

COMPANY K, FIRST VIRGINIA CAVALRY.



AMONG the first, if not the very first, Maryland cavalry organizations effected in Virginia was Company M, First Virginia Cavalry. Although it was late in the war transferred to the First Maryland Cavalry, so distinguished had been its services prior to its transfer that the author deems it but just that it should have a separate chapter in this book.

This company was organized at Leesburg, Virginia, on May 14, 1861, and comprised seventy-five fine young men, mostly from the Western Shore counties, and every man a horseman.

In the selection of officers George R. Gaither was elected Captain, George Howard First Lieutenant, and Samuel W. Dorsey Second Lieutenant.

At this early stage of the war there was but little organization in the cavalry arm of the service, and the different companies were often operated separately, and in many instances they moved when and where they pleased.

Captain Gaither's company was not altogether an exception, and it was not even mustered into the service of the Government until several months after its organization.

The first service the company did was to picket at Edward's Ferry, on the Potomac River, at which place and at Leesburg it remained until about the 15th of June, 1861, when the company was sent to Winchester and reported to Colonel Angus McDonald, with whom it marched to Romney, having been united with Captain Turner Ashby's company. McDonald scouted and picketed in the vicinity of Romney until July 15, when he returned to Winchester with his command, and reported to General Joseph E. Johnston, then commanding an army at that place of about ten thousand men.

On July 18, when General Johnston started from Winchester to the relief of Beauregard, who had been attacked at Manassas, Captain Gaither was ordered to Berryville with his company, there to remain until the last of the infantry had crossed the Shenandoah River, when he was to report to Colonel J. E. B. Stuart, in command of the First Virginia Cavalry, and Captain Gaither joined Colonel Stuart at Piedmont, and then the company became known as Company M. Colonel Stuart having so designated it.

The First Virginia reached Manassas at noon of July 21, and took a conspicuous part in the battle fought that day and in the subsequent pursuit of the Federal Army.