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MILITARY HISTORY

OF

ULYSSES S. GRANT,

FROM APRIL, 1861, TO APRIL, 1865.

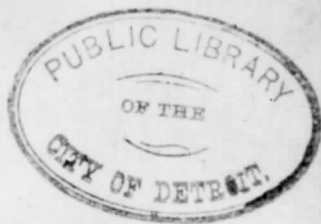
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THE spirit of the North was greatly depressed when it was discovered that by crossing the James, Grant had absolutely moved further away from Richmond. The strategical importance of the new position and of the railways was not apparent to the unmilitary mind, which only perceived that Peters-

burg, with all its works, now lay between Grant and the rebel capital, whereas, a week before, the national army had been within six miles of the prize. Places affect the ordinary imagination more strongly than armies; it was Richmond on which the loyal people of the North had set their hearts, and they could hardly comprehend that Lee's army was more important than any town, or even that by destroying Lee, Richmond would be secured.

The President, however, was staunch, and came to the rescue at once. As soon as he saw clearly himself the purpose of Grant, he dispatched an approving message; and the next day, addressed a public meeting at Philadelphia, in these words: "We are going through with our task, so far as I am concerned, if it takes us three years longer. I have not been in the habit of making predictions, but I am almost tempted now to hazard one. I will. It is that Grant is this morning in a position, with Meade and Hancock, of Pennsylvania, whence he will never be dislodged by the enemy, till Richmond is taken." This support was invaluable to Grant, and it did not end in words.

On the 21st of June, the President visited the lieutenant-general and the armies, riding out to the front of both Meade and Butler's commands. On his way back from the army of the Potomac, he passed through the black troops of the Eighteenth corps, which had fought so gallantly in the first assaults on Petersburg. They crowded around him, anxious to see the man who had liberated them, and cheers and cries of joy and affection arose on every hand. These men who had been slaves, pressing up in the garb of soldiers, to bless and look upon him who

was now *their* President and chief, made a sight to impress the dullest imagination. The simple blacks laughed, and cried, and in their broken English called him "Massa Lincoln," "Massa President," "Fader Abraham," and sought to shake or kiss his hand, or touch his garments or his horse; and Abraham Lincoln rode bareheaded among his colored soldiers.

Immediately after the failure of the assaults on the 18th of June, Grant began his dispositions to envelop Petersburg, and strike the Southern railroads. Wright's entire command had been restored to Meade, and Martindale's to Butler, so that the organization of each army was complete. Brooks was placed in command of the Tenth corps, from which Gillmore had been relieved; Ferrero was released from the duty of guarding trains, in which his division had been engaged since the beginning of the campaign, and reported to Burnside; and Ledlie superseded Crittenden in the command of a division in the Ninth corps.

Butler was now ordered to extend his line as far as possible to the left, not only holding Bermuda Hundred neck, but relieving the Sixth corps, immediately south of the Appomattox river. The Sixth and Second corps were withdrawn entirely from the lines, which Smith, Burnside, and Warren were to hold, fortifying their front, and extending as far as the Jerusalem plank road, on the left; the siege train was ordered from Washington, and regular approaches were begun in front of Burnside; while Birney and Wright were directed to hold themselves in readiness for a movement to the left, to seize the Weldon road, and if possible, reach the Appomattox, west of Petersburg. The Second corps took position on the

left of Warren, and Wright on the extreme left of the army. The enemy apparently stretched out as rapidly as Meade; for Lee knew as well as Grant what must be the object, and what the next movement of the national army, and constructed earthworks in advance, to be occupied whenever occasion should arise. Thus, on the night of the 21st of June, the Second and Sixth corps were immediately in front of a large force of the enemy.

On the morning of the 22nd, Birney, still in command of the Second corps, was moved westward. The idea was to cross the Weldon road, and then swing around to the Appomattox river, above the town.* Wright also advanced on the extreme left, by a road that separated him somewhat from Birney, and soon found the enemy's skirmishers in considerable force. Fearing that Birney would become exposed, Meade now ordered Barlow, who had the left of the Second corps, to be moved back, so as to connect with Wright. While engaged in this manœuvre, Barlow was vigorously attacked by a portion of Hill's corps, which penetrated the gap between him and Wright, taking his command in reverse, throwing it into great confusion, and capturing many prisoners. At the same time, Gibbon, holding Birney's right, was very warmly assailed, and forced back from his front line, with the loss of four

* "You can move your corps, taking position on the left of the Fifth corps, and extending as far to the left as practicable, enveloping and keeping as close as possible to the enemy's line. I hope you will be able to get possession of the Weldon railroad, though it is possible the enemy may attempt to cover and defend it. . . . I will send the Sixth corps to-night, to take post on your left, and desire to stretch across to the Appomattox."—*Meade to Birney, June 21.*

instructions to *put himself south of the enemy*, and follow him to the death. Wherever the enemy goes, let our troops go also. Once started up the Valley, they ought to be followed till we get possession of the Virginia Central railroad." Sheridan left the army of the Potomac the same day, and on the 4th of August, a second division of cavalry followed him to Washington.

