the destruction across northern Mississippi, in the hopes of beginning another push toward Vicksburg. In *The Daily Picayune* of January 14, it was reported that trains were beginning to run again from the supply depot in Jackson, Tennessee, south into Mississippi. From what the New Orleans paper had to say, this appears to have come not a moment too soon, as "The garrison at Corinth was on half rations, but that, with what could be

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<sup>104</sup> Ibid.

<sup>105</sup> "North Mississippi," *Daily Morning News*, January 15, 1863.

<sup>106</sup> "Grant's Failure Admitted- His Future Operations," *Daily Morning News*, January 13, 1863.

secured by foraging, was good living.” The dispatch from Cairo, Illinois, which *The Daily Picayune* gained its information from, also noted that a Union cavalry force led by a Colonel Lee was in hot pursuit of Van Dorn’s command, who the northerners believed was the best man available to catch the Confederate commander.<sup>107</sup>

*The Daily Picayune* added more details the following day, this time giving a more detailed description of some of the supplies the Confederates destroyed at Holly Springs. According to the dispatch, some of the equipment lost in Van Dorn’s raid included two train engines and forty train cars, “10,000 army blankets, \$100,000 worth of cotton; blew up the ordnance stores, and got \$10,000 in greenbacks.” In addition, all of the buildings housing supplies for the Union troops were burned to the ground. It would have been highly difficult to take a complete inventory of what had been taken or destroyed by Van Dorn’s cavalry raiders, but even with fragmented counts such as this, the general public still gained some scope of the destruction wrought on the Union supply depot at Holly Springs on that December day.<sup>108</sup>

In Great Britain, Van Dorn’s raid in northern Mississippi stirred up some excitement among the newspapers there as the reports about the attack began to arrive less than a month later, though not at the same level as what was seen in America. Among the first publications to report on the attack was England’s *The Birmingham Daily Post*, on January 8. The *Post* noted that the Confederates had caught the Union troops in Holly Springs unawares, which compelled the overwhelming majority of them to surrender, though around 200 were listed as killed or wounded during the brief fighting. Like other news publications, the Birmingham paper attempted to make sense of the accounts of destruction brought upon the Union supplies stored in the town, claiming that the total damage came to approximately half a million dollars, along with

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<sup>107</sup> “Further News Through Southern Sources,” *The Daily Picayune*, January 14, 1863.

<sup>108</sup> “Further News Through Southern Sources,” *The Daily Picayune*, January 15, 1863.

cotton bales and wagons for transporting the equipment. Out of all the reports printed, however, the *Post* provided one of the largest counts of the Confederate cavalry involved, estimating Van Dorn's force at 50,000 strong.<sup>109</sup> The same report appeared on the January 10 in *The Leicester Chronicle*, which contradicted parts of another report printed in the same paper, only one column over. As with the Birmingham paper, the *Chronicle* informed its readers that 50,000 Confederates under Van Dorn had attacked Holly Springs, killing or wounding 200 of the 800 stationed there while taking many of the rest prisoner, and burning military supplies worth \$500,000.<sup>110</sup> However, another dispatch received and printed in the Leicester paper claimed that, while Union casualties from the raid did number approximately 200, and the equipment lost cost half a million dollars, only 150 men had been taken prisoner by Van Dorn's men, a far cry from the 800 Union troops in Holly Springs noted in the other communication.<sup>111</sup>

A more realistic account of the raid appeared in *The Glasgow Daily Herald* on January 13. Using a report from Memphis, the *Daily Herald* informed its readers that roughly 3,000 Confederate cavalry pushed into Holly Springs in order to wreak what havoc they could on Grant's rearguard. Surprise was key for the southerners, as, "The suddenness with which the Confederates sprang upon them [the Union garrison at Holly Springs] while asleep created much confusion and consternation, and it was some time before they could return the fire. Our informant states that Van Dorn lost only three men killed and several wounded." Similar to what a number of other reports on the destruction mentioned, the raiding cavalry burned \$500,000 worth of equipment for the Union forces, though the *Daily Herald* claimed that 4,000 bales of cotton had gone up in flames along with Grant's supply depot.<sup>112</sup> At around the same time,

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<sup>109</sup> "Confederate Capture of Holly Springs," *The Birmingham Daily Post*, January 8, 1863.

<sup>110</sup> "The War in the South West," *The Leicester Chronicle*, January 10, 1863.

<sup>111</sup> "News by the Norwegian," *The Leicester Chronicle*, January 10, 1863.

<sup>112</sup> "Important from Holly Springs," *The Glasgow Daily Herald*, January 13, 1863.

reports from transatlantic liners began bringing news of the major battle at Murfreesboro, Tennessee, along with continued follow-up details about the mid-December engagement at Fredericksburg, Virginia. With this information being received as well, the fascinating story of Earl Van Dorn and his cavalry raid against Holly Springs became less important to write about, as his attack, though important, paled in comparison to these two major clashes.

Unlike a number of other times news of cavalry raiders appeared in newspapers on both sides of the war, Van Dorn's attack on Holly Springs in December 1862 was more thoroughly understood as to its impact on operations elsewhere. Articles appeared, detailing how, in the aftermath of the raid, Grant and the northerners under his command began withdrawing back to stronger positions in northern Mississippi and western Tennessee. A number of these newspapers realized that the destruction of the supply depot at Holly Springs was a key factor in this retreat, since an army without supplies cannot successfully sustain major operations for a lengthy period of time. While the newspapers may not have fully understood the time this bought Vicksburg, Mississippi, they did grasp the correlation between the Holly Springs raid and Grant's retreat back into Tennessee.

#### John Hunt Morgan Pushes Into the North

Like Earl Van Dorn's raid on Holly Springs in December 1862, Confederate General John Hunt Morgan's raid into the North stirred up a great deal of newspaper attention at the time. However, this makes perfect sense, as this marked perhaps the first time many of the people in Indiana and Ohio had seen the war come home to their backyards.

*The Daily Cleveland Herald* provided the population of northern Ohio with some of the first news of Morgan's raid across the Ohio in a series of dispatches published on June 23, 1863. In a brief summary of the front page war news, the *Herald* proclaimed that Confederate raiders

were reported in Indiana, believed to be out to destroy railroad tracks, including the lines of the Ohio and Mississippi Railroad. Also detailing a report from Louisville, Kentucky, the Cleveland paper claimed that, “the famous rebel John Morgan has crossed the Cumberland 5000 strong near Carthage, bent on mischief.”<sup>113</sup> More detailed dispatches found their way onto the front page as well. A piece of information received from Cincinnati claimed that 900 Confederates had crossed the Ohio River near Leavenworth, Indiana, and were making their way across the state “to burn bridges on the Ohio & Mississippi Railroad. Troops are moving to intercept them.” From Indianapolis came another communication, which sought to correct information being reported from New York, explaining, “The report... that 20,000 six months men were called for in Indiana on account of the rebel raid is absolutely groundless.” As confusion about how strong Morgan’s force was and where they were going existed early on in the raid, it was important for these newspapers to report what they knew, even though reporting rumors and hearsay could have contributed to additional panic among the population of the Midwest, which could have been advantageous to Morgan and his raiders as they roamed the countryside.<sup>114</sup>

On July 6, 1863, the *North American and United States Gazette* ran a story received from Louisville, which further complicated the already confusing task of tracking Morgan and his men. According to this dispatch, the Confederates under Morgan had engaged a unit of Union infantry in the town of Lebanon, Kentucky, which surrendered, leaving the southern cavalry to press on toward their next objective.<sup>115</sup> This same story ran in the *Milwaukee Sentinel* on July 7, along with another piece from Louisville, which listed the towns Morgan’s men had recently

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<sup>113</sup> “The News,” *The Daily Cleveland Herald*, June 23, 1863. While this may suggest that the Louisville news outlets were behind the times, having their report confirming Morgan’s thrust into Kentucky lent further credence to the news that Confederates had made it into Indiana, or were on the way, as virtually any path into the North would have led them through the Bluegrass State.

<sup>114</sup> “Telegraphic: Last Night’s Report,” *The Daily Cleveland Herald*, June 23, 1863.

<sup>115</sup> “John Morgan Attacks Lebanon,” *North American and United States Gazette*, July 6, 1863.

passed through, seemingly on their way toward Louisville itself. In response to this information, “The alarm bells now ringing are calling the citizens together in defense of the city. Rumors were prevalent all the evening of the approach of Morgan’s force.... His force is estimated at from 2,000 to 4,000. It is impossible to get particulars under the present excitement, before morning.” This last sentence essentially summed up how many northern newspapers must have felt in trying to get accurate details about the raid to their readers. It may have been that, until reports could be confirmed as accurate, rumors and hearsay would have to suffice.<sup>116</sup>

*The New York Herald* published information received from a correspondent in Lexington, Kentucky, who exclaimed that the city was in a great uproar over the news of Morgan’s raid. The city was in virtual chaos, as Union soldiers in Lexington worked to safely remove any supplies and equipment from the city that the Confederates could either take for themselves or destroy if they were unable to spirit them away. Fort Clay, where some of the harder-to-move items would be taken, had filled with northern forces ready to engage Morgan should the southern troops arrive. In the growing madness, the correspondent initially claimed that the Confederates numbered no more than 5,000, though later reports indicated a force of approximately 7,000 moving in the general direction of Lexington.<sup>117</sup>

Further early news asserting that Morgan and his command had crossed into the North, ready to incite panic among the people of Indiana and Ohio, was received and quickly reported by the *Lowell [MA] Daily Citizen & News*. Using a source from Louisville, the Massachusetts paper informed its readers that “4080 men, with ten pieces of artillery, including two howitzers, passed the Ohio at Brandenburg on Wednesday, and encamped near Corydon, Ind.....” This force, acknowledged to be Morgan’s raiders, had stated Indianapolis was the focus point of the

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<sup>116</sup> “From Louisville: Fears of an Attack by Morgan,” *Milwaukee Sentinel*, July 7, 1863.

<sup>117</sup> “Important from Kentucky,” *The New York Herald*, July 9, 1863.

raid, though the Louisville source pointed out that this statement was an unsubstantiated rumor.<sup>118</sup> A somewhat similar report was printed in the *Milwaukee Sentinel*, received from sources in Indianapolis. The dispatch received from Indiana claimed that Morgan's forces numbered between 6,000 and 8,000, and was thought to be moving toward a major supply depot at Jeffersonville, Indiana. In the capital city, "Business is entirely suspended here to-day— Our citizens are forming companies for self-defence. One regiment has been raised since last night." The communication also pointed out that Indianapolis was not the only city hurriedly assembling defense units, as forces from other locations across the state were being gathered and moved toward the areas most threatened by Morgan's raiders.<sup>119</sup>

A trio of dispatches from Cincinnati and Indianapolis provided further information about the raid to the readers of the *Daily National Intelligencer*. The report from Cincinnati detailed how "Gen. Burnside has a large force in Morgan's rear, and another in his front. The Indiana militia are pouring out from all parts of the state...." It further explained that Indiana's governor had declared martial law in southern Indiana, specifically those counties which bordered Kentucky, though it believed that, once the Union pursuers were able to catch up to him, Morgan would be made short work of. The first communication received from Indianapolis claimed that the Confederates had taken the town of Salem, Indiana, and left after burning the railroad depot there and capturing 500 prisoners, presumably continuing eastward. It noted that one of the cavalry groups pursuing Morgan's raiders was not too far behind, and the Home Guard was working to make the Confederates' potential routes across the Midwest harder to utilize. A

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<sup>118</sup> "The Raid into Indiana," *Lowell Daily Citizen & News*, July 10, 1863.

