

**Full of Bluecoats: Sherman's Army in Franklin County**

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**The Civil War and Its Aftermath in North Carolina and Franklin County**

Sherman's army, 60,000 strong, entered North Carolina, in the vicinity of Laurinburg on March 7, 1865. Sherman and his commanders believed that North Carolina bore far less responsibility than South Carolina for plunging the nation into war. Consequently, orders went out to better regulate foraging and to better protect the lives and property of civilians on and near the army's path. In general, it can be said that this state fared better than Georgia (where he sought to make them "howl") and South Carolina (where they laid waste to Columbia). That said, these were not Boy Scouts and, at practically every crossroads and community along the way, an outrage can be discovered. Most of these were part of the attempt to live off the land which meant the livestock and the smokehouses. The valuables in the main house were targets as well.

Union soldiers entered Raleigh on April 13 and there they remained for sixteen days. The story of the occupation is dramatic as it involves the surrender of the city, the delivery of the keys to the Capitol, the theft of the our copy of the Bill of Rights, the encampment of thousands of men across the city and county, the negotiations at the Bennett House, the visit by Gen. Ulysses Grant, and destruction by Union soldiers, by bummers, and by Confederates. On April 14, as we all know, Lincoln was shot and he died the next day. Receipt of the news alarmed

Union officers who expected rampant chaos which did not transpire.

The story I wish to present today is that of the post-Raleigh segment of the march with particular attention on Louisburg and Franklin County where the soldiers were present on May 1 and 2. On April 15 Mayor W. H. Pleasants of Louisburg forwarded to Sherman, then in residence in Raleigh, a letter surrendering his town. Sherman's response is said to have been, "Louisburg—hell—what and where is it?" Sherman himself was not along for this part of the march, having departed Raleigh for Savannah on April 28. Not all of the troops stationed in the Capital City were involved in the march to Washington, D.C. The 23<sup>rd</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> Corps under Gen. Judson Kilpatrick remained to garrison Raleigh and Wake County. But the 14<sup>th</sup>, the 15<sup>th</sup>, the 17<sup>th</sup>, and the 20<sup>th</sup> Corps commenced on the journey. "We set our faces homeward," wrote Gen. William Hazen, "with feelings of thankfulness and joy no language can express."

The complaint heard most often from those on the march, left in letters and diaries, was the pace. It was rapid but nonetheless carefully regulated and well directed. The 17<sup>th</sup> Corps on May 1 marched from Raleigh toward Forestville, a community just south of Wake Forest. The 15<sup>th</sup> Corps took a more northeasterly route out of Raleigh, crossing the Neuse River at Rogers Crossroads (later known as Wake Crossroads). It is important to consider that the army moved in three lines of march, the greater part up the center of Franklin County (via present US 401) through Louisburg and with others taking routes west and east of the county seat.

Officers placed bets on whose men could march the fastest to Richmond and, in some cases, they drove their troops as far as thirty-five miles per day in the May heat and humidity of North Carolina and Virginia. Many fell ill or lagged behind. According to Joseph T. Glatthaar, in his general history of the march, "dozens who had survived the war died of heat prostration." The pace was the responsibility of junior officers left in charge by the corps commanders in

Sherman's absence. Their decisions enraged the troops. One officer wrote that "some of our Generals deserve to have their necks broke for such 'Tom foolery' after the war."

Another recalled, "The result of this amicable race was a disorganized and fagged-out column of troops put to the severest test of endurance. Brigades would be ordered to take the road in the middle of the night in order to steal around other troops and get in the advance. There was more straggling and actual suffering from fatigue in this march, perhaps, than in any other during the Carolina campaign. . . . The first warm weather of the season had come, making the tramp doubly exhausting to the men, several fatal sun-strokes were reported." Charles Wills of Illinois wrote, "I saw a number laid out this morning by the roadside looking as if they had been boiled. The 50 pounds of equipment is what uses them up."

