General John T. Wilder

By SAMUEL C. WILLIAMS

John Thomas Wilder was born in Hunter's Village, Greene County, New York (Catskill Mountains), January 31, 1830, deriving from English stock. His lineage, beginning with Thomas Wilder, of Shiplake-on-Thames, Berkshire, England was:

Thomas Wilder, and wife, Martha, of Shiplake, England, whose son was
   Edward Wilder, and wife, Elizabeth Eames, of Marshfield, Massachusetts, whose son was
      John Wilder, and wife, Mary, whose son was
         Seth Wilder, whose son was
            Seth Wilder, Jr., and wife Mariam Beale, whose son was
               Reuben Wilder, and wife, Mary Merritt, whose son was our subject.

The Wilders gave soldiers to the three major wars of their country. The great-grandfather of General Wilder, Seth Wilder, lost a leg in the battle of Bunker Hill, while the grandfather, Seth Wilder, Jr., at the age of sixteen, served in the place of his disabled father and participated in the Revolutionary War battles of Saratoga, Monmouth, and Stony Point. In the last named engagement he was wounded by a bayonet-thrust of an enemy. In the War of 1812, the father, Reuben Wilder, raised a company of light-horse and fought at Plattsburg and Sacket's Harbor. He survived the Civil War, and when his son was at Murfreesboro preparing for the approaching campaign, Reuben Wilder wrote his son from his home at Kingston, New York, asking to be permitted to serve on the staff of the Colonel, though he was at the time sixty-nine years of age.

1 Moses H. Wilder, Book of Wilders, 348.
2 Annals of the Army of the Cumberland, 288.
As a boy John T. Wilder received a fairly adequate education for that day, in the public schools of his native county; but, restless by nature, he heard the call of the West and left home to try his fortunes. He journeyed to Columbus, Ohio, arriving at the age of nineteen years, practically penniless. For a time he was unable to get work, but at last obtained employment as an apprentice in Ridgeway's Foundry which was located in Columbus on the west bank of the Scioto River, his duties being to aid as draftsman, pattern-maker and in mill-wrighting—labors that materially moulded his after-career. Young Wilder showed such skill and industry that he was constantly promoted, until finally Mr. Ridgeway offered to give the foundry to his son and Wilder, if together they would operate it. Wilder having conceived a plan for his own future, declined the offer. He then removed in 1857 to Greensburg, Indiana, where he established, on a modest scale, a foundry and mill-wrighting establishment of his own. Putting into the enterprise all his initiative and driving-power, it bounded forward to a pronounced success.

On May 18, 1858, Wilder was married to a young lady of great charm, Miss Martha Stewart, whose father, Silas Stewart, had been one of the founders of the town of Greensburg. Wilder as a young man is thus described by a kinswoman: "He was a handsome young man, of fine physique, mentally alert, and fond of research in nature. His genial and hospitable nature was equaled by that of his remarkable wife."

At the time of the breaking out of the Civil War, the business of the Wilder establishment was widespread. It sold equipment and erected mills and hydraulic works in Indiana, Illinois, Wisconsin, Virginia, Kentucky and Tennessee. A turbine wheel, thrice patented by Wilder, was a main factor in this advance. By the spring of 1861, the plant employed about one hundred men and its owner was rapidly accumulating an estate of magnitude for that day. So proficient had Wilder become in the field of hydraulics that he was recog-

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6 One day while walking along Broad Street he espied a coin on the ground, which he picked up and hastened to High Street to get a bun; but, when he reached the restaurant, he concluded that he would wait until he got hungrier before spending the coin, so he walked away with it in his pocket, and he kept that coin in his pocket through all of his eventful days. Columbus Journal, Nov. 8, 1917.

4 The town was given the name of Greensburg because the Stewart family had migrated to Indiana from Greensburg, Pennsylvania. Mrs. Wilder was a cousin of Vice-President Thomas A. Hendricks whose ancestor was of the same migration.

5 Mrs. Daniel Stewart, of Indianapolis, in 1928, at the age of ninety-two.

6 Annals of the Army of the Cumberland, p. 284.
nized as an expert to such an extent that he was called to serve as a witness or umpire in distant parts of the country.' His foundry and machine works carried on at Greensburg through the greater part of the Civil War.

THE OUTBREAK OF CIVIL WAR

Wilder’s political alignment prior to the Civil War was with the Democratic party. When war became an actuality, he promptly decided to support the Union cause, and turned his attention to the casting of two six-pound cannon in his foundry at Greensburg, and to the organization (May, 1861) of a light artillery company for the first three-year regiment recruited in Indiana. The artillery company, authorities decided, did not fit into the plans and it was not accepted as such though the company was mustered into service as Company “A” of the regiment, the Seventeenth Indiana Infantry, with Wilder as captain. Within less than a month (June 4, 1861), he was promoted to the lieutenant-colonelcy of the regiment, without having been a major. The regiment was organized at Camp Morton in May, 1861, and mustered into service on July 12.

IN WEST VIRGINIA

On the first day of July, 1861, the Seventeenth Indiana Regiment left Indianapolis for Parkersburg, Virginia (later West Virginia) which place was reached on the fifth, after stopping for three days in Cincinnati. On the twenty-third it moved by railroad train to Oakland, Maryland, from which place it marched sixteen miles to the North Branch of the Potomac, where the regiment aided in constructing Camp Pendleton. The regiment was then moved to Cheat Mountain Pass on August 12, and afterwards went into camp at Elkwater. Under Brigadier-General J. J. Reynolds, it took part in the battle of Cheat Mountain and Greenbrier. 8

At Cheat Mountain, General Robert E. Lee’s plan of battle was for a regiment of General H. R. Jackson to attack the Federals on the mountain which was to be the signal for his own attack by his own force on the enemy at Crouch’s. The signal not being given, the plans went awry. On the thirteenth of September, Company E of the Seventeenth Indiana Regiment was sent to support the outposts as the Confeder-
ates under Lee were reconnoitering for an attack. Sergeant J. J. Weiler was given charge of ten men who were to go up the mountain side as scouts for a Federal advance. This party met a group of Confederate officers who were also reconnoitering. The sergeant and W. L. Birney and William Johnson, under him, fired and killed Colonel John A. Washington, a kinsman of General Lee and topographical engineer on his staff. On the body of this fallen officer were found the plans of General Lee, the number of his troops, etc.* The remains of the scion of the house of Washington, headed by General George Washington, were taken in an ambulance, by the Colonel, an adjutant and young Weiler to the headquarters of Lee who, deeply touched, thanked the group for the courtesy thus shown an enemy.

There is a paucity of materials on the details of the campaigns in West Virginia in the first year of the war. The following letter sent from the field by Wilder to his wife is, therefore, all the more interesting on that account and because it describes a soldier's first battle. Under date of October 5, 1861, he wrote from Beverly:

I have been in a regular battle and had command of our Regiment. On the 3rd of October, at midnight, seven regiments under General Reynolds marched from Cheat Mountain summit down into Greenbrier Valley, to make a reconnoisance of the enemy's camp. I had been sick for nearly two weeks and did not know whether I could ride a horse or not; but I was bound to be in the fight if I had to be carried. So I started and the nearer we came to the enemy the stronger I got. Our Regiment was ordered to open the fight by covering Loomis' Battery of six ten-pound cannon. I took the Regiment into the field within five-eighths of a mile of the enemy's batteries planted on an entrenched hill. I formed the men in line of battle across an open field, while the battery took position immediately in our rear. When the battery was ready to open I deployed the Regiment around and covered the battery on its right; and then such a roar of cannon! The first gun fired by the enemy threw a twelve pound ball directly over my head; the wind it made taking my cap off, but I caught it. The ball struck the earth within ten feet of General Reynolds who was in the rear.

After lying in the open field for an hour, we were ordered to go around the hill directly in front of and only four hundred yards from the enemy's works to support Colonel Dumont. I formed the Regiment and told them that any man who was not willing to storm the enemy's batteries with me, and follow wherever I led the way, could fall out of ranks. But not a man stirred or spoke. I could see them clutch their.

* For this service young Weiler received the thanks of Simon Cameron, Secretary of War. Cameron to Gen. Reynolds, Oct. 22, 1861.
muskets tighter and straighten up a little taller; and when I gave the
order to advance double-quick every man started off with a promptness
and will that convinced me that they would follow to Mobile if I led the
way.

