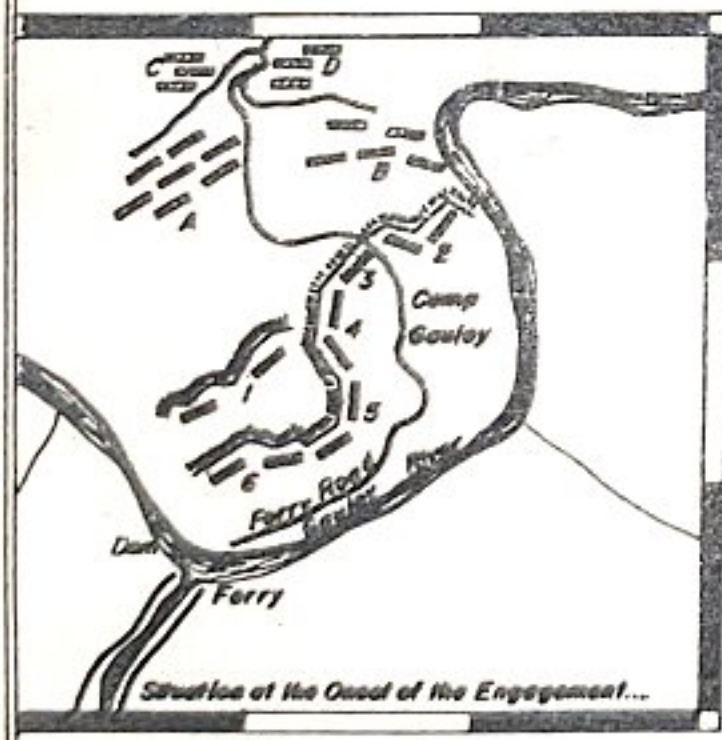




Sept. 10th. 1861



CARNIFIX FERRY



Situation of the Ground of the Engagement...

- U.S.A.**
- A 9TH, 10TH, 12TH, OHIO INFANTRY
 - B 12TH, 13TH, 28TH, OHIO INFANTRY
 - C SCAMMONS BRIGADE
 - D SCAMMONS BATTERY

- CSA.**
- 1 LIGHT ARTILLERY - VIRGINIA
 - 2 45TH VIRGINIA INFANTRY
 - 3 GUYS BATTERY
 - 4 22ND VIRGINIA INFANTRY
 - 5 61ST VIRGINIA INFANTRY
 - 6 61ST VIRGINIA INFANTRY

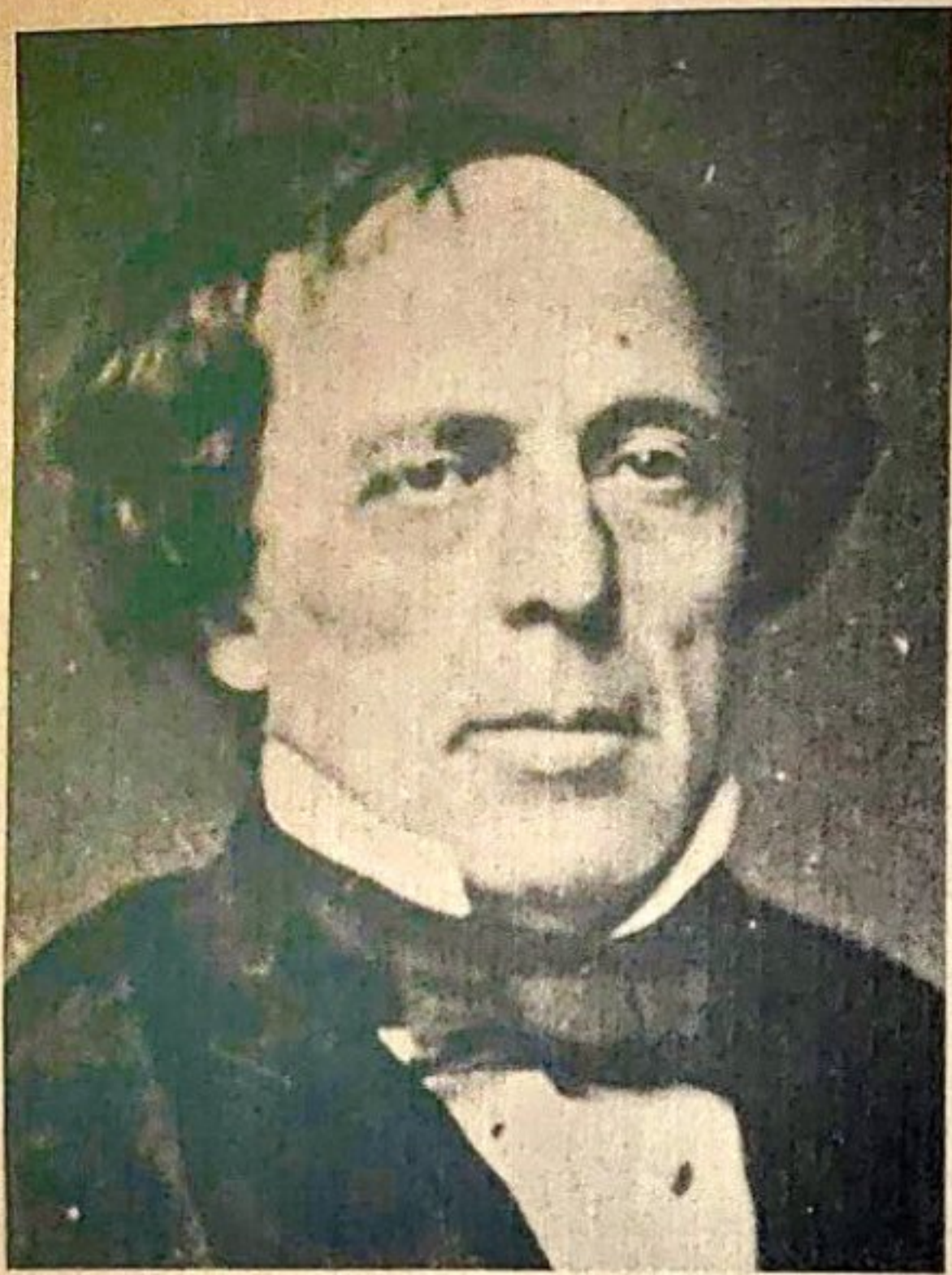


Poffeson Home, Used as Federal Hospital.



