

CHAPTER VI.  

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On the 9th of May, 1864. Sheridan began his raid around Richmond. Colonel Johnson had gone on a scout toward Yorktown and left Lieutenant-Colonel Ridgely Brown in camp in command of parts of four companies. On the afternoon of that day Colonel Brown received information that a portion of the enemy's cavalry were raiding on the rear of Lee's army, and had cut the railroad and destroyed the cars and provisions accumulated at some point above Hanover Court House. He immediately assembled his little command of one hundred and fifty sabres and set out to ascertain the truth of the report. Shortly after passing Hanover Junction the gleam of camp fires in the distance (it was just after dark) along the line of railway in his front seemed to confirm the rumor. The battalion pushed on at a trot, taking the usual precaution to throw out an advance guard and flankers, and about 11 o'clock P. M. arrived at a point about a mile from Beaver Dam, when it became evident that they were in close proximity to a large force that was taking no pains to conceal their presence. The battalion was halted, and Colonel Brown himself dismounted and went ahead on foot to reconnoiter. He found the enemy in great glee, laughing and shouting at the top of their voices, whilst at the same time they were busily engaged in burning railroad ties, and generally seemed to feel the existence of an enemy to be an absurdity. So close did Colonel Brown get to them that he came near surprising a party in a cut. After having taken a good view, he quietly returned to his command, which had been silently awaiting him, and dismounting all the men that could be spared, amounting to some eighty or ninety, he advanced on the railroad. Silently the little band crept on, carbine advanced, and ready to begin the work of death at an instant's warning. Not a word was spoken, and the men held their breath in anxious expectation, until right upon the bank of the railroad, when a whispered exclamation announced that the enemy had gone. Not far, though, for they could be plainly heard a short distance up the road.

The skirmish party was then formed in column, and moved to the left toward the county road, not a hundred yards distant, with the intention to again deploy and advance until the enemy was found. Not half the column had crossed the fence which bounded the road when there was a challenge and shot almost simultaneous. followed by a volley from both sides. In the darkness, blinded by the fires the enemy had lighted, the head of the column had come suddenly upon a Federal picket at a point which Colonel Brown, not half an hour before, had found entirely unguarded ; but during his absence they had finished their work and gone to bed, posting pickets in the meantime, from habit more than anything