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The Third Minnesota Regiment in Arkansas, 1863-1865

DONALD J. SIMON

ON A HOT July morning in 1863, four hundred men of the Third Minnesota Volunteer Regiment disembarked from a steamboat at the Mississippi River port of Helena, Arkansas. The Minnesotans and their commander, Colonel Christopher C. Andrews, soon found that the heat was as unbearable as it had been farther south, where they had recently participated in General Ulysses S. Grant's successful siege of Vicksburg. Despite the heat, as Andrews proudly recorded, the regiment landed, reassembled its wagons, loaded them, and was on the march to camp within

an hour of its arrival at Helena. The encampment was well situated "on the bank of the river . . . about 1½ miles below the town . . . [in] a pleasant spot, covered with scattering timber." The men supplemented the shade of the trees by covering their tents with branches.¹

Here they occupied themselves with drill and brief scouting forays into the countryside, while the Union command gathered troops for an expedition against Little Rock, the capital of secessionist Arkansas. For two years Union and Confederate campaigning in this border state of divided loyalties had been subordinated to the needs of more important theaters east of the Mississippi. When troops could be spared, Federals and Rebels had skirmished back and forth in a boundaryless warfare. By the summer of 1863, Union troops had gained control of posts scattered along the northern and eastern edges of the state; Confederate forces were concentrated at Little Rock on the Arkansas River. Union military commanders now found an opportunity for a strong drive across the state to clean out Confederate resistance.²

The expedition was to be commanded by General Frederick Steele, an officer who had acquired a reputation for "great coolness and skill in battle" as one of Grant's division commanders.³ The immediate objec-

¹ *Minnesota in the Civil and Indian Wars*, 1:166 (St. Paul, 1890); James Madison Bowler to his wife, July 30, 1863, Bowler Papers, in the Minnesota Historical Society. Andrews (1829-1922) was a St. Cloud lawyer who had enlisted soon after the Civil War began. Commissioned a captain when the Third Regiment was organized, he later rose to the rank of brigadier general. After the war he had a distinguished career as minister to Sweden and Norway, consul general to Brazil, and as a conservation leader in Minnesota. His accounts of the experiences of the Third Minnesota are found in the regiment's official history, cited above, as well as in his diaries and "Autobiography," both in the Minnesota Historical Society; his field reports, published in volume 2 of *Civil and Indian Wars*; and his published *Recollections: 1829-1922*, 178-191 (Cleveland, 1928).

² Warfare in the trans-Mississippi theater is described in volumes 4 and 5 of Kenneth P. Williams, *Lincoln Finds a General* (New York, 1956, 1959).

³ Charles A. Dana, *Recollections of the Civil War*, 65 (New York, 1898).



Colonel Christopher C. Andrews

tive of the expedition was Little Rock. The city itself had little military value, aside from a former United States arsenal, but it did have great strategic importance. Its capture would ensure control of the rich Arkansas River Valley, isolating and outflanking Confederate resistance to the north and west. Steele's expedition thus had important possibilities, although it was to take place in a side theater of the war.

In preparation for the campaign the Third Minnesota undertook a reconnaissance in force three days after its arrival in Helena. On that hot July day, 240 men marched out "eleven miles, frightened a squad of guerrillas, gobbled about 100 negroes and as many mules, and returned to camp all safe and sound." This little expedition served more notice of the health and stamina of the regiment than of its military performance, but the latter would not pass unnoticed. The regiment's drill and military appearance were superb; as Captain James Madison Bowler wrote to his wife in Nininger, the Third stood "the highest of all the regiments in the expedition."⁴

Unfortunately, inspection by the top com-

mand also revealed a humiliating reminder of the regiment's past. Little more than a year before, the Third had been surrendered by its then commanding officer, Colonel Henry C. Lester, to raiding Confederates at Murfreesboro, Tennessee, and the men were still without regimental colors. This fact was not overlooked, as Bowler told his wife. At a review on August 12, "Gen. Steele asked Col. Andrews where his colors were, and was politely informed that we had—lost them." The absence of a flag was the harder to bear because the Third, later released on parole and sent back to Minnesota, had proved its valor against Chief Little Crow at the Battle of Wood Lake during the Sioux Uprising. "It is a shame that we cannot have a flag," Bowler added. "Minnesota ought to present us with a flag for what we did in the Indian Campaign last fall."⁵

As the summer days passed, the Union army at Helena was hard hit by the ravages of typhoid, dysentery, and other diseases. General Steele reported to his superiors that the ever-growing sick list was "frightful." In this campaign more men would be lost from illness than from enemy bullets. The Third Minnesota, nevertheless, remained healthy, "While the men of other reg'ts have been dying off rapidly."⁶ Colonel Andrews' troops evidently used adequate sanitary measures and took care with their drinking water.

BY AUGUST 11 all was in readiness for the campaign and the advance on Little Rock began. Six thousand men marched out of Helena toward the White River, where they would be joined by General John W. David-

⁴ James Madison Bowler to his wife, July 30, August 12, 1863, Bowler Papers.