**MAP
OF THE
AFFAIR
AT
CARNIFIX
FERRY**





General John B. Floyd

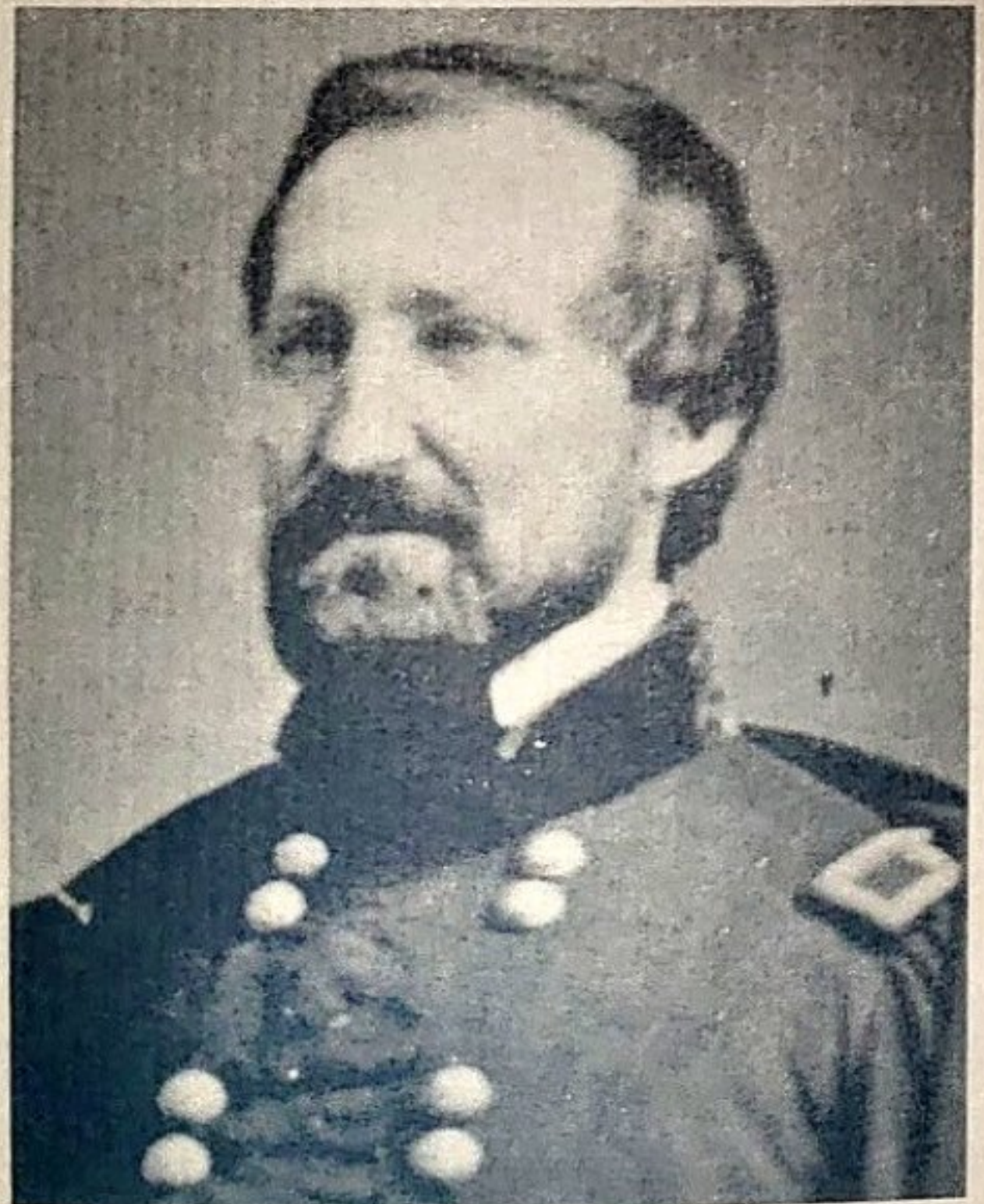
The South

The Battle At Carnifex Ferry


By Dallas B. Shaffer

General William S. Rosecrans


The North



The Background



ON SEPTEMBER 10, 1861, Union troops led by Brigadier General William S. Rosecrans engaged the Confederates and forced them to evacuate an entrenched position overlooking Carnifex Ferry. The Confederate commander, Brigadier General John B. Floyd, retreated across the ferry to the south side of the Gauley River and on eastward to Meadow Bluff near Lewisburg. This Civil War battle represented the failure of a Confederate drive to regain control of the Kanawha Valley, a part of General Robert E. Lee's campaign of 1861 to push Union forces from the Allegheny Mountains to beyond the Ohio River.

