

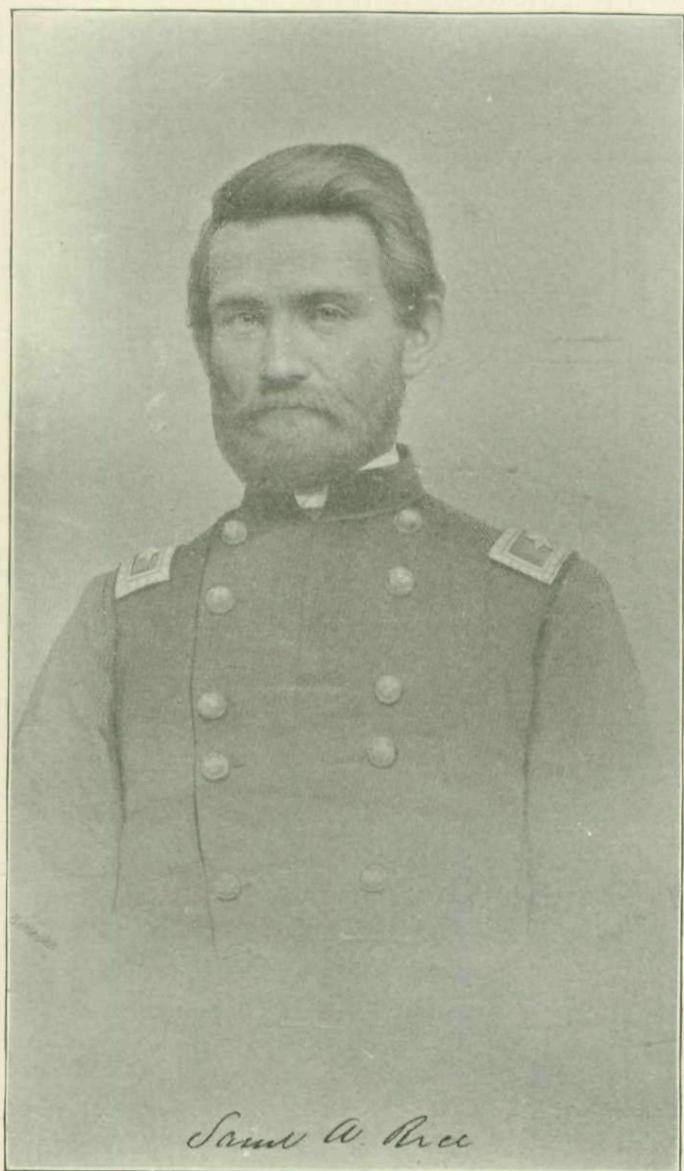
## GENERAL SAMUEL A. RICE AT JENKINS' FERRY.

BY JOHN F. LACEY.

Brigadier General Samuel Allen Rice was the only general officer from the State of Iowa who died of wounds received in battle. He fell at the age of thirty-six, in the beginning of a career already great. He was a self-made man, as the term is generally understood. By his own efforts he acquired a collegiate education and prepared himself for that success in life which in America so often rewards men of his class. He was in his youth a steam-boat pilot on the Ohio and Mississippi, and his earnings in this employment were expended in obtaining a classical and mathematical education at Union College. It is hard to tell how much of his rapid success in military life was afterwards due to the vigils and training of the pilot. It takes a memory of exceptional cultivation and strength to follow the currents and shallows of the mighty streams which he learned to navigate. At that time no government lights by night, or land marks by day, aided the pilot. The frequent changes of the channel kept him ever alert.

The training of sight, hearing, and memory which fitted General Rice for a skillful and successful pilot was supplemented with a full collegiate course, and upon graduation he came to Iowa to follow his profession. His rise was rapid, and his reputation soon became as wide as his state, and he was elected to the responsible position of Attorney General at the early age of twenty-eight.

With his wife and little children around him he hesitated at the beginning of the war to follow his inclinations and sense of duty into the field; but in the great enlistments of 1862 he was chosen by Governor Kirkwood as



*Saml A. Rice*

Colonel of the 33rd Iowa, one of the newly organized regiments.