⁵ Bowler to his wife, August 12, 1863, Bowler Papers. On the surrender of the Third in July, 1862, see Walter N. Trenerry, "Lester's Surrender at Murfreesboro," in *Minnesota History*, 39:195-197 (Spring, 1965).

⁶ United States War Department, *The War of the Rebellion Records: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies*, series 1, vol. 22, part 1, p. 472; Bowler to his wife, August 9, 1863, Bowler Papers.

son, who was bringing six thousand cavalrymen south from Missouri. With later additions, Steele's expeditionary force eventually totaled three divisions, or approximately sixteen thousand men. Steele had no accurate information on the strength of the opposing Confederates, led by General Sterling Price, for it was not known what reinforcements the Southern command might send him. Price was reported, however, to be well served by the cavalry of General John S. Marmaduke and Colonel Joseph O. Shelby. In spite of this uncertainty, the Union command's estimate of the situation was optimistic. From corps headquarters at Memphis, General Stephen A. Hurlbut told Grant that "the occupation of Little Rock will be simply a question of marching, and the holding of it merely a question of supplies."⁷ As it turned out, the marching alone entailed serious losses from disease.

The Third Minnesota, in the second brigade of the second division, tramped out of Helena on August 13 and climbed the heights behind the town. With 380 effectives, it was the strongest unit in the column. The men were subjected to intense heat and clouds of dust as they marched along. Their route took them through a land of plenty, but orders from Colonel Andrews against foraging were respected. The colonel informed his men that it was "better for them to take some of their rations . . . and give them to the poor residents we pass on our march, than to rob them of their subsistence.

⁷ War Department, *War of the Rebellion Records*, series 1, vol. 22, part 2, p. 425; vol. 23, part 3, p. 431.

⁸ *Civil and Indian Wars*, 1:166. The second brigade consisted of the Fortieth Iowa, Twenty-seventh Wisconsin, 126th Illinois, Twenty-second Ohio, and Third Minnesota regiments, and a battery of Missouri artillery. See Bowler to his wife, August 9, 1863, Bowler Papers. The quotation is from Andrews, *Recollections*, 179.

⁹ War Department, *War of the Rebellion Records*, series 1, vol. 22, part 2, p. 430. Steele now had a two-to-one edge over Price in cavalry.

¹⁰ *Civil and Indian Wars*, 1:167; War Department, *War of the Rebellion Records*, series 1, vol. 22, part 2, p. 475.

¹¹ *Civil and Indian Wars*, 1:167.

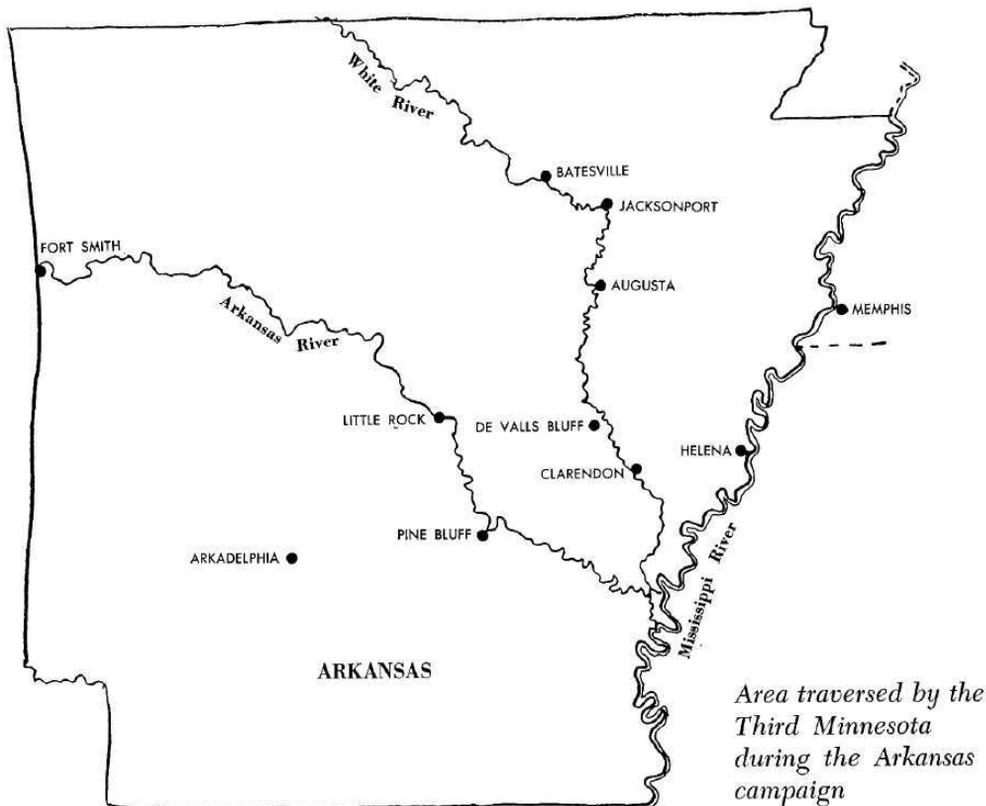
These Arkansas people . . . know we are from Minnesota and they will remember and talk of us for many years. Let us give them reason to remember our regiment and state with respect." Foraging was a universal habit among the volunteer regiments; only a well-disciplined unit would follow such an order.⁸