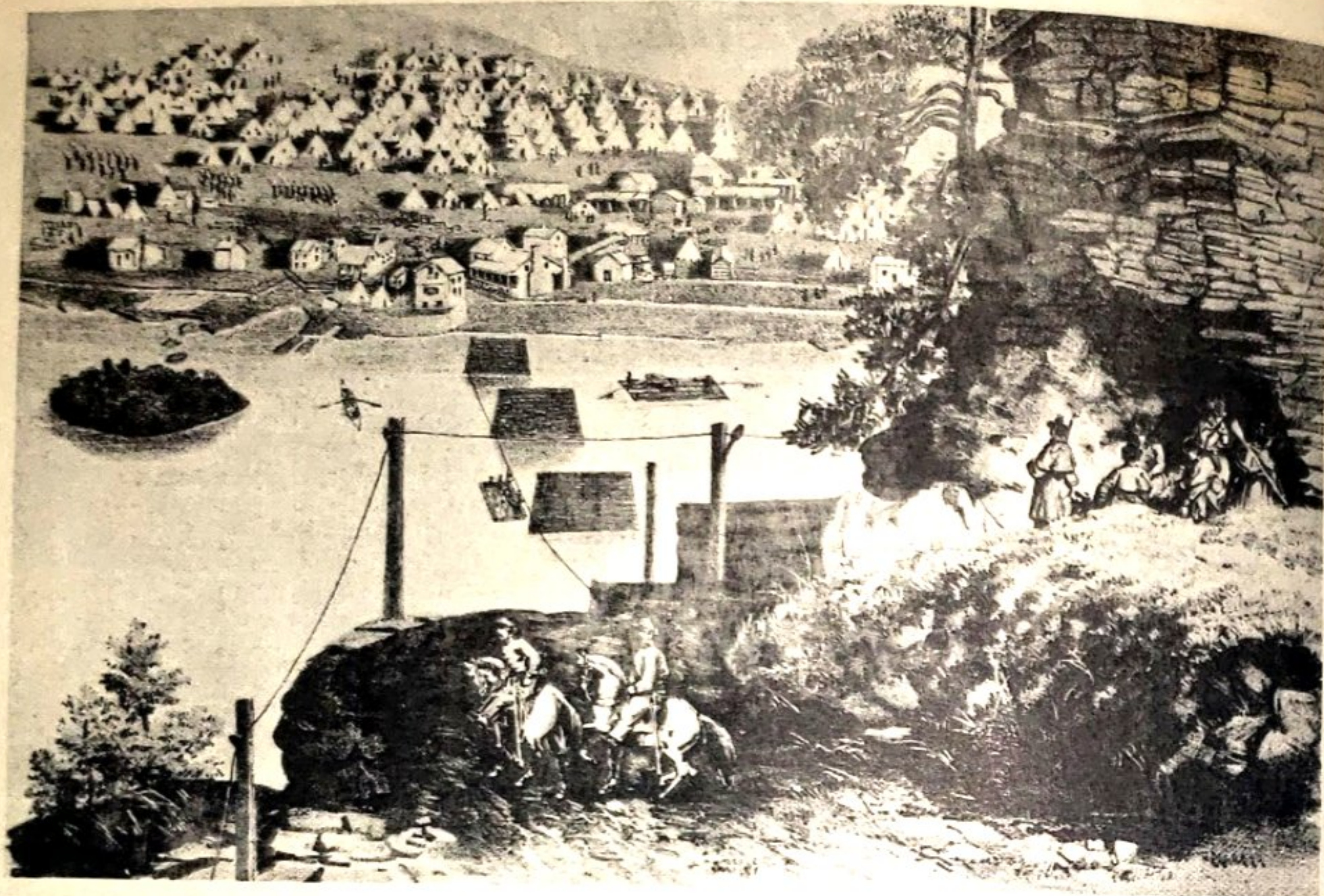


Carnifex Ferry *

GENERAL GEORGE B. McClellan's campaign of May-July 1861 shattered Confederate control of the Trans-Allegheny counties of Virginia, and as far south as the Great Kanawha River secured the area for the Union. Following the Confederate success of First Manassas on July 21, 1861, McClellan was called to reorganize McDowell's humiliated army. Upon his transfer to Washington, the Military Department of the Ohio was entrusted to McClellan's distinguished subordinate, General Rosecrans. Rosecrans was the logical successor to McClellan, because he had an enviable record since his days at West Point. Moreover, he had served McClellan well in his recent campaign, and having engaged in business east of Charleston before the Civil War, he had a general knowledge of this area. After First Manassas the Confederates turned their attention to regaining this area in Western Virginia, which became part of West Virginia in 1863.

Warned by McClellan of the Confederate intentions and acting upon his advice, Rosecrans established a defensive perimeter extending from Gauley Bridge eastward to Cheat Mountain, continuing on to the Potomac. Assigning a general officer to protect the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad, Rosecrans secured the Staunton-Parkersburg Turnpike by a strongly fortified position at Cheat Mountain commanded by Brigadier General W. W. Reynolds. Elements of this command extended from Elkwater to Summersville. In the south, Brigadier General Jacob D. Cox held a fortified post at Gauley Bridge, where the New and Gauley rivers join to form the Great Kanawha. Cox ordered detachments to patrol the Lewisburg pike to the east, the west bank of the Gauley to the north, and the Great Kanawha westward to Charleston from which Gauley Bridge was provisioned. He supplied the troops at Summersville and maintained communications with Rosecrans' headquarters at Clarksburg by means of the turnpike which extended

*There are at least three variations of the spelling of "Carnifex." In this booklet the present-day spelling, "Carnifex," is used throughout the text. On the front cover and the map on pages spelling is "Carnifix," as spelled in official records and the maps drawn at the time of the battle.



When Confederate control of Northern West Virginia was shattered during the initial campaign of the Civil War by the loss of the battle of Rich Mountain near Elkins in July of 1861, subsequent Federal advances from this area threatened to isolate a Confederate army at Charleston under General Henry A. Wise. Wise was already engaged by a Union army under General Jacob D. Cox. As Wise retreated to White Sulphur Springs, Cox pursued him to Gauley Bridge where Cox established a fortified position. From Gauley Bridge, Cox dispatched reconnaissance patrols and provisioned Union troops at Summersville. While the Federal army attacked the Confederates at Carnifex Ferry, Cox was concerned with engaging the enemy at Hawk's Nest to prevent their reinforcing the main body at the Ferry.

from Gauley Bridge through Summersville to Sutton and Weston.