<sup>119</sup> "From Indianapolis," *Milwaukee Sentinel*, July 10, 1863.

follow-up dispatch from the Indiana capital reported that Morgan's men had struck again, this time burning the rail depot in Vienna, before resuming their eastbound course toward Ohio.<sup>120</sup>

As Morgan and his men continued their movements across the Midwest, reports became more credible, though the papers, like everyone else, still had to guess where the Confederate cavalry would be moving next. One of the first dispatches recounting his initial movements into Ohio came from *The Daily Cleveland Herald* of July 15, 1863. Using a report from Cincinnati as the source of this information, the *Herald* described how, after crossing the Little Miami River, Morgan's raiders burned a train, along with a handful of government wagons taken from the town of Loveland. Interestingly, the paper pointed out how, despite Morgan and his men damaging seven different railroad lines across Indiana and Ohio, all had been virtually restored to normal service shortly thereafter. This could have been done as a way to minimize the local population's fears of Morgan's raiders, and also downplay what success the Confederates had enjoyed in Indiana and Ohio.<sup>121</sup>

More interesting points were made in another Ohio newspaper, the *Newark Advocate* on July 17, 1863. The *Advocate* informed its readers that the Confederates were nearly able to make off with a contingent of fresh horses and mules housed at Camp Monroe, but the Union troops there removed the animals shortly before Morgan's men entered the area. Instead, near the towns of Reading and Montgomery, the Confederates acquired the well-rested mounts of local farmers, leaving behind tired animals as a replacement for what they took. The Newark paper also refuted claims made in other publications, which had reported the destruction of another Union position, Camp Dennison. Like many other news outlets, the *Advocate* noted that a pursuit force under

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<sup>120</sup> "Rebel Invasion of Indiana," *Daily National Intelligencer*, July 13, 1863.

<sup>121</sup> "Telegraphic: Last Night's Report," *The Daily Cleveland Herald*, July 15, 1863.

General Hobson was not too far behind Morgan, and believed that, “If Morgan should be checked, even half a day, on the Ohio river, Hobson will be upon him, and is able to whip and capture him.”<sup>122</sup>

By July 21, 1863, reports began to trickle in to newspapers in the North that Morgan and his troops had been captured, thus ending the extensive raid across Indiana and Ohio. Among these was an article in *The Daily Cleveland Herald*, which described how the Confederates had been engaged with a Union force under General Henry M. Judah, where the Federal pursuers “succeeded in capturing one thousand of the rebels, with all their artillery.” Judah claimed to have scattered the raiding force across the countryside, and that he and his men would soon be able to apprehend the remaining cavalrymen. Until then, he believed, the Confederates would “find it almost impossible to again concentrate....” As such, without the ability to move with any sense of massed numbers, Judah was essentially declaring that the raid was no longer a threat to the people of Ohio. Another fascinating point made in the article was the notion that Morgan had not initially planned on crossing the Ohio River into Indiana, but had been forced to do so to escape a Union force that had been pursuing him across Kentucky.<sup>123</sup> This theory, in various forms, was presented in other northern newspapers, such as *The Daily Palladium*, which wrote that Union General Burnside was pushing Morgan’s raiders toward the Ohio River as they rode across Kentucky, in the hopes of pinning him against the river, but Morgan was able to escape over the Ohio, which led to his campaign across the American Midwest.<sup>124</sup>

Official military reports were not long in reaching the northern press. Two separate dispatches were published together in the *Daily National Intelligencer* on July 22. The first was

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<sup>122</sup> “John Morgan’s Raid,” *Newark Advocate*, July 17, 1863.

<sup>123</sup> “Morgan’s Band Defeated,” *The Daily Cleveland Herald*, July 20, 1863.

<sup>124</sup> “The Late Riots,” *The Daily Palladium*, July 24, 1863.

written by Union Brigadier General James M. Shackelford, who claimed he had captured at least a thousand of Morgan's men after engaging them in a running fight across several miles of Ohio countryside. The day before this skirmishing, Shackelford and his men had detained several hundred other raiders. Shackelford suggested that the Confederates his forces killed were not as important as those he had taken prisoner, and concluded his report with the belief that "I think I will capture Morgan himself to-morrow." The second communication, from Lieutenant LeRoy Fitch, detailed how he had engaged in a firefight with some of Morgan's men, but had caused many of the Confederates to run due to artillery fire being poured in from the Union troops. Fitch also mentioned how General Judah had pressed on in an attempt to capture more of the Confederate cavalymen who had escaped the fighting.<sup>125</sup>

Following the publication of army reports telling of Morgan's capture, the *Milwaukee Sentinel* provided its readers with an in-depth piece about what had become of the Confederate cavalry commander. According to the *Columbus Journal*, which the *Sentinel* used as its main source of information, Morgan and approximately thirty of his men had been brought to the Ohio Penitentiary and would be held there "until the rebels see proper to release the officers of the Straight [sic] and Grierson expedition, now inmates of the Libby Prison at Richmond." The article even provided details regarding how the Confederates were received upon their arrival at the penitentiary, including listing some of the items that were taken from the prisoners as they were examined, and informing the readership that the raiders were given time to wash before being taken to their cells. Some in the North may have felt such humane treatment to Morgan's officers was unwarranted, but the *Sentinel* hoped that, by printing such facts, it would "secure the speedy release of the officers of Col. Straight's [sic]...."<sup>126</sup>

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<sup>125</sup> "Rout and Capture of Morgan's Band," *Daily National Intelligencer*, July 22, 1863.

<sup>126</sup> "John Morgan an Inmate of the Ohio Penitentiary," *Milwaukee Sentinel*, August 5, 1863.

Among southern newspapers, one of the first reports on Morgan's raid into the North came from *The Richmond Whig* on July 15, 1863. Printing a news dispatch originating from Indianapolis, the *Whig* let its readers know that Morgan and his command, numbering between 6,000 and 8,000, had crossed the Ohio River and captured the town of Corydon, with Union forces falling back, most likely to more defensible positions to guard against the raiders. The Richmond paper also noted reports from Louisville, which stated that the Kentucky city had been placed under martial law while Morgan and his band roamed the countryside, though the communications from Louisville claimed the Confederates were somewhere between the Indiana towns of Corydon and New Albany. The *Whig* even went as far as to print a somewhat abridged version of the correspondence sent to *The New York Herald* from one of its reporters in Kentucky, allowing Virginia readers to see the sense of fear and panic that news of a potential advance by Morgan and his raiders stirred up among pro-Union populations.<sup>127</sup>

Another early southern publication that attempted to keep up with Morgan's movements and report them as quickly as possible was the *Chattanooga Daily Rebel*.<sup>128</sup> On July 20, 1863, this southeastern Tennessee newspaper printed a handful of dispatches received from Cincinnati to provide information about Morgan's movements to the *Rebel's* readership. One of these communications stated that gunboats were carefully watching the Ohio River for any potential crossing back into Kentucky by Morgan or his men, as the river had apparently become too

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<sup>127</sup> "Additional from the North: The Invasion of Indiana and Kentucky," *The Richmond Whig*, July 15, 1863.

<sup>128</sup> The *Chattanooga Daily Rebel* was a highly interesting specimen of Confederate newspapers. Initially printed in Tennessee, the paper took flight across the Southeast later in the war, in order to keep from falling into Union hands. According to a short history of the paper on the Library of Congress website, the *Daily Rebel* set up shop in the Atlanta area during much of 1864, before fleeing again and settling in Selma, Alabama. It was in Selma, at the very end of the war, that the *Daily Rebel* finally ceased publication, having lost virtually all of their equipment during Wilson's raid in April 1865.

swollen for the Confederates to simply ford the water. Another noted that he was still moving east across southern Ohio, but had reached a point where martial law was no longer necessary in Cincinnati. At the same time, should Morgan and his men reverse course and return to Indiana, Union troops in Indianapolis defending the city were being reinforced with “two full batteries of twelve-pounders and twenty-four howitzers... for the reception of John Morgan.”<sup>129</sup>

*The Chattanooga Daily Rebel* followed up this story with an article combining details of Morgan’s movements with Union reports that the Confederate raiders had been captured in Ohio. A dispatch from Louisville reported that Morgan and his men had been encamped near the town of Vinton, Ohio, on the night of July 21, while a similar statement from Maysville, Ohio, stated that the Confederates had raided that particular town on July 20. Below these two communications, the *Daily Rebel* reprinted both the letter Lieutenant Fitch had penned to Gideon Wells, the U.S. Secretary of the Navy, and General Shackelford’s report on the capture of between 1,000 and 1,500 Confederate cavalymen. It seems interesting that a newspaper would publish the two dispatches on the continued movement of Morgan’s raiders in the same article as Union military reports about the capture of many of these same troops. In doing so, the paper could have created a different kind of confusion regarding the raid, leaving southerners wondering if Morgan was still raiding or had indeed been captured, and perhaps even disheartened once his ultimate capture was confirmed.<sup>130</sup>

Though the original report had first been published over a week earlier, the *Fayetteville [NC] Observer* printed an article received from the *Knoxville Register* in Tennessee on July 20, 1863. Showcasing a similar sense of confusion that plagued northern news publications about the

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<sup>129</sup> “Movements of John Morgan,” *Chattanooga Daily Rebel*, July 20, 1863.

<sup>130</sup> “Very Latest from John Morgan,” *Chattanooga Daily Rebel*, July 26, 1863.

early days of Morgan's raid, the *Register*, and thus the *Observer*, informed its readers that news arriving from Kentucky claimed that Morgan and his men had successfully taken Lexington, Kentucky. While the newspapers noted that the reports indicated this was true, it was also noted that this information "may be premature." While the *Register* and the *Observer* might have included this disclaimer as a way to suggest the event had not been officially confirmed yet, it was good that such a statement was made. Morgan's raiders did not even attempt to capture the city, so noting that the hearsay being printed could have been just that reminded the public that the paper was not trying to deliberately mislead them.<sup>131</sup>

In the same edition that carried the official communications from Union officers Shackelford and Fitch, a late July 1863 issue of the *Daily Richmond Examiner* presented the opinion that, even though Morgan and his raiders had been captured, their loss was not entirely a terrible thing. The paper explained, "While the capture of twenty-five hundred cavalry... is matter for regret, it is a trifle in comparison with their achievement." When discussing Morgan, the *Examiner* presented a position similar to what certain northern newspapers had written about the attempted raid on Rome by Abel D. Streight earlier in 1863. The Richmond paper emphasized this belief heartily in their writing, proclaiming,

No! Morgan's expedition was not a failure. With twenty-five hundred men he traversed two enormous States from end to end- occupied their principal towns at his pleasure- cut their arteries communication, burnt depots, destroyed engines, sunk steamboats innumerable. He threw several millions of people into frantic consternation for the safety of their property, turned entire populations into fugitives, and compelled a hundred thousand men to leave their occupations for weeks and go under arms— only as an equivalent to him and his twenty-five hundred troops.<sup>132</sup>

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<sup>131</sup> "Morgan Heard From," *Fayetteville Observer*, July 20, 1863.

<sup>132</sup> "Daily Examiner," *Daily Richmond Examiner*, July 27, 1863.

While the northern papers suggested that the destruction of the railroad lines in and around Rome would have balanced out the loss of Streight's 1,700 men, the *Examiner* asserted that Morgan's capture was a small price to pay for the panic and destruction he had caused north of the Ohio River.<sup>133</sup>

A short news item ran in the July 31 edition of Augusta, Georgia's *Daily Chronicle & Sentinel*, which attempted to clarify the numerous reports from the North suggesting that Morgan had been captured. According to *The Richmond Dispatch*, where this item originated, Union reports were heavily inflating the strength of the raid into Indiana and Ohio, which the southern papers seemed to ridicule. The initial northern accounts claimed that only 4,000 cavalymen and six artillery pieces had crossed the river into the Midwest, but as the *Dispatch* noted, by the time all the numbers in the several reports had been added up, Morgan's raiders had grown so vast in number that "there have been captured 31,000 men and 28 pieces of cannon." While the confusion as to the Confederate movements had subsided as the raid continued, sorting out its strength as the troops were being captured by their Federal pursuers was a different matter entirely.<sup>134</sup>

Confirming the news that Morgan had been defeated and taken prisoner by Federal forces in Ohio, a short piece ran in the *Chattanooga Daily Rebel* in early August 1863, which simply stated that "the War Department has decided that Morgan and all his officers are to be confined in the Ohio Penitentiary, until the rebel authorities release the officers and negro troops captured some time ago in Georgia." Though more vague with its information than papers such as the

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<sup>133</sup> Ibid.

<sup>134</sup> "Morgan's Losses," *Daily Chronicle & Sentinel*, August 2, 1863.