We moved in under a perfect rain of canister, shot and shell, until
we passed the Ohio Regiments who were halting and wavering, and until
we passed the 7th [Indiana] whose men had scattered through the
woods, recoiling from the iron hail. Here I was ordered to halt and
hold the men for half an hour as steady as mile-posts, awaiting further
orders, when I was ordered back. I immediately put the men back in
perfect order and we were the only regiment of six that turned the
point of the hill and came back in order. General Reynolds rode up to
me as I came out into the open field and said, "yours is the only regi-
ment in order. Can you cover those batteries and bring them off the
field?" I said, "certainly, sir." I then deployed the Regiment across
the open bottom between the batteries and the enemy, formed them
in line and stood ready to repel any force that might attempt to cut
off the batteries. The batteries then limbered up and retired. I fol-
lowed and brought them safely into camp, having lost but one man.
Our whole loss was ten killed and fifteen wounded. We killed thirty-
eight of the enemy in driving them into their entrenchments and cap-
tured fourteen. . . . With our glasses we could see them
hauling away their dead and wounded. They were re-enforced with
four thousand men and six pieces of artillery. Their shells would burst
in the midst of our men, knocking down a dozen men, but only scratch-
ing them; not more than one of their shells in ten burst, they forgetting
to cut the fuses. One six-pound ball came between me and another
officer as we were talking and stuck in the hillside; a cannon ball struck
in the ground under Lieut. Shields' feet, but did not hurt him in the
least. . . . He is going to Indiana to raise a company. Make
him stay at Father Stewart's as long as he stays in Greensburg.

On November 19th the Seventeenth Indiana was ordered
to Louisville, Kentucky, where it was incorporated in General
Buell's Army of the Ohio, and assigned to General William
Nelson's division (Fourth).

SHILOH, CORINTH AND AFTER

On the nineteenth of November, 1861, the Seventeenth
Regiment, under Colonel Milo S. Hascall as Colonel and Wild-
er as Lieutenant-Colonel, proceeded under orders to Louis-
ville, where it reported to General Buell on the thirtieth. It
encamped on Oakland Race Course until December 10. Hav-
ing been assigned to General William Nelson's division, it was
moved towards Nashville, Tennessee, where it arrived on
March 12. Colonel Hascall being raised to a brigadiership,
Wilder succeeded him as colonel of the regiment on March
29. Under him it marched towards the Tennessee River, reaching the field of Shiloh on the eighth of April, too late to engage in the great battle (Shiloh or Pittsburg Landing) fought on April 6-7, 1862. The regiment participated in the march to and siege of Corinth in a way that brought the commendation of Buell.\[10\] After the evacuation of that place, the regiment moved with the main army through Northern Alabama to McMinnville, Tennessee, where on August 30 it overtook and attacked Forrest who rapidly retreated without serious loss. The regiment went next, by marching, to Louisville, and saw service in Kentucky between September 25 and November 26 when it was again in Nashville.

SIEGE OF MUNFORDSVILLE

General Braxton Bragg while in East Tennessee planned an invasion of Kentucky that should draw the Union forces in Tennessee under Buell northward. Turning westward as if to strike Nashville, he crossed the Cumberland River and followed the line of the Louisville and Nashville Railroad, destroying railway bridges and track as he went, in order to break Buell's source of supplies from Louisville and Cincinnati.

Colonel Wilder had been sent to hold the fortifications constructed to protect the bridge of that railroad over the Green River at Munfordsville, a town on the north bank of that stream. Under Wilder were about 3,500 men for garrison service.\[11\] Buell was marching toward Louisville by one road, Bragg by another. The two roads converged a few miles from Munfordsville. Bragg was in the lead and interposed between Buell and coveted Louisville. Wilder "a brave and accomplished officer"\[12\] was under orders from General H. G. Wright to hold it to the last.

General J. R. Chalmers, in command of Mississippi troops had been sent by Bragg to intercept supply trains and destroy the railroad south of Munfordsville, and when he approached that place he could not resist the temptation, without orders, to capture Fort Craig held by Colonel Wilder. The Federal pickets were encountered a mile from the fortifica-

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\[10\] Gen. T. J. Wood also reported as to Col. Wilder: "Gifted by nature, of uncommon capacity for usefulness in such operations as characterized the late campaign, this officer was zealous at any and all times in the performance of any duty, whether it appropriately belonged to him or not." (June 14, 1862).

\[11\] Of these only 2200 were fit for duty, according to Wilder’s estimate.

tions at dawn of September 14 and soon driven in. The Confederate force had brigade composition: Seventh, Ninth, Tenth, Twentieth, Twenty-ninth and Forty-fourth Mississippi, and Garrity's and Scott's Louisiana batteries. The Tenth Mississippi Regiment, under Colonel Robert A. Smith, on the left, was ordered to begin the assault and this was undertaken across an open field for a quarter of a mile through artillery fire, the colonel leading on horseback. Soon a skirt of woods was reached where an abattis of felled beech trees had been so arranged as to prevent regimental formation. A gap had been left in the abattis by the Federals, and into this the colonel led his men to be himself shot and mortally wounded. The Lieutenant-Colonel and his horse were torn to pieces by canister shot, and the commander of the Forty-fourth Mississippi was mortally wounded while trying to reform his men among the logs with limbs sharpened. The slaughter was so great that Chalmers ordered a retreat.

Before the assault was begun, General Chalmers had sent in a demand for surrender, which was refused by Wilder: "We'll try fighting for awhile." Two small detachments came in during the day, reinforcing Wilder. One was under the command of Colonel C. L. Dunham, who being Wilder's senior in rank, assumed command.

Two days later another unsuccessful attack was made by the Confederates. In the afternoon Bragg with his forces appeared before the fortifications and made a third demand for surrender, saying that the garrison was surrounded by his entire army, and an assault would only result in a useless sacrifice of life. Colonel Dunham decided that it was wise to comply; but he asked for time for consultation. This Bragg agreed to grant until nine o'clock in the evening. Dunham wired the facts to General C. C. Gilbert at Louisville, who telegraphed back an order placing Dunham under arrest and ordering Wilder to resume command.

Wilder now did a thing most unusual in warfare: He

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18 Col. Smith said to the messenger from Gen. Chalmers: "To charge now before the right is ready will draw upon me the concentrated fire of the enemy. Will I not be too soon?" "No," replied the messenger, "the General says charge now." "The duty is mine; the responsibility belongs elsewhere." Col. Smith was a native of Scotland. His brother, James Smith, had been a resident of Mississippi, but had returned to Glasgow, Scotland, where he amassed a large estate. In 1884, James Smith purchased the land on which his brother had fought, had it enclosed by an iron fence and dedicated the site to serve as a military cemetery for the Mississippians who had fallen there. A handsome monument was by him erected there to commemorate "the sacrifice of the Tenth Mississippi Regiment, commanded by Col. Robert A. Smith."
proposed to Bragg that to satisfy himself he be permitted to go, under escort, to inspect Bragg's forces and their disposition. To this Bragg assented.\textsuperscript{14} Wilder after his inspection called a council of war to which he reported that he had found forty-five cannon in position, supported by 25,000 men. A surrender was decided upon, and to the Tenth Mississippi Regiment was awarded the honor of marching in to receive the surrender, at two o'clock in the morning of September 17. Under the terms of the capitulation the troops of Wilder marched out with the honors of war at daylight, retained their side-arms and private property, and on the same day marched back to Louisville where they were paroled.

Otis, writing in 1903, said: "It has always seemed to me that Wilder might have been relieved without serious difficulty. It is part of our history that Buell's army remained in camp less than twenty miles away for two whole days, and permitted Wilder to be surrounded by overwhelming numbers. One result of Buell's deliberate movements was the receipt of 4,000 paroled prisoners who were sent back to help consume the rather scanty supplies and embarrass our advance."

Bragg, smarting under this resistance of his advance guard at Munfordsville, yielded to the temptation to punish the impertinent enemy, but in so doing lost valuable time. Had he marched on Louisville he would have found fruit ripe for plucking, since Buell was ready to send the dispatch from Munfordsville (September 22) to Nelson at Louisville advising him under no circumstances to resist an attack by Bragg, but to abandon the city and move his forces down the Ohio. Ineptitude seems to have paralyzed both Bragg and Buell at this point.

"By this brilliant and gallant defense [of Fort Craig] Colonel Wilder gained due credit as a gallant and determined

\textsuperscript{14} On eminences on the north side of the river a part of Polk's corps had planted a number of field pieces completely commanding the fortifications below. Sykes in \textit{Southern Historical Society Papers}, XXI, 476.