Capt. George Pepper, a member of the 53<sup>rd</sup> Ohio, who crossed the Neuse River on April 29, recorded that his outfit passed "through a poor section of North Carolina" but that the "weather was delightful." He recalled a year later that "the music of the bands precede[d] us, ringing through the gorges and passes of the hills." Louisburg, he wrote, "is an old, beautiful place. . . . a town of considerable trade and enterprise. It has been much celebrated for its quiet, rural appearance, its excellent buildings, and the intelligent and enterprising character of its inhabitants. The churches and other public buildings, though not elegant are substantial, and indicate both liberality and taste. The Methodist Female College is a fine building, located in a pleasant portion of the city, with a large and beautifully shaded yard. The country between this place and Raleigh is delightful and well cultivated, diversified with gentle hills and beautiful vales, refreshing streams and cooling shades--presenting here beautiful groves and there extensive plantations--The scenery was lovely."

Charles Brown Tompkins wrote in his diary: "(W)e marched through Louisburg. It is the

prettiest little place I ever saw. Nearly every yard is filled with large forest trees, no grass at all. The Negroes shouted and acted as though they were crazy. George P. Metz pronounced Louisburg "a nice small place" and remarked upon how the streets were "crowded with citizens and negroes to see Sherman's army--some were hollering for Sherman--some were waving handkerchiefs." William M. Davis of the 4<sup>th</sup> Minnesota, like other Union diarists, found the landscape inviting and the people, white as well as black, welcoming: "[We] saw some beautiful plantations, well fenced, well cultivated, and I think must be very productive. The citizens are a much better class than those in South Carolina or southern North Carolina. They are much better dressed, more intelligent and more enterprising. Their dwellings are always neat and adorned with taste—often elegant—with splendid grounds adjacent. The country is superior in all respects to any that I have seen since leaving west Tennessee. There are many plantations which I would be content to own and reside upon."

Rice C. Bull of the 123rd New York Infantry offered an opinion of the landscape that differed from those of his compatriots. He stated that the "country from Raleigh to Richmond did not appeal strongly to us northern people." The countryside, he later recalled, was "mostly wooded, and where farms were cultivated, they did not look prosperous." Nearly all buildings, he found, were "poor and ill-kept."

To this point I have quoted Union soldiers exclusively. But I wish to introduce four citizens of Franklin County who had distinctly different observations. The first is Anna Fuller of Louisburg, age 47, mother of novelist Edwin Wiley Fuller. She had been dreading the arrival of the Union troops for weeks. On April 29 she received definite word of their approach and wrote in her diary: "A squad of Yankee cavalry entered town and stopped in front of our house. They came to tell of the approach of the Army, a large portion of which will pass through here

Monday and Tuesday . . . . We have lived in constant dread of them for the last two weeks . . . .”

Fuller’s entries are remarkably similar to those of the better known North Carolina diarist, Catherine Edmondston of Halifax County, who based her writings largely on speculation, fear, and rumor. In a later entry Fuller wrote, “I am bewildered and my head is sick. . . . Would that I could describe my feelings, but I have not the power. The reality is upon us, that we are a subjugated people. . . . This morning a few cavalry companies came in, followed by bands of music and then the infantry, to number 12,000 to 15,000 men, then came the wagon train, which was very long. . . . [W]ithin my breast not a single emotion of patriotism or pleasure, I felt indignant. Our house was kept closed, while they were passing and so were the neighbors, as far as I could see.” Fuller continued, “The Negroes seem wild with excitement; they expect now to be free, and never more do any work, but poor deluded creatures, they are sadly mistaken.”