*Milwaukee Sentinel*, the Chattanooga publication still gave its readers a fairly accurate picture of what had become of the great Morgan and his command following the raid.<sup>135</sup>

Morgan's raid into the North received far less attention overseas. Two early reports about the Confederate cavalry assault across the Ohio were little more than a couple of sentences, each contained within a larger news story chronicling a number of accounts about the war in America. One English newspaper, *The Bradford Observer*, on July 30, 1863, noted that "John Morgan's raid into Ohio has not been ended, but at the latest date he was said to be hemmed in by the Federal forces,"<sup>136</sup> while the entirety of the report given by another British publication, *The Leeds Mercury*, explained, "General Morgan with the balance of his command have been captured and taken to Cincinnati."<sup>137</sup> The dispatch printed in Leeds was expanded some by a Scottish paper, *The Dundee Courier and Argus*. Included with a reprinting of Shackelford's official communication on August 11, 1863, the Dundee paper also published information from a telegram originating in Cleveland, claiming that the remnants of the raiders, including Morgan himself, had been captured by Union troops near New Lisbon, Ohio, and were being held prisoner in the town of Wellsville.<sup>138</sup> It seems interesting that, while Morgan's raid into Indiana and Ohio received a great deal of newspaper coverage in both the North and the South, the British instead devoted their war news to other incidents taking place around the same time as the cavalry campaign, spending a large portion of the time given to the raiders over to descriptions of their capture. It is hard to understand why the British did not print more about the raid that stirred up such an uproar in the Union. Most likely, it could be considered that, since the titanic clashes at Gettysburg and Vicksburg had recently concluded, coupled with the time it took

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<sup>135</sup> "From the United States," *Chattanooga Daily Rebel*, August 4, 1863.

<sup>136</sup> "The American Conscription Riots," *The Bradford Observer*, July 30, 1863.

<sup>137</sup> "America," *The Leeds Mercury*, August 10, 1863.

<sup>138</sup> "America (Supplemental to Telegraph)," *The Dundee Courier and Argus*, August 11, 1863.

for news to travel across the Atlantic, British newspapers felt it more paramount to give their readers as much information as possible about the most crucial aspects of the conflict raging in North America.

#### Accounts of the Fighting at Fort Pillow

Forrest's thrust to take the defensive position at Fort Pillow was one of the most important Confederate actions in western Tennessee during the spring of 1864, and the fighting there stirred up a great deal of controversy regarding whether or not he ordered the African-American troops defending the fort to be killed in the manner which they were after surrendering. As such, it only seems natural that newspapers in the North, the South, and overseas would devote a relatively large amount of their column space to news about this attack.

An overwhelming majority of articles published about Forrest's attack on the fort gave detailed descriptions of the battle and subsequent massacre of the African-American troops garrisoned there. A handful also provided other descriptive information that would help readers better understand the situation unfolding in western Tennessee. This included a short piece in the *Daily Cleveland Herald* from April 20. This article, published eight days after the fighting took place, provided readers with a brief description of the fort, rather than of the battle that had occurred. Informing Clevelanders that it had been initially constructed by the Confederates to aid in the defense of Memphis, the fortifications had been taken by Union forces in 1862, and provided a good point from which to launch the assault which captured the southwestern Tennessee city in the summer of that same year. Since then, Union troops used Fort Pillow for essentially the same reason that the Confederates had: to defend Memphis and protect northern assets traveling along the Mississippi River. Interestingly, the *Herald* mentioned in this article that, before the battle on April 12, Union military reports were submitted stating that the fort was

considered weak and would potentially be easily taken by a concentrated Confederate attack on the position. While perhaps not giving a detailed layout of the fortifications or its topography, having this information helped the *Herald's* readers understand more about Fort Pillow and why it was considered a relatively important position for the Union Army to hold.<sup>139</sup>

One of the first northern reports giving readers any indication of the fighting taking place at Fort Pillow ran in the *Daily National Intelligencer* on April 15, 1864. This brief article provided a relatively detailed account of how the battle began. According to the Washington paper, the Confederates demanded an unconditional surrender from the fort's defenders, but the officer in charge, "Col. [William Hudson] Lawrence, of the 34<sup>th</sup> New Jersey regiment, commanding the post, replied that his government had placed him there to defend the fort and that a surrender was out of the question."<sup>140</sup> While the *Intelligencer* provided little information in its initial report on April 15, the newspaper published a rather hefty article about Fort Pillow the following day. According to the April 16 article, the Confederates relentlessly assaulted the defenses beginning on the morning of April 12, and it was not until mid-afternoon that the fort's defenders finally surrendered to the Confederates. This piece was also one of the first to recount the subsequent massacre of the troops inside the defenses. The report stated that relatively few of Fort Pillow's defenders had been killed during the Confederate assault, but that once the Union troops surrendered, "the incarnate fiends commenced an indiscriminate butchery of whites and blacks, including those of both colors previously wounded." The northern paper went on to state that not only were the soldiers stationed at the fort attacked in such a way, but a number of

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<sup>139</sup> "Fort Pillow," *Daily Cleveland Herald*, April 20, 1864.

<sup>140</sup> "News by Telegraph: Latest Despatches," *Daily National Intelligencer*, April 15, 1864.

women and children also suffered a similar fate and that even the dead were treated the same as the living.<sup>141</sup>

Another interesting early report appeared inside *The Daily Cleveland Herald*. According to witnesses on board a steamer headed up the Mississippi, the *Olive Branch*, the fort had not surrendered as the ship passed by, though the American flag had been taken down from the flag pole.<sup>142</sup> From its report, “it was believed it [the American flag] had been shot away as there seemed to be efforts made to raise it again.” This initial report gave Clevelanders little information about the horrific events that had taken place in western Tennessee, but it began to prepare them for the articles that were sure to follow in the days ahead.<sup>143</sup>

Similar to both the initial articles that appeared in the *Daily National Intelligencer* and *The Daily Cleveland Herald*, *The Daily Palladium* of New Haven, Connecticut, first broke the news to their readers using the report received from the *Olive Branch* after its arrival in Illinois. Though the *Palladium* used the same source as the *Herald*, it made no mention of the lowered flag. Instead, it sounded more like the article which appeared in the Washington publication, explaining that the Union troops refused to surrender under the terms presented by the Confederates. One of the more interesting aspects of the proposed surrender was that the African-American troops defending Fort Pillow would be returned to the life of a plantation slave, but would be shown no quarter if the Confederates were forced to assault the position. Such a statement, though perhaps standard for a set of surrender demands of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, seems to suggest that the actions occurring following the capture of the fort, while maybe not at

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<sup>141</sup> “News by Telegraph: Latest Despatches,” *Daily National Intelligencer*, April 16, 1864.

<sup>142</sup> Interestingly, historians like Robert Browning, Jr. noted that the *Olive Branch* was being used by the Union military as a troop transport, hopefully to bring reinforcements to Fort Pillow and prevent its capture by General Forrest.

<sup>143</sup> “Telegraphic: Last Night’s Report,” *The Daily Cleveland Herald*, April 14, 1864.

the level some believed it to have happened, had been forewarned by the men of Forrest's command.<sup>144</sup>

News about the attack reached the western states fairly quickly, as one of the first articles about Fort Pillow appeared on April 15, 1864 in the *Daily Evening Bulletin* of San Francisco, California. Not only did this news piece give those in northern California the first hint that a battle had occurred north of Memphis, but also that the wholesale killing of African-American soldiers had taken place. Like some of the reports published in newspapers back east, the *Daily Evening Bulletin* used an account relayed from a steamboat traveling up the Mississippi River, though not the same one supplying *The Daily Palladium* and *The Daily Cleveland Herald* with their information. This ship, the *Platte Valley*, detailed how the vessel had stopped at the fort under a flag of truce as they journeyed northward, and assisted in taking some of the Union wounded on board. While they were doing so, passengers on board watched as Confederate soldiers went about "butchering the colored men on the field, and mutilating the bodies of those already dead- mostly those of colored soldiers. It is stated that out of 600 in the garrison, only 200 are alive, and some of these were wounded after the capitulation." While the dispatch began with a description of movements during the battle, and concluded by stating the belief that Forrest would fall back to a safer position, rather than attempting to hold the fort, a majority of the space given to this report was spent describing the massacre of the African-American troops that had been defending the position.<sup>145</sup>

News stories about Fort Pillow quickly changed, from talking about the Confederate assault of the defenses to the massacre of the Union troops that took place after their surrender.

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<sup>144</sup> "The Rebels at Columbus, Ky.," *The Daily Palladium*, April 14, 1864.

<sup>145</sup> "The Eastern News," *Daily Evening Bulletin*, April 15, 1864.

The *Daily National Intelligencer* provides a prime example of this. While early reports of the battle at Fort Pillow began to appear on April 16, 1864, a news piece on April 18 gave readers in the U.S. capital a rather detailed description of certain moments of the slaughter. The main incidents related on April 18 were when the Confederates reached the fort's hospital and the events that occurred on the day after the battle. According to the *Intelligencer's* source, a correspondent for the *St. Louis Union*, "many of our wounded were shot in the hospital. The remainder were driven out and the hospital was burned." This report continued by explaining how, on the day after the battle, wounded African-American soldiers who survived the night were shot by the Confederates, and that many of those who had escaped the fort wishing to be taken prisoner were lined up and executed by the southern troops. However, this account states that not all the soldiers who defended Fort Pillow were treated in such a manner, as a number of the wounded were allowed to be transferred onto steamboats on the river, to be given what medical treatment could be provided.<sup>146</sup>

The *Boston Daily Advertiser* published a pair of articles about the battle on April 16, adding more details to what had already been printed about the fighting. The Boston paper described the events taking place after the Union troops surrendered the defenses as an incident "which baffles all description." As noted by the *Advertiser*, a majority of the casualties suffered by the Union forces at the fort occurred after they had surrendered to the Confederates, civilians and the wounded being killed indiscriminately as well, with the corpses being seriously mutilated by the victorious southerners. This article, like many others, attempted to guess at Forrest's next move, and suggested that his next operation would be launched against Memphis itself, as a way to further weaken Union control over western Tennessee.<sup>147</sup> The second dispatch discussing Fort

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<sup>146</sup> "The Massacre at Fort Pillow," *Daily National Intelligencer*, April 18, 1864.

<sup>147</sup> "From the Mississippi," *Boston Daily Advertiser*, April 16, 1864.

Pillow to appear in the April 16 issue included another facet of the massacre that had not been reported in earlier publications. Here, it was reported that, “Two negro soldiers wounded at Fort Pillow, were burned by the rebels, but afterwards worked themselves out of their graves.<sup>148</sup> They were among those brought up in the *Platte Valley*, and are now in the hospital at Mound city.” Interestingly, this piece explains that the Confederate attackers had not initially planned on killing the white officers inside the defenses, but upon finding them serving alongside African-Americans, this changed their beliefs rather quickly, leading to the killing, regardless of skin color. It also makes note that, “While the rebels endeavored to conceal their loss, it was evident they suffered severely.” While a number of other dispatches claimed that the Confederates had only suffered a handful of losses in the assault, it is possible that northern newspapers would grasp at any potential straw that would put any sort of positive light on the loss of Fort Pillow and the wholesale killing of its defenders.<sup>149</sup>

Northern newspapers continued to find and report what they considered to be damning evidence against the Confederate forces that attacked the defensive position north of Memphis, proving that they had sought to massacre the troops stationed there. A short piece in *The Daily Cleveland Herald* in late April 1864 reported that a man from Vermont who had been living in the vicinity of Fort Pillow, and was at the location on the day of the battle, had given a statement at the headquarters of Union General William Rosecrans. According to the account given by Edward Benton to the northern forces, not only had the wholesale killing of the Union troops attempting to surrender taken place, but that the Confederates, wanting to be sure they had killed

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<sup>148</sup> While there are no words seriously misspelled in this sentence that would cause confusion as to what was meant in that regard, the probable rush to get this story in the paper to meet the printing deadline most likely caused the word “burned” to be substituted for “buried.” This was quite possibly an honest mistake made when rushed, but still could have caused some confusion for the readers.

