

**THE BATTLE OF
CEDAR CREEK,
OCTOBER 19, 1864**

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649263196

The Battle of Cedar Creek, October 19, 1864 by B. W. Crowninshield

Except for use in any review, the reproduction or utilisation of this work in whole or in part in any form by any electronic, mechanical or other means, now known or hereafter invented, including xerography, photocopying and recording, or in any information storage or retrieval system, is forbidden without the permission of the publisher, Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd, PO Box 1576 Collingwood, Victoria 3066 Australia.

All rights reserved.

Edited by Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd.
Cover @ 2017

This book is sold subject to the condition that it shall not, by way of trade or otherwise, be lent, re-sold, hired out, or otherwise circulated without the publisher's prior consent in any form or binding or cover other than that in which it is published and without a similar condition including this condition being imposed on the subsequent purchaser.

www.triestepublishing.com

B. W. CROWNINSHIELD

**THE BATTLE OF
CEDAR CREEK,
OCTOBER 19, 1864**

THE
BATTLE OF CEDAR CREEK

OCTOBER 19, 1864

A PAPER READ BEFORE THE MASSACHUSETTS MILITARY HISTORICAL
SOCIETY, DECEMBER 8, 1879

Benjamin William^{BY}
COL. B. W. CROWNINSHIELD

CAMBRIDGE
Printed at the *Riverside Press*
1879

CEDAR CREEK.

THIS battle was the last of the war for the possession of the Shenandoah Valley. During the four years from 1861 to 1865, each year brought its Shenandoah Valley campaign, and some years there were several. What happened in 1864 is a fair illustration of the activity of these four years' campaigns, for all were lively: the advance of Hunter to Lynchburg (which he failed to capture) in June; his retreat, chased by Early up to the fortifications of Washington, in July; the pursuit of Early via Snicker's Gap by the Sixth Corps; Early's raid across the Potomac and burning of Chambersburg in retaliation for Hunter's destruction of dwelling-houses. Then, on Sheridan's taking command of the Middle Military Division (which included the valley) in August, Early was pushed back to Fisher's Hill; when, on being reinforced by Anderson's division of Longstreet's corps and by Fitzhugh Lee's division of cavalry, which came up by way of Chester Gap and Front Royal, he pushed Sheridan back to Halltown, near Harper's Ferry, only in turn to be driven back to Winchester. September 19th the battle of Winchester sent Early in haste to Fisher's Hill, from which position, three

days afterwards, he was pursued in complete rout to Waynesboro and Staunton. Sheridan desolated the upper part of the valley and retired to Cedar Creek in October (and on the way the cavalry had a fight, in which Rosser was pursued twenty-eight miles up to Mount Jackson). Then came the battle of Cedar Creek, after which, as far as the main body of the army was concerned, except a few reconnaissances, came a quiet, not broken until February, when, on Sheridan's march to join Grant, the balance of Early's command was captured, and the valley became peaceful, only because for the rebels almost nobody was left to fight but Jubal himself. But he, with his strange activity, betook himself across the mountains of the Blue Ridge, and organized himself into an independent cavalry command, which a few days afterward was run into and dispersed; upon which the "bad old man" (as General Lee is said to have called him) was relieved from command by Lee, and retired to Lynchburg, being succeeded by Echols.

What was there peculiar in the valley that it should afford such a continuous theatre for action? Many things. Looking at the map of the Southern States, you will notice that from the Potomac River to Atlanta, Georgia, there is only one avenue, one means of communication, one pass from west to east, that, namely, from Kentucky and Tennessee (whose two roads unite at Knoxville) to Virginia by the line of road called the Virginia and Tennessee Air Line. This line runs through a country between Knoxville and Richmond, never visited by our troops, — a rich country, with rich valleys branching out from it. Wa-

tered by the James and its branches, and supplied with railroad and canal, abounding in coal and iron and wheat and forage, it was the natural source of supply for Lee's army. At Lynchburg were arsenals and foundries and manufactories, which supplied Lee with clothing and arms; and Lynchburg in the north was to the rebel armies what Atlanta was in the south. Connecting with this valley from the north was the Shenandoah Valley, full of grain and forage, and largely populated by a curious people of German origin, the Dunkards and Mennonites, who like the Quakers were non-resistants, and during all the war had managed to be non-combatants. They tilled the land and raised crops, which became, in the general neglect of such things in the South on account of the war, constantly more necessary to Lee's army. Each year about the time the crops ripened a rebel force went down the valley to secure and harvest them.