It is not my purpose to write the life of General Rice, nor a history of the battle of Jenkins' Ferry, but to give a sketch of the man and of the occasion that, at the same time, ended his career and crowned it with glory. No soldier in the Union Army in only two years time accomplished more or won greater distinction. Commissioned in July, 1862, he was followed to the grave in July, 1864. Those were two years when history traveled with electric speed. When he was appointed Colonel of a regiment of new recruits he had never looked into a book of tactics. With an old Springfield rifle in his office he learned the manual of arms and the facings, practicing with a good drill-master until he could handle his gun with the skill of an old regular army sergeant. The book of tactics was ever in his pocket, and the drill of the company, the regiment, and finally the brigade and division, became as familiar to him as if he had commenced life as a cadet at West Point. It did not take him long to learn. Constant vigilance and study, the never failing attention to the material needs of his men, his strict discipline, invariable courtesy and kindness to all, and when the opportunity came, his cool heroism in battle, won him the respect of every man in his regiment, brigade and division, and finally the admiration of the whole army with which he served.

At Helena his first experience in defending an entrenched fortress against the gallant and desperate assault of Generals Holmes and Price won for him the stars of a Brigadier General.

His subsequent experience in campaigns in the field prepared him for the last trying hours that I have chosen to describe in this sketch.

Steele's army left Little Rock March 23, and was at Camden April 25, 1864. His attempted cooperation with

Banks had failed, for Pleasant Hill had been fought and lost before Steele could form a junction with the Red River Army. A return to Little Rock became imperative, but it was delayed at Camden at request of Banks, who believed that he was threatened with Kirby Smith's whole army following in his rear. In fact Smith's victorious infantry, fresh from his successes on the Red River, were hurrying in hot haste to crush Steele before the Army of Arkansas could regain the line of the Arkansas river at Little Rock.

The defeat of one brigade of Steele's army at Poison Springs, and the capture of General Drake's brigade and supply train at Mark's Mills, rendered retreat imperative, and on the night of April 26th after tattoo and as taps were sounded, the pickets were drawn in and the army crossed the Ouachita, the enemy being unaware of the movement until daylight next morning. A pontoon bridge built of boat gunnels and timbers was hastily built constructed by the Confederates, and Smith's army commenced the pursuit with Steele twelve hours in the lead. On the afternoon of the 29th the rebel cavalry under Marmaduke attacked the rear of the retreating army. Steele had made a shrewd movement to the right so as to cross the Saline at Jenkins' Ferry, thus placing that river behind him one day earlier than he could hope to do if he took the direct road to Little Rock by way of Benton. He apprehended what proved to be the fact, that a force of rebel cavalry was waiting for him on the Benton road. This move upon the chess board of war saved his army, and gave him the bloody morass of the Saline bottom in which to turn at bay. Had he gone forward on the Benton road he would have met Fagan's cavalry who would have held him in the open country until Kirby Smith closed up upon the rear. No one in Steele's army knew that the pursuers were anything but the Marmaduke and Shelby cavalry, which had already been hanging on front, flank and rear

since the first of April, and when the night of April 29th came down in rain and gloom, the army was in the act of crossing wagons, artillery and cavalry as rapidly as possible over the pontoon bridge to the hill on the eastern side.

Had the rain-storm delayed a few hours the river would have been crossed and the Union Army would have been in a place of safety.

An attack in the rear by a formidable division of cavalry was expected in the morning, but no one of the Federal Army knew that all the way from Princeton to our picket-lines the troops of Kirby Smith were marching through the darkness in overwhelming force. At midnight Church-ill left Princeton, following the muddy trail that Steele had passed over the evening before. Parsons was six miles north of Princeton, and started with his division, on the same road. Walker's division, with Scurry's, Randall's and Waul's brigades, broke camp at 2:20 A. M., and marched in the same direction. Marmaduke's cavalry had harrassed the Federal rear the afternoon of the 29th and were ready to renew the contest at daybreak. Not suspecting this gathering storm of Confederate Infantry, Steele expected a battle next morning with the enemy's cavalry which he thought would attack the rear of his column in force, as it was crossing the river. It was a fearful night. Lightning flashed, thunder rolled and rumbled, rain poured down in torrents and the river bottom speedily became a sea of mud, rendering the passage of the wagons, artillery and cavalry extremely slow.

It was impossible to pass the river with the whole army in the night, and the rebels were known to be already face to face with our rear guard upon the hills overlooking the river bottom. Steele was an old soldier who had gone direct from West Point to Mexico and had spent his life in arms. He was a classmate of Grant and Sherman, and had won their confidence at Vicksburg. He

knew Rice's brief experience, but had seen him tried so often that he relied upon him as implicitly as if the volunteer General had been bred like Hannibal, in camp and field. With Rice at the point of danger Steele felt secure.