Meeting no resistance, the army reached Clarendon on the White River on August 17. At this point General Davidson's cavalry division joined the expedition. His six thousand troopers were not just cavalrymen, but, their commander declared, "dragoons, taught by me to use the carbine dismounted when necessary."⁹ These hard fighters would pave the way for the slow-moving infantry, clearing away rebel bushwhackers and cavalrymen alike.

The sick list had mushroomed to serious proportions by the time the army arrived at Clarendon. With several thousand men unfit for duty, the expedition was forced to halt. Forty men of the Third Minnesota were sick on August 20, and Colonel Andrews attributed the increasing amount of illness to the week the army spent at Clarendon. The thousands of sick men could not be transported with the expedition and a place had to be found where they could recover safely with only a small detail of healthy men as guards. De Valls Bluff, north of Clarendon on the White River, was chosen as a supply base and hospital for several reasons. The bluff was a "healthy location," and one which could easily be defended and resupplied.¹⁰

While General Davidson's cavalry rode on ahead to reconnoiter the town of Brownsville, the sick troops, well guarded by gunboats, sailed up the White River to De Valls Bluff. The Third Minnesota along with the remainder of the army arrived at the bluff at noon on August 24 after a day and a half of marching. The bluff was secured without incident, the ground prepared for defense, and a supply depot and hospital built.¹¹

With the sick taken care of, the expedition pushed on to rejoin Davidson's cavalry.



*Area traversed by the
Third Minnesota
during the Arkansas
campaign*

The two-day march to Brownsville was uneventful, the weather pleasant, and the nights cool. The country was virtually uninhabited but spectacular in scenery. Colonel Andrews noted: "The first three miles was through oak forest; then we came out upon a handsome prairie, skirted on each side with hard timber. The air was bracing and we could almost realize we were on one of the beautiful prairies of Minnesota."¹²

Confederate opposition began to stiffen after the expedition reached the vicinity of Brownsville, and Davidson fought a heavy skirmish with Rebel cavalry just east of the town. Madison Bowler wrote to his wife that there had been "firing between the rebel pickets and ours almost every day." In fact, reported Colonel Andrews, "there had been repeated occasions when, from the firing in front, the regiment seemed liable to be called into action." On the whole,

however, the Confederate delaying action remained surprisingly slight.¹³

On September 7 the Third Minnesota camped ten miles from Little Rock. Here the expedition halted for two days, while men of the Third "tested Arkansas sweet potatoes and watermelons" and Steele formulated his strategy.¹⁴

¹² Andrews Diary, September 1, 2, 1863; *Civil and Indian Wars*, 1:167.

¹³ Bowler to his wife, September 9, 1863, Bowler Papers; *Civil and Indian Wars*, 1:167. The fact that the Confederates suffered only 64 casualties in the advance on Little Rock indicates that their resistance was not very determined. See War Department, *War of the Rebellion Records*, series 1, vol. 22, part 1, p. 523. For some reason the Southern army failed to utilize opportunities for delaying the expedition. Price's men were somewhat outnumbered, but it is possible that stiff resistance at points where there was good defensive terrain, combined with Union losses from disease, might have forced Steele to retreat.

¹⁴ *Civil and Indian Wars*, 1:167.

THE GENERAL devised a plan of battle which was simple, yet took full advantage of the situation. Price had entrenched the bulk of his troops in strong fortifications north of the Arkansas, across from Little Rock. Steele planned to have his infantry hit Price's entrenchments on the north bank, while Davidson's cavalry crossed the river below the city and struck at the rear. The crossing was to be made at a spot called Buck's Ford; here the main channel was only three hundred feet across and beyond it lay a sand bank six hundred feet wide.¹⁵ A pontoon bridge could easily be erected over the channel and the sand bar would give the soldiers maneuvering room after crossing the bridge. In addition Steele planned a feint at another ford, a few miles below Buck's.

Price's defense of Little Rock did not show the same vigor and boldness, and his plans reflected a pessimistic attitude which he displayed throughout the campaign. He was later to declare: "I did not believe it would be possible for me to hold it [*Little Rock*] with the force then under my command."¹⁶ He placed the bulk of his men in the fortifications on the north side and scattered the remainder — 1,200 men under Colonel Archibald S. Dobbin — along the south bank of the river in an attempt to cover twelve different fords.