\textsuperscript{15} In \textit{Campaigns in Kentucky and Tennessee}, 1862-1864, p. 248. Bull's defense, as urged by Col. Stone, \textit{ibid.} p. 278, is that Wilder was not placed by Buell, who had no communication with Wilder, "and did not know he was there until too late to help." As commander of the entire Army of the Ohio, Buell should have known of the perilous situation of the garrison, at Munfordsville—a part of his forces.
officer in whom confidence could be placed in time of need." Buell wrote: "Wilder was a year under my command and was distinguished for the push and untiring devotion with which he met every duty." For two months Wilder was a prisoner, after which he was paroled. He went immediately to Washington where he procured an early exchange, and at once rejoined the Army of the Cumberland.

IN THE ARMY OF THE CUMBERLAND

Shortly after General Rosecrans assumed command and his forces took the name of the Army of the Cumberland, Colonel Wilder was assigned to the command of a brigade, consisting at first of four regiments: the Seventeenth, Seventy-second, Seventy-fifth Indiana and the Ninety-eighth Illinois. Later the Brigade was reconstituted to omit the Seventy-fifth Indiana and include other regiments to the total number of five.

Early in December, 1862, the Brigade was ordered to Gallatin, Tennessee, as a part of General J. J. Reynold's division; but on the seventeenth of the same month joined in the pursuit of the bold and wily General John H. Morgan who was on a raid in Kentucky for the express purpose of cutting the Louisville and Nashville Railroad at strategic points, particularly at crossings over rivers. While not successful in preventing serious damage by Morgan, the Federal force did delay him in his return to Murfreesboro, which he did not reach until the battle of Stone River had been fought. The Brigade was, for the like reason, not in that hot and long-drawn battle of December 30-January 2, 1863.

The rapidity of Morgan's movements had impressed Colonel Wilder, who on his return to Tennessee, at Murfreesboro, pressed Rosecrans for leave to make expeditions into the nearby counties of Middle Tennessee where he might im-
press horses and mount his brigade. Permission was granted and in March Wilder was in the counties of Wilson and DeKalb in the Cumberland Valley, primarily in search of suitable horses for his men, and secondarily to carry out orders to destroy grist-mills that supplied forces of the Confederacy. Wilder preferred to construe the order of General Rosecrans not to mean that mills should be burned or destroyed outright. So exercising his skill in millwrighting he removed essential parts of the machinery and left the buildings intact. One large mill only, operated by steam, in DeKalb County did he destroy. When he reported to Rosecrans what he had done, he was told that he had disobeyed orders but would be excused that time. In this way Wilder's Brigade was mounted by its own efforts. Gradually good horses displaced inferior ones so that, eventually, the mounts were equal to those of brigades of regular cavalry.

On this expedition during March, 1863, several hundred soldiers of Wilder’s Brigade entered Wilson County, Tennessee (Lebanon, county seat), where the population was in very large part Confederate in sympathy. The force went to the home of an old and wealthy citizen, who was a bitter partisan of the southern cause and who had done much to procure volunteers to enter the army. He looked astonished when his horses and mules were seized and led away; the quartermaster’s men appeared next and emptied his corn crib; then came his fat cattle. The old gentleman in alarm asked if his property was to be paid for. “We are not paying money at present to any one,” blandly replied the quartermaster. “Well, but you will give me a receipt for my property you have taken?” “Certainly, sir, here are your vouchers already made out.” The old man read them, apparently well pleased until he came to the words “to be paid for at the close of the war, on proof.

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50 Was this due to the Colonel’s predilection for water-mills, and of these for those driven by turbines? Or to a lack of skill in crippling the steam mill?

51 Hale’s History of DeKalb County, Tennessee, 209. The same author says that Colonel Wilder “was assisted into DeKalb County by a Union girl, Miss Mary, daughter of Dr. J. W. Bowen of Gordonsville. He had started out with seven scouts. These were captured by Confederates; all wounded, five dying from their wounds. Wilder reached Gordonsville after dark. Dr. Bowen being absent, Miss Bowen volunteered to act as his guide to Smithville. It was dark and rainy, but the trip was successfully made. Miss Bowen b came Mrs. Aust, mother of John R. Aust, a prominent lawyer of Nashville.” Ibid., 212.
of loyalty." "Well, if that's the case, you can go to the devil." 

THE BRIGADE

As in its commander, there were strong elements of the unique in Wilder's Brigade. It may well be said that these elements were imparted to the Brigade by its leader. For quite a time it built its own wagons, ironing them from the wrecks found along the roads; it shod its own horses; and, when in a region that permitted, secured the coal for its forges. Each man carried a hatchet with a handle two feet in length, handy in bivouac and in fighting, and at Murfreesboro (when encamped there after the battle), for that reason, received the sobriquet of "The Hatchet Brigade." The real official title was "The First Brigade of the Fourth Division of the Fourteenth Corps," but, operating as an independent command as it did, the name of Wilder was almost invariably given to it. It started out from Murfreesboro toward Chattanooga, designated as the "First Mounted Rifles," only to receive, because of the celerity of movement and its strong impact in attack, in the very first battle, the appellation, "Wilder's Lightning Brigade." It was so named in the official reports of Confederate officers. This name stuck. The Brigade endeavored to, and did, live up to that name. It may well be doubted whether in either army any single brigade was better known, or bore so many marks of singularity.

The men composing the Brigade were for the larger part young men from the farms of Indiana and Illinois, with a fair portion of young mechanics—all out for an adventurous career under a leader of dash and innate purposefulness. It is said that Wilder's old regiment drew recruits from every county of Indiana, and that there was only a sprinkling of the foreign element among them. This was measurably true of the Illinois regiments, as related to that state. The morale was

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32 Annals of the Army of the Cumberland, 681. Another incident in the same county was related by the mother-in-law of the writer, Mrs. Almyra (Badgett) Hayes: Some of the soldiers went to her widowed mother's home and, breaking bounds, took some heirlooms and household effects as well as horses. Miss Myra went to Gen. Wilder's headquarters to complain in behalf of her mother. She was politely received and told by Colonel Wilder that, except as to the horses and cattle, the men had not obeyed orders and that the other effects would be returned and his men rebuked. After the close of the war, the young lady married Newton M. Hayes, of Gen. Pat. Cleburne's command (Confederate).

33 Each company made for its use a mess-chest; they early appreciated the value of negroes as cooks, and they chose negroes as extra-duty men. In Middle Tennessee the Brigade by sallies into the rich agricultural neighborhoods practically fed itself for months, relieving the Federal government to that extent.
high even under adverse circumstances; at times the spirit that animated the Brigade is best described by the French word *elan*, particularly when Wilder was leading an advance or attack. The regard of its officers and men for their commander survived the Civil War and found outlet at brigade or regimental reunions, most of which General Wilder made it a point to attend. He was always enthusiastically received by officers and privates.

Of the Brigade's equipment Colonel Smith D. Adkins said at the sixth triennial reunion of the Ninety-second Illinois Regiment, at Byron, Illinois:

> The Spencer rifles made the sweetest music that was heard during the war for the Union. Now, I believe it to be true that among all the officers in the army of the United States, volunteer or regular, there was but one man brainy enough to appreciate the advantages of that repeating firearm, and that man was your old comrade, Col. John T. Wilder, of Indiana, now of Chattanooga, Tennessee, who sits here by me, one of the happiest soldiers attending this reunion. The regular army officers had been taught that the men wasted much of their ammunition in battle. That was true, and so the regulars concluded that a clumsy gun, difficult to load, was the best weapon; but that was not true. The position of the regulars appeared to be logical; but Wilder's quick wit argued that if the soldier could depend upon his weapon, and could know surely and certainly that when he fired one shot that another was instantly ready, that soldier would hold his fire, and make every shot count. History has demonstrated that troops armed with the Spencer rifle, shooting eight shots as quickly as two could be fired from the Springfield musket, actually expended less ammunition in battle than troops using muzzle loaders, while doing thrice the execution. Wilder demonstrated that important fact; give him the glory, for it is his.

