

On the morning of Thursday, April 6, 1865, they probably stopped for a short rest at Amelia Springs after having to ford Flat Creek because the bridge had collapsed. Their rest was interrupted by Sheridan's cavalry which was trying to get in and destroy the wagon train. After the loss of a few wagons, the Blue Coats were driven off but not far. They would always be close and a constant threat.

The tired Rebels then moved out on the road toward Rice's Station on the Southside Railroad. The men were now desperate for something to eat and each company was sending out foraging parties to find something, no matter what. Some of these parties got lost or left or just decided not to return and this could possibly be the reason Company B's men were not together the next few days and had men captured on the 6th at Sailor's Creek and a few surrendered at Appomattox on the April 9th.

Longstreet's First Corps lead the march on the 6th, then came Anderson followed by Ewell with Kershaw's Division-Dubose's Brigade-Cobb's Legion-Company B. Between Kershaw and Gordon's Corps, which was bringing up the rear and fighting Yankees every step of the way, was the long main wagon train which was Gordon's responsibility to protect.

The Yankees had repaired the bridge at Flat Creek and their infantry was hot on the tail of the long Confederate column while the infernal Yankee cavalry was buzzing around in front and alongside of their left flank.

Longstreet's First Corps' wagon train was between his troops and those of Anderson's, thus, Anderson was out of touch with Longstreet and Lee who was with the First Corps and "Old Pete" at the time.

Custer and other Union cavalry were giving Anderson a particularly difficult time, causing him to continually skirmish with them and they were causing a distance to develop between him and Longstreet. The Rebels would have to stop and battle and drive away the cavalry only to have the blue clad horsemen merely get ahead and wait for the column to approach, then swarm in again.

Longstreet and his train passed across Sayler's, sometime spelled Sailor's, Creek and continued on its route toward Rice's Station a mile or two away, where he prepared to meet a Union infantry column which he believed was moving toward there.

Around 11:00 AM, both Anderson and Ewell halted in order to let wagons pass, then Ewell, with Dubose and the Legion, moved up closer to Anderson, leaving the main wagon train following with Gordon in the rear. Gordon was sending urgent messages forward for the column ahead of him to move on as the Union infantry was seriously pushing him.

When Ewell and Anderson discovered that the Yankee cavalry blocked the road in front of and between Anderson and Longstreet, Ewell decided to send the main wagon train, which followed him, by a road that branched off to the right and followed a road away from the attacking cavalry and crossed Sayler's Creek further down and which would bring them back to the column ahead of Anderson's present position.

The wagons took the road to the right and, unfortunately, Gordon was not told that he was to continue on the straight road and cover for Ewell's troops. When Gordon reached the road where the wagons had veered off, he followed their tracks and therefore Ewell inadvertently became the rear of the army. The old bald headed, one-legged, excitable former commander of the Second Corps had, typically, failed again. It was Ewell's responsibility to have sent word to Gordon regarding which route to take and to close up on him. Ewell was operating under the assumption that Gordon was following him.

Just as Ewell was succeeding in getting his troops back on the road to move up closer to Anderson, a messenger reported that the enemy and not Gordon was approaching his rear in large force and was preparing to attack. Now, they had Union cavalry in front and flank with infantry in their rear. The enemy cavalry was pressing Kershaw, who was in the rear of Ewell's column, and drove him across Sailor's Creek.

Soon the enemy infantry was spotted approaching from down the road which the Southerners had just traveled. It was the infernal VI Corps again! It appeared that the Legion would never be able to rid themselves of the men with the Greek Cross who they had fought so many times, especially at Crampton's Gap in of '62, Salem Church in '63 and Cold Harbor and the Valley in '64.

Ewell, the ranking officer, and Anderson decided that Anderson would have the responsibility of the opposing troops in front and on the left flank and, hopefully, be able to break through them in order that the column could continue on toward Rice's Station to join Longstreet. Ewell's troops of Kershaw's Division, which contained Dubose's Brigade and Cobb's Legion, Custis Lee's troops of sailors and artillerymen and just about everything else that could be assembled on the retreat from Richmond, would have to fight the Union forces that were coming up on their rear.

A line was established with Custis Lee's troops on the left and Kershaw's on the right with the line of battle crossing the road and facing Sailor's Creek which was approximately 300 yards to the north, in their front. The creek itself was a small stream and would not be much of a deterrent factor to an advancing army.