The Gauley River formed a protective barrier to this tenuous line of communication. Eight miles south of Summersville and over 20 miles north of Gauley Bridge is the confluence of the Gauley and a southern tributary, the Meadow River. Carnifex Ferry is situated at this point where the narrow Gauley widens into a long smooth body of water—about 100 yards wide at the time of the Civil War. Flanked on either side by steep banks, the rough waters of the Gauley above and below the ferry defied crossing except at a few places. As reported to General Floyd on August 9, Carnifex Ferry was

the principal point at which the Gauley might be crossed by a considerable force. Moreover, usable roads led from the Lewisburg pike to the ferry.

Sunday Road extended from Carnifex Ferry to a point on the Lewisburg pike about 15 miles east of Gauley Bridge and 12 miles south of the ferry. About two miles south of the ferry Saturday Road branched from the Sunday Road and touched the pike about five miles farther west. The Lewisburg, or James River and Kanawha Turnpike, was the principal route into the Kanawha Valley from the east.

Anticipating a Confederate advance over these routes, Rosecrans ordered Colonel E.

B. Tyler, a former fur trader in this area, to move the Seventh Ohio Infantry from Summersville to Cross Lanes on August 13.



General Jacob D. Cox

Fearing a Confederate attack on Summersville, the Thirteenth and Twenty-Third Ohio regiments followed Tyler but returned there a couple of days later. From Cross Lanes, Tyler patrolled the road extending $2\frac{1}{2}$ miles to Carnifex Ferry, another road west to the Gauley-Summersville pike about five miles distant, and the area above and in front of the ferry.

Kesslers Cross Lanes

AS OF AUGUST 11, 1861, General Floyd was in command of the Confederate forces in the Kanawha Valley, the "Army of the Kanawha." Floyd, the controversial Secretary of War in President Buchanan's Cabinet, had organized a brigade near Wytheville under the authority of the Confederate President. The Confederate plan to drive the Federals from the Valley was frustrated by Floyd's quarrel with Brigadier General Henry A. Wise, both ex-governors of Virginia and longtime political antagonists. Since joining Wise with two regiments of his brigade on August 6, Floyd showed considerable contempt for his subordinate who had retreated from Charleston to White Sulphur Springs in the latter part of July. Fearing that Floyd meant to divest him of his command, Wise burdened Lee at Valley Mountain with criticisms of Floyd. This quarrel was not settled until General Rosecrans had capitalized on the lack of Confederate coordination in the Valley.

By driving the Federals from the Valley, Floyd wished to prevent a referendum scheduled for October 24, 1861, relating to the division of the state. Although his defeat at Carnifex Ferry altered his grandiose de-



The rugged Gauley Canyon as seen from the overlook at Carnifex Ferry Battlefield State Park

sever the Parkersburg branch of the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad, a prime objective of Confederate strategy. Floyd's original plan, involving this movement after the destruction of Tyler and the expulsion of Cox from the Valley, was thus far showing promise of success.

Floyd dispatched cavalry units to guard the northern and southern approaches to Camp Gauley. Captain James M. Corns patrolled the road to Gauley Bridge, while Major F. A. Reynolds held a post eight miles north of Summersville at the foot of Big Birch Mountain. To protect his position Floyd constructed entrenchments consisting of log and rail breastworks extending across the rugged jutting strip of land formed by a bend in the Gauley. The precipices overlooking the Gauley on either extremity of the lines were entrenched to protect the camp from a flanking movement. Floyd reported to the Confederate Secretary of War that the lines were so extensive that not a man was left in reserve. General Cox, who later visited General Rosecrans at his headquarters at Cross Lanes, and other Union officers verified the extent of the entrenchments.

Captain John H. Guy's Goochland artillery battery, consisting of about 100 men and four six-pounders, was entrenched at the center of the line. This parapet battery faced an open space of about 300 yards through which extended the road from Cross Lanes to the ferry. Two pieces from another artillery unit were added to Guy's artillery to protect the open space. From either side of the battery the long line of palisaded wings of heavy logs, screened by rails laid obliquely across them in front, extended to the precipices. The lines were protected by dense woods, except in front of the battery where the timber was felled and the brush distributed over the face of the hill to form abatis, serving the similar purpose of barbed wire in modern combat. Flushed with confidence over the performance of his troops at Cross Lanes and his entrenchments, Floyd assured Jefferson Davis that Camp Gauley could withstand

any attack mustered by the Union forces. Moreover, he considered such an attack improbable. This easy optimism, contrary to the sentiments of his reluctant subordinate, General Wise, who considered the position on the north side of the Gauley indefensible, faded somewhat upon the approach of the enemy some days later.

When Floyd entered the Valley the Twenty-Second and Thirty-Sixth Virginia regiments remained at White Sulphur Springs to reorganize after the disastrous retreat from Charleston. The former was commanded by Colonel C. K. Tompkins, whose family was often visited by General Cox at their summer home on Gauley Mountain. This regiment, with Wise at Hawk's Nest after Cross Lanes, returned to Floyd on the afternoon of September 10. It was later commanded by Colonel George S. Patton, forefather of the noted tank commander of World War II fame. The Twenty-Second was placed at the center of the line. The Thirty-Sixth under Colonel John McCausland returned from Summersville to defend the outer entrenchments protecting the left flank.

The three remaining regiments were part of "Floyd's Brigade." The Forty-Fifth Virginia under Colonel Henry Heth defended the right flank. A personal confidant with whom Floyd entrusted the movement of arms from Manassas to his command, Colonel Heth was acting Quartermaster General before joining this regiment. He later commanded a division of the Army of Northern Virginia at Gettysburg. The Fiftieth Virginia under Colonel Alexander W. Reynolds held an outpost about a mile from Camp Gauley on the road to Cross Lanes. It later held the center of the line beside Guy's battery on the left of the road. The last regiment of his brigade to join Floyd, the Fifty-First under Colonel Gabriel C. Wharton, defended the left flank.