In the little log cabin of the widow Jenkins the commanding General and his staff stood at 2 o'clock in the morning, seeking shelter from the pelting rain. The dim light of a single tallow candle only deepened the effect of the gloom without. The troops stood or sat in the woods, protecting themselves as best they could with their ponchos. General Rice was sent for to go to headquarters. Steele said to him, "General, we are sure to have an attack upon our rear in the morning, and I look to you to hold the enemy in check with your brigade until the remainder of the army can cross the pontoon bridge." This Rice promised to do, and his preparations were speedily made.

But, while waiting in that little cabin, standing upon its muddy puncheon floor, discussing the issues of the next morning, neither Rice nor Steele for a moment realized the magnitude of the storm that was gathering along the Princeton road ready to burst upon them with the break of day. Thus it is with battles. Not often do the opposing commanders know fully the position or strength of their foes. But in this campaign the Confederate operations had been so completely shrouded and covered by the movements of their large force of cavalry, and communication with Banks was so completely cut off, that no one could have guessed that Kirby Smith had abandoned the Red River, leaving only a small force of cavalry to follow Banks on his retreat. In fact the Confederate General had planned and rapidly executed one of those brilliant movements upon short inside lines which so often resulted in great successes in the campaigns in Virginia. It was well devised and skillfully executed, and had the retreating army been brought to bay in the open country at a place where superior num-

bers could have been made available it would have resulted in assured success. There was one spot between Camden and Little Rock where the Union Army could best resist the largely superior forces of the foe, and that was at the crossing of the Saline. There was one part of the valley within our lines where the defense of the next morning could be best made. Rice promptly chose that particular place. There he saved the army, and there he lost his life.

The retreat had been a severe one. Coffee happened to be plenty, but food was scarce, and parched corn and coffee were the only diet of the men. Blankets and extra clothing were torn to shreds and dropped by the wayside as the army lightened its burdens for its long and hungry journey.

The enemy were following, and they, too, were stripped for the race and followed upon light diet. They were elated with success, but many of them had met the same troops before at Helena and in the campaigns in Arkansas, and they knew their foe. The night march from Princeton and then the descent into the dark valley, where in the rain and gloom the Union army were waiting for the attack, excited the liveliest emotions on the part of the Confederates, who knew that death had an appointment there for many of them. To overtake Steele in the open country was the wish of his enemies, for there the maneuvers of a superior force would be of great advantage. All night long the struggle to get the train, artillery and cavalry across the turbid river continued, and all night long the march of the pursuers was kept up; and when day broke the men who were about to attack and those who were to defend were alike wet, hungry, gloomy, sullen and desperate. Such a night robbed life of its charms and death of its terrors.

General Rice selected the place to make his stand behind an open field in which the timber had been deadened.

Coxe's Creek was on his right flank, a swamp rapidly growing deeper on the left, and he knew that his brigade could do much in such a position against a superior force. And thus it happened that, though only commanding a brigade of Salomon's division, Rice had practically given to him the immediate management of the forces in the battle on the Union side. Having formed his line with the 29th Iowa, 9th Wisconsin and 50th Indiana, he brought back the 33rd Iowa from the hill where they had stood guard through the night, and with his brigade in line he was ready to make the defence that he had promised. He did not have long to wait.

The battle began with suprising suddenness and desperation. Marmaduke opened the ball, not as cavalry usually do, but with that confidence and assurance which distinguishes that arm of the service when strengthened and supported by masses of infantry. As the battle raged, re-enforcements were sent from the direction of the river to report to Rice, and he placed the new troops in line as they came.

The left flank was partially turned by the enemy and re-enforcements coming forward, the gap was filled up to the swamp on the left; a few of the enemy were taken prisoners, who disclosed for the first time the fact that General Kirby Smith's whole trans-Mississippi Confederate army was engaged. Not only were the formidable cavalry of Marmaduke in the fray, but Price, Walker, Parsons, and Churchill were there with their infantry against the Union forces. Every soldier under Rice knew that if the two blue lines that reached from the creek to the swamp should waver or break, defeat with captivity or death would follow. It was a vital moment.

There were many turning points in the wavering lines of success and failure, of advance and retreat, from the Potomac to the Red River, which attended the progress of the war. Pleasant Hill marked the turn of the invading tide

of the Union army in Texas, but the returning flow of rebellion again ebbed from the bloody repulse of Jenkins' Ferry; and out of that now silent valley the form of Rice still rises in our minds after thirty years as the chief figure of one of the turning points in history.