Another thing he demonstrated was, the truth of the old saw that you must 'fight fire with fire'; that is, if the enemy have long range guns, fight on foot, and take advantage of trees, stumps, fences, ditches and barricades, you must fight him dismounted, with long range guns, and take like advantage of trees, stumps, fences, ditches and barricades. Wilder was no West Pointer—fortunately for him and the country that he was not—for, if he had been, he would have had the same idea of cavalry that the regulars had—that is that its heavy fighting must always be done in heavy masses, at short range, and most dependence must be placed on the sabre. That was all right on the plains of Europe, where there was opportunity for maneuvering heavy bodies of cavalry, where the momentum of heavy cavalry columns charging en masse was difficult to meet or break, but it amounted to nothing in a new

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24 Many of Wilder's men went to Tennessee after the war to engage in business under the General or near him. Not a few of them located in Johnson City, Tennessee, the writer's home town, and all "swore by the General."
country, covered with groves, mountains, marshes, ditches, stone fences, stumps and trees. The conditions of battle in this country were entirely changed. Reason, common sense, logic, the highest military art and science, demanded that the fighting should be changed to meet the new conditions. John T. Wilder was the first, and, at first, the only soldier, volunteer or regular, who had the brains to take in the situation, and the nerve to change the rules of battle to meet the changed condition of the physical structure of the country where the fighting was to be done. He deserves for that immortal glory and honor; and, in my opinion, in the end he will receive the honor and glory that rightfully belong to him, and to him alone.

It is also an historical fact, undisputed and conceded, that until Wilder [no one] had demonstrated that in this country, horses were only valuable as a means of transportation. The cavalry arm of the military services of the United States was the most ineffective and useless, and the most expensive arm of the service—useful it is true, as a scouting force, or flankers, as "the eyes of the army,"—but in actual battle, cumbersome and worse than useless. From the moment that Wilder demonstrated that men could be transported on horse-back rapidly to the important point of military operations in the field and under fire, and could be dismounted instantly and fight on foot with the coolness, steadiness, and bravery of the oldest and best drilled infantry, the cavalry of the army of the United States was a byword. But after Wilder had demonstrated that important fact, then the brilliant genius and matchless courage of Phil Sheridan in the Valley of Virginia, with his troopers armed with the Spencer repeating rifle that Wilder had demonstrated to be the best firearm in the world, fighting his men dismounted, as Wilder had demonstrated was the true way to fight, Sheridan redeemed the cavalry from disgrace, and covered himself with glory. The regulars may not like to admit it, but when the true history of the war is written, the crown of glory will rest on Wilder. We know it, my comrades, and we give him the glory now.

**BATTLE OF HOOVER’S GAP**

After the battle of Murfreesboro, Rosecrans rested and recruited at that place, while Bragg withdrew his army southward to Shelbyville and Tullahoma. A long ridge that divided the waters of the Cumberland and the waters of the Tennessee interposed between the two armies. Three gaps in the ridge needed to be protected by the Confederates: Guy’s Gap to the west through which ran the Murfreesboro-Shelbyville pike and which was held by a portion of Polk’s Corps; Liberty Gap, through which the road south to Wartrace ran, was held by a part of Hardee’s Corps; and Hoover’s Gap, to the east through which ran the Murfreesboro-Manchester road, was defended by Stewart’s Corps.

Rosecrans, in moving against the enemy, planned to make
a feint at penetrating the two western gaps, but in fact to carry Hoover's Gap. For the attack on that Gap, he chose Thomas' Corps, with Reynold's Division in advance, Wilder's Brigade as the spear-head. Rosecrans, in person, followed Thomas.

Wilder's Brigade left Murfreesboro about four o'clock in the morning of June 24, 1863, under instructions from Reynolds to drive the enemy's pickets back into Hoover's Gap and await the arrival of supporting infantry. Wilder to his surprise encountered the resistance of only one brigade of Kentucky cavalry, and decided to go, beyond his orders, through the Gap—a long canyon-like defile—and seize its mouth on the south. His brigade, moving speedily forward, the men now for the first time on their mounts, drove all contestants before it out of the Gap. Reaching the southern extremity, the "long-roll" was heard sounding in the Confederate camp two miles away. Brigadier-General W. B. Bate near Fairfield village early in the afternoon learned of the danger that confronted the entire Confederate army by this bold and unexpected "break-through," and sent up re-enforcements.

Wilder's task was to hold the Gap until Reynold's Infantry could come to his support. His advance had pushed on two miles farther and captured seven supply wagons. These men were called back and the entire Brigade placed in position on hillocks on either side of the southern exit of the Gap. This gave the Federals the same defensive advantages that the Confederates would have had in holding the northern entrance. Bate's brigade advanced against them, two companies as skirmishers in double-quick time, the leader, the gallant Major Fred Claybrook, losing his life at this time. The main forces of Bate and Rudler's Thirty-seventh Georgia Regiment, giving the "rebel yell," engaged the Seventeenth Indiana and the batteries of each side opened up a galling fire. The Federals gave way, but, seeing this, Wilder rushed the Ninety-eighth Illinois to their relief, when the Confederates in their turn retreated. General Bate in his report stated that there continued for nearly an hour "a bloody engagement" in which "my command lost in killed and wounded nearly twenty-five per cent of the number engaged—146 officers and men." The...
loss of Wilder's Brigade in killed and wounded was fifty-one officers and men.

The execution from the Spencer rifles was so deadly that General Bate conceived that he had confronted a force of strength five to his one. It was not until the close of the "most spirited and sanguinary conflict" (Bate), that Reynolds arrived with two brigades of infantry. About dark both Wilder and Bate were relieved by fresh forces.

The boldness and celerity of the movement of Wilder's Brigade in this action, as already mentioned, caused it to be dubbed "Wilder's Lightning Brigade," General Thomas expressing the opinion that the loss of one thousand men had been saved by the exploit. In the event, by it Bragg was forced back from Shelbyville to Tullahoma in order to prevent being flanked on his right by the Federals pouring through Hoover's Gap in Wilder's wake. This battle was, without doubt, the most brilliant one in execution and results that the Brigade ever fought single-handed.

On June 28 the Federals, Wilder's Brigade again leading the advance, moved on Manchester and the next morning it was in that town before the Confederates knew of its approach. Forty were captured. Four companies were sent under Wilder to destroy trestle work on the McMinnville branch railroad. Their object was accomplished. The command then moved rapidly towards Hillsborough.

From Hillsborough, Confederate Colonel of cavalry George G. Dibrell hearing that Colonel Wilder's Brigade was marching on Decherd Station, rushed with his Eighth Tennessee Regiment to the relief of the small garrison of Confederates there, in time to prevent Wilder's men from doing more than destroy about three hundred yards of the main line of railway, the water tank and depot filled with supplies. Wilder reported that, on the thirtieth of June, "A large force was by this time approaching, and, having destroyed about three hundred yards of track, we left, believing that I would have little success in a fight with them on account of the darkness and our total ignorance of the ground."[#]

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[#] Dibrell's home was at Sparta, Tennessee. He represented his district in Congress, 1875-1885. He was a valuable adjutant of Forrest; volunteered as a private in 1861 and retired a brigadier-general.

[#] "Colonel Wilder's Brigade, sent to the rear of Bragg's army, and which, moving with uncommon celerity, inflicted a good deal of damage to the railroad in the rear of General Bragg." Jordan and Pryor, Campaigns of Forrest, 261.
General Forrest, with his escort numbering sixty in advance, followed by a portion of his brigades, started in the direction of Pelham to intercept Wilder on the latter's return. It was raining and Forrest and his escort (their identity concealed by their heavy, long oil-cloth coats) were well in advance of the troops following. "Suddenly advancing toward a sharp turn in the road, they met a detachment of mounted troops of about equal numbers and similarly clad in non-committal water-proofs. The two companies were soon side by side in the highway, when Forrest asked what company it was. The captain replied, naming a company in Wilder's mounted infantry. Forrest coolly rejoined that his was Company C in a cavalry regiment, naming a Federal division which was under another commander. Not suspecting the deceit, Wilder's men passed them by in the road and went their way. The Confederate commander, feeling assured that the passing company would soon collide with his troops, which he supposed were not more than a mile behind him, determined to proceed only far enough to get out of sight of the company he had just passed, in order to form his men across the way and intercept them when they should come back towards him in retreat. Unfortunately, not a great distance ahead, as he advanced, he observed Wilder's main column approaching. He then immediately and quickly turned back and soon ran into and through the Federal advance he had some minutes before passed, capturing and killing a number of these and causing a stampede among the rest. Before Forrest could reach his command and return to attack Wilder, this wary leader had escaped, just getting ahead of Forrest, who, with nine regiments of cavalry, aimed to intercept Wilder's force at Pelham."