<sup>149</sup> “From the Southwest,” *Boston Daily Advertiser*, April 16, 1864.

as many of the enemy as possible, explained that “bloodhounds were used to discover the hiding places of those who had escaped massacre.” By printing this report from St. Louis, the *Herald* added one more shred of evidence northerners needed to cry out against the South, demanding a full-blown retaliation for the atrocities perpetrated by Forrest and his men during and after the Battle of Fort Pillow.<sup>150</sup>

*The Daily Palladium*, upon learning of the wholesale killing in western Tennessee, published their opinion of these events. Stating that never before had such an atrocity occurred on the American continent, the New Haven publication claimed this this was the beginning of a policy that had been threatened before, labelled “black flag” by the Connecticut writers. The *Palladium* then pushed the belief forward that the United States government owed it to the soldiers fighting desperately for the preservation of the Union to protect them from such horrific actions, and to do everything in its power to punish the Confederates for this massacre, keep them in check, and prevent incidents such as Fort Pillow from happening again. In addition, the *Palladium* seemed to advance the notion that the massacre in western Tennessee was becoming a rallying point for those in the North who wanted the rebellion crushed by any means possible, instead of seeking any form of reconciliation with the Confederates, that the southerners were untrustworthy people who needed to be thoroughly whipped instead of compromised with.<sup>151</sup>

Attempting to put the massacre at Fort Pillow in a larger perspective, the *Farmers’ Cabinet* of Amherst, New Hampshire, ran an article providing one opinion on the future of the war. In this piece, the killing of African-American troops both at Fort Pillow and at Plymouth, North Carolina, “puts a new and fearful aspect upon the future of our national struggle. Such

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<sup>150</sup> “Telegraphic: Last Night’s Report,” *The Daily Cleveland Herald*, April 25, 1864.

<sup>151</sup> “The Black Flag!,” *The Daily Palladium*, April 15, 1864.

enormities can only be stayed by the sternest retaliation.” The writer went on to state that, in a speech given not long after the battle, President Lincoln believed that retaliation would come to the South if these events were proven to be true. Not only were Americans listening to the President, but, according to the *Farmers’ Cabinet*, a number of people living in Boston were holding daily prayer meetings, asking for divine intervention in order to bring the war to a close, which would hopefully prevent such wholesale killings from being repeated.<sup>152</sup>

Interestingly, as reports continued to pour in to northern newspapers of any sort of massacre of the Union troops in western Tennessee by Forrest and the men under his command, there were a handful that appeared to see the same events in a somewhat different light. As stated in an article running in San Francisco’s *Daily Evening Bulletin* on April 16, 1864, the Confederates captured about 100 prisoners after Fort Pillow officially surrendered. While it concurred that a relatively large number of the Union troops defending the position were killed after laying down their arms, some of the African-American troops had fled during the assault and hid in spots on the slope leading down to the river. It was here that many the fort’s defenders who were supposedly massacred after surrendering were shot, said the *Evening Bulletin*. Unlike many of the other northern papers who reported that the women and children who had been in the fort during the assault had been killed alongside the soldiers, this edition of the San Francisco paper stated that “Some citizens were also inside the fort, who fought well. The women and children went over on an island.” With this notation about what happened to the civilians that found themselves in the crossfire, the news story published by the *Daily Evening Bulletin* adds that much more confusion to the narrative of an event that was already difficult to comprehend.<sup>153</sup>

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<sup>152</sup> “Weekly Review of War News,” *Farmers’ Cabinet*, April 28, 1864.

<sup>153</sup> “The Eastern News,” *Daily Evening Bulletin*, April 16, 1864.

Another interesting dispatch ran in the *North American and United States Gazette* in Philadelphia on April 16, 1864. As many other northern newspapers had, the *Gazette* decried the actions of the Confederates who assaulted Fort Pillow, but continued describing their feelings, detailing what they thought was the true nature of these soldiers rebelling against the United States. After describing the wanton butchery Forrest's men engaged in after accepting the fort's surrender, the writer then listed a number of other instances throughout history where troops surrendering to superior forces were treated with relative fairness. This suggested that Forrest and his men were not honorable soldiers, but instead mere murderers to be looked down upon by those following the rules of civilized war. The *Gazette* also shamed northerners who believed in reconciliation with the South, seemingly scorning them for entertaining the notion that the Confederates were merely "our misguided southern brethren!" The Philadelphia paper concluded its story on the massacre by wondering, "Can too much be done to prevent and to punish such excessive barbarism in behalf of such excessive wrong?"<sup>154</sup>

One of the most detailed accounts of the fighting at Fort Pillow was printed in the *Daily National Intelligencer* in early May. Rather than simply utilizing a source that was strung from newspaper to newspaper until it reached Washington, this article detailed a report submitted to the Joint Committee on the Conduct and Expenditures of the War of the United States Congress. This report used eyewitness testimony collected by a delegation that had traveled to western Tennessee for the sole purpose of investigating the battle and massacre in the hopes of finding the truth about what happened on April 12. For two and a half columns of newsprint, the *Intelligencer* faithfully copied the report created by the delegation, which claimed that the Confederates used a flag of truce not only to send the fort's defenders the message to surrender,

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<sup>154</sup> "Confederate Civilization," *North American and United States Gazette*, April 16, 1864.

but also to move their assault forces into prime locations to storm the defenses. Once the fort had been taken, the report went on to state, the Confederates began indiscriminately killing everyone inside, no matter what their race, gender, or age. “Some of the rebels stood upon the top of the hill, or a short distance down its side, and called our soldiers to come up to them, and as they approached shot them down in cold blood.” Much of the report paints the men under Forrest’s command in the most negative light possible, essentially claiming that they were liars and murderers who had no respect for the rules of civilized warfare, nor human life in general.<sup>155</sup>

Unlike the stories being reported in the North, southern newspapers examining the Battle of Fort Pillow found somewhat of a different narrative than Union publications were describing.

Among newspapers published in the Confederacy, the *Daily Columbus Enquirer* of Columbus, Georgia, was among the first to report on the Battle of Fort Pillow. Though the articles printed in the *Enquirer* were from news publications in Mobile, Alabama, these stories were possibly the first word those living in west Georgia heard of the fighting north of Memphis. One of the articles, itself having reached Mobile via newspapers in Memphis, explained that two infantry regiments, eight artillery pieces, and nearly a thousand African-Americans had been captured by the Confederates following the fighting.<sup>156</sup> One column over, another article on Fort Pillow was printed, giving a slightly more detailed account of the engagement. According to this piece, after a surrender was refused by the garrison, the Confederates stormed the defenses and captured the fortification. After the fighting had died down, six artillery pieces were taken by Forrest’s men, and around 100 men made prisoner, while many of the rest were killed.

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<sup>155</sup> “The Fort Pillow Massacre,” *Daily National Intelligencer*, May 7, 1864.

<sup>156</sup> “Capture of Fort Pillow Confirmed!,” *Daily Columbus Enquirer*, April 17, 1864.

According to the Mobile writer, there were some who sought to avoid this fate by jumping into the Mississippi River, but virtually all who did so drowned.<sup>157</sup>

Despite the fact that acknowledging any sense of a massacre of Union troops taking place at Fort Pillow would be a black eye for southerners, there were newspapers that remained truthful and reported the incident as a mass killing, though still attempting to avoid directly accusing the Confederate troops of murder. One such instance came in the *Fayetteville Observer*, a newspaper from North Carolina. Its account explained that the southern forces divided into two groups and assaulted the fort, but then continued with the statement, “Indiscriminate slaughter followed. 100 prisoners were taken and the balance slain. The Fort ran red with blood. Many jumped in the river and were drowned or shot in the water.” This was the extent to which the Fayetteville paper described the massacre at Fort Pillow, suggesting that they realized it was necessary to report that the event had taken place, but did not want to go so far as to accuse the men of Forrest’s command of killing Union troops who were looking to surrender against overwhelming odds. The *Observer* also printed statistical data that ran counter to the belief a number of northern papers held at the time, informing their North Carolina readers that the Confederate attackers had only suffered 71 casualties in the assault, contrary to the notion Union publications put forth that Forrest’s command had suffered heavy casualties during the battle.<sup>158</sup>

While the *Fayetteville Observer* published an article shortly after the fighting along the Mississippi, informing its readers that many of Fort Pillow’s defenders had been killed by the Confederate attackers, two weeks later, the North Carolina newspaper reversed its position somewhat, refuting claims from northern publications that any such action had occurred at the

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<sup>157</sup> “Telegraphic: Reports of the Press Association,” *Daily Columbus Enquirer*, April 17, 1864.

<sup>158</sup> “The Capture of Fort Pillow- Further Particulars,” *Fayetteville Observer*, April 18, 1864.

fort during or after the battle. Quoting a Union newspaper asserting that northern forces had never engaged in such wholesale killings of Confederate soldiers, the *Observer* responded to this statement by saying, “It would not be easy to find a batch of more false claims than these. The South knows, and the yankees know, and the world knows, that it is all false, altogether false.” Interestingly, it suggested that even if such a slaughter had occurred, there would be some amount of justification for engaging in such actions. The Fayetteville paper explained “that if a fortified place refuses to surrender when it is morally impossible for it to escape capture, the storming forces are justified in putting the garrison to the sword....The principle is a humane one, preservative of life.” With this in mind, the *Observer* made it clear that President Lincoln was thus unjustified in his belief of executing Confederate prisoners of war as a way to retaliate for the losses suffered at Fort Pillow, a stance he had taken when speaking about how retaliation would come to the South, as the Union defenders had chosen to fight on against Forrest’s men, and as such, suffered the consequences for not capitulating in a timely manner.<sup>159</sup>

Another early southern account included a pair of brief front page notices in the *Richmond Whig and Public Advertiser* on April 19, 1864. The first piece stated that Fort Pillow had been captured, between 800 and 1,200 African-American soldiers had been taken prisoner, and eight artillery guns acquired as well.<sup>160</sup> Just like the *Daily Columbus Enquirer*, the second article was a report from the Mobile newspapers, though the Richmond paper used more of the Alabama publication’s article than the Georgia news outlet had. In addition to letting its readers know that few prisoners were taken and six guns captured, the *Whig and Public Advertiser* stated

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<sup>159</sup> “Retaliation,” *Fayetteville Observer*, May 2, 1864.

<sup>160</sup> “Good News from the Southwest,” *Richmond Whig and Public Advertiser*, April 19, 1864.

that Forrest's troops were also able to seize around \$100,000 worth of supplies and equipment from the fort.<sup>161</sup>

Wanting to make sure that official southern military reports about Fort Pillow were given to the Confederate citizenry, the *Daily Richmond Examiner* printed a letter General Forrest wrote to his superior, Lieutenant-General Leonidas Polk, on April 20. According to Forrest, his troops were able to force the fort's defenders back inside the walls during the early stages of fighting, before demanding the Union troops to surrender. When the garrison refused to capitulate, the Confederates assaulted the fort, and carried it within the span of half an hour. Forrest stated that his forces suffered fewer than 100 casualties in the battle, while roughly 500 Union troops were killed, some of the defenders were taken prisoner, and 100 horses and a large amount of supplies were captured. He confirmed that some within the fort attempted to escape by fleeing to the river, where they drowned, but he claimed that these were almost all citizens who had made their way to the fort before the battle. In his report, Forrest did not specifically confirm or deny that the fort's African-American defenders had been killed after surrendering, but his claim that 500 northern soldiers were killed could have potentially included any massacre victims, numbering them with those killed in battle in order to hide the post-battle carnage.<sup>162</sup>

In contrast to the northern newspapers believing that Forrest would make his way south and attempt an attack on Memphis, *The Daily South Carolinian* of Columbia, South Carolina asserted, on April 22, 1864, that their sources (in this case, a dispatch from Cairo, Illinois) were certain the Confederates under Forrest were making their way north after abandoning Fort Pillow, "leaving it a perfect wreck." After leaving the fortifications, Forrest had supposedly set

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<sup>161</sup> "The Capture of Fort Pillow," *Richmond Whig and Public Advertiser*, April 19, 1864.