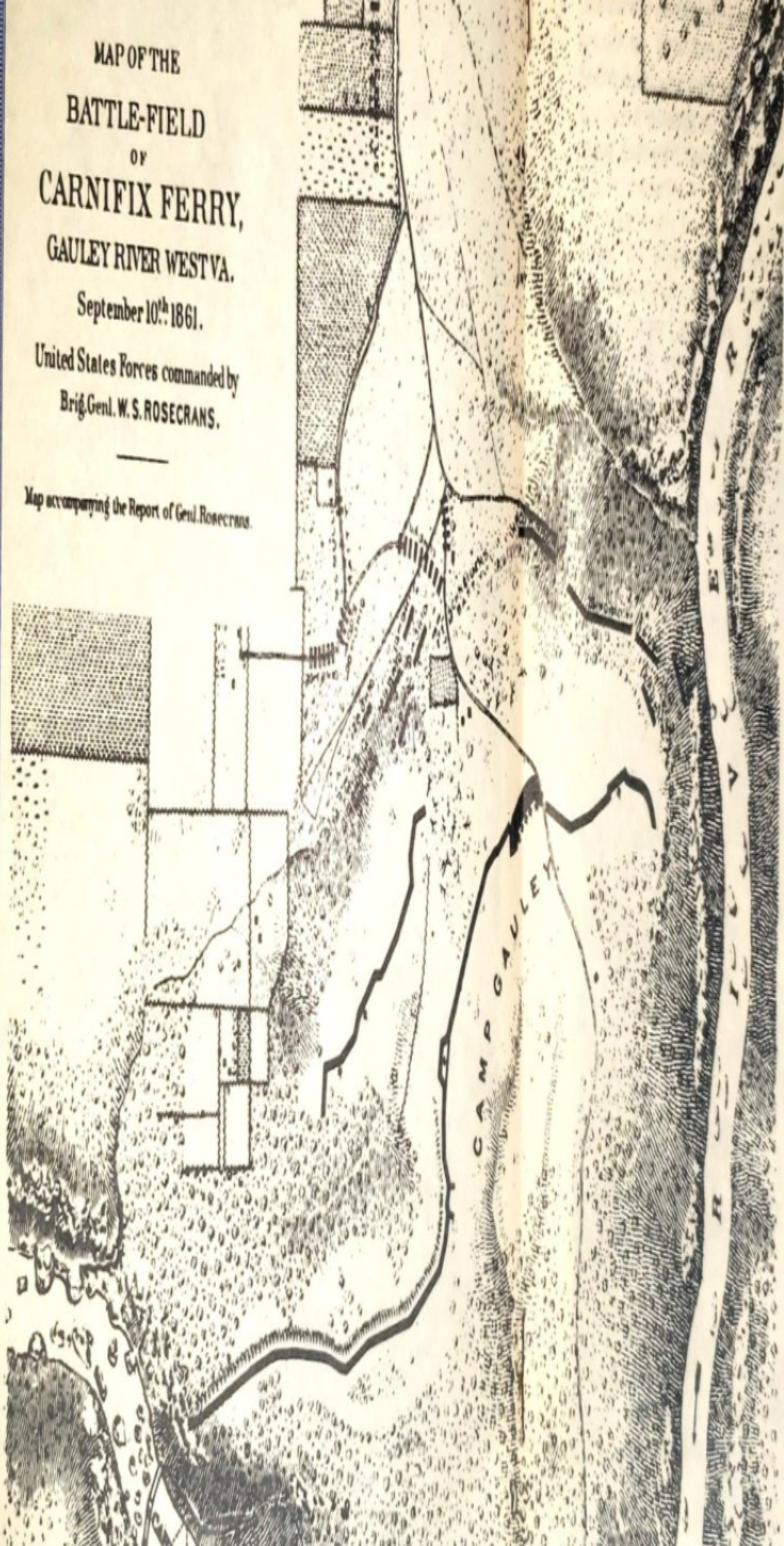
At Camp Gauley Floyd commanded over 2,000 effectives counting the artillerists and cavalymen. According to a dispatch from Wise to Lee on September 9, 1861, Floyd's forces in the Valley were about 6,200 strong.

MAP OF THE
BATTLE-FIELD
OF
CARNIFIX FERRY,
GAULEY RIVER WEST VA.

September 10th 1861.

United States Forces commanded by
Brig. Genl. W. S. ROSECRANS.

Map accompanying the Report of Genl. Rosecrans.



His troops were described in a report at the close of the campaign as raw, undisciplined levies whose instruction in the most simple drill was entirely wanting. The Assistant Inspector General concluded: "Yet these raw countrymen have certainly gone through a campaign which would do credit to any force however perfect in its composition." An additional force of 1,600 men, the Fourteenth North Carolina and the Third Georgia regiments, were advancing to reinforce Floyd.

Although an advantageous point from which to make an offensive, Camp Gauley was difficult to defend. A superior force might force Floyd to retreat over a hazardous route winding down the mountain to the ferry a mile away, whose crossing was slow and difficult under the best circumstances. At the same time the Federals at Gauley Bridge might force General Wise eastward to cut off his retreat. Informing Floyd of the Union column advancing from the north on September 8, General Lee recommended that he recross the Gauley unless he felt the camp strong enough to withstand a combined attack by Cox and Rosecrans. That same day Colonel McCausland reported his preparations to evacuate Summersville upon the approach of the enemy from Sutton.