Among those interviewed in the 1930s by the field workers contracted by the Federal Writers' Project, as part of the slave narratives series, was Mary Anderson, who in 1865 was fourteen years old and lived with her family on the plantation of Sam Brodie southeast of Mapleville. Brodie's plantation house no longer stands but was located just off Ferrell's Bridge Road. It stood on the eastern flanking line of march taken by the 15th Corps of Sherman's army. By Anderson's account the Brodie plantation was home to 162 slaves. One day they sensed the approach of the army, booming in the distance and whispers among their owners. The next day, she recalled, “everybody on the plantation seemed to be disturbed, and Marster and Missus were crying. Marster ordered all the slaves to come to the great house at nine o'clock. [They] came out on the porch and stood side by side. You could hear a pin drop, everything was so quiet. Then Marster said "Good morning," and Missus said, "Good morning, children." They were both crying. Then Marster said, "Men, women, and children, you are free. You are no longer my slaves. The Yankees will soon be here."

As they arrived the troops filled the mile-long avenue from the main house to the Louisburg Road and spread out over a mile-square grove. According to Anderson, "They called the slaves, saying, "You are free." Slaves were whooping and laughing and acting like they were crazy. . . . They busted the door to the smokehouse and got all the hams. They went to the icehouse and got several barrels of brandy, and such a time. The Negroes and Yankees were cooking and eating together. The Yankees stayed there, cooked, ate, drank, and played music until about night. Then a bugle began to blow and you never saw such getting on horses and lining up in your life. In a few minutes they began to march, leaving the grove, which was soon as silent as a graveyard."

The third witness is Robert W. Winston, from the politically and socially prominent Winston family of Windsor. The family has refuged from their Bertie County home to a plantation house. Their Franklin County home, which was on the western flanking line of march for the 15<sup>th</sup> Corps, still stands northeast of Franklinton near Mitchiners Crossroads. In time Winston became a judge and a writer. But in 1865, he was five years old.

In his memoir, *It's a Far Cry*, published in 1937, Winston recalled that in May 1865, he sat on a set of steps alongside Lunsday, a black boy about his same age. The scene he witnessed remained vivid sixty years later: "For several days we had been expecting the triumphant Union troops to march through Springfield, our refugee plantation, on their way north. Expectation was at tip-toe. . . . Finally the eventful day had arrived. In the distance, Lunsday and I could catch the rub-a-dub-dub of the kettledrum and the notes of the fife. Nearer came the sound of marching feet and soon our ten-acre grove was alive with Blue Coats. Almost in a moment horses were unhitched and fed, tents, white and circus-like, arose and a little city sprang up." Winston reckoned that the reason they were spared was that his father, Patrick Henry Winston,

had attended the University of North Carolina with the commander of the division, General Frank P. Blair.

Finally, I wish to share the memories of E. H. Davis, who like Winston was five years of age in 1865. Davis, son of the college president, wrote the standard history of Franklin County (at least the one that most people consulted before the work of T. H. Pearce). He distinctly remembered the face of Union Gen. John A. Logan. At the age of five he accompanied his father to the school grounds where classes had been disrupted by the commotion. "The whole grove--the town as well--was full of blue coats," he recalled. He remembered the rows upon rows of tents. The old academy building had been filled to the point of bursting with corn brought in from outlying areas to feed horses belonging to Union cavalrymen. Despite the numbers, Davis recalled, the few days of occupation were attended with no violent disorder of any sort.

This brings us to the last major point I wish to consider, that being the conduct or demeanor of the Union troops. For a variety of reasons the depredations visited upon North Carolinians were few in this leg of Sherman's march. First, as has been mentioned, the pace of the march was exceptional, allowing only a few spare moments to break down a smokehouse door or to twist the neck off a chicken. Second, instructions prohibiting foraging had been distributed the previous day. Fred Wilson, an acting assistant adjutant general for the Union army, reiterated and expanded upon those instructions: "During the march . . . full rations of hard bread or flour, meat, coffee, and salt, and half rations of sugar will be issued to the troops. No foraging will be allowed excepting by permission from these headquarters, and everything taken must be paid for." Headquarters provided that vouchers were issued to all from whom corn, fodder, beef, and bacon were taken. Private property of every description, horses, mules, harnesses, wagons, and the like, were to be respected. Unauthorized men found away from the

line of march within any house, yard, garden, or enclosure, except to obtain water, were to be promptly arrested.

