

# THE GREAT RAILROAD RAID

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## Part II

Sunrise on August 16 found the Federals in the saddle. The 9th Illinois Mounted Infantry took the lead as Phillips' and Coon's commands headed southward from the Oxford area. By 9 o'clock Wallace's vanguard had overtaken the rear of Coon's brigade.

When he reached the Yocona River, Phillips was disappointed to find the water deep and swift. Large quantities of debris were being swept downstream by the booming river and would constitute an additional hazard. Five prisoners and a good but small ferryboat were captured by the Yankees. When questioned by Phillips, the prisoners remarked that a wagon train had been ferried across the river about one hour before. Phillips threw four companies across the river. Accompanied by these men, Phillips drove ahead. The "flying column" thundered into Water Valley at 11 a.m. and captured the train.

At the cry, "Yankees are coming!" the teamsters had reined up their teams, leaped off their vehicles, and fled. Inspecting the train, Phillips found that he had captured six heavily loaded six-mule wagons. Three of the wagons were burned, and the mules turned over to the quartermasters to replace animals which had broken down on the raid. The remaining wagons and teams were assigned to three of the Union units.

Phillips and the men of the "flying column" were disappointed at not finding any of the rolling stock on the Water Valley spur. When questioned by the bluecoats, the civilians remarked that the engines and cars had been moved southward toward Grenada. Although he would liked to have pushed on, Phillips decided he should remain at Water Valley pending the arrival of the rest of his command.

While waiting to cross the Yocona, Wallace sent patrols to scour the countryside near the crossing. One of these groups bagged two Confederates belonging to the 18th Mississippi Cavalry Battalion.

An accident delayed the crossing of the Yocona by Wallace's brigade. The ferryboat, while taking across Wallace's prisoners, foundered. It took the Federals the better part of two hours to salvage the craft, consequently, the afternoon was almost spent before the last Yankee reached the south bank of the river. Pushing on, Wallace and his troopers rode into Water Valley at 5 p.m. Phillips told Wallace to take an hour's break to feed his horses and men.

At 6 o'clock the bugles sounded. Phillips' and Coon's commands rode out of Water Valley via the Coffeerville road—Coon's brigade had the lead. The officers and men fretted as billowing black clouds came rolling out of the southwest. Darkness soon enveloped the column. Rain began to beat down in torrents. One lightning flash followed another; there was a continual roll of thunder. Water was soon cascading down every ravine and hollow. "It would have been impossible for man or beast to have marched," Coon recalled, "but for the continual flash of lightning which kept us in the road a part of the time." Even so, a number of horsemen tumbled into water-filled ditches. It was a source of amazement to the major that none of his men was drowned.

At midnight, the brigade reached the area north of Coffeerville, where a battle had taken place the previous December. Here, exasperated by his snail-like progress, Coon called a halt, and decided to wait for the clouds to scatter, so that his column could benefit by the light from the moon and stars. After about an hour, it stopped raining and the clouds broke. "Boots and Saddles" sounded; the brigade pushed on. Before the troopers had ridden a mile, Phillips galloped up on a mud-spattered horse. Since the various units of the expedition had become separated, Phillips had decided to call a halt. The advance, he told Coon, would be resumed in the morning.

Before Wallace's troopers could finish feeding their mounts, the storm had commenced. Wallace, in view of the driving rain and the "pitch blackness of the night," decided that a

march was "utterly out of the question." Orders were issued for the men to take shelter. It was daylight on August 17 before Wallace's brigade struck southward from Water Valley.

The sun was peeping over the horizon as Coon's blue-coats swung back into their saddles. Followed closely by the 9th Illinois Mounted Infantry, Coon's brigade entered Coffeerville. Several Confederates were captured and disarmed by the vanguard. Phillips called a short halt. After discussing the situation with his officers, he determined to press on without waiting for Wallace's brigade. A staff officer was sent pounding northward to tell Wallace to quicken his pace.

Two miles south of Coffeerville on the Grenada road, Coon's advance surprised and overran a Rebel outpost. An embarrassed greyclad who said he belonged to Col. Robert McCulloch's 2d Missouri Cavalry was taken prisoner. Four miles beyond, Coon, who was riding at the head of his brigade, sighted a slowly approaching locomotive. Coon ordered out a patrol. The troopers were to try to get between the engine and Grenada and block the track. The trainmen, however, spotted the Federals as they were approaching the right of way. They threw the engine into reverse. In a futile effort to prevent the escape of the locomotive, the patrol opened fire at it with their carbines as it roared past.

Meanwhile, Coon's men had sighted a car. When searched, it was found to be loaded with railroad equipment. Coon conjectured that the locomotive had been sent to recover this car.

Near a mile post reading "8 miles to Grenada," the Federals encountered a strong force of Confederates, estimated by Phillips to number about 600. As the Confederates pulled back, they skirmished with the Union advance. Six miles north of Grenada, the Federals overran a spur on which were parked six locomotives and 20 cars. The Union advance had been so rapid that the Confederates had been unable to remove or destroy this valuable rolling stock. Phillips left a guard, the 3d Illinois, with the engines and cars, with orders to start the fires under the boilers and run the trains into Grenada.



Driving the Confederates before them, the Federal vanguard closed to