Forrest was fired upon as he dashed away from Wilder's main command, and reported at once to headquarters that the Federals were in force "with the evident purpose of turning the Confederate right flank, which obliged General Bragg to resume his movement southward immediately."
Forrest went to Cowan, a station on the main line of the railroad, to cover the retreat of the Confederate infantry over Cumberland Mountain. The Federal advance again appeared to press him and came in contact with his rear-guard under General Forrest in person. Firing and falling back through the village and towards a gap in the mountain, Forrest, near the rear, was berated by a woman from the door of her cabin for not “turning on the Yankees and whipping them back.” Shaking her fist at General Forrest she shrieked: “You great big cowardly rascal; why don’t you turn and fight like a man, instead of running like a cur? I wish old Forrest was here; he’d make you fight!” Forrest put spurs to his horse and fled from the presence of the fiery woman.80 Wilder and Forrest alike ran when running was wise.

As Forrest’s wagon-train was crossing Cumberland Mountain, a number of the natives collected at a house on the roadside. They gazed in silence until the huge black-smith’s forge appeared in the rear, when an old woman’s curiosity got the better of her, and she inquired of Major Rambaut who happened to be passing: “What sort of a thing is that, mister?” “That is a gunboat, madam,” gravely replied the major. “Lor, ma’am,” she said, “I never thought I’d live to see a gunboat on these mountains.”81

ENTERS CHATTANOOGA

The Brigade advanced towards Chattanooga which was then but a small town held by General Bragg. A point opposite the town on the Tennessee River was reached on the twenty-first of August, 1863. The four guns of Lilly’s Battery were placed in position on Stringer’s Ridge overlooking the town across the river. Wilder started under a flag of truce to the river’s edge to demand a surrender of the town, and was fired upon by a Confederate battery in Chattanooga. Two steam-boats82 were lying at the wharf and they were fired upon before they could raise steam. These were sunk and the batteries of the “Lightning Brigade” then turned on a pontoon bridge. This, too, was destroyed. In the mean-

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80 Morton, Forrest’s Artillery, 119; Sheppard’s Forrest, 128. Morton says: “The incident was never related in General Forrest’s presence without embarrassing him.”
81 Dr. J. B. Cowan, in Drake, Annals of the Army of Tennessee (Nashville, 1878), 191.
82 The Paint Rock, a large stern-wheeler, and the Dunbar, a side-wheeler. They were later raised and used by the Federals.
time the Confederate batteries were busy on Cameron's Hill.

Jefferson Davis, President of the Confederate States, had recently visited Chattanooga and appointed a day of prayer for August 21, and Rev. Dr. B. M. Palmer, one of the South's most eminent divines, was holding services in the Presbyterian Church, which was filled with citizens and army officers. An early shot from Lilly's Battery passed over the church. General B. F. Cheatham arose in the gallery and said: "Do not be alarmed. It's our gunners practicing. There's not a Yankee within fifty miles of here." Just then another shot tipped the roof top, but the minister continued his already long prayer—to Harry Watterson, who was present, "the longest prayer I ever heard." For eighteen days desultory firing was kept up, until Watterson's Chattanooga Rebel was forced to leave for the further South, and the officers' headquarters were driven out of the town, soon to be followed by Bragg's army.

On the morning of September 9, the Ninety-second Illinois of Wilder's Brigade entered the town—the first of the Federal army to do so—and placed the Federal flag above the Crutchfield House, the town's leading hotel.

PRE-BATTLE MOVEMENTS

When on September 9, it became known to the Federals that Bragg was evacuating Chattanooga, Wilder's Brigade was sent up the Tennessee River to a point opposite a small island, known as Friar's Island, and it became important to ascertain where the Tennessee could be forded. Wilder resorted to stratagem. Calling to Confederates on the opposite bank, he proposed to exchange coffee for tobacco—two commodities of unfailing appeal. This being assented to Wilder stripped himself to nudity, and waded out to the lower end of the island, taking twenty-five pounds of coffee. He was met by a sergeant with two large plugs of tobacco. Wilder wheedled the unsuspecting sergeant into giving the essential information, as to the best fording place. Out of abundance of caution, he had the night before secretly placed a number of sharpshooters on the island to protect him should there be
a breach of faith on the part of the enemy.33 On the tenth, Wilder’s Brigade crossed at this ford, followed by Hazen’s Brigade.

Bragg’s evacuation of Chattanooga had back of it a deeply conceived strategy: to draw the Federal forces out of the town into a pursuit. He arranged that some of his men might be captured as stragglers who should give information that their commander’s plan was to fall back to Rome, Georgia. Every Union commander was misled, Wilder among them. The corps of McCook, Thomas and Crittenden were sent out to intercept the retreating Confederates, and in so doing those corps became far separated. A part of Bragg’s design was, when this occurred, to strike and crush in detail.

The main force of Bragg was at LaFayette, Georgia, and that place Thomas was to attack. Crittenden had hurried to Ringgold, where on the eleventh Wilder, as a part of his corps (shifted temporarily from that of Thomas), fought Scott’s brigade, capturing some prisoners.

Forrest, seeing that a large number of Federal troops under Crittenden were separated from the main army, planned their capture. He rode hurriedly to Bragg’s headquarters at midnight to solicit aid, but Bragg had gone to LaFayette. Hastening back, Forrest, on September 11, placed his command in front of the line of the Federals to prevent, if he could, their escape, but was himself forced back by Wilder to Tunnel Hill. “Forrest led a charge at my [Wilder’s] advance-guard, but was repulsed and wounded in the back as he turned to flee from the fire.”84

Wilder, as leader of the advance, sensed the grave danger of Crittenden’s corps. “Nothing could have been easier for the Confederate General than the concentration of almost his entire force, and its interposition in such manner as to have effectually barred Crittenden’s escape. The strategy of Rose-
crans was equally faulty—so faulty, indeed, that it must have ended in complete disaster but for the prodigious want of skill on the part of his adversary.”

The trap in which Crittenden was at the time was reported to Rosecrans at Ringgold by Wilder, who on the twelfth set himself the task of impeding the Confederates and protecting Crittenden’s flank nearest Chattanooga on the left and in doing so he had an encounter at Leet’s Tanyard with Pegram’s division of Forrest’s cavalry corps, reinforced by Dibrell’s brigade.

The engagement was “maintained for several hours with notable obstinacy and gallantry.” General Pegram reported: “For a time the fight was almost hand to hand. My loss was about fifty killed and wounded, their’s thirty killed and wounded. We fought for two hours Wilder’s Lightning Brigade—the picked brigade of the corps.” But Crittenden was extricated, and effecting a concentration of his command at Lee and Gordon’s Mills, enabled to take part in the great battle that was impending.

Rosecrans, in ignorance of the large force of Bragg at LaFayette, rebuked Thomas for not seizing that place. Thomas in reply explained that the roads were blockaded, and added: “If I had had Wilder’s Brigade I am satisfied LaFayette would have been in our possession now, as with it I could have prevented the enemy from blocking the road.”

BATTLE OF CHICKAMAUGA

A leading author of England, J. B. Priestly, recently said of the Civil War, that it was “the strangest and most fascinating of all wars.” And of all the battles of that war, the one fought at Chickamauga was the strangest and most fascinating. It was, moreover, the most sanguinary major battle known to history, from the standpoint of numbers

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86 Ibid.
87 Ibid.
88 Bragg to Polk on this same day, 12th, discloses the plan to crush Crittenden: “I enclose you a dispatch from Genl. Pegram. This presents you a fine opportunity of striking Crittenden in detail, and I hope you will avail yourself of this opportunity at daylight tomorrow. This division crushed, and the others are yours. Wheeler’s cavalry will move on Wilder so as to cover your right.” Bragg’s Report to the Confederate Congress (Richmond, Va., 1864), 9, 10.
89 Jordon and Pryor, op. cit., 312.
90 Ibid.
91 Ibid., War of Rebellion Records, Vol. 82, 584.
killed and wounded compared with the total of combatants actually engaged in the struggle—about thirty-three per-cent. In the famous battle of Waterloo, which was one of the most desperate and bloody in European history, the casualties were much below the rate for either side at Chickamauga. "The battle, in the main on both sides, was dogged, stand-up fighting far within the limits of point-blank range. On the second day, on the Confederate side, the contest was one continued series of brave and magnificent assaults."