Kershaw, facing the approaching enemy, placed Dubose's Brigade with the Legion on the edge of the woods nearest the creek with his left on the road, Simm's Brigade to the right of the road and slightly to the rear and right of Dubose. Custis Lee's troops were on the left of the road with his right occupying a line slightly in the rear of Dubose. Humphreys' Brigade had been left across the creek near the Hillsman house which, at the time, was being used as a hospital for Pickett's Division, to cover Kershaw's crossing of the creek.

The Yankees quickly forced Humphreys across the creek after taking many of the Mississippians as prisoners. The troops that made it across took positions on Dubose's and the Legion's left.

The enemy brought up their artillery and placed it near the Hillsman house/hospital and raked the Rebel position at short range with good success as the Southern Army had no guns with which to reply.

Under cover of artillery fire, the VI Corps formed a line so long that it overlapped both flanks of the Confederate's and attacked down the hill from the Hillsman house. Some made it across the creek and Kershaw and Lee gave them a resounding volley which stopped them in their tracks. It was only a temporary halt and the Blue Coats soon charged again. At this time, their left overlapped Simms' (Kershaw's right brigade) right.

Kershaw rallied Simms' Georgia men and told them that Anderson was beginning his attack to clear the road for their retreat and to just hold on a little longer and things would be all right.

In only a few minutes, Simms' troops saw a mass of Blue Coats approaching in their rear who, Kershaw correctly supposed, were mounted and dismounted cavalry which had quickly defeated Anderson and were now free to attack his and Custis Lee's line from the rear. All of Kershaw's Division which included Dubose's Brigade and the Legion now had to face the rear to meet the new threat. They were almost totally surrounded.

The situation was hopeless. Kershaw's men tried to escape by moving to their left and rear but it was of no use. Kershaw ordered "every man for himself" and perhaps a few did manage to escape. Kershaw and Dubose, along with most of the other officers and practically all of the men were captured by the Yankee cavalry or by the Federals that were across the creek. The Federals had two corps of infantry and three divisions of cavalry against the thin Confederate line.

At this stage of the war, enemies were kinder to the opposing forces; much more so than at Crampton's Gap and there was less firing into the defeated Rebels. There appeared to be a little pity shown to the hungry men in grey.

Anderson had been defeated by Sheridan's cavalry led by our adversary from Fort Royal, George Armstrong Custer. It was almost a reunion for the Legion with the VI Corps and Custer's troopers.

I have not found any record of Company B's men being killed or seriously wounded at Sailor's Creek; however, we do have records showing that 10 men were captured. They were Lt. John King, Sergeants W. F. Morris and W. T. Morris, Privates James Buchanan, Thomas Rice, William Stephenson, Edward Sutton, Robert Tomme, T. J. Warner and B. C. Word. See the Appendix for details.

General Ewell was captured afterwards while Generals Anderson and Pickett made good their escape on horseback.

Custis Lee and his men met the same fate as Kershaw's. General Lee had lost two of his four corps. He said to General Pendleton, "Half of our army is destroyed." (6) He had been able to witness this disaster from the crest of a high hill nearby. The South's top ranking general would now again have a son in a Yankee prison.

The captured officers were well treated and entertained by their Yankee counterparts. Ewell was one of the highest-ranking officers to be captured during the war. "Old Baldy" was in a very bad way: completely demoralized. Some of the captured officers said that he tried to make himself popular with the enemy officers. The high-ranking officers were shipped off to prison at Fort Warren in Boston Harbor. On April 16, Ewell wrote a letter to General Grant, which was endorsed by other officers including Dubose and Kershaw, stating the sorrow felt over the assassination of President Lincoln. (7)

The enlisted men and lower ranking officers were rounded up and put under guard and given rations. The battle had ended late in the day and the men made their little fires and cooked what rations they had or what were being shared by their captors and attempted to keep warm during the damp night.

Captain A. A. Winn of Cobb's Legion, Company D, the Mell Volunteers, tells the story of what happened to Cobb's Legion's colors in a story that appeared in the *Savannah Morning News* on November 6, 1888 and which I found in the scrapbook of Sarah Martha Cobb Whitener which is located in the Atlanta Historical Society. (8) A copy of the article is included at the end of this chapter.

Captain Winn was from Newton County and was captured at Crampton's Gap in September, 1862 and exchanged in November of that year. He was captured at Saylor's Creek and took the oath at Fort Delaware on June 17, 1865 where he was described as being 5'8" tall, blue eyes, fair complexion and dark hair.