At three o'clock on the morning of September 10, 1863, the battle for Little Rock began as the Third Minnesota led the infantry column on the two-and-a-half-mile march to the Arkansas River. Arriving at

Buck's Ford, the Third quickly deployed in line behind a levee and threw out sharpshooters close to the bank. Three other regiments and a battery arrived to complete the line, and the bridge site was secured.¹⁷

Colonel Dobbin was completely misled by Steele's feint downriver and the pontoon bridge was more than half completed before the Confederate officer realized his error and moved his artillery into effective position. At eight o'clock four Confederate guns opened fire with solid shot from a position about eight hundred yards from the bridge. Union batteries were not long in replying. "Before the smoke of the first discharge of their guns had scarcely reached the top of the trees . . . twenty guns belched forth . . . a stream of shell into the midst of their battery, compelling it to retire disabled, after firing only three shots, entirely harmless."¹⁸

Now it was up to the infantry, which for once would clear the way for the cavalry. The Twenty-seventh Wisconsin and the Fortieth Iowa crossed the pontoon bridge, deployed on the sand bar, and advanced to secure the far bank. "Every one expected that at any moment a terrible fire would be opened upon them," but the beachhead was secured without difficulty.¹⁹ After Davidson's cavalry had reached the far bank, the two infantry regiments recrossed the river to join Steele. By 11 A.M. the passage was effected.

The afternoon found Steele's infantry moving toward Little Rock up the north side of the river, while the cavalry approached the city along the south side. Despite bitter resistance, Federal cavalry overran the strong natural position of Bayou Fourche, not far from the crossing, receiving invaluable assistance from artillery batteries across the river. The capture of Little Rock was assured at Bayou Fourche.

The last few miles of the advance to the city required hard fighting by Davidson's cavalry and continuous artillery support. In a determined series of actions for "every advantageous foot of ground," the troopers

¹⁵ *Civil and Indian Wars*, 1:168.

¹⁶ War Department, *War of the Rebellion Records*, series 1, vol. 22, part 1, p. 520. In the same report (p. 521) Price stated that he was outnumbered 20,000 to 8,000. On the other hand, a clerk in his headquarters, described by Steele as "perfectly reliable," stated that Price had a paper strength of 20,000 men, with 12,000 present for duty. See War Department, *War of the Rebellion Records*, series 1, vol. 22, part 1, p. 480.

¹⁷ *Civil and Indian Wars*, 1:167.

¹⁸ War Department, *War of the Rebellion Records*, series 1, vol. 22, part 1, p. 489.

¹⁹ *Civil and Indian Wars*, 1:168.

dismounted and worked forward through woods and cornfields. During the bitter fighting Price had time to evacuate his troops from their entrenchments and retreat across the river and south toward Arkadelphia. He had vowed that “the Yankees were not going to entrap him like they did [General John C.] Pemberton” at the battle of Vicksburg. He managed to keep his word.²⁰

The infantry on the north side of the river encountered Confederate delaying action, but the resistance was not as severe as that which Davidson was slashing his way through. Nevertheless, the advance took the entire afternoon. Possibly the delay was caused by the constant positioning of batteries in support of Davidson. By late afternoon Price’s abandoned earthworks were passed. After dark the Third Minnesota encamped a mile below the town, where it found that “Confederate kitchen fires [were] still burning and their corn cakes yet warm.” Early on the morning of September 11 the regiment crossed the Arkansas and entered Little Rock. Marching in column by company, the Third tramped up the city’s main street and raised the Stars and Stripes over the dome of the capitol.²¹

ALTHOUGH STEELE had let the garrison escape, Little Rock was now in Union hands. Almost everything of value in the city had been destroyed or evacuated by the Confederates, but Steele was able to report that the million-dollar Federal arsenal had been seized intact, with three thousand pounds of powder and five cannon.²² The Union strategic objective—control of the Arkansas River Valley—was tentatively achieved with the capture of the city and the fall of Fort Smith, located upriver near the state’s western border.

General Steele, however, still faced a formidable task. With only eleven thousand effective troops, he had to check the activities of as many Confederate army regulars and at the same time establish law and order in half the state, an area abounding with Rebel guerrillas. The re-establishment

of civilian government loyal to the Union required firm but wise policies. The citizens of Arkansas would have to govern themselves and in time defend themselves against remaining Rebel elements. Steele’s occupation policies, aimed at both these goals, achieved considerable success. On November 6, 1863, a Confederate colonel in Arkansas reported to Jefferson Davis: “General Steele . . . is winning golden opinions by his forbearance, justice and urbanity. Anyone can judge what will follow.” General William T. Sherman commended Steele in the following words: “I have no doubt you have made more progress in Arkansas toward a reconstruction of government than we have in any part of the country east of the Mississippi.”²³

One of Steele’s first decisions was to select Andrews as garrison commander for Little Rock. The colonel was notified of his appointment as he led his regiment into the city on the morning of September 11. The men of the Third, in all probability, learned that Steele had selected them for garrison duty because of their “efficiency and good discipline.”²⁴

Colonel Andrews soon informed the new garrison what was expected of it. A general order instructed the troops “by all means to abstain from unnecessarily irritating the citizens; to abstain from all conduct that will tend to tarnish the good name of the federal army; and by courtesy and good conduct to command the respect and encourage the loyalty of the people.”²⁵

The Third Minnesota was stationed within the town—“a beautiful city,” according to Lieutenant Colonel Hans Mattson, “nearly as large as *St. Paul*.” Quarters for the men

²⁰ War Department, *War of the Rebellion Records*, series 1, vol. 22, part 1, p. 487, 480.