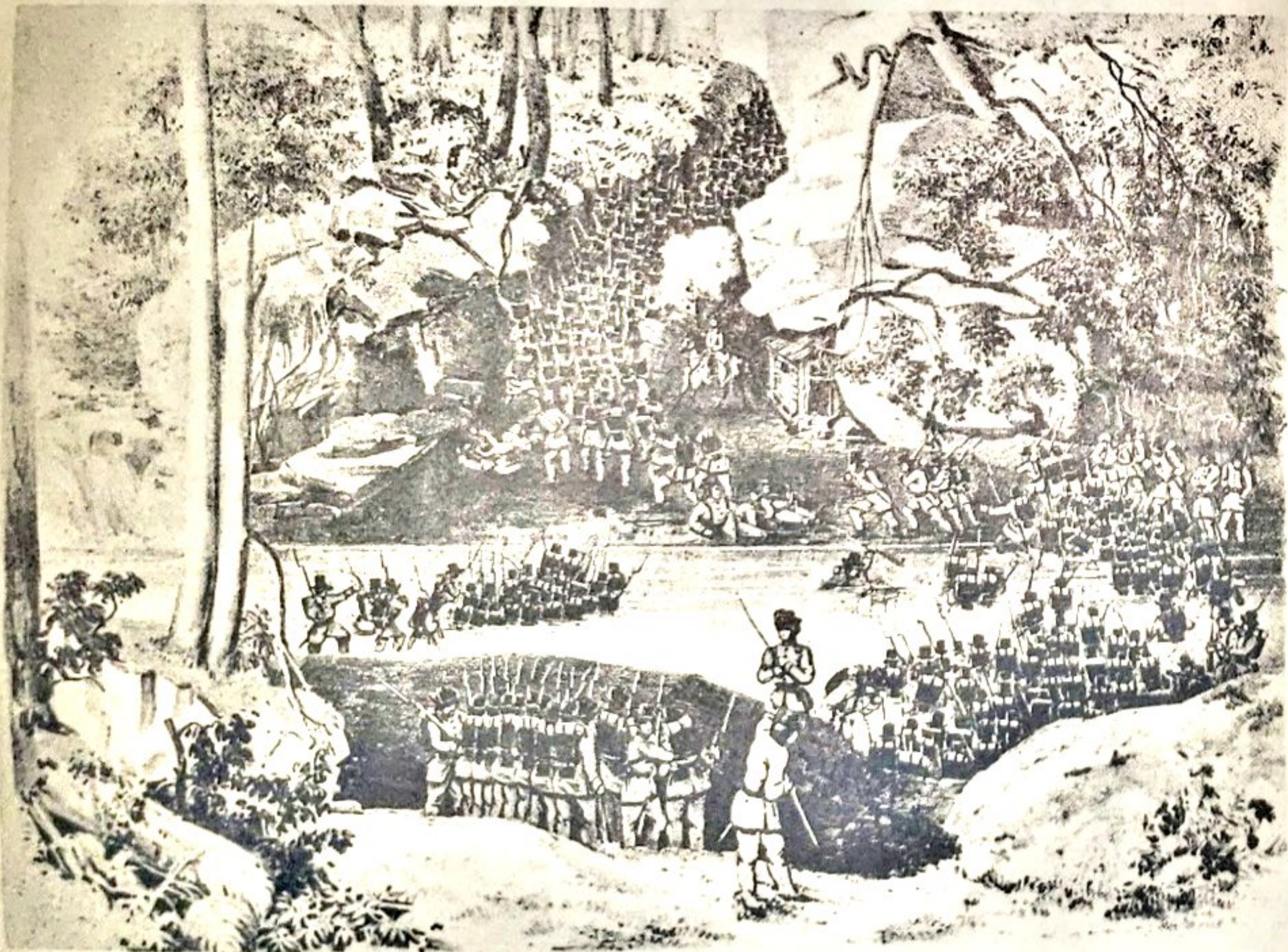
Floyd quickly appealed to Lewisburg for the North Carolina and Georgia regiments to come up, and ordered General A. A. Chapman to send 800 militia from his command south of the Kanawha. At this time Floyd expected the attack on September 12, or the following day at the latest. At one o'clock a.m. on September 10, Floyd ordered Wise to return the Twenty-Second Virginia and send one of his (Wise's) regiments to Camp Gauley. Because of Wise's

The Fall of Camp Gauley

WARNED OF FLOYD'S threat to Gauley Bridge, General Rosecrans moved quickly to save his army on the Kanawha. Leaving Clarksburg on August 31 with three new regiments, Rosecrans halted five days later at Sutton to arrange the troops in battle array. Here on September 5 three provisional brigades were formed of the new regiments, the two formerly at Summersville, and others from the Cheat Mountain area. This army consisted of about 6,000 combat and 1,000 service

troops. With a company of Indiana cavalry to guard his headquarters detachment, Rosecrans proceeded along the Gauley-Weston turnpike, constructing telegraph lines as he advanced. On September 9 this army encamped at the foot of Big Birch Mountain.

Leading the column was the First Brigade commanded by Brigadier General Henry W. Benham, a "West Pointer" commissioned to his present rank on August 13 for meritorious service during McClellan's campaign. To this brigade Rosecrans assigned his best regiments, the Tenth, Twelfth, and Thirteenth Ohio commanded by Colonels William H. Lytle, John W. Lowe, and William S. Smith. Artillery of this brigade included the First Ohio Independent Battery of four



After General George B. McClellan destroyed the Confederate stronghold near Elkins, his successor General William S. Rosecrans moved his army southward to save the Federal position at Gauley Bridge which was being threatened by a Confederate army at Hawk's Nest and outflanked by another at Carnifex Ferry. Rosecrans' army moved from Clarksburg through Weston to Sutton, and early in the morning on the day before the battle, his forces crossed the Birch River and advanced through Summersville to Carnifex Ferry.

mountain howitzers under Captain James R. McMullen and two rifled cannon under Captain George Schneider of Company E, Thirteenth Ohio. A company of the Federal Fourth Artillery was with a following brigade. Captains William West and George Gilmore commanded two companies of the First West Virginia Cavalry with Benham's brigade. This brigade, some 2,500 strong, was to bear the brunt of the coming battle.