The achievements of any command in that titanic struggle deserve ample and secure perpetuation. Wilder and his "Lightning Brigade" did signal service, from the beginning to the very end of the battle. On orders from Rosecrans, he moved his Brigade to Alexander's Bridge over Chickamauga River, a little over three miles below Lee and Gordon's Mills (Crittenden's position) to resist the crossing of the stream by the Confederates. At ten o'clock in the morning of September 18, a company of infantry made the first attempt to cross, but was driven back. At noon Brigadier-General E. C. Walthall, under orders from General Liddell, attacked in force, and a bitter struggle for Alexander's Bridge ensued. The first assault was repulsed, but finally about mid-afternoon the Confederates reached the bridge only to find that Wilder's men had torn up the plank flooring and thrown it into the river.

The Confederate report stated: "The force in our front consisted of Wilder's Brigade, from whom we captured half a dozen or more breech-loading rifles. Our loss was 105, killed and wounded, and I can only account for this disproportion from the efficiency of this new weapon."

The spirited resistance forced Walker's entire corps to ford the Chickamauga at night, and the stream was forded by the ordnance not until the following morning. Thus, in
the inception of the contest, there was given to Rosecrans’ army an opportunity to manoeuvre into position.

Wilder’s troops near nightfall took position near Viniard’s place where he held the ground though twice attacked during the night, seemingly by Gregg’s Brigade of General Bushrod Johnson’s Division, supported by McNair’s Brigade. After midnight Wilder heard rumbling past his post wagon trains moving northward—Thomas coming from McLemore’s Cove to take his stand to prevent any effort of the Confederates to reach Chattanooga. It was to the conduct of Wilder’s Brigade in these early struggles on the day and night of the eighteenth that General Thomas referred in his recommendation of Wilder for promotion to a brigadier-generalship: “For his ingenuity and fertility of resource in occupying the attention of an entire corps while our army was getting around its flank.”

Wilder’s Brigade viewing, on confrontation, the Confederate left since daylight, was shifted to Davis’ left and the whole line was soon in a desperate struggle with Bushrod Johnson’s Division and a part of Preston’s. The lines ebbed and flowed as the tide. In one of the Confederate advances near Viniard’s, Wilder rushed forward two guns and enfiladed the massed line with great slaughter. Johnson’s line was forced to retire. At sundown the day’s conflict ended after raging throughout the afternoon “with an intensity not exceeded in any part of the field.”

Wilder’s Brigade acted as an independent command in this entire battle, and was shifted from one division to another where the need was sorest. It was, on the morning after the severe struggle at Viniard’s, placed at the extreme right of the right wing of Thomas’ command to prevent its being turned and to support Sheridan. When Longstreet discovered a gap that weakened the right wing of Thomas and threw his forces, alongside Bushrod Johnson’s, against that wing, it weakened and was being driven back in confusion. McCook, Davis, and Sheridan were in retreat which Wilder was attempting to cover, but realizing the peril of the situation, he formed his Brigade in echelon and started back...

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46 Bragg’s Report, 89. “In the darkness Gregg’s Brigade was immediately delayed under a sharp fire. . . . Our front line was now 800 yards from Viniard’s house.”
48 First detached from Reynolds and placed under McCook.
to confront Manigault's Brigade, Hindman's Division, of Longstreet's corps, into which an overwhelming fire from the Spencer rifles was poured. Manigault's men were driven back, and a large number of them were captured. Bushrod Johnson now ordered the hill to be held at all hazards, though his own troops showed the effect of the intense shock of battle. He sent word to Manigault to reform and come to his aid, but that general "had decided that it would not be safe to put his command in the same position without the support of fresh troops. Over three hours passed in this conflict, in which officers and men manifested more perseverance than I ever before witnessed on any field."  

Fresh Confederate troops under Preston, Virginians and Tennesseans, were now thrown in and the shattering of Thomas' right wing was completed. The men in grey were not to be denied—and were not.  

The battle was at crisis. Wilder turned to aid in repulsing a large force of the enemy pressing around his left (near the Bloody Pond) and over the coveted ridge. Sheridan, and other commanders, and even Rosecrans, were now in disorder, then rout, hastening towards Chattanooga. Appealed to by Wilder for help, Sheridan's reply was one advising Wilder "to get out of there." Assistant Secretary of War, Charles A. Dana gave the same advice to Wilder, reporting Rosecrans as dead and "the army routed as badly, if not worse, than the one at Bull Run." Dana begged that he, himself, be piloted into Chattanooga.  

Learning that Thomas was yet holding out (until about 5 p.m.), Wilder near nightfall placed his brigade in a line from a point near the Vidito house across the hills towards Lookout Mountain in order to prevent the Confederate cavalry from intercepting Thomas' retirement towards Rossville.

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48 Manigault confirms: "My three right regiments being thrown in much confusion, and a large force of the enemy advancing through the field on my center. . . . I ordered the Brigade to fall back about three hundred yards across the Chattanooga and LaFayette road." Bragg's Report, 118. "Wilder's Brigade in furious charge swept down upon Manigault's flank and rear and drove them in wild confusion, etc." General Gordon's Reminiscences of the Civil War, 208.


50 Perhaps Manigault and Deas belatedly returning at last to participate in the great push. "Again and again we were driven back but as promptly rallied and moved forward again, at each advance driving the enemy still further from their original position. Nothing but the determined valor of our soldiers could have withstood the withering volleys poured into them by the enemy who certainly fought with great obstinacy." (Manigault).

51 That Thomas began his retirement in the later afternoon is fully demonstrated by Gracie in his Truth About Chickamauga, 80-100.
The “Lightning Brigade” did not leave the field until the next morning, after Thomas’ command had passed through McFarland’s Gap toward Chattanooga. Thomas well earned the sobriquet of “the Rock of Chickamauga,” and Wilder did valiant service buttressing the Rock. Among the earliest of the Federals to enter the contest, at Alexander’s Bridge, he was last to leave the field which he had materially aided in making historic.

Perhaps the greatest compliment ever paid to Wilder, the soldier, was by Sheridan by whose side he fought when the battle waxed fiercest and where the Confederate impact was most keenly felt. Cist, the historian of the Army of the Cumberland, wrote in 1897 to President McKinley: “General Sheridan told me just after the battle of Chickamauga that he would rather have Wilder’s military reputation than that of any other man in the service.”

General Thomas shortly after the battle recommended that Wilder be raised to the rank of brigadier-general:

Headquarters Department of the Cumberland. Chattanooga, Nov. 27, 1863.

Brig.-General Lorenzo Thomas, Adjutant-General, U.S. Army.

General: Enclosed herewith I have the honor to transmit the report of Col. John T. Wilder, Seventeenth Indiana Volunteers, commanding brigade of mounted infantry, of the operations of his brigade in co-operation with the main portion of the Army of the Cumberland before and after the evacuation of Chattanooga by the rebel army, including the battle of Chickamauga, and up to the time of the assembling of the army at Chattanooga.

For his ingenuity and fertility of resource in occupying the attention of the entire corps of the rebel army while our army was getting around its flank, and for his valor and the many qualities of a commander displayed by him in the numerous engagements of his brigade with the enemy before and during the battle of Chickamauga, and for the excellent service rendered by him generally, I would respectfully recommend him to the President of the U. S. for an appointment of Brigadier-General.

I am, sir, very respectfully, your obedient servant,

GEORGE H. THOMAS,
Major-General, Commanding.

Indiana and Illinois have not been without appreciation of Wilder and his men. Governor Claude Matthews, of the former State, said at the dedication of Chickamauga Park in 1895: “The fame of Wilder’s Brigade cannot perish from the
memories of men so long as mankind shall reverence true bravery and undaunted courage. To Indiana is due the credit of the fame of the brigade, for the 17th Indiana Regiment furnished the leader, Colonel John T. Wilder.”

OPENING OF TENNESSEE RIVER

The sanest and fairest estimate found of the “greatest battle of modern times,” prior to the World War, is that of Colonel Smith D. Adkins, of Wilder’s brigade:

The battle of Chickamauga, with its awful loss of life, might have been avoided by Rosecrans. It was a useless battle and because it was useless and disastrous, Rosecrans was relieved from command. . . . These views were entertained and expressed by me at the time, and I have entertained them ever since. . . . The broken and shattered Army of the Cumberland was driven from the field and cooped up and nearly starved to death in Chattanooga.

The contemporary reports and accounts support this description of conditions in Chattanooga after September 21.

Supplies must come from Middle Tennessee across the Cumberland Plateau, and this was attempted, only to have the wagon trains intercepted and destroyed or captured by General Joe Wheeler’s cavalry. Wilder was sent to attend to Wheeler, and succeeded in driving his force across the Tennessee.