²¹ *Civil and Indian Wars*, 1:168.

²² War Department, *War of the Rebellion Records*, series 1, vol. 22, part 1, p. 479.

²³ The two statements are quoted in *Civil and Indian Wars*, 1:169.

²⁴ *Civil and Indian Wars*, 1:168; War Department, *War of the Rebellion Records*, series 1, vol. 22, part 1, p. 518.

²⁵ *Civil and Indian Wars*, 1:169.



Third Minnesota entering Little Rock, an oil painting by Stanley M. Arthurs

were set up in the capitol building while the officers messed in a nearby cottage. The Minnesotans found that the town's residents were "all respectful and civil, many even cordial." The ensuing guard duty and drill were dull but not unpleasant tasks, more enjoyable than marching in the dust and heat. As one of the officers commented: "I assure you [it] is much better than bivouacking out in the woods among the woodticks, chiggers, etc."²⁶

²⁶ Hans Mattson to his wife, September 15, 1863, Mattson Papers, in the Minnesota Historical Society; Bowler to his wife, September 16, 1863, Bowler Papers; *Civil and Indian Wars*, 1:169. The Forty-third Illinois and the Seventh Missouri Cavalry regiments completed the garrison. Both were stationed outside the city.

²⁷ The quotation from General Kirby Smith is in War Department, *War of the Rebellion Records*, series 1, vol. 22, part 2, p. 1011.

The army's moderate occupation policy soon bore fruit in a movement for self-government under the Stars and Stripes. Union clubs had been established in many localities, with an unofficial headquarters in Little Rock. Visible proof of Union sentiment was demonstrated by the formation of loyal militia units. Some citizens, even former Confederate soldiers, enlisted in the Union army to help clean out the guerrillas. Although Confederate General Edmund Kirby Smith cynically attributed the change of loyalty to "love of property," it could be more properly attributed to the heavy demands made in the name of the Confederacy on the people by guerrillas, plus a praiseworthy Union occupation policy. Life, and the means to sustain it, had a higher value to the people than allegiance to a largely beaten Confederacy.²⁷

The concrete expression of this change of loyalties came in January, 1864, when a convention met in Little Rock to adopt a free-state constitution. Colonel Andrews described the event as "a spontaneous movement of the people, and not initiated by any official authority . . . I gave the movement, however, every encouragement in my power, caused rations to be issued to a number of the delegates who had come from northwestern Arkansas in a destitute condition, and did everything . . . I could for their comfort and the success of their work." On March 14–16, 1864, Arkansas ratified the constitution by a vote of 12,426 to 222 and elected state officials. A month later the Third Minnesota marched "in a fine civic and military procession at the new governor's inauguration."²⁸

January was also an important month to the men of the Third Minnesota. Their original two-year term of enlistment had expired and they were free either to leave the army or to sign up again. Anxious to retain the services of experienced soldiers, the War Department offered liberal terms to veterans who re-enlisted. Only moderate progress was made in this direction until the colonel assembled the men of the Third and urged them to keep the regiment in existence. He assured them that "they could not make a mistake in such an act of patriotism." Within two days 350 men, over three-fourths of the regiment, were mustered in again. Company K, the first to complete its re-enlistment, was sent home on leave the following week, and three more companies left for Minnesota in February; the last six units did not receive their furlough orders until August.²⁹

IN MARCH, 1864, after a winter of inactivity on the western front, the Union army undertook a series of campaigns against Confederate army and irregular units. On the army level, General Nathaniel P. Banks was moving up the Red River in Louisiana. General Steele made preparations to march south from Little Rock to join Banks and

thereby catch any Confederate units between them. The pincer movement, it was hoped, would for all practical purposes liberate the rest of Arkansas and Louisiana. The Southern army, however, did not allow itself to be trapped. Confederate troops first defeated Banks, then in a long series of clashes forced Steele to retreat to his supply base at Camden in southern Arkansas. The Union troops left behind in Little Rock had somewhat better luck.

On March 30, 1864, shortly after General Steele departed for the south, the Third Minnesota initiated a small-scale operation. Colonel Andrews, thinking that after six months of garrison duty his men "would enjoy an expedition into the country," planned to clear up a nest of about a hundred Rebel skirmishers who were reported to be operating near Augusta on the White River. The expedition was typical of those frequently undertaken by the Union army against the Arkansas irregulars, and Andrews was confident of success. It was not until some time later that he learned he was taking the field against a brigade of about six hundred Confederates under the command of Brigadier General Dandridge McRae, an experienced and capable officer.³⁰

Approximately two hundred men from the Third Minnesota volunteered for the expedition. At De Valls Bluff they joined forces with forty-five men from the Eighth Missouri Cavalry. The expedition went up the White River by steamer, guarded by the gunboat "Covington."