The three new regiments were assigned to the rear brigades, the Second and Third commanded by Colonels R. L. McCook and E. P. Scammon. McCook, as well as Rosecrans and Benham, had served with McClellan in his recent campaign. Benham's classmate at West Point, Colonel Scammon had been aide-de-camp to General Scott in the Mexican War, and had taught in a Cincinnati college until his appointment to the Twenty-Third Ohio. In this regiment were two men who later became prominent in American history, Major Rutherford B. Hayes and Private William McKinley.

On September 10 the army at Big Birch Mountain was awakened by reveille at three o'clock and within an hour resumed the march southward. Delayed by a bridge destroyed by the Confederates, the column entered Summersville four hours later. Within a five-hour march from the Confederates on the Gauley, Rosecrans' first task was to determine Floyd's strength and location. Advancing from Sutton, Rosecrans received a message from General Cox who reassured him that Floyd was in the vicinity of Cross Lanes. From local citizens and two Confederates captured at Summersville, Rosecrans learned that Floyd was strongly entrenched and confident of holding his position at Carnifex Ferry.

From Summersville the army marched to an intersection about one mile from Cross Lanes where a small road led to the ferry. After resting the men, closing up the ranks, and reconnoitering the area, Rosecrans proceeded with the First Brigade toward the ferry. A detachment of the Twenty-Eighth, left to guard Cross Lanes, later joined the advance. About a mile from the recently

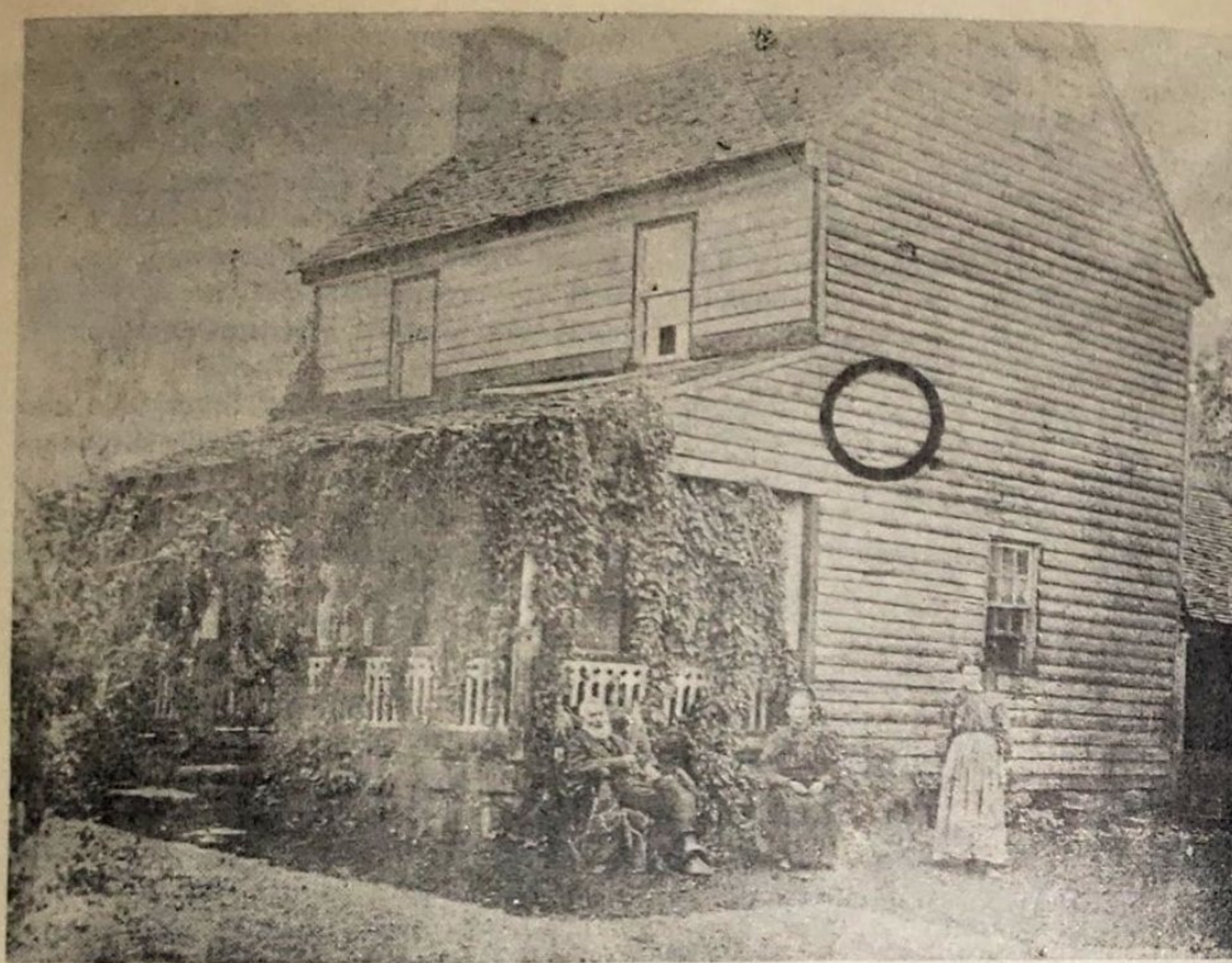
abandoned camp of the Fiftieth Virginia, Rosecrans halted the brigade while he and Benham went to the crest of a hill to reconnoiter. Here he instructed Benham to proceed toward the Confederate position with his leading regiment, the Tenth Ohio commanded by Colonel Lytle. Benham was ordered to reconnoiter the Confederate line closely, but to avoid a general engagement.

About three o'clock the Tenth Ohio entered the abandoned camp. While disposing of property left here by the Fiftieth Virginia, Benham was informed by advance scouts of the Confederate entrenchments a short distance ahead. Deploying skirmishers to the front and on either side of the road, Benham rushed the regiment through the woods and halted at the edge of a cornfield. Here the regiment was greeted by a heavy volley of musket fire, followed immediately by round shot and canister from the batteries in full view across the open space. This initial fire wounded several men and caused the ranks to break, although most of the Confederate shells tore into the trees above them. After regrouping his men, Benham ordered up his artillery and the Twelfth and Thirteenth regiments.