The Federal commander, Rosecrans, thus frustrated, looked for relief from Huntsville, Alabama, by way of Bridgeport, but it was necessary to construct a temporary bridge over the Tennessee for ingress. Wilder, who with Wm. Crutchfield as guide, had in August before carefully reconnoitered the river for practicable crossings and discovered

58 Boynton’s Dedication, 262. Matthews further stated (p. 266) that Indiana lost at Chickamauga one-eighth of Indiana’s entire loss during the entire Civil War. The battle-field was a veritable inferno. Scarcely a tree or sapling was left unscathed; limbs were torn leaving many bare; where leaves remained they were white with the dust of conflict; dead bodies of the slain at places laid in heaps; the dry grass and stubble caught fire which lapped around the slain and wounded. In the morning a dense fog enveloped the field; the dusk of the last day’s struggle found the sun scarcely visible because of dust and smoke—smoke from burning vegetation, from cannon and guns.

54 Chickamauga, Useless and Disastrous Battle (1907), a pamphlet containing Adkins’ address at Mendota, Ill.

59 Dana: “We were on the verge of starvation.” Lack of food for the mules and for horses rendered them unfit to draw cannon. Gen. J. D. Cox: “A better way of supplying the army must be found. . . . The actual peril was not from the enemy, but from hunger.” (Scribner’s Magazine, Sept. 1900, 825). Gen. W. F. Smith: “Our lives were measured by days.”

60 On the occasion of a visit of Wheeler to Chattanooga, some years after the Civil War, he was taken out for a carriage drive up the Nashville road, accompanied by Wilder and other Chattanoogans. As they were passing along the Tennessee at a place where the water was shallow and fordable, Wheeler remarked, “Right here I once crossed the river with my entire command.” Wilder divertingly replied: “That’s so, General, I remember the occasion well. I was only a short way behind you.”
that Brown's Ferry was such a place, went on September 23 to Rosecrans and produced his rough sketch map showing the situation. The next day Wilder and Crutchfield accompanied Rosecrans and Reynolds to this ferry and explained how supplies might reach Chattanooga without coming within the reach of the enemy's guns on Lookout Mountain. Rosecrans discussed the feasibility of pontoon boats being dropped down from Chattanooga and used as a bridge at the ferry. This plan was successfully executed in October. As Rosecrans later said: "The river was opened and the army was saved and supplied with bread. The remarks of the soldiers that they could defend that line if I would open the cracker line were about right."

It was men of Wilder's Brigade who had first entered Chattanooga, and it was the keen eye of Wilder that enabled him to point out how Chattanooga could be saved from a staggering disaster.

Thomas Robson Hay, an intelligent commentator, says: "Bragg was deeply chagrined at the collapse of his hopes of starving the Federal army shut up in Chattanooga. He should have held the crossing at Brown's Ferry at all costs." He describes the crossing of the troops under Hooker at that point as "brilliantly conceived."

MINOR ENGAGEMENT AND RESIGNATION

The "Lightning Brigade" next marched to McMinnville, Tennessee, where it successfully skirmished with the enemy and occupied the town. On October 7 at Farmington, Wheeler's cavalry and three Kentucky cavalry battalions were engaged in a sharp conflict, Wilder's old regiment (Seventeenth Indiana) alone suffering a loss of forty-eight killed and wounded, but the enemy was driven south across the Tennessee River.

The Brigade did not participate in the battle of Missionary Ridge. Under order of General Thomas, two hundred and fifty of the best mounted of the Brigade marched towards

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57 So named for Brown, a half-breed Cherokee-Chickamauga Indian, who was reputed to have murdered travelers for robbery and to have thrown their bodies in the river. Crutchfield's statement to Wilder.

58 See Proceedings Third Annual Reunion of the Society of the Army of the Cumberland, Indianapolis, Dec. 15 and 16, 1899; and full details in Report of Board of Army Officers on claim of General William Farrar Smith, Washington, 1901. General Smith claimed for himself the honor of originating this plan of relief, over Rosecrans. Wilder's statement is to be found at page 35. The Board found against Smith and that Rosecrans had known of the feasibility of the spot "since September 24, in as much as a battery to cover it had been placed there on that day—thus agreeing exactly with Wilder. See page 20 of the Report so showing.
Williams: General John T. Wilder

Chattanooga, crossing the Tennessee on pontoon bridges on the night of November 23, and then moved in the direction of Cleveland and Ringgold, while the spectacular battle of Missionary Ridge was raging. This, in order to destroy the enemy's wagon trains and stores of supplies. They returned to Cleveland on the twenty-sixth after destroying about seventy-five wagons. Without their commander, parts of the Brigade that were at Knoxville crossed the mountains into North Carolina, and on return went into camp at Charleston on the Hiwassee.

Reinlistment being ordered, the men of the Brigade as veterans were given home-leave. The Indiana regiments were on January 25, 1864, given a reception on the capitol grounds in Indianapolis, and addressed by Governor Morton19 and General Wilder. The latter, by reason of ill-health, was in the fall of 1864 forced to resign his commission, but the Brigade as reformed continued to participate in the war under the competent and faithful Colonel Abram O. Miller of the Seventy-second Indiana.

Soon after the evacuation of Corinth, Mississippi, in 1862 Wilder was taken ill with typhoid fever, and was absent from the field for about three months, the disease at one time threatening to become fatal. He was left subject to recurrences of a stubborn diarrhea which broke the continuity of his service on campaign and finally caused his retirement on October 5, 1864, at a time when his star was in the ascendant.

The qualities and methods of Wilder as a commander may not unfittingly be compared to those of Forrest with whom he so frequently came in contact. Both were marked by initiative and daring and by a fertility in a sort of strategy that was not manifested by West Pointers. Neither was handicapped by a training that held one to that which was the recognized or usual. The soldiers under both leaders rode as cavalry but customarily fought as infantry. It is not improbable that the success of Forrest had no little to do with Wilder's insistence upon mounting the men of his Brigade. That Wilder measured up to Forrest is not contended; his recurrent absences from his command on account of illness, no doubt, prevented his nearer approach to the measure of the "Knight

19 Gov. Morton in his address did the Seventeenth Regiment the honor of choosing it to be first eulogized. "It occupied the advance in all occasions in Rosecrans' army. There have been instances of daring that can only be named by that much abused word, chivalric. They are historic and will live while liberty lives."
GEN. JOHN T. WILDER—1863
of the Saddle.” But, on the other hand, conceive what Forrest would have achieved had his commands been equipped with Spencer rifles!

The fairest test applied to a military man is the esteem in which he is held by the enemy with whom he came in immediate contact. Wilder and Forrest each truly esteemed the other, both as man and as soldier.80

Mathes, a biographer of Forrest and himself a Confederate soldier, says:

In the early part of the war such cavalry leaders as Forrest and Wheeler, John Morgan, Mosby and J. E. B. Stuart and their men, seemed to have the advantage in horsemanship, in alertness, dash and in the use of sabers, shotguns and pistols. But as they began to wear out and exhaust their resources, and possibly some of their earlier enthusiasm, they realized that their opponents were possessed not only of courage, but training, methods and great powers of endurance. Sheridan and Wilder and Wilson and Kirkpatrick became famous as hard riders and fighters.81

The admirers of Wilder may rest content in finding him ranked in such a group by one competent to judge who did so impartially.

POST-BELLUM CAREER

From his youth, Wilder had a fondness for practical geology. He collected specimens and arranged a small cabinet, though he had never had an opportunity to study the science. While campaigning between Murfreesboro and Tullahoma, by chance there came into his possession a copy of one of the reports on the geology of Tennessee, by the learned Hollander, Dr. Gerard Troost, state geologist. At his leisure its contents were devoured, and thereafter the reader’s eyes were open to observe the mineral resources of those parts of Tennessee through which he passed as a soldier.

Strangely enough, before the war, Wilder had in some way come into ownership of a tract of land in Tennessee. When the war closed, he was by no means in vigorous health, and he decided that he would remove to Tennessee for the benefit of its milder climate and for an opportunity to draw profit from the wonderful natural resources that there awaited exploitation.