Arriving at the little village of Augusta on the morning of April 1, Andrews interrogated some civilians and learned that the enemy's principal camp was located near a plantation about seven miles away. As the Union column marched through the streets of the town, Southern sympathizers noted

²⁸ Andrews, *Recollections*, 184, 185, 187; *Civil and Indian Wars*, 1:172.

²⁹ *Civil and Indian Wars*, 1:170, 175; Andrews *Diary*, January 5, 7, 1864.

³⁰ Andrews, *Recollections*, 188; *Civil and Indian Wars*, 1:170.

its strength and relayed the information to the Confederate forces.³¹

Within a few miles of the town, the Union forces encountered three small parties of Rebels and came upon a recently abandoned camp, where they seized a wagonload of hams. Meeting no organized resistance, the expedition pushed on into a hilly and wooded area about twelve miles from Augusta. Here the men were halted for lunch and a rest.³²

By this time Andrews had concluded that there was little chance of confronting any sizable group of Rebels and ordered a return to the city. The expedition was on its way back when a civilian doctor was seized and questioned. In answer to the colonel's expressed "disappointment in not finding more Confederates, he replied, 'Before you

get back to your boat, you will see as many of them as you want.'" The column had marched no more than a third of the way when a large force of troopers swooped down from the northeast. The attack was quickly repulsed and the expedition resumed its march with greater caution. Two more miles were passed without incident. Suddenly a cavalry force of about six hundred men was sighted at a point where the road passed between a cultivated field and a heavy stand of trees known as Fitzhugh's Woods. The Confederate troopers commenced their advance through the field to the left of the road. Their cheering, shouting lines maintained good order as they bore down upon the Union column.³³

Colonel Andrews quickly swung his command to meet the impending attack. A line of skirmishers was thrown out in the woods to the right of the road and a "strong company" was held in reserve. The fate of the column now rested upon its own courage.

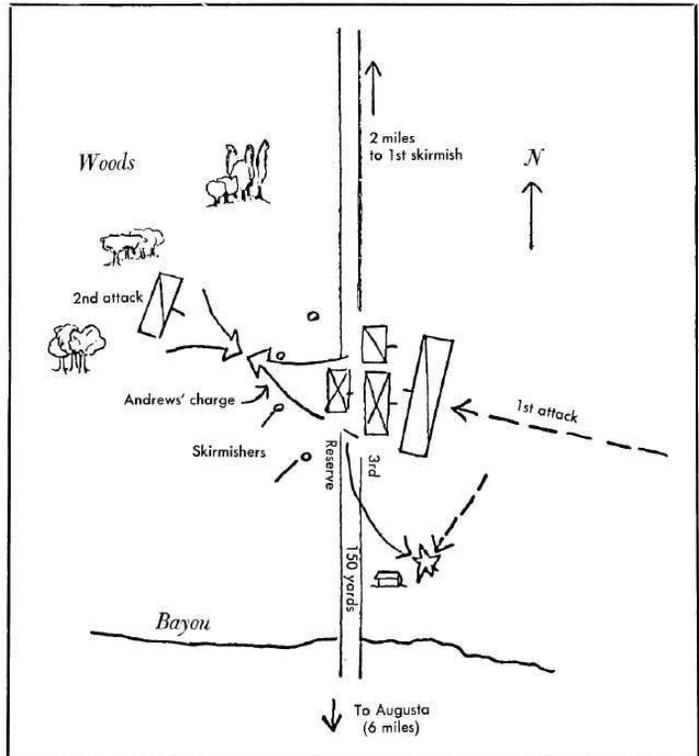
The distance between the two commands quickly closed. When not more than two

³¹ Andrews Diary, March 31, 1864; *Civil and Indian Wars*, 2:432; 1:170, 172.

³² *Civil and Indian Wars*, 1:170; 2:433.

³³ The quotation is from Andrews, *Recollections*, 188; the account of the engagement here and below is based on Andrews' description in *Civil and Indian Wars*, 1:171.

Diagram of the engagement at Fitzhugh's Woods, April 1, 1864



hundred yards remained, the Union line opened fire. The men in Lincoln blue were soon enveloped by cursing, milling cavalrymen. Fierce fighting raged along the line. "At one time the firing and clamor were so intense that 'cease firing' was sounded on the bugle" so the Union soldiers could hear the commands of their officers. Despite the determination of the courageous troopers, the Union line did not break.