But apart from this the valley had other values. Towards the east numerous gaps opened from the valley to Eastern Virginia, with a system of roads leading towards Richmond, and through Rockfish Gap was a railroad to Staunton from the main line running north from Richmond. The valley itself had three railroads. The Baltimore and Ohio, across the lower part, near to and parallel with the Potomac, connected Baltimore and Washington with the West. This road is one of the largest corporations in the United States, and during the war was of the greatest use in bringing troops and supplies from the West. It was frequently raided upon by the rebels, and at times rendered useless by the destruction of the

iron bridge at Harper's Ferry, and other bridges. Though useful, it was not a necessity to us, as there were several other lines of railroad further north which connected the East with the West. A branch road connected Harper's Ferry with Winchester, and another Alexandria, via Manassas Gap, with Front Royal, and thence up the main valley to Mount Jackson. The latter was never of much use to the rebels, as it did not connect with their railroad system.

But the great feature in the way of transportation was the valley pike, a well-graded, well-drained, and macadamized broad road, leading from Martinsburg on the line of the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad, via Winchester, Strasburg, etc., to Staunton. This road had good feeders (several macadamized) running through the gaps into Eastern Virginia and all south of Front Royal towards Richmond. By the valley pike an army, in all weathers and seasons of the year, could march at great speed, and except in very wet seasons in many parallel columns, with baggage and artillery up. This was always the chosen route for the rebel armies to march by to invade Pennsylvania and Maryland. No large bridges spanned the rivers and creeks it crossed, so that it was always ready for the march of troops and trains.

The valley, being so well cultivated, was an open country generally, admirably adapted for fighting, with large fields, and woods pretty clear of underbrush. Troops, in good weather, could march in any direction, independent of roads, and the streams were fordable every few miles, even the Shenandoah itself. As the principal idea of all the Virginia campaigns was to

cover Washington securely, in the first place, and as the valley was the high road thereto, in the earlier campaigns attempts were made to fortify the valley and interrupt the pike, the "race-track of armies," as one writer has aptly called it, by earth-works and forts at important points. At Strasburg is an earth-work called Fort Banks; at Winchester are several detached forts on the hills, erected by Milroy. All the fortification, however, served only to supply the rebels, who in their invasions of the valley never, until in Sheridan's time, failed to defeat our armies, with guns of position as well as field-pieces, as attempts at permanent occupation gave them larger dépôts of supplies to capture. It really seemed as if there were something fatal to our arms and uncanny in the valley.

Whenever our armies advanced beyond Winchester, their left flank became exposed to any force Lee chose to detach from his army in Eastern Virginia and send through the gaps into the valley, and the roads were so good that Jackson's "foot cavalry," as they got to be called, generally effected a surprise on our troops. It was this corps that was always detached, and their success was so uniform that they might be pardoned for thinking themselves invincible when in that part of Virginia. The cavalry of Lee's army was largely recruited there, and was generally sent there to winter, so that every trooper was perfectly familiar with all the roads. Admirable roads facilitated quick marches, and the advance of our troops south, of the rebels north, in the valley, necessitated always a counter movement by the threatened party.

We find, then, Early at Fisher's Hill October 13th, to which place he followed, after Sheridan's retreat from Staunton, with an army which, though lately twice defeated with great loss of men and guns, was yet composed entirely of veteran soldiers, to whom all the battles of the valley were household words and names in which until Sheridan's advent they could take pride. His cavalry had in great part had its success there also under Ashby in the beginning of the war. The last year had been for his cavalry a cruel season. They had been defeated almost uniformly. Their leader had been changed, but Rosser, "the saviour of the valley," as some of his own people called him in anticipation when on his way to the front, was now shorn of guns, glory, and saviourship.

Singularly enough Sheridan's army contained many troops who had had unfortunate experience in the valley fighting the very men who now stood opposite. Part of the Nineteenth Corps was in Banks's army in the valley in 1862, while the third division, Sixth Corps, were Milroy's old men, and had helped build the forts by Winchester.

To Early and his men, then, the valley was a scene of former glory, as it was to many of our men of loss and disgrace. To most of our generals it was new ground.

When Sheridan withdrew down the valley to the position of Cedar Creek, he had been followed cautiously by all Early's army except the valiant Rosser, and he had good reason to regret his temerity. It certainly was not presumptuous to imagine that Early had had his bellyful of fighting, and would now con-