Never was an army in greater peril. Never was an army saved by more heroic endurance and resolute bravery. On the bloody field of Essling, with the swollen Danube at their backs, Napoleon's soldiers stood waiting for night, and no command was heard but the oft-repeated "close up," as shot after shot made a gap in the ranks. So the line of the Army of Arkansas remained on that fearful day by the dark Saline river. It was an obstinate contest. Ankle deep in mud the combatants stood for six hours, shooting each other down in their tracks, and filling the morass with the dead and dying.

The roll of honor is a long one, and I feel tempted here to turn aside and recount the many deeds of valor performed on that memorable field. But I must refrain, for it is with Rice, the chief spirit of the scene, that we are dealing. He dominated the battle; around him it raged; he was the central figure; his inspiring example and unflinching bravery set the example that the whole army was in a mood to follow. Rice seemed to love the heat of battle. Danger stimulated him. He never lost his head. Mounted on his roan horse that day, he moved along the lines carrying confidence wherever he appeared. His coolness and personal presence cheered his men at all points of the line.

I will not in this article attempt to enumerate the individual deeds of bravery of others. The length of the space to be occupied forbids, and to select a few might seem to detract from others who were equally deserving; but the living and the dead may yield alike to the gallant Rice as the master spirit of the field. Every one of his

comrades in honest pride may say: "I fought with Rice at Jenkins' Ferry."

The repeated assaults of the enemy were brave and impetuous. They did honor to their blood and lineage in the gallantry of their deeds in their mistaken cause. The pall of smoke, mingled with the drizzling rain, the dark forest and the gloomy swamp, the constant roar of musketry, the repeated assaults of fresh troops, as one division followed another in the attack, the position of the men, many of them knee-deep in mud, with a rapidly rising river in their rear, all combined to make the Union troops realize their desperate situation; and every man seemed to feel that our line could not be broken without ruin to all, and that not a gap must be made in it except by death. When they learned that Kirby Smith's army was in the field, Steele and Salomon supported Rice with all the troops that could be sent to the front, for the rear of the army had become its front. Cavalrymen brought forward boxes of cartridges from the wagons and distributed them along the line, and fresh ammunition was the most effective reinforcement that could have been sent.

Marmaduke and his division made the first attack, followed by Churchill and Parsons' divisions in succession. Each attack had been successively repulsed. After steady and fierce fighting the battle slackened and Parsons' troops withdrew. Only desultory firing followed for a few minutes, and an order came from Steele, through Salomon, to fall back towards the river. Rice, with his quick intuition, and being at the very front, realized the danger of attempting then to obey this premature order. The time to retire had not arrived. The only safety lay in holding the line of defense. He said to his staff: "I am ordered to fall back; such a movement at this time would be disastrous, and as I am here on the ground and understand the situation, and there is nothing in the order as to how I shall retreat, I will first advance my whole line and at-



John Lacey  
A. Aguil.

tack the enemy, driving him back, before executing the order to retire. This is the only safe way to carry out the order. If we drive them a little way, they will let us fall back unmolested." He gave orders to have the regiments in front exchange places with the rear line, as the ammunition of the front line was nearly exhausted, and the line in the rear had just refilled their boxes. This movement was executed, and as he was about to give the order to advance, Walker, with his Texas division, came thundering down upon him, like a hurricane, and the battle was renewed with the greatest fury along the whole line. In the early part of this last attack a minie ball struck General Rice in the right foot, shattering it and driving his spur buckle into the body of the foot. The writer of this article assisted the wounded General from the field. In the dense smoke and noise of this last assault the wounding of Rice was known to but few of his men. Colonel Salomon, of the 9th Wisconsin, took his place, the attack was continued, the defense was stubbornly maintained until Walker was repulsed and the battle was ended. Then the order to cross the river was again renewed, and the bloody, but barren field was left to be taken into possession by the Confederates.

The struggle for life resulted in all the advantages of a victory to the Union cause. The Federal army pursued its way unopposed to the defenses of Little Rock; the crippled and exhausted army of Kirby Smith returned, broken and dispirited, to its former lines. General Rice was carried to his home in Iowa where his great heart soon ceased to beat, and in his own loved state he sleeps beneath a marble shaft "erected to his honor by the soldiers of Rice's brigade."