The battle was not yet over, for a new Confederate assault was launched from the righthand side of the road. Colonel Andrews related: "I felt that unless we boldly met it we were lost. I started towards the enemy's line calling and motioning my men to follow, which they promptly and resolutely did; we got very near the enemy, who soon turned and disappeared in the woods." Andrews' horse was shot from under him. The gallant charge proved to be the decisive point in the battle.³⁴

The situation, nevertheless, remained serious. The ammunition supply was low and General McRae was not yet willing to admit defeat.³⁵ He sent part of his remaining force south along the road in an attempt to cut the Union line of withdrawal to Augusta. Colonel Andrews perceived the object of this movement and ordered most of his men to move up 150 yards where they could take cover in a cluster of log buildings and behind some fences. The Confederates, mistaking this move for a retreat, advanced with shouts, only to receive a damaging fire from the Third in its new position. The Confederates thereupon withdrew out of range. After several lulls in the firing they "practically disappeared." The battle of Fitzhugh's Woods was over.

It was now four o'clock, almost two hours after the first Confederate cavalrymen had ridden into view. The Third Minnesota had suffered casualties amounting to seven killed and about twenty-eight wounded. The regiment's bag of prisoners totaled one officer, one sergeant, and eleven enlisted men; in addition the Confederates had sustained heavy losses in killed and wounded.³⁶

That the outnumbered Union column had escaped certain capture was due to the bravery and competence of its officers and men. "The result of their hard-fought contest," Colonel Andrews believed, "shows what a resource there is in courage and what power there is in discipline."³⁷ Final credit for the victory must be attributed to Andrews, who handled his command courageously and skillfully during the entire action. Not long after, Andrews was promoted to brigadier general, and Lieutenant Colonel Hans Mattson assumed command of the regiment.

EVENTS in the southern part of the state were soon to limit the sojourn of the Third Minnesota in Little Rock. As Steele retreated from the ill-fated Red River campaign, Price inflicted two serious defeats upon him and virtually isolated his forces in Camden. General Andrews planned to move the Third Minnesota, with two other regiments and a supply train, south to relieve Steele. At 3:00 A.M. on April 26 Colonel Mattson received orders to ready his command for immediate movement. The Minnesotans had marched only as far south as Pine Bluff when orders were changed; a messenger brought news that Steele was retreating again.³⁸

With Price somewhere behind him, Steele fell back on Little Rock after what a reporter for the *St. Louis Democrat* called "a campaign of forty days in which nothing had been gained but defeat, hard blows

³⁴ The quotation is from Andrews, "Autobiography," 188, in Andrews Papers.

³⁵ When one company reported that it was out of ammunition, Andrews replied, "We have our bayonets left." See "Autobiography," 188, in Andrews Papers.

³⁶ On the Union prisoners, see Andrews, *Recollections*, 190. On McRae's losses see Andrews, "Autobiography," 189, Andrews Papers. It was later estimated that Confederate casualties amounted to sixty to seventy-five wounded and twenty to twenty-five killed.

³⁷ *Civil and Indian Wars*, 2:435.

³⁸ *Civil and Indian Wars*, 1:174; Mattson to his wife, April 26, 1864, Mattson Papers.

and poor fare.”³⁹ Nobody knew where the Confederates were, except that they were near, and few could guess when and where they might attack next. General Andrews took vigorous defensive measures. He ringed Little Rock with fortifications and batteries and ordered the Third Minnesota to reinforce the garrison at Pine Bluff.

The name Pine Bluff was deceptive. Dr. Albert C. Wedge, the regimental surgeon, painted a dismal picture of the post. He wrote that it was situated in a “flat, swampy unhealthy locality—the Arkansas River on the north and a filthy bayou on the south. . . . The south wind came over the bayou night and day, bringing miasma into our camp.”⁴⁰

Colonel Mattson was conscious of a danger more tangible than noxious air—Confederate cavalymen. He ordered the camp strengthened. The Third Minnesota spent many a hot summer day at hard work constructing fortifications, and the sick list began to grow. General Price did not unleash the full force of his cavalry squadrons upon the camp, but the Confederates made their presence felt. Colonel Mattson wrote on May 27 that “they come right up to our picket line, but dare not attack us.” Two weeks later about five hundred Confederate cavalymen made a surprise assault upon the post, but were driven back by Company H of the Third Minnesota after a short brisk skirmish. Disease, not Confederate raiders, remained the greatest danger.⁴¹

On May 1, 1864, Colonel Mattson had written his wife: “We are in fine spirits and condition ready for a fight.” By July his regiment was decimated by disease. During the summer of 1864, malaria killed close to

150 men, and countless others lay in hospitals. In September men were dying almost daily, and at one point the regiment’s commander could report only three officers and 150 men fit for duty. Dr. Wedge attributed the high death rate to the fact that the unit had received “a lot of unacclimated men fresh from the north.” Needless suffering was caused by the lack of a “sufficient supply of medicine.” Colonel Mattson took every possible measure to preserve the health of his command, but little could be accomplished while the regiment remained in its unwholesome location. Minnesota Governor Stephen Miller responded to the outbreak with a request that the Third be transferred, so that the men would at least “have an opportunity to die at the post of honor.” Despite staggering losses the regiment remained in commission.⁴²