The change was made in the year 1866 from Greensburg.
Indiana, to Chattanooga, Tennessee. In reconnoitering the mineral resources of the Chattanooga district, General Wilder was struck with the advantages afforded by the county of Roane. He visited Col. Robert K. Byrd, alongside whom he had fought, who owned the farm where the city of Harriman now stands. Byrd urged upon Wilder the desirable features of that location as a town site. Looking over the farm with Byrd, Wilder asked: “Colonel, what about the Emory River. Won't it flood these bottoms?” Byrd made a reply that might be construed to be a negation. In a short time Wilder saw a small log lodged in a tree several feet from the ground, and said: “Bob, what devilish boys put that log up that tree?” “Oh, let's go to the house and eat dinner,” closed the incident, and another site was chosen. This was a few miles to the southwestward and near the Tennessee River, ninety-two miles by land above Chattanooga. Iron ore was found there in a fairly continuous vein, nearly vertical, about four feet in thickness. A quarter of a mile from this vein was found coal well suited for coking and iron-making, and lime-stone for fluxing was immediately at hand.

A company, styled Roane Iron Company, was organized in 1867 by Wilder and two associates, Maj. W. A. Rockwood and Capt. H. S. Chamberlain, and the town of Rockwood was laid out and given the name of Major Rockwood. A blast furnace was erected between the deposits of iron and coal—the first using coke to be operated in the South. Soon a second furnace was erected, and ever thereafter Wilder's primacy as an industrialist was freely acknowledged by Tennesseans. The next enterprise was the establishment of the Roane Rolling Mills at Chattanooga for the manufacture of rails for railroads, the two operations being connected by water transport, first by barges and then by steamboats on the Tennessee River. These and other enterprises projected by General Wilder went far towards fixing the fate of Chattanooga as the industrial center of the Central South. In the fast developing city he erected Wilder's Machine Works, where, among other articles, was manufactured Wilder's turbine wheel, an invention of the General that was widely marketed; the Southern Car and Foundry Company; and, at nearby Dayton, Tennessee, the Dayton Coal and Iron Company. Later followed the Durham Coal Company which operated on deposits of
coal near the battlefield of Chickamauga. In the meantime the General had served as Tennessee commissioner to the Vienna Exposition of 1873, and had sent a challenging exhibit of Tennessee minerals to the Centennial Exposition at Philadelphia in 1876.

Wilder's farsightedness and enthusiasm marked him as a dependable promoter. He removed from Chattanooga to Johnson City, Tennessee, to serve as active vice-president of the Charleston, Cincinnati and Chicago Railroad which was soon placed under construction, the intended northern terminus being Ashland, Kentucky, on the Ohio. Wilder, taking the saddle, rode into the mountains, and purchased for himself and associates hundreds of thousands of acres of rich coal lands in Southwest Virginia and Eastern Kentucky through or near which the railway was to run. The railroad is today the Carolina, Clinchfield and Ohio, one of the great coal carrying roads of the South, and the coal lands have been developed by the Clinchfield Coal Company and others on an immense scale.

At Johnson City, General Wilder organized the Carnegie Land Company, erected a large blast furnace, a fine hotel and an office building. He had previously purchased a large boundary of magnetic iron ore lands in western North Carolina, and built on Roan Mountain (6,313 feet altitude) Cloudland Hotel—at the time the highest habitation east of the Rocky Mountains—a resort for those seeking immunity from hay-fever. The General's last enterprise was entered upon after he had passed the age of seventy-five years, the Fentress Coal Company on the Cumberland Mountain Plateau where stands the mining town, Wilder.

Wilder foresaw the development of the Tennessee's water power. Anticipating the Tennessee Valley Authority by more than two decades, he led in the organization of a power company and the acquisition of water-rights along the Little Tennessee River. In this instance, as in some others, he but manifested the vision of a seer and pioneer. Others, rather than himself, profited in later years from a prescience that can only be termed remarkable. There was more than a dash of optimism in his makeup which tended at times to blind him to hazards.

As to personal appearance: General Wilder was six feet
two inches in height, but well proportioned. As age advanced he took on flesh but until after eighty years he moved with ease and a degree of grace. His eyes were particularly penetrating and bright; they were readily kindled by merriment. He had unusual conversational powers; his speech was spicy and at times emphasis was attempted to be lent by strong and explosive words, after the manner of many military men. His information was wide and in some directions ample, such as in the field of the history and traditions of the regions in which he resided, and in reminiscences of the great and near-great with whom he had come in contact. He was a total abstainer from intoxicants and made no use of tobacco; but at the board he was no mean trencherman, especially when confronting a juicy beefsteak.

While always interested in public affairs, General Wilder seldom aspired to elective office. He was elected Mayor of Chattanooga in 1871, but resigned when his term had run but eight months. In 1876 he was put forward by the Republicans as their candidate for Congress from the Chattanooga district, and though he cut a large adverse majority to a very narrow one, he failed of election. He had not the arts of the politician; his positive character and forthrightness prevented his being such. He served a term as postmaster at Chattanooga, being appointed November 15, 1877, and gave satisfaction to patrons of all party alignments.

General Wilder suffered grievous losses in the Baring Brothers panic of 1893, and in 1897 was glad to accept appointment from President McKinley to the pension agency at Knoxville through which flowed to the nation's pensioners in the South multiplied thousands of dollars each pay day. Asking for his appointment to that place, was General and ex-President Benjamin Harrison who had been done a great favor by Wilder in May, 1878, which was of too intimate a nature for recital here. He was twice re-appointed, once by President Theodore Roosevelt and again by President Taft.

Yet later, General Wilder was honored by appointment as a member of the Chickamauga National Park Commission, of which he became chairman. No fitter man could have been found, having in view his part in the great battle fought there and his natural adaptability to the task of marking and caring for the large acreage dedicated by the Nation to the a-
Williams: General John T. Wilder

GEN JOHN T. WILDER IN LATER YEARS
chievements of those who there had met in fateful and deadly struggle.

In 1904 General Wilder married Miss Dora E. Lee, of North Carolina, whose father was a captain in the Confederate army and a scion of the great Lee family of Virginia.

A pronounced feature of the General's life after the Civil War was his popularity among the ex-Confederates and Southerners. Between them and him was a sort of affinity, as he often remarked.

Perhaps no incident in Wilder's post-war career so marks the man as his intervention to prevent the arrest and prosecution of General Nathan Bedford Forrest when the latter was charged with breaking the terms of his parole on surrender in 1865 by taking part in the operations of the original Ku Klux Klan. On learning of the steps being taken against Forrest, Wilder visited Forrest in Memphis to get from him his own statement as to his motives and attitude. Convinced that Forrest had sincerely headed the Klan for the protection and betterment of his people, Wilder went to Washington and prevailed upon President Grant to see that no arrest should be made of the great Southern leader. There can be little doubt that Grant was easily persuaded, though Wilder had enlisted the aid of Senators Oliver P. Morton and John A. Logan and Richard J. Oglesby. General and Mrs. Forrest paid a return visit of a week to the Wilders in their home on the terrace in Chattanooga. Many a story of the war must then have been told!

The funeral sermon of General Wilder was preached by the ex-Confederate soldier, Rev. Dr. John W. Bachman, for fifty years pastor of the Presbyterian church in Chattanooga, in which reference was feelingly made to this incident, and as one proving the high mutual regard that existed between Wilder and Southerners.

The esteem in which General Wilder was held as a citizen was well expressed in a tribute by one who knew him long and well, Adolph S. Ochs, of the Chattanooga Times and the great New York Times. In a souvenir edition of the first named newspaper, issued December 8, 1892, in an editorial, Ochs said:

We feel that an edition, the chief object of which is to celebrate the growth of Chattanooga, would be incomplete if it omitted to fittingly acknowledge the services of General John T. Wilder in the days of the
town's small things. He has been the true-tried, never-flinching friend of Chattanooga in sunshine, stormy adversity and prosperity. He cannot be forgotten or neglected but by the ungrateful.

In the same spirit of appreciation and gratitude this biography of General Wilder has been written by a resident of another home-town of the General, Johnson City.82

General Wilder passed away on October 20th, 1917, at Jacksonville, Florida. He had gone to Florida to spend the winter to avoid the rigors of the climate on the Cumberland Plateau where he made his last home, in Monterey, Tennessee. Interment was in Forrest Hill Cemetery, Chattanooga.

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82 In Johnson City, where Mrs. Martha (Stewart) Wilder, the first wife of the General, was much beloved, one of the city's streets bears her family name; the handsomest public school building is named "Martha Wilder School," in which is located a school library named in honor of her daughter, Annie Wilder Stratton, and endowed by the latter's husband, Francis A. Stratton of Mount Vernon, N.Y.—the only endowed public school library in the state of Tennessee.