<sup>162</sup> "The War News," *Daily Richmond Examiner*, April 20, 1864.

up a headquarters near the town of Jackson, Tennessee, between Memphis and Nashville. This newspaper article also mentioned the mood of Union officers in Memphis following the battle, stating that, “Officers in Memphis are greatly excited about the Fort Pillow massacre. The soldiers threaten to show Forrest and his men no quarter hereafter.” While newspapers during the war would use whatever information they could get in order to keep their readers up to date, publishing such a statement from a northern newspaper in a southern publication is interesting to note.<sup>163</sup>

An intriguing point about the attack on Fort Pillow was made in the *Daily Richmond Examiner* on April 28. According to this article, General Forrest had essentially abandoned the fort after taking it from the Union defenders. The *Examiner* explained to the citizens of Richmond not to be upset with Forrest for not holding the fort once it was safely in Confederate hands. Specifically, the newspaper stated that “Fort Pillow is far within the enemy’s lines and easily reached by the river.” Realizing that Union troops could easily move up the Mississippi to attack and regain the position, especially with no way to command control over the river around the fort, Forrest pulled back to a more secure area, and it was this realization that the *Examiner* conveyed to their readers. “Fort Pillow was of no importance to us, and the only value of the capture was its occasion of the severe punishment of the enemy and his heavy loss in stores.”<sup>164</sup>

Further attempting to refute the claims from northern newspapers that the Confederates had indiscriminately slaughtered the Union defenders of Fort Pillow, including the belief that Forrest had explicitly ordered their killing, *The Daily South Carolinian* printed a dispatch originally published in an Atlanta newspaper. This article claimed that Forrest himself had tried

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<sup>163</sup> “Latest Northern News,” *The Daily South Carolinian*, April 22, 1864.

<sup>164</sup> “The War News,” *Daily Richmond Examiner*, April 28, 1864.

with all his might to stop the killing of the fort's defenders once they began trying to surrender. However, by the time he was able to succeed in doing so, a relatively sizeable number of the Union forces had already been killed in the assault. The report went on to detail that roughly 200 prisoners had been taken after the battle, while another 50 who had been seriously wounded were loaded onto a steamer heading upriver in order to receive medical attention. Even though this article agreed that a number of the fort's defenders were killed during and immediately after the battle, "There is not the semblance of a shadow of truth in the Federal exaggerations of wholesale slaughter. The above are substantially the facts of the capture, coming directly and officially from the prominent actors in the bloody drama."<sup>165</sup>

Whether or not southern newspapers believed that such a massacre had taken place at Fort Pillow, a number of them reminded their readers of the great cavalry commander that General Forrest was. This was reinforced by various news items, including a small piece that ran in the *Richmond Whig* in early May 1864. In a regular report detailing the events taking place in the Confederate Congress, the *Whig* noted that a resolution was passed, commending General Forrest for his tireless work to defeat the invading northern forces, and celebrating his many achievements, which included the taking of Fort Pillow. Interestingly, this resolution suggested that, through his actions, Forrest had managed to free not only western Tennessee, but western Kentucky, from the grip of Federal troops and restoring Confederate control to these areas. While such a claim might be a stretch, there can be no doubt that Forrest's abilities as a commander made it that much more difficult for the Union military to assert and maintain control of the region.<sup>166</sup>

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<sup>165</sup> "The Fort Pillow Affair- Refutation of Federal Slanders," *The Daily South Carolinian*, May 5, 1864.

<sup>166</sup> "Confederate Congress," *Richmond Whig*, May 7, 1864.

Overseas, the attention being paid to the events occurring at Fort Pillow grew as each new transatlantic liner made its way to British ports. Some of the earliest pieces of information about the battle appeared in *The Birmingham Daily Post* and *Trewman's Exeter Flying Post*. In the April 25 edition of the *Daily Post*, a small item appeared in an article detailing various aspects of the war raging in America, simply stating that "Forrest's forces yesterday demanded the surrender of Fort Halleck, Columbus, Kentucky, and of Fort Pillow, which was refused."<sup>167</sup> Two days later, the *Flying Post* published information similar to the *Daily Post*. Not only was the Exeter paper one of the first to break the news of the Battle of Fort Pillow to its readers, but was also one of the first to give details about the massacre believed to have happened there as well. According to the *Flying Post*, the Confederates who succeeded in carrying the fort began killing off its defenders after the remaining men of the garrison began surrendering. More specifically, "Out of 350 of the latter [the African-American troops stationed at Fort Pillow] only fifty escaped. It is also stated that not one officer that commanded them survived." Having received their information from a northern source, it only seems natural that this British paper would agree with the belief that a potential war crime had taken place at Fort Pillow.<sup>168</sup>

On the same day that the *Flying Post* gave its readers an account of the wholesale killing at Fort Pillow, *The Leeds Mercury* published a similar account of the events in western Tennessee, giving a brief description of the fighting. The Mercury also tried looking at the larger picture, believing that Confederate forces moving south out of Kentucky at the same time as the fighting at Fort Pillow suggested the main southern goal was to gain and hold ground in west

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<sup>167</sup> "America," *The Birmingham Daily Post*, April 25, 1864. While the Battle of Fort Pillow occurred on April 12, and this news item did not appear in the Birmingham newspaper until April 25, using the term "yesterday" is not completely incorrect. The information about the fighting in western Tennessee used in this newspaper came from a wire report received in New York early on the morning of April 14, thus suggesting it had been written late on April 13, and therefore yesterday would be, in essence, accurate.

<sup>168</sup> "America," *Trewman's Exeter Flying Post*, April 27, 1864.

Tennessee. In addition to this, the *Mercury* also presented its opinion on the news emanating from north of Memphis.

We forbear making any attempt to characterise this act, because we would fain hope for the sake of our humanity that the news may prove to be untrue. Should it really appear that Forrest's troops have slaughtered their prisoners because they happened to have black skins, there will be no term in our language strong enough to describe the atrocity of the dead.<sup>169</sup>

Writing their opinion in this form seems to present an interesting dichotomy. If reports from Fort Pillow confirmed the wholesale killing of the African-American defenders by Forrest's men, *The Leeds Mercury* would be just as outraged by this crime as the citizens of the Union desiring the Confederates to be punished as heavily as possible. However, the paper wants these reports to be untrue, most likely because they would be aghast at the massacre, but also that some writing for the *Mercury* might harbor pro-Confederate sentiments, and hearing of such an occurrence would put serious doubts in their minds about supporting the southern rebellion.<sup>170</sup>

Providing its readers with information about the April 12 battle, *The Liverpool Mercury* also put their spin on the effects of Fort Pillow's capture. Unlike what northern reports claimed about the strength of the defenses at the fort, the Liverpool paper noted that Fort Pillow was quite strong, and intense fighting was required in order for the Confederates to capture the position. The *Mercury* made note of the reports of the African-American troops being massacred after surrendering, but it claimed that these accounts were so far unfounded, though stating the belief that such incidents could take place if the Union military continued utilizing African-Americans in combat roles against Confederate troops. The Liverpool publication then took an interesting stance on what Fort Pillow's capture by southern forces meant, believing that this gave the

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<sup>169</sup> "The Leeds Mercury," *The Leeds Mercury*, April 27, 1864.

<sup>170</sup> Ibid.

Confederates control of the Mississippi, and that, if Forrest and his men were able to hold the fortifications, “the Federal position on the Mississippi will be as precarious as it was previous to the capture of Vicksburg.” While that statement was somewhat of an exaggeration, the *Mercury* was attempting to see the bigger picture, that the Confederates regaining control of the fort could have presented problems for Union riverboats traveling north from Memphis had Forrest chosen to remain and hold Fort Pillow, instead of reporting the battle as an episodic incident.<sup>171</sup>

Another intriguing report of the battle was printed in the May 2 edition of *The Birmingham Daily Post*. Using a dispatch sent from General Sherman as its main source, the British paper cited a handful of statistics that would have been highly valuable for anyone wanting details about the fighting at Fort Pillow. According to Sherman’s report to Washington, a majority of the white troops stationed at the fort were wounded, but when approximately 300 African-American soldiers tried to surrender, they were simply murdered. A fascinating point the Union commander makes in his statement claims that, “We are satisfied that due investigation will show that the loss of Fort Pillow was simply the result of a mistake of the local commander, who occupied it against direct orders....” Like a number of other reports, Sherman concluded that Forrest’s next move would most likely be against Memphis, a place where the Union general believed Forrest would be done in by a superior number of Union forces there.<sup>172</sup>

One report that went into great detail about the fighting at Fort Pillow was printed in *The Daily News* of London. However, rather than simply retelling the same overarching narrative, the report published was an interrogation conducted on “Mr. Benton, a civilian, who owns the land round the fort, and was in it at the time of capture.” The questions asked of Benton, and his

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<sup>171</sup> “Progress of the War in America,” *The Liverpool Mercury*, April 28, 1864.

<sup>172</sup> “The Capture of Fort Pillow,” *The Birmingham Daily Post*, May 2, 1864.

replies, were printed verbatim in the London paper, and provides a great insight into what he observed during the battle. His statements confirmed the northern accounts of the fighting, that Forrest's men used the time given to the garrison to consider an unconditional surrender to move into a position from which it would be easier to storm the fort. Benton also explained that he had indeed seen the African-American troops stationed there lined up and shot by the Confederates, barely escaping such a fate himself, and that bloodhounds had been used to root out any Union soldiers attempting to hide from the slaughter. While he could not assert that he had seen any African-American troops buried alive, Benton stated that there were enough witnesses to that incident, including the soldiers themselves, that it was believable. Of all the newspaper articles printed about Fort Pillow, the question-and-answer session with a civilian who had been at the scene was perhaps the most powerful of all the published reports. It is one thing to print an article about the events, using military dispatches and other newspaper stories as sources, but they pale in comparison with the punch provided by running statements made by an eyewitness. If newspapers of the time wanted to sway public opinion one way or the other, few articles could have matched, much less surpassed, Benton's statements.<sup>173</sup>

While a number of the foreign newspapers publishing accounts of the Confederate assault on Fort Pillow and the subsequent massacre of the African-American troops stationed there expressed horror at such actions, one article reacted in a different and highly interesting way to the events north of Memphis. In a larger piece about various events occurring in the United States at the time, *The Belfast News-Letter*, on May 3, 1864, exclaimed that "the news from Tennessee is glorious." Not only did it blatantly celebrate the Confederate victory over the Union defenders of the fort, but it also addressed the news that Forrest's men had brutally killed nearly

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<sup>173</sup> "The Massacre by the Confederates at Fort Pillow," *The Daily News*, May 12, 1864.

everyone inside the fort once it was taken. The *News-Letter* claimed that “There is, of course, no truth in the statements of ‘wholesale massacre’ which the Abolitionists send forward by telegraph from Cairo.” Like many of the other articles being published about the Confederate victory at Fort Pillow, *The Belfast News-Letter* concurred that the loss of this position was somewhat damaging to the Union war effort in western Tennessee. However, suggesting that news of the massacre that followed the battle was merely an invention of northerners to stir up anti-southern sentiment across the country, and potentially around the world as well, puts the writing in this Irish news publication in a class almost all of its own.<sup>174</sup>

*The Belfast News-Letter* continued to push its stance on the Battle of Fort Pillow by printing “a private letter from a gentleman in Cincinnati to a friend in New York. It gives a rational, and probably very correct, account of the affair.” As stated in the letter, the African-American troops defending the position fled as soon as the fighting commenced, though some did attempt to return fire on the attacking Confederates as the Union troops ran. It explained that those who surrendered were not harmed, though until the officers could gain control over their men again, there were some African-American soldiers and civilians who were shot and killed. The letter concluded by suggesting that, when assaulting fortified positions, the rules of war allowed the attacking force to forgo giving quarter to the defending troops. Publishing this letter adds further credence to the belief that the *News-Letter* not only considered northern reports of the battle to be falsehood, but also openly and highly supported the Confederate cause.<sup>175</sup>

The Battle of Fort Pillow was a major engagement for the control of western Tennessee, and the source of a controversy that may never fully go away. Whether or not Forrest directly

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<sup>174</sup> “American Correspondence,” *The Belfast News-Letter*, May 3, 1864.

<sup>175</sup> “The Taking of Fort Pillow,” *The Belfast News-Letter*, May 13, 1864.

ordered his men to execute the African-American troops defending the position after their surrender, the fact remains that the loss of Fort Pillow weakened the Union position on the east bank of the Mississippi River, and potentially put Memphis in danger of a Confederate assault. With this in mind, it should come as no surprise that northern, southern, and international newspapers gave the clash a great deal of attention in their publications. In addition, the newspapers showed their partisanship when discussing the massacre by either becoming enraged and wanting retribution for those who were senselessly murdered, or by decrying reports of such killing as a northern invention to ferment undue hatred against the Confederates.