Nonetheless, rumors circulated that Sherman's army would continue to forage and plunder. And, as the account of the Brodie plantation confirmed, a limited number of foraging activities did continue. But theft of livestock, as compared with the rest of the march through North Carolina, was greatly reduced if not eliminated.

The letter writers and diarists in Sherman's army addressed this. Charles W. Wills of Illinois, commented on the conduct of his men: "We are on our good behavior this trip. No foraging, no bumming rails, or houses, and nothing naughty whatever. We have the best set of men in the world. When it is in order to raise h--- they have no equals in destructiveness and ability to hate and worry, or superiors as to fighting Rebels, but now they have none, and they are perfect lambs. Not a hand laid on a rail this evening with intent to burn, not a motion toward a chicken or smoke-house." George P. Metz offered a similar account, observing "Oh what a difference-- nothing is destroyed--everything is protected--no fences burned."

According to the history of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Wisconsin, "not a "bummer" left the ranks, not a house or field was invaded, nor goose or chicken disturbed." Rice Bull of New York recounted his view of the march, which he described as "the last, and to me, I can truly say, the happiest made by Sherman's army. It was to differ greatly from any made by us that preceded it. . . . We were to go through the country from Raleigh to Washington in an orderly manner, no straggling would be allowed; there were to be no foragers to gather food from the area through which we passed and no destruction of property of any kind would be permitted."

The contrast of the behavior of the soldiers on this portion of the march with the conduct earlier was striking to most Union observers. Charles Wills of Illinois offered that "It seems like



the early days of my soldiering to see the citizens all at home, their horses and mules in the stables, and gardens full of vegetables passed untouched. When a man can pass an onion bed without going for them, and they did a number of them today, no one need talk to me of total depravity.

The spirit amongst the Union soldiers made possible friendly interaction between the armies. By one account, at night “some of Lee's men, on their homeward journey, came into camp; and were fed most generously by the Union soldiers, who in fact lived on half-rations, because they made so liberal contribution from their haversacks to the many visiting Confederates to feed them and give them a few meals on their journey. The forager's occupation was now gone.”

Cornelia Phillips Spencer of Chapel Hill wrote about the encounters between Union and Confederates returning home. Bitter enemies only days earlier, members of the two armies found common ground and broke bread together. Mrs. Spencer wrote: “But I am glad to say that wherever a Federal soldier met any of them, he was prompt to offer help and food, and express a kindly and soldierly cordiality. . . . There was something worth studying in the air and expression of these men, a something which had a beneficial and soothing effect on the observers. They were not unduly cast down, nor had any appearance of the humiliation that was burning into our souls. They were serious, calm, and self-possessed. They said they were satisfied that all had been done that could be done.” Spencer, a true Confederate diehard, said of Sherman, mindful of the generous peace terms he proffered to see rejected by Washington, that he was “possessed of the requisite nobility and statesmanship and magnanimity to seize the opportunity for an equitable adjustment of our difficulties.” Anna Fuller in her diary expressed her surprise that the Union soldiers to that point had been well behaved.

The amity between Confederates and Union troops extended into the Reconstruction period. This is the principal theme of a recent book by Mark Bradley entitled *Bluecoats and Tar Heels*. Still, there were residual hard feelings. Bradley notes that in Franklinton a Union officer reported that it required “all his forbearance at times to endure the arrogance and insolence daily exhibited by a part of the country.” Writing in his *Narrative*, published in 1874, Gen. Joseph Johnston commended the occupying Union troops that remained in the South as garrisons after the peace. In doing so he drew a contrast between those Northerners posted in the South on military duty and those with postwar political responsibilities.

On May 3 the central line of march and two flanking lines of the Fifteenth Corps reunited in southern Warren County and marched into Warrenton. <sup>← WARRENTON - 616</sup> The 17<sup>th</sup> Corps would reunite with the 15<sup>th</sup> north of Warrenton, while the 14<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> Corps would continue their line of march northward through Oxford and into Virginia at a point about thirty miles west.