Relief did not come until October 10, 1864, when the Third was transferred to De Valls Bluff, the depot established by Steele fourteen months earlier on his way to Little Rock. Here the men, like countless others before them, could recover their health. They built large, comfortable log houses for quarters and spent the “winter working on fortifications, and performing picket and scouting service.”⁴³

While the Third Minnesota recovered its fighting form on the White River, Federals and Confederates elsewhere clashed in the largest battle ever fought west of the Mississippi. General Price, perhaps emboldened by his defeat of Steele, undertook a strong offensive into Missouri. Early in September he slipped across the Arkansas River between Fort Smith and Little Rock, whose separated and outnumbered garrisons dared not attack him. The alerted Union command in Missouri concentrated its forces and Price was heavily outnumbered by the time the two armies clashed at the battle of Westport on October 23. More than 29,000 men took the field, 20,000 of them Federals. Superior numbers overwhelmed a gallant stand by the Southern army. General Price retreated out of Missouri for the last time,

³⁹ Quoted in J. Cutler Andrews, *The North Reports the Civil War*, 514 (Pittsburgh, 1955).

⁴⁰ *Civil and Indian Wars*, 1:174n.

⁴¹ Mattson to his wife, May 27, 1864, Mattson Papers; *Civil and Indian Wars*, 1:175.

⁴² *Civil and Indian Wars*, 1:174, 174n.; 2:453; Mattson to his wife, July 18, 1864, Mattson Papers; War Department, *War of the Rebellion Records*, series 1, vol. 48, part 2, p. 32.

⁴³ *Civil and Indian Wars*, 2:457; 1:175.



Colonel Hans Mattson

and in December he led his exhausted survivors into the Confederate lines in southern Arkansas. For all practical purposes, organized resistance in the West was ended.⁴⁴

LATE SPRING of 1865 found the Third Minnesota again assigned to garrison duty, this time at Batesville, Arkansas. Colonel Mattson enthusiastically described the area of his new command as “rocky, hilly, healthy and beautiful — Here are plenty of springs, with cold crystal water fully equal to our Minnesota spring waters,” not to mention other benefits which any soldier would appreciate — “peaches by the wagon load, chickens eggs milk and vegetables of every kind are here.”⁴⁵

On May 26, 1865, as Colonel Mattson wrote to his wife that life in Batesville was like a “dream,” the Confederate forces west of the Mississippi formally surrendered in New Orleans. The Civil War was over.

Administrative problems mushroomed with the end of hostilities. Colonel Mattson, now stationed at Jacksonport, Arkansas, was responsible in a five-county area for appointing loyal civil officials, establishing local militia companies, supervising the paroling of six thousand Confederate soldiers, and feeding the population when necessary. Mattson divided his command in order to govern the area effectively and provided the firm, imaginative leadership that was desperately needed.⁴⁶

Leadership in another area was needed by July, 1865. Despite easy duties and a pleasant social life, there existed a serious morale problem within the regiment. The

men wanted to go home. Colonel Mattson on July 12 received orders to muster out the one-year men, but this only increased the bitterness of the veterans — and with cause. The disaffection grew more serious as the summer lingered on. By August Colonel Mattson feared that half the regiment would desert, that only “Co. D — A — H and perhaps some others will remain faithful.” On August 15 companies B and K “refused to do duty, and demanded to be mustered out.” Colonel Mattson was able to persuade the men to return to their duties, but he believed it was “very wrong for the Government to keep them so long.” Fortunately, the long-awaited orders arrived before another serious incident occurred.⁴⁷

In late August of 1865 the Third Minnesota was ordered to report to Fort Snelling for mustering out. The governor of Arkansas paid the departing regiment this tribute: “While they have been on duty in our capital, good order has prevailed and they have won the respect and esteem of the citizens. When called to meet the enemy, they have proved ready for any undertaking and reliable in every emergency. . . . Their State may justly be proud of them, as they will do her credit wherever duty calls them.” The Third Minnesota Regiment had performed well no matter what its duties were. Its discipline and professional competency were objects of praise and admiration wherever it was stationed. On September 16, 1865, after two years of continuous service in Arkansas, the men returned to their homes.⁴⁸

⁴⁴ Jay Monaghan, *Civil War on the Western Border, 1854–1865*, 310, 311, 336, 343, 347 (Boston, 1955).

⁴⁵ Mattson to his wife, May 15, 21, 26, 1865, Mattson Papers.

⁴⁶ Mattson to his wife, June 8, 1865, Mattson Papers. Mattson stationed companies at Augusta, Batesville, Searcy, Jacksonport, and Powhatan. See his letters of June 5, July 12, 1865.

⁴⁷ Mattson to his wife, July 12, August 7, 15, 21, 1865, Mattson Papers.

⁴⁸ Quoted in *Civil and Indian Wars*, 1:177.

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