---

In the early part of the fight Gov. Crawford, with his 2d Kansas colored regiment, came forward and reported to Rice. The 29th Iowa was nearly out of ammunition and

Rice desired to relieve them with the 2d Kansas. The hail of bullets was severe, and General Rice had never seen a black regiment under fire. "Do you think your men will stand so hot a fire?" said Rice. Colonel Crawford said: "Try them, they will stand where any men will," and they passed through the lines of the 29th Iowa and were soon loading and firing with great effect. Very soon two guns of Ruffner's Confederate Missouri Battery were brought up in front of the colored regiment and commenced firing. An immediate charge was made by the 2d Kansas and 29th Iowa, and in a few minutes the guns were brought back in triumph. The whitened bones of eighteen horses still mark the spot where this splendid charge was made.

As an illustration of the high regard in which General Rice was held by every member of his command, I will relate an incident connected with the last battle. Our mules were exhausted and starved, and many of our wagons were burned to keep them from falling into the hands of the enemy, and amongst them was the one carrying the books and the baggage of the brigade headquarters. The writer had a valise in the wagon containing clothing and other articles which he supposed was burned with the rest. A few days after our return to Little Rock an ambulance driver of the 50th Indiana met me in the street and said he had brought my valise to the city, and asked where he should leave it. Said he: "I saw it lying in the mud near the burning headquarters wagon; it was marked with your name, and I knew that it belonged to one of Gen. Rice's staff. I thought if I could do anything for General Rice, or for any man connected with him, that it was a pleasure and a duty to do so." General Rice's pale face lit up with a smile when he was told of the courtesy that I had thus received by reason of the honor of service by his side. "God bless the whole brigade," he said.

One of General Rice's rules on the march was to halt his brigade just as they were approaching camp, close up the ranks and have his musicians strike up some lively air, and come into camp to the step, and in close marching order. This gave an individuality to the brigade which attracted the attention of the whole army. They never came in straggling. The day of the battle of Terre Noir, where Rice had fought all day defending the wagon train from the attacks of General Jo. Shelby, his brigade did not get into camp until long after dark. They were weary and hungry, but they closed up, the music started up as if there had been but an ordinary day's march, and as the brigade filed into camp the cheers of the whole army greeted them and their leader.

---

A small circumstance often produces great consequences. General Rice was accustomed to wear his spur with the buckle on the side of the foot next to the flank of his horse. The day before the battle this trivial matter attracted his attention, as he noticed his staff officers wore their buckles fastened on the other side of the foot. He spoke of it and said he believed he had worn his spurs wrong, and sat down on a log and changed them. Next day the fatal bullet struck the brass buckle and carried it into the middle of his foot, where it remained undiscovered for a week, contributing to, if it did not cause, the blood poison which ensued and from which he died.

---

Twenty-two years after the battle a party of General Rice's comrades revisited the scene of his glory, and cut a letter "R" upon a large tree at the place where he received his fatal wound. A monument ought to be erected there to Rice and the gallant men who fell with him defending the country's flag. The remains of those who fell had been dug up and transferred to the National Cemetery at Little Rock, where their graves are marked "Unknown,"

and over their resting place flies the Nation's flag from sunrise to sunset.

General Rice was made a Major-General by brevet after his death, in recognition of his services in the Camden campaign.

---

THE TWENTY-FOURTH IOWA VOLUNTEERS.  
FROM WINCHESTER TO DAVENPORT.

BY CHAS. L. LONGLEY.

(Concluding article.)

The paper published in the October ANNALS left the Twenty-fourth Iowa at Winchester, West Virginia, under orders to take the cars in the early morning of January 6th, 1865, for some unknown destination. But before actual departure from that locality it is desired to correct the statement that Camp Russell was named for the gallant officer "killed in the final charge at Cedar Creek." General Russell fell at the battle of Winchester, September 17th, 1864, while General Lowell gave his life in the final struggle at Cedar Creek. The familiar association of the two names is doubtless responsible for the inadvertence.

After over two years in active service the men of the Twenty-fourth now considered themselves veteran soldiers; nevertheless a wholly unexpected order to move, in the dead of winter, from comfortable quarters only just completed was not received with complete resignation. It is true the order was promptly obeyed, but obedience was accompanied by certain observations, commonly known as "kicking," which were lurid enough to modify the weather. Perhaps they did so. At all events it rained, and the snow

Copyright of Annals of Iowa is the property of State of Iowa, by & through the State Historical Society of Iowa and its content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's express written permission. However, users may print, download, or email articles for individual use.