Rosecrans sent up Benham's artillery from the abandoned camp, and ordered the Twelfth Ohio to proceed toward the Confederate right along a well-beaten path which paralleled the main road. Colonel Smith led the Thirteenth into the woods on the opposite side of the road, feeling that the Confederates were attacking Benham's right. As he proceeded toward the front, Rosecrans ordered the Second and Third

brigades to advance. Most of his staff felt that the Confederate position should be studied first, allowing time for the troops to rest after the 16-mile march from Big Birch. Yet Benham's involvement and his urgent call for reinforcements induced Rosecrans to direct an ill-advised and poorly coordinated assault.

Meanwhile, Benham studied the Confederate line and determined the right flank to be the weak point. After placing his artillery,



The Pattleson House. Located between Union and Confederate lines during the battle of Carnifex Ferry, this farm house (above) was struck by several stray shots, the holes from which can still be seen in this picture (in circle). At left, the Pattleson house as it appears today, after restoration to its original condition. The house serves as a museum, containing civil war items of the area and a large map of the battle area indicating both Union and Confederate lines and movements.

which soon disrupted the Confederate fire. Benham ordered the Twelfth and Thirteenth to probe the Confederate right. Unable to contact the Twelfth, Colonel Smith led eight companies of the Thirteenth into "Pierson Hollow," a deep ravine across the road from Benham's left. Here he was joined by four companies of the Twelfth under Lieutenant Colonel Carr B. White. Ascending the eastern slope of the ravine to the crest of the hill, the Union column opened a sustained fire which drove the Forty-Fifth Virginia from the extremities of the line. Smith then returned, reporting that he could turn the right flank if he were reinforced.

About four o'clock Colonel Lytle led part of the Tenth Ohio across the open space to storm the Confederate batteries. Half of his regiment failed to hear the order. With the remainder Lytle advanced to within pistol shot of the batteries when he was pinned down by a withering musket fire. In this daring charge both the bearer of the National colors, Sergeant Daniel O'Conner, and the bearer of the Ohio colors, Sergeant Michael Fitzgibbons, fell wounded. Lytle ordered the troops to retreat after he had fallen wounded from his horse and several of his men were killed. (Lytle was spared to die two years later while trying to stop a break in Rosecrans' lines at Chickamauga.) The commander of the Twelfth Ohio, Colonel Lowe, was killed while attempting a charge across the cornfield against the Confederate left flank.

Upon his return, Smith found Rosecrans at the front to direct the attack. Declining Benham's offer to lead an assault on the Confederate weak flank, Rosecrans ordered Smith to do so with the support of the Twenty-Eighth Ohio and four companies each of the Twenty-Third and Twelfth. Smith was ordered to return to the ravine and wait until sunset to attack. Rosecrans ordered Colonel McCook to bring up the Second Brigade to launch a simultaneous attack on the center. With Rosecrans' ad-

jutant to guide them, McCook advanced the Ninth, Twenty-Eighth, and Forty-Seventh Ohio regiments into the woods opposite the Confederate center. About seven o'clock the Twenty-Eighth was ordered to Smith's column. At the same time the Third Brigade advanced as reserves to a position behind the Second Brigade.

After moving through the heavy undergrowth on the eastern slope of the ravine to the crest of the hill, Smith determined the assault to be impractical because of darkness and confusion among his units. The detachment under Major Hayes had advanced with only the setting sun and the sound of musket fire to guide them. Part of his detachment moved gropingly along the steep hillside above the river toward the extreme right of the Confederate line, while another segment crossed in front of the main column and was almost mistaken for Confederates. The commander of the Twenty-Eighth, Colonel Augustus Moor, informed Smith that his regiment could not be brought up before midnight. Smith then ordered the column to retire quietly to its former position. Retreating in parallel lines, the Thirteenth and Twenty-Eighth thought each other to be the enemy. A chance shot touched off an exchange which resulted in about 30 casualties.

Rosecrans learned of Smith's return and that the troops were too tired to make the attack on the center. Upon the advice of his staff, Rosecrans ordered the brigades to return to the site of the former camp of the Fiftieth Virginia. Leaving a detachment to guard the road at the cornfield, Rosecrans was busy until two o'clock the next morning arranging the brigades for a renewal of the attack. He then retired to a hayloft, only to be awakened before dawn to find that the Confederates had escaped across the Gauley.

At eight o'clock that night, Floyd dispatched an order to Wise instructing him to leave one regiment to hold Hawk's Nest and to rush the remainder of his troops to Camp Gauley. Slightly wounded in the right

ever, despite the commendations, his withdrawal from Carnifex Ferry eastward was a shattering blow to the Confederates in the Valley, who took little stock in his assurance that he was at Meadow Bluff, "not in retreat, but to fight."

General Wise was recalled to Richmond and additional forces were ordered to Floyd. A few weeks later Floyd moved up the south side of New River and made an attempt to hold Cotton Hill, opposite Gauley Bridge. However, his threat to the Union positions in the Valley was never again so great as that posed by his occupation of Carnifex

Ferry. Of greater significance, the failure of his campaign freed a large part of the Valley to participate in the new statehood movement.

For General Rosecrans the battle at Carnifex Ferry was but another stepping stone to greater responsibilities and commands. Having fulfilled his promise to General McClellan to prevent the Confederates from regaining this area, Rosecrans thereby earned the confidence of Lincoln's General-in-Chief, Winfield Scott, who said of him: "You are a soldier, a scientific general, and confidence is reposed in your judgment and discretion, as well as in your zeal and valor."

CARNIFEX FERRY



DR. DALLAS B. SHAFFER