#### Newspapers on the Battle of Brice's Crossroads

While a relatively small engagement, the June 10, 1864 Battle of Brice's Crossroads, Mississippi, garnered attention, mainly because it represented yet another reversal of fortune for the Union troops in northern Mississippi at the hands of none other than Nathan Bedford Forrest.

As it seemingly often was, the *Daily National Intelligencer* was one of the first northern papers to carry news of the fighting in northern Mississippi. On June 16, 1864, the Washington paper explained to its readers that 8,000 men under General Sturgis's command were attacked by approximately 10,000 Confederates, who had been making a move toward General Sherman's rear to disrupt his supply and communication lines. The source used by the *Intelligencer* detailed that the southern capture of Sturgis's wagon train was the biggest blow of the battle, as it forced the Union commander to abandon his artillery once the ammunition ran out. As the men under Sturgis's command began to return to Memphis, the first officers to arrive said that a large percentage of the infantry had been captured by Forrest's men, but it was unclear exactly how many were now prisoners of war.<sup>176</sup>

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<sup>176</sup> "News by Telegraph: Latest Despatches," *Daily National Intelligencer*, June 16, 1864.

The next day, the *Daily National Intelligencer* verified further details regarding the fighting at Brice's Crossroads. According to the *Intelligencer*, the forces commanded by General Sturgis fought valiantly, but the Confederates had routed the northern troops, capturing fourteen artillery pieces, 100 supply wagons, and a majority of the Union wounded in the process. Another dispatch reported on in the same article, received from Memphis, stated that the remnants of the Union forces which engaged Forrest at Brice's Crossroads were straggling their way back into Memphis, which would soon allow for a more accurate count of the casualties sustained during the engagement. The bulletin from Memphis attempted to be optimistic with this dismal news, believing that once all the remnants had returned, the total Union loss count would fall below 1,000. Despite trying to find the positives in this situation, these reports from the Western Theater could not hide the fact that this battle had been a serious blow to Union forces seeking to subdue Forrest and his command.<sup>177</sup>

Like many of the other early reports printed in Union newspapers, the June 15, 1864, edition of the *Boston Daily Advertiser* informed its readers that a battle had ensued between the Confederates and the forces of William Sturgis's command, "having left Memphis a fortnight ago, on some mission not stated." The *Advertiser* was also unable to verify specific numbers lost during the engagement, though the paper confirmed that the Union troops "were worsted with the loss of their trains and ammunition. They also destroyed and abandoned their artillery, and lost a number of prisoners." Summarizing the fight at Brice's Crossroads up, the Boston publication simply labeled the battle as a disaster for the Union.<sup>178</sup>

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<sup>177</sup> "The Defeat of Gen. Sturgis, &c.," *Daily National Intelligencer*, June 17, 1864.

<sup>178</sup> "Boston," *Boston Daily Advertiser*, June 15, 1864.

While being printed in a southern state, *The Daily True Delta* of New Orleans was a mostly pro-Union publication, and thus wrote about the Battle of Brice's Crossroads in a manner similar to that of any northern newspaper. The dispatch received in New Orleans published by the *True Delta* explained that Sturgis had been sent into Mississippi by his superiors to tear up the railroad lines in the northern region of the state, especially the tracks that had been recently repaired by the Confederates. Because of heavy rains, Sturgis's men found the march very slow going, though they continued to press on across Mississippi as best as they could. After explaining that the Union units were forced to retreat in the face of superior southern numbers, the New Orleans paper, like many other Union news publications, attempted to find any kind of positive aspects about the battle. According to the *True Delta*, while the big guns had been forced to be left behind by the retreating army, none had been destroyed in battle. Also, though Sturgis's men had no choice but to fall back to Memphis without the wagon train supplying them, the animals [most likely horses and mules] that had accompanied the column, were not lost in the retreat from the battlefield. While the paper informed its readers that the Union force had not been completely lost at Brice's Crossroads, they could not find enough positive notes to counter the fact that Forrest's command had thoroughly whipped Sturgis's troops in this battle.<sup>179</sup>

Among all the northern newspapers printing articles about the serious defeat at Brice's Crossroads, *The Daily Cleveland Herald* published a story that focused only on the bright spots of Union actions. The dispatch from Memphis explained that, even though the Confederates were numerically superior, and the northern troops could not continue withstanding attacks from Forrest's forces, the retreat was not a mass flight of individuals racing for their lives. Instead, "our men began to fall back, contesting every inch of ground. The colored troops fought with

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<sup>179</sup> "A Fight in Mississippi," *The Daily True Delta*, June 19, 1864.

desperation and were the last to give way.” This report went on to state that a number of the wagons supplying Sturgis’s columns were burned by the retreating northerners, unlike many other accounts, which reported that these vehicles fell into Confederate hands. A handful of the African-American soldiers were even reported to have salvaged some of the spare ammunition from destruction, which the dispatch claimed allowed them to keep the retreat covered as well as possible. Even the tally of losses seemed more positive in the *Herald* than in other publications, suggesting that only around 1,500 men had been lost at Brice’s Crossroads, along with 125 wagons and fourteen artillery pieces, though it did concede that there were still some units missing, including 300 artillerymen and nearly 300 more African-American soldiers.<sup>180</sup>

While the June 17, 1864 edition attempted to find an optimistic look at the disaster for Sturgis’s men, *The Daily Cleveland Herald* of June 23 was unable to present such an upbeat tone. The main report on Brice’s Crossroads appearing in this edition was a letter from one of the main Union commanders in Memphis. This communication included details about both the battle in northern Mississippi and the overall campaign. It provided a handful of key points that contributed to the Union defeat at Forrest’s hands. Having plenty of wagons loaded with supplies and ammunition, or capable of serving medical purposes, would have been useful to the Union force marching across northern Mississippi. However, when Sturgis’s men were attacked by the Confederates, these wagons proved to be a hindrance. They were strung out for two miles behind the Union column, with the lead wagons in the immediate rear of the northern forces. This, the letter stated, created a situation where more than 1,000 troops were having to guard the supply train, rather than engage the enemy at some of the critical moments of the battle. Being on a narrow road, this presented further complications when the Union troops began to retreat, as the

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<sup>180</sup> “Telegraphic: This Day’s Report,” *The Daily Cleveland Herald*, June 17, 1864.

wagons could not be easily turned around, creating an opportunity where the victorious Confederates giving chase would have been able to capture much of the supply train with relative ease. What was most telling about the retreat from Brice's Crossroads came in the description of the retreating force, especially the wounded. After resting for a few hours, some were unable to stand, many had lost their hats and shoes during the flight, and even those who were more well off suffered severe swelling in their legs, along with multiple blisters. Having numerical figures available to give readers a sense of how much was lost during a battle is definitely a good thing, but to hear from those who were on the campaign discuss the mistakes made, and describe the agony of a bloody retreat packs a far stronger punch.<sup>181</sup>

Shortly after the battle, *The Daily Palladium* printed a message written by U.S. Secretary of War Edwin Stanton, in which he detailed how the Union forces in the Western Theater were attempting to salvage the overall situation in western Tennessee and northern Mississippi. Stanton began his report with the insinuation that Sturgis had been the wrong man for the job: "In another part of Gen. Sherman's east Mississippi division our forces have not met with the success that has attended competent commanders." He added that the expedition consisting of 3,000 cavalry, 5,000 infantry, and fourteen artillery pieces had been decisively bested by Forrest's command, but that some of the force had returned safely to Memphis. Stanton concluded his dispatch with the information that "Gen. Sherman, having received the news of Sturgis's defeat, reports that he has already made arrangements to repair Sturgis's disaster and placed Gen. A.J. Smith in command, who will resume the offensive immediately." Hearing the news of Sturgis's losses at Brice's Crossroads would have been disheartening to northerners, but

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<sup>181</sup> "Army Correspondence," *The Daily Cleveland Herald*, June 23, 1864.

being told by the Secretary of War that men like General Sherman were quickly working to rectify the situation must have provided some sense of relief to the American public.<sup>182</sup>

In the southern states, the mood was, on the whole, more joyful than that up north. One of the first southern accounts of the battle ran in the *Daily Columbus Enquirer* on June 11, 1864. Their source, a report from Mobile, noted that General Forrest initially planned on moving against Union General William T. Sherman in northwest Georgia but changed his plans upon learning of the force leaving Memphis, pushing southeast across Mississippi. According to this dispatch, after countermarching back through Tupelo, Forrest's forces engaged the enemy north of there.<sup>183</sup> The *Enquirer* provided further information about Brice's Crossroads on June 16, 1864, celebrating that General Forrest "has achieved a brilliant and very important success- one that will contribute much to make Sherman uneasy in his situation...." Though the Columbus paper was unable to guess where Forrest might strike next, it held firm to the notion he would attack in the best place possible to make any Union advances that much more difficult.<sup>184</sup> A similar story appeared in *The Daily South Carolinian*, claiming that "the battle of Tishomingo Creek was one of the most signal victories. There were, besides the wagon train, thirteen pieces of artillery captured. The rout of the enemy was complete." Even while printing the bare minimum of facts known at the time, the paper from Columbia joined with many of the other Confederate publications in celebrating the resounding victory, giving those in the Palmetto State that much more to cheer about.<sup>185</sup>

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<sup>182</sup> "Official War News," *The Daily Palladium*, June 15, 1864.

<sup>183</sup> "Latest from Forrest," *Daily Columbus Enquirer*, June 11, 1864.

<sup>184</sup> "Gen. Forrest Turned Up!," *Daily Columbus Enquirer*, June 16, 1864.

<sup>185</sup> "The Confederate Victory at Tishomingo," *The Daily South Carolinian*, June 14, 1864.

Confederate reports of the fight at Brice's Crossroads written by military commanders were readily printed in the *Daily Richmond Examiner*, though a comparison of the two dispatches tell different stories. The first bulletin, penned by Major General S.D. Lee on June 11, 1864, informed his superiors, "The battle of Tischimingo [sic] creek, fought yesterday by Major General Forrest, is one of the most signal victories of the war for the forces engaged." Lee claimed that the Confederates were in hot pursuit of the retreating Union troops, and at latest count had captured 200 Union prisoners, twelve artillery pieces, and more than 100 fully loaded supply wagons, though more were still on their way from the battlefield. Two days later, General Lee had written another report on the fighting, containing higher numbers than had been in his earlier dispatch. In his June 13 communication, Lee had calculated that the Union losses at Brice's Crossroads now stood at roughly 3,000 killed or captured, twenty cannons, and approximately 250 wagons. Lee may have inflated the numbers he was reporting to his superior officers, but no matter which of his dispatches is closest to the truth, both end their stories with General Sturgis's decisive defeat.<sup>186</sup>

Having almost the same figures as what Lee wrote about in his dispatches, the *Daily Richmond Examiner* published another account of Brice's Crossroads one day after printing Lee's letters. This article, in addition to listing the losses suffered by Sturgis's men, also counted up an estimate of Forrest's casualties, approximating Confederate dead and wounded to be between 600 and 1,000 men, though the newspaper seemed to suggest that the total of Union dead, prisoners, and captured stores easily balanced out whatever Forrest may have lost in the clash. According to this news story, the latest tally counted 1,000 Union soldiers dead and 3,000 captured, in addition to the twenty cannons and 250 wagons that had been mentioned the

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<sup>186</sup> "The War News: Splendid Victory by Forrest," *Daily Richmond Examiner*, June 14, 1864.

previous day. The *Examiner* further believed that the number of Union prisoners could go even higher as they continued their retreat toward Memphis because “General Forrest is pursuing them beyond Ripley. The heavy rains may retard the enemy’s retreat. Forrest is on all sides of him.”<sup>187</sup>

General Lee was not the only Confederate commander to have his official reports on the battle published in southern newspapers. A message from General Forrest himself was printed in the *Daily Columbus Enquirer*, allowing its readers to see what the cavalry commander had to say about his recent actions against the northerners. According to his communication, Forrest had only 4,000 men under his command at Brice’s Crossroads, facing off against a Union force 10,000 strong. Marching under the battle cry of “Remember Fort Pillow,” the northern units arrayed against Forrest were routed after an intense battle. The Confederates claimed that their dead and wounded only totaled around 600, while 1,000 Union troops lay dead, another 2,000 taken prisoner, and all their artillery pieces and the supply train were now under southern control. As he and his men were still following the retreating northerners, Forrest estimated that the final loss tally for his enemy could not total less than 5,000. Like Lee, Forrest may have overestimated the northern loss somewhat, but as a military officer, he would need to be as accurate as possible. Exaggerated or not, reading such a letter written by General Forrest easily gave the *Enquirer’s* readers more reason to celebrate his victory at Brice’s Crossroads.<sup>188</sup>

Another article which concluded that the Battle of Brice’s Crossroads had been a resounding success for the southern troops ran in *The Daily South Carolinian* in late June. The *South Carolinian* pointed out a discrepancy between Union and Confederate reports as to how

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<sup>187</sup> “Further of General Forrest’s Victory,” *Daily Richmond Examiner*, June 15, 1864.

