

from Little Rock, by which the enemy's difficulties in supplying himself would be increased and his employment of gunboats rendered impossible should he move against me. White River was falling rapidly; the gunboats and transports dropped down and went into the Mississippi, fired upon to the last moment from the west bank. Curtis, at the same time, moved eastward to the Mississippi and established himself at Helena. A portion of my cavalry, under Col. W. H. Parsons, was thrown forward in that direction and many successful attacks were made upon the enemy. The most important of these was at Hughes' Ferry, on L'Anguille River, 30 miles from Helena (August 3). A Federal cavalry regiment, with about 200 armed negroes and as many more unarmed, was surprised in camp and, in effect, cut to pieces, losing over 400 in killed, wounded, and prisoners, with all its baggage.

"Colonel Parsons and Lieut. Colonel A. B. Burleson, of his regiment, highly distinguished themselves. Our loss was 30 killed and 58 wounded.

"After this affair the enemy confined himself within very narrow limits immediately around Helena. Parsons' command was left to watch that line, and the remainder of my troops were put in camp near Little Rock and their organization and instruction commenced.

"The scarcity of supplies now caused great distress. Nearly two months must yet elapse before the new crop would ripen. To lessen the consumption of corn, I found it necessary to dismount four regiments of Texans and three of Arkansians. This produced much dissatisfaction, and there were many desertions as a consequence.

"The diseases to which fresh troops are subject became prevalent; many died and many deserted for this cause. The men became clamorous for pay. I prevailed on the State authorities to turn over to me the war tax due the Confederacy, amounting to upward of \$400,000, and caused it to be disbursed as pay funds, \$100,000 to the troops in the Indian country and the residue to those in Arkansas; but the unavoidable delay in doing this gave occasion for many desertions. In a word, desertions took place upon every conceivable pretext.

"Frequent arrests were made, but in many instances the offenders were at first pardoned and returned to duty on promises of better conduct in future. Forgiveness was thus extended from different considerations. Many were extremely ignorant and probably had been misled. Others had wives and children suffering for food. Lastly, the regimental organizations made by me were not authorized by law, and under the circumstances I shrank from inflicting the death penalty. This lenity brought forth evil fruits; mercy was mistaken for timidity; desertions increased. My command seemed likely to dwindle to nothing. The raising of additional troops was paralyzed. At length Col. A. Nelson discovered and reported to me a widespread conspiracy to disband and go home. He ascertained that there was a regular organization for this purpose, and that a badge was adopted by the members for distinguishing each other. Within a few hours after this discovery a signal gun was fired in the camp of an Arkansas regiment, and 60 men, headed by two lieutenants, deliberately marched away, with their arms and accouterments. Orders to arrest them were not executed.

"For the salvation of the country I had taken the responsibility to force these men into service. I now resolved, for the same object, to