It was not enough, however, for Grant to issue orders, or even to send subordinates; his personal presence was at this time indispensable. Halleck at once suggested another disposition to be made of Sheridan; and on the 4th, the President himself telegraphed to Grant: "I have seen your despatch in which you say: 'I want Sheridan put in command of all the troops in the field, with instructions to put himself south of the enemy and follow him to the death; wherever the enemy goes, let our troops go also.' This I think is exactly right as to how our forces should move; but please look over the despatches you may have received from here since you made that order, and discover, if you can, that there is any idea in the head of any one here, of 'putting our army south of the enemy,' or of 'following him to the death' in any direction. I repeat to you *it will neither be done nor attempted, unless you watch it every day and hour, and force it.*—A. LINCOLN, President." Grant's reply was short, but to the point: "Your despatch of six P.M. just received. I will start in two hours for Washington, and will spend a day with the army under General Hunter."

He left City Point that night, and by evening of the next day, had arrived at Monocacy station, where Hunter's head-quarters were established, not

stopping at Washington on the way. Hunter's army he found encamped over the fields around, and a large accumulation of railroad trains at the station. His first question to Hunter was: "Where is the enemy?" But Hunter replied that he did not know; despatches were coming so rapidly from Washington, ordering him hither and thither in every direction to keep between the enemy and the capital, that he found it impossible to determine the position or movements of the rebels, much more to pursue them. Grant simply said: "I will find out where the enemy is;" and put the whole army—railroad trains and all—in motion that night for the Valley of Virginia. Before daybreak the advance was at Halltown, thirty miles from Monocacy, and four beyond Harper's Ferry. Grant knew very well that as soon as the rich storehouses of the Valley were threatened, the rebels would be in front of the national army to defend them.

At eight p.m., he wrote out Hunter's orders: "Concentrate all your available force without delay in the vicinity of Harper's Ferry, leaving only such railroad guards and garrisons for public property as may be necessary. . . . From Harper's Ferry, if it is found that the enemy has moved north of the Potomac in large force, push north, following him and attacking him wherever found; following him if driven south of the Potomac, as long as it is safe to do so. If it is ascertained that the enemy has but a small force north of the Potomac, then push south with the main force, detaching under a competent commander a sufficient force to look after the raiders and drive them to their homes. . . . In pushing up the Shenandoah Valley, where it is expected you will have to go

at once: "Send all my dispatches that have gone concerning operations to Sherman. . . . Have you stopped Mulford from delivering prisoners? If he has any on hand for delivery, tell him to hold on to them." To Weitzel he now said: "You need not assault in the morning unless you have good reason for believing the enemy are leaving. We have a good thing of it now, and in a day or two I think I will be able to send you all the troops necessary."

At 4.40 p. m., the general-in-chief telegraphed to City Point: "We are now up, and have a continuous line of troops, and in a few hours will be entrenched from the Appomattox below Petersburg to the river above. . . . The whole captures since the army started out gunning will not amount to less than twelve thousand men and probably fifty pieces of artillery. . . . All seems well with us, and everything quiet just now. I think the President might come out and pay us a visit to-morrow." To this Lincoln himself replied: "Allow me to tender to you, and all with you, the nation's grateful thanks for the additional and magnificent success. At your kind suggestion, I think I will meet you to-morrow." Grant thereupon telegraphed again: "If the President will come out on the nine a. m. train to Patrick station, I will send an escort to meet him. It would afford me much pleasure to meet the President in person at the station, but I know he will excuse me for not doing so when my services are so liable to be needed at any moment." At 8.40 p. m., he added to this: "I have just heard from Miles. He attacked what was left of Heth and Wilcox's divisions at Sutherland station, and routed them, capturing about a thousand prisoners. The enemy took the

road north to the Appomattox. As Sheridan was above them, I am in hopes but few of them will escape."

All west of the rebel centre had now been driven beyond the Appomattox by Sheridan, while all to the east was forced into Petersburg, from which there was no exit for Lee except by the country roads north of the river. The only question with Grant was, whether at once to assault the inner lines or wait for the rebels to move out from behind their works, and attack them in flight and undefended. The troops in front of Petersburg had been under arms for eighteen hours; they had assaulted the strongest lines known in modern war, swept down them several miles, and, returning, marched five miles east of the original point of attack; they were too exhausted for another assault, unless it was absolutely necessary. Meade and others entitled to offer their opinions urged strongly that the whole army should be brought up to Petersburg, and the place assaulted in force; but Grant did not doubt that Lee had already determined upon flight, and a further assault of fortified works would only occasion unnecessary slaughter. He therefore decided to envelop the town on the southern side of the Appomattox, but to hold half his army in readiness for prompt pursuit. If the rebels should not withdraw, he meant, of course, to assault in the morning; but, if Lee evacuated the city in the night, the national troops in front of the town could take prompt possession of Petersburg, while Sheridan, and those disposed along the Appomattox, would be ready to intercept and pursue the flying columns. No assault was therefore ordered for the 2nd of April.