William M. Davis of the 4<sup>th</sup> Minnesota followed the same course. "We marched today through woods, on cowpaths, and anyway to get along," he wrote on May 3, adding, "The country along the line of today's march [is] much the same as yesterday--rolling, with rich plantations, fine residences and good timber. In Warrenton they encountered a group of former Confederates and exchanged pleasantries: "A novel and inspiring sight greeted us as we were passing through this village. A squad of ex-Confederate officers stood by the wayside and reviewed us en route. If within a few short days these same officers had presented themselves to our view, our compliments and cards would have been tossed to them with a minie ball; but in lieu of such acts of legalized murder such interrogatories and remarks as these were made: "How are you, Johnnies?" "Are you glad you are alive?" "How do you enjoy peace?" "Did you find your wives and babies well?" "We are on the road to see our wives, babies, mothers, fathers, and

sweethearts.” “ Say, Johnny, we abandoned a lot of lame mules at Raleigh, go and get them and go to farming.” And much more of the same character.”

George Pepper described Warrenton as "a neat and picturesque village . . . it has a very attractive and imposing appearance.” He wrote that he "longed for more time, so that I might feed on the enchantment for hours.” The rapid pace of the march precluded much interaction with the citizens of the town.

However, Warrenton historian Lizzie Montgomery, writing in 1924, indicated that several local people, some of whom had U.S. Army associations predating the conflict, entertained soldiers in their homes. "Of course,” Montgomery wrote, "the majority had a very deep-seated hostility to the Federal government and all connected with it." Many of them, including the author's father, secured guards to watch over their property.

May 4 was the day that Sherman's troops, or at least the greater part of them, marched out of North Carolina and into Virginia. Most Union soldiers who kept an account of the march made some reference to their departure from the Tar Heel State, after a stay of over two months, and their passage into the Old Dominion. The 53<sup>rd</sup> Ohio Regiment, encamped with most of the others in the 15<sup>th</sup> Corps, crossed the Roanoke River on a pontoon bridge. "Soon thereafter we crossed the state line of North Carolina into 'old Virginny.'" When the 3<sup>rd</sup> Wisconsin Regiment reached the boundary, they found a cracker box had been set up with the words "State Line" written on it. The bands of the 20<sup>th</sup> Corps, of which that unit was a part, played "Carry Me Back to Ole Virginny.” Writing in reference to war-scarred Virginia, George Pepper indicated that "the country in which Grant and Lee fought, presents to the eye one vast sheet of misery.”

Several more days of marching through Virginia lay ahead for the men of Sherman's army. Within a week most had arrived in Washington, D.C., by way of Petersburg and

Richmond. On May 23 and 24, the 14<sup>th</sup>, 15<sup>th</sup>, 17<sup>th</sup>, and 20<sup>th</sup> Corps took part in the Grand Review of Union troops in the Capital City. General Sherman sat on the reviewing platform on Pennsylvania Avenue alongside Gen. Ulysses S. Grant, President Andrew Johnson, and members of the cabinet. As his men passed the stand Sherman swelled with pride.

Sherman later wrote in his *Memoirs*: “It was, in my judgment, the most magnificent army in existence--sixty-five thousand men, in splendid physique, who had just completed a march of nearly two thousand miles in a hostile country, in good drill, and who realized that they were being closely scrutinized by thousands of their fellow-countrymen and by foreigners . . . Many good people, up to that time, had looked upon our Western army as a sort of mob; but the world then saw, and recognized the fact, that it was an army in the proper sense, well organized, well commanded and disciplined; and there was no wonder that it had swept through the South like a tornado.”

Sherman's words of tribute to his men demonstrated at once his awareness of the reputation that they had gained and his defensiveness about their conduct. The actions of Sherman's men would continue to be the subject of debate for generations to come.