<sup>188</sup> “Official Dispatch from Gen. Forrest,” *Daily Columbus Enquirer*, June 17, 1864.

many northern troops were engaged during the battle, with estimates ranging between 6,000 and 9,000. This discrepancy aside, “the Yankee foe could not withstand the impetuous valor, and the good marksmanship of our men. They broke and fled. A running fight ensued.” The Columbia newspaper also carried some of the highest numbers of Union losses and lowest total Confederate casualties of the battle, claiming that “the fruits of our victory was the capture of all their artillery, nearly 300 wagons, about 1,500 prisoners, and over 2,000 killed and wounded. Our losses will not exceed 400.” If these numbers were to be believed, a victory on this scale would have been cause for much happiness among those who thought that total Confederate victory was not long in coming.<sup>189</sup>

In Great Britain, a number of the early reports on the fighting at Brice’s Crossroads were short items, not much more than a couple of sentences, simply stating that a fight had occurred in northern Mississippi between Forrest’s Confederates and Sturgis’s Union troops. This included *The Preston Chronicle and Lancashire Advertiser*, stating that the Union expedition had been badly defeated, with the northern artillery and supply trains being lost in the battle;<sup>190</sup> London’s *The Morning Post*, which claimed that not only had the artillery and a multitude of prisoners been captured by the Confederates, but Sturgis himself had been killed during the battle;<sup>191</sup> and *The Leeds Mercury*, which noted that the shattered remains of Sturgis’s columns were straggling back into Memphis after losing all their artillery and ammunition to Forrest.<sup>192</sup>

As more information arrived on the island, news publications printed longer pieces about the Battle of Brice’s Crossroads, allowing their readers to understand the fighting in greater

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<sup>189</sup> “War News: Mississippi,” *The Daily South Carolinian*, June 24, 1864.

<sup>190</sup> “Third Edition: America,” *The Preston Chronicle and Lancashire Advertiser*, June 25, 1864.

<sup>191</sup> “Latest From America,” *The Morning Post*, June 25, 1864.

<sup>192</sup> “The Leeds Mercury,” *The Leeds Mercury*, June 27, 1864.

detail. On June 27, 1864, *The Glasgow Daily Herald* published its own article. Like many of the other early reports appearing in British papers, the *Daily Herald* was unable to publish specific tallies on total losses for either side, “but they [losses for the Union] have no doubt been very heavy, if it is true, as is stated, that the commander of the expedition has returned to Memphis with a mere remnant of his army.” At the same time, the Glasgow paper did manage to realize the larger ramifications of the engagement in northern Mississippi between Forrest and Sturgis. Earlier in the story, it was mentioned that Union troops under William T. Sherman were pushing their way across Georgia toward Atlanta, but their position was becoming more untenable as their advance continued. With the victory at Brice’s Crossroads, the *Daily Herald* pointed out that Forrest had placed Sherman’s communication lines in serious danger. While not specifically stating it, the Scottish publication seemed to understand that Forrest, with Sturgis out of the way, could move relatively unmolested into Sherman’s rear and cut him off from Union headquarters in Nashville, jeopardizing the Atlanta campaign in the process.<sup>193</sup>

*The Blackburn Standard* reached a similar conclusion in its June 29 news story on the battle, writing that 8,000 Union troops had engaged 10,000 Confederates at Guntown, Tennessee, and were defeated in a decisive engagement.<sup>194</sup> Similar to several reports from other British newspapers, the *Standard* claimed that General Sturgis was dead, many northern troops had been taken prisoner, and all of their supplies had been captured. Though both the *Daily Herald* and the *Standard* saw this Confederate victory as threatening Sherman’s thrust toward Atlanta, the Blackburn paper was more explicit with this realization, considering that their report

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<sup>193</sup> “Glasgow Herald,” *The Glasgow Daily Herald*, June 27, 1864.

<sup>194</sup> Interestingly, *The Blackburn Standard* was not the only British newspaper to place the town of Guntown in Tennessee, rather than Mississippi. Perhaps it was the relative closeness of Guntown to the Mississippi—Tennessee border that caused the confusion as to its location.

on Brice's Crossroads began with the statement that General Sturgis was leading this expedition "for the purpose of frustrating any attempts to impede General Sherman's long line of communications...."<sup>195</sup>

Of all the British newspapers to provide details about the engagement, perhaps the most in-depth was the July 4 edition of *The Glasgow Daily Herald*. Providing a number of detailed specifics, such as the order in which the Union units departed Memphis, the *Daily Herald* virtually placed its readers in the middle of the raging battle. The paper noted that the first phase occurred at a bridge over Old Town creek, but that Sturgis's men were pushed back several miles, where the main engagement took place. It was here, the Glasgow publication reported, that the rout was made complete, with the Confederates able to capture fourteen artillery pieces, 100 supply wagons, and 500 Union troops. The article concluded that, despite the serious setback suffered by the northern forces, "The losses consist chiefly of infantry and artillery, and will not, prisoners and all, foot up much more than 2,000."<sup>196</sup>

Despite being a relatively minor engagement during the summer of 1864, the fighting between Forrest and Sturgis at Brice's Crossroads was of major importance to both sides, and the newspaper coverage of the time reflected it. The Union force that left Memphis needed to distract Forrest and his men, or the Confederate cavalry might have been able to ride toward Nashville and wreck the railroads between there and Chattanooga. This would have placed Sherman in dire straits, possibly even forcing him to abandon his campaign against Atlanta. Forrest could even have moved his forces into the rearguard of Sherman's columns, creating that much more havoc for the Union armies. Though Sturgis's troops were badly whipped during the

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<sup>195</sup> "Grant's Plan Again Changed— Sherman in Peril," *The Blackburn Standard*, June 29, 1864.

<sup>196</sup> "The Recent Defeat of General Sturgis," *The Glasgow Daily Herald*, July 4, 1864.

battle, their sacrifice kept Forrest distracted for the moment, keeping him occupied in Mississippi while Sherman continued pushing against Atlanta. The newspapers reporting on the war realized this, and thus felt it worthwhile to print a plethora of articles about the fighting in northern Mississippi.

#### Nathan Bedford Forrest at the Battle of Tupelo

Of all the northern and pro-Union newspapers reporting on the July 14, 1864, Battle of Tupelo, one of the first articles on this topic appeared in *The Daily True Delta* of New Orleans. The first section of its article on the fight was simply a dispatch written up by General Lee to his superior commanders, giving them insight into how he felt the engagement had taken place. Interestingly for a pro-Union paper, the *True Delta* followed this information up with a statement suggesting that, “It is confidently believed that Lee and Forrest will annihilate the enemy column.” Given that the source this information was obtained from was pro-Confederate, such a statement can be understood, but to print it in a pro-Union publication seems somewhat odd.<sup>197</sup> To contrast this suggestion, one of the first articles regarding Tupelo to appear in the *Daily National Intelligencer* carried the subheading, “A Fight and a Victory in Mississippi.” This story reported that a Union column had left Memphis “with instructions to move in pursuit of Gen. Forrest, bring him to bay, and fight him.” As the northern force neared Tupelo, it engaged the Confederate troops it was seeking, and, according to General Cadwallader Washburn, the Union officer in command, Forrest’s men were badly beaten thrice. The *Intelligencer* also stated that the northern forces engaged in northern Mississippi claimed victory over the Confederates twice

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<sup>197</sup> “Late Northern News,” *The Daily True Delta*, July 19, 1864.

more, leaving them with more than 2,000 casualties at the cost of only around 300 Union troops.<sup>198</sup>

While the early reports from *The Daily True Delta* seemed to read more like the publication had turned pro-Confederate, any ideas that this may have been the case were quashed with the distribution of the July 23, 1864 edition of the paper. Like the earlier story printed about the fighting near Tupelo, this article's brief description of the fighting consisted solely of a dispatch received from Union officials in Memphis. In this communication, the author, a military clerk named D.F. West, proclaimed that the news from northern Mississippi was glorious. "Forrest and his army smashed. Terrific defeat of the rebels after a three days fight. Their loss said to be 2500. Ours much less." He also noted that General Forrest had been wounded during the fighting at Tupelo, which almost seemed a cause for celebration among the Union forces that had to face off against the famous Confederate cavalryman.<sup>199</sup>

*The Daily True Delta* added further details about the fighting near Tupelo on the following day, including confirmation from Union scouts that the Confederate losses were indeed somewhere in the vicinity of 2,500, while a tally of Union casualties appeared to be approximately no more than 300. The New Orleans paper went on to remind its readers that Forrest had reportedly been wounded during the fight, and stated one report even claimed that the Confederate cavalryman had died from his wounds. The *True Delta* went so far as to assert that the information gleaned from General Andrew Smith's dispatch that had run in an earlier edition of the paper would be confirmed in due time from other reliable Union sources, and that

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<sup>198</sup> "News by Telegraph," *Daily National Intelligencer*, July 21, 1864.

<sup>199</sup> "By Telegraph," *The Daily True Delta*, July 23, 1864.

the Battle of Tupelo was not only a crucial victory for the northern forces, but had also nearly resulted in the complete destruction of General Forrest's forces.<sup>200</sup>

Presenting its readers with more of an opinion on the events occurring in northern Mississippi, the *North American and United States Gazette* published a piece, examining the battle more from the position of how it had been reported by both the Union and Confederate commanders who were engaged in the fight. The *Gazette* noted the fact that, "It seems that the rebel commander in that State is not Forrest, but Lieutenant S.D. Lee," before explaining how the information Lee sent to Richmond was "the first authentic news we have had since Smith succeeded Sturgis." In this article, the Philadelphia publication surmised that Lee had been trying to smash Smith's columns at Tupelo in the same manner he had wrecked Sturgis's forces at Brice's Crossroads. However, unlike Sturgis, "Smith must have made a very good fight at Tupelo to have compelled Lee to retreat to Okolona and telegraph to Richmond his own defeat." Though this story lacked much of the information that had been circulating in newspapers already, the *Gazette* appeared to suggest that this battle might have represented a turning point in the fight to hamper the Confederates in northern Mississippi.<sup>201</sup>

Using a report that had traveled up the Mississippi River from Memphis to Cairo, Illinois, *The Daily Cleveland Herald* printed, on July 25, 1864, a news item that contained perhaps the highest estimated total of losses for both sides during the fighting at Tupelo. Similar to some of the other northern newspapers, the *Herald* wrote that Smith's troops had bested the Confederates in battle five times, though it claimed that one or two of the Union units suffered somewhat heavy losses during the fighting and eventual withdrawal back toward Memphis. Also falling in

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<sup>200</sup> "Late News via the River," *The Daily True Delta*, July 24, 1864.

<sup>201</sup> "The War in Mississippi," *North American and United States Gazette*, July 20, 1864.

line with what other news publications had reported, the Cleveland paper noted that the southern forces had suffered far greater casualties than what the northerners had, though the numbers reported were greater than virtually anywhere else on either side of the conflict. According to the *Herald*, northern losses could not possibly exceed 500, though this was still higher than a majority of the other reports, while also obtaining the relatively astronomical tally of at least 4,000 Confederate casualties suffered at Tupelo.<sup>202</sup>

Newspapers in the South also told their readers about the Battle of Tupelo, though they, of course, tried to put a different spin on the events and suggest that the fighting had not been as devastating to the Confederate cause as northern newspapers were attempting to suggest it had been.