Captain Winn states that Cobb's Legion was near the center of the Confederate line and that the troops on the right and left flanks were overwhelmed and compelled to give way and that they were given the order to save themselves. They fell back in the direction of the High Bridge but met other members of the corps who told them that the bridge was on fire and that they could not escape and join the rest of the army in that direction. They returned to a pine thicket near the battlefield and there they met the color bearer of Cobb's Legion, William Cook of Covington. Seeing that escape was not possible, Cook stated that he did not want to surrender the colors. The woods had been set on fire by the enemy artillery. Captain Winn took out his knife, cut the colors from the staff and threw them into the fire where it burned to a crisp. The staff and tassels were thrown aside and next morning they were shown to other members of the Legion.

The color bearer, William Cook, was recruited in Covington in August, 1861 by Jeff Lamar and served in Company A. He was 16 years old when he enlisted. In May, 1864, he was listed as a patient at Jackson Hospital in Richmond with "minnie ball". He was returned to duty on June 5.

Winn, Cook and about 200 other members of the brigade surrendered the next morning, April 7. There were some of Kershaw's men who were able to escape and who would rejoin Lee's Army for the final act.

The captured men were put on the march to Petersburg then by rail to City Point from where they were transported by steamer to Newport News and a POW camp named Camp Butler. There they were held until they "took the oath" in July and were given railroad passes back to the nearest railroad station to their home. The federal government probably had the railroads operating from Virginia to Georgia at that time and, hopefully, the ten released men of Company B were able to ride as far as Atlanta or Newnan and, from there, made their final march to Bowdon and home. One thing the Yankees could definitely do better than the Rebels was to operate and maintain the railroads.

The night of April 6 was a critical one for the remainder of Lee's Army. They must get across the Appomattox River and put it between them and the closely following enemy. Longstreet would continue on to Farmville and cross there while Gordon would cross at High Bridge and, once across, burn the bridge, allowing the Southerners to gain a day's march on their enemy. Some of Anderson's and Ewell's men would also find their way to rejoin the army.

It was a difficult march the entire night and more and more men dropped out along the way. Some rations had been obtained from Farmville and, at least, some of the men had had something to eat. The march was made in the rain and the roads were deep with mud. Because of the rain the High Bridge did not burn completely, however, and Union engineers had it repaired and their troops were crossing.

The army of General Lee converged on Farmville and crossed the river. The men who had escaped the Sailor's Creek disaster were assigned to Longstreet's command; thus, a number of Kershaw's men which included a few from Dubose's Brigade, were reunited with their old commander. All of the army was now consolidated under Lt. Generals Longstreet and Gordon.

We will not dwell on the following two days except to say that it was more of the same hard marching for the exhausted men of the Army of Northern Virginia. There were several good fights, including Gordon's bout at Cumberland Church. Lee was following the road that leads to Appomattox Court House and on to Lynchburg. He knew that supplies were waiting at the railroad at Appomattox.

What he did not know was that Custer's cavalry had beaten him to the supplies and that they had helped themselves to anything they needed and destroyed the remainder along with the rail cars.

On April 7, a number of the Southern officers, believing the situation of the Army of Northern Virginia was now a hopeless one, composed a letter to General Lee, requesting that he surrender the army. General Pendleton, the artillery chief and an Episcopal priest, was selected to deliver it to the Southern Commander. Longstreet, when asked to endorse the letter, stormed, "If General Lee does not know when to surrender until I tell him, he will never know!"(9)

The Reverend-General Pendleton who, after the war, would serve as Lee's Episcopal priest in Lexington, delivered the report to the commander and Lee responded, "Oh, No! I trust it has not come to that." He went on to explain to the embarrassed Pendleton that there were yet too many brave men who were willing to fight and that any such proposal to Grant would be a sign of weakness and would result in Grant's demanding unconditional surrender, a proposal that Lee would never listen to.(10)

At New Store, 20 miles from Farmville, the men were allowed to rest until 1:00 AM on the 8th, then march with Gordon's taking the lead and Longstreet's bringing up the rear. Longstreet later wrote that the enemy allowed them a quiet day's march. By late afternoon, Gordon's lead troops approached Appomattox Court House.

The army settled down for the night but that night was a scene of terror for them. In every direction except the north thousands of Yankee campfires could be seen. There were Union troops to their front, their rear and to their left flank. They were almost completely surrounded by a much stronger foe.