Looking to get good information out to its readers shortly after the battle, the *Richmond Examiner* printed an official dispatch from General Lee to General Braxton Bragg, reporting on the fighting near Tupelo. Lee's communication claimed that the engagement began with the Confederates attacking, which forced the Union troops to destroy some of their supply train. However, on the following day, Smith's forces had made their position somewhat more secure, and despite the best southern efforts to dislodge them, they were unable to do so, and thus disengaged from the fight, which Lee claimed to be a draw between the two forces.<sup>203</sup> The *Examiner* followed up this dispatch with another report penned by Lee, while also adding in their own thoughts about the battle. According to Lee's latest communication with Bragg, "The enemy are in retreat toward Ripley. General Forrest is in close pursuit." Giving its outlook on what was being reported to General Bragg, the Richmond publication suggested that the Union

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<sup>202</sup> "Telegraphic," *The Daily Cleveland Herald*, July 25, 1864.

<sup>203</sup> "From Mississippi- Battle at Tupelo," *Richmond Examiner*, July 16, 1864.

forces engaged at Tupelo had suffered more than the Confederate commanders originally believed, and that, while Lee claimed the fight to be a draw, “to an invader, especially a raider, a drawn battle, being a check, is essentially a defeat.”<sup>204</sup> However, in the same edition of the *Examiner*, a dispatch ran, claiming that the northern forces had indeed suffered heavily during the fighting at Tupelo, but that the Confederates had also come out of the engagement with their fair share of casualties as well.<sup>205</sup>

Attempting to correct what had been reported in a previous edition, on July 23, 1864, the *Richmond Examiner* explained that the information stating that the Union columns sent from Memphis to work in tandem with General Sherman was not completely accurate. General Smith, commanding the expeditionary force into Mississippi, had informed General Washburn in Memphis of his encounter with, and subsequent victory over, Lee and Forrest’s men near Tupelo, and “was then on his return to Memphis, bringing everything back in good order.” While this story partially contradicted the first reports published, it began to paint a more accurate image of the battle, suggesting that perhaps even the suspected draw was not as promising of a result as it had initially been believed.<sup>206</sup>

In Columbia, South Carolina, *The Daily South Carolinian* printed a dispatch received from Tupelo, which may have been written by General Forrest, presenting his account of how events unfolded during the battle. What makes this communication all the more interesting is how it tried to place the engagement in a more positive light. The report from Tupelo explained how the initial rounds of fighting began with a series of attacks against the Union flanks as they marched across the countryside, before the main clash took place at the position Smith’s men had

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<sup>204</sup> “From North Mississippi,” *Richmond Examiner*, July 18, 1864.

<sup>205</sup> “From Our Forces in Mississippi,” *Richmond Examiner*, July 18, 1864.

<sup>206</sup> “Still Later from the North,” *Richmond Examiner*, July 23, 1864.

taken and strengthened near Harrisburg, a town immediately west of Tupelo. Despite their best efforts, the Confederates were unable to push the Union forces out from their defenses, but that Smith's men were finally driven back by rested southern troops. According to the dispatch, "The enemy fought stubbornly when compelled to do so, but was evidently afraid of a set fight. Our loss was severe." This apparent military report did what it could to try and spin the Battle of Tupelo in a positive manner, and to some degree, appeared to have succeeded in doing so.<sup>207</sup>

The newspapers of New Orleans proved to be interesting specimens of period journalism. Given that the city was under northern occupation, anyone with pro-Confederate leanings had to keep these feelings hidden. *The Daily Picayune*, which appeared to mostly present a neutral attitude toward the war, turned heavily pro-Union when printing information about the Battle of Tupelo. Relying on dispatches from Memphis for its information, *The Daily Picayune* cried out, "Glorious news from Smith! Forrest smashed! Terrific defeat of the rebels! After a three days' fight, their loss said to be 2500, ours much less. Gen. Forrest is badly wounded, and Gen. Faulkner is killed. The fight took place at Tupelo." Similar to the situation encountered in *The Daily True Delta*, it would reason that using dispatches from northern sources in Memphis would result in unabashed pro-Union comments, but printing them in a newspaper such as *The Daily Picayune* creates a rather interesting situation in the Crescent City.<sup>208</sup>

Having obtained a detailed account of the Battle of Tupelo from a newspaper in Okolona, Mississippi, the *Daily Columbus Enquirer* printed a report at the end of July. Its story provided readers with a blow-by-blow retelling of the engagement, such as describing how the Union expedition attempted to fortify themselves in a position near Harrisburg, approximately two

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<sup>207</sup> "Forrest's Movements in Northern Mississippi," *The Daily South Carolinian*, July 20, 1864.

<sup>208</sup> "Telegraphic: Latest From the North," *The Daily Picayune*, July 23, 1864.

miles west of Tupelo, where the main Confederate assaults took place. The account received from Okolona claimed that only 1,000 of Forrest's troops had been killed or wounded during the battle, including the wound suffered by General Forrest, while their best estimates showed that the Union losses totaled approximately 1,700. Following the description of the fighting, this report asserted that the Battle of Tupelo could have been a resounding Confederate victory if the engagement had taken place in a more favorable location, where Forrest's men would have been more easily supported by southern infantry. The article concluded with the exclamation that if another Union expedition marched into northern Mississippi, "Gen. Forrest will soon be in the saddle again, and we repeat it, let them come!"<sup>209</sup>

Overseas, the Battle of Tupelo was not as heavily covered as it had been in North America. Given that transatlantic liners were also carrying reports of the intense fighting near Atlanta and in Virginia as well, it stands to reason that a smaller engagement occurring some distance away from these battles would not stand out as much to British publications.

One of the first printed reports appeared on August 3, 1864, in *The Morning Post* of London. Using a series of dispatches penned by military officers involved in the Western Theater, *The Morning Post* presented a detailed account of the battle, though there were points in the article that somewhat contradicted other points. From one communication source, the London paper stated that Forrest had been defeated thrice in northern Mississippi, yet several lines later, it was reported that the Union troops had driven the Confederates to a position south of Tupelo after besting the southerners in five different encounters. Despite the issues caused by different sources giving conflicting accounts, *The Morning Post* did concur with the myriad reports

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<sup>209</sup> "Our Late Raid- Battle of Harrisburg," *Daily Columbus Enquirer*, July 30, 1864.

received from America, noting that the Battle of Tupelo had been a rather disastrous defeat for the Confederates in Mississippi.<sup>210</sup>

Other British newspapers, including *The Daily News* of London and *Lloyd's Weekly London Newspaper*, simply printed this same set of reports received from American sources. A handful, such as *The Liverpool Mercury*, published a short piece claiming that General Smith had returned to Memphis after engaging and defeating the Confederate forces near Tupelo.<sup>211</sup> This brief dispatch was elaborated upon somewhat in a later edition of *The Morning Post*. The London paper explained that a series of Confederate assaults on the Union positions near Tupelo had been repulsed, with relatively heavy casualties inflicted on Forrest's troops. After the fighting, Smith's men fell back to Memphis, though this withdrawal was noted to be because the Union supplies were running low, not because of any serious losses taken during the Battle of Tupelo.<sup>212</sup>

Like the Battle of Brice's Crossroads a month earlier, newspapers covering the war realized the importance of the Battle of Tupelo, and what it could have meant for other campaigns in the Western Theater. However, there was not as much attention placed on the fighting near Tupelo as there had been on Brice's Crossroads. Given that the armies under Sherman had reached the outskirts of Atlanta, and the battles there were growing more and more intense, it makes sense that Tupelo would not be given the attention that Atlanta was receiving in the press.

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<sup>210</sup> "America," *The Morning Post*, August 3, 1864.

<sup>211</sup> "America: Miscellaneous," *The Liverpool Mercury*, August 5, 1864.

<sup>212</sup> "Latest from America," *The Morning Post*, August 8, 1864.

## CONCLUSIONS

Given the many problems facing newspapers during the American Civil War, including the inability to always receive the most accurate information possible in the quickest amount of time, and the desire to spin stories about the raids and battles taking place in such a way as to show one side's superiority over the enemy, the campaigns discussed here were given fairly decent coverage in the press. Since reporters were not allowed to travel with the military, and censorship prevented troops numbers and other such valuable information from being printed, these publications still managed to publish the best information available, giving their readers some sense of the events taking place. While the articles were sometimes wildly inaccurate, or in complete contradiction with other articles printed in rival newspapers, these publications were still doing the best they could to get the information they had out to the public in a timely manner, given the slowness and sketchy details that often plagued reports coming from the battlefield.

Individual biases were a problem for newspapers on both sides of the war. Southern news publications in areas not under northern occupation asserted that the Union Army were ruthless invaders set on destroying the southern way of life, while many northern papers saw the Confederates as a somewhat backwards people who were sometimes given to show contempt, and even downright hatred, for their fellow man, especially African-Americans. Beyond simple generalizations, they would try spinning news stories to demonstrate their side's superiority. For example, after the Battle of Fort Pillow, southern newspapers expressed the belief that the tales

of a massacre were lies created by the northerners to stir up rabid anti-Confederate sentiments, while Union publications reporting on the fighting at Tupelo suggested that the northern victory was complete and decisive, no matter how much the southerners wanted to believe it was a drawn battle. Even newspapers in the British Empire were not immune to such displays of bias, as the potential desire to stay on relatively friendly terms with both the Confederates and the Union would have led them to slant their coverage of the war in favor of one side or the other.

In addition, another issue that the newspapers writing about the war had was that they could not always see the bigger picture, covering these raids as episodic, isolated events, rather than as part of a larger strategy spread out over a wider area. Sometimes they were able to grasp this concept, such as the fall of Fort Pillow creating a potentially harmful situation for Union river traffic on the Mississippi north of Memphis, or the Battles of Brice's Crossroads and Tupelo being a way to keep Sherman's supply and communications lines open from marauding Confederates like Nathan Bedford Forrest. However, this was not always the case: Rousseau's assault on the railroads near Auburn was not linked with Sherman's Atlanta campaign in any real way, nor was Streight's raid across north Alabama to Rome, Georgia, fully realized as an attempt to place Braxton Bragg's Confederates in southeastern Tennessee in a precarious predicament. Even when the newspapers did see some correlation, they still did not always see everything. The press may have understood Van Dorn's attack on Holly Springs, Mississippi, may have helped to hinder Grant's push to Vicksburg, but failed to comprehend that the destruction there was almost certainly the primary reason the Union Army was unable to launch another campaign to capture Vicksburg until the spring of 1863.

For students of history, this research allows them to gain somewhat of a better understanding of the raids launched by both the North and the South, as well as the men who led

these campaigns. It might also become apparent that, despite the newspapers treating all of these raids in a similar way, there were key differences to the campaigns. Some of the raids were used as a way to influence events in other areas of the Western Theater, making Streight and Rousseau very similar to Van Dorn and Forrest at Brice's Crossroads and Tupelo. There were those commanders who led their forces on raiding campaigns because they were more well-suited to the mission at hand than other units. Thus, parallels can be drawn between Forrest at Fort Pillow and Wilson's and Croxton's raids in Alabama during the final days of the war. And lastly, there were those, like John Hunt Morgan, whose raids were utilized more as psychological warfare, stirring up a great deal of panic and terror among an enemy population who had not, until then, directly experienced the war. By grasping concepts like these, future historians can find both similarities and differences that may distinguish two nearly identical events or figures from one another, or realize that what appeared to be two completely different incidents actually have a lot in common.

Students of journalism will find this research useful as well, though in a different way. Understanding the problems that newspapers of the Civil War era faced, including sketchy and delayed information, wildly exaggerated details, biases, and slanting information in favor of one side can help future journalists in avoiding such problems when writing news stories of their own. They also could see the value in examining all the details, no matter how minute, yet not sacrificing the ability to view these facts within the larger narrative. One miniscule piece of information might make all the difference when writing a news article, but trying to see the trees should not obscure the view of the whole forest.

While the raiders and their campaigns discussed here may not have been the most important to the war's outcome, or the news stories written about them the most attention-

grabbing, there is no doubt that these commanders and newspapers provide great insight into the lesser-known aspects of the American Civil War, and still have plenty to teach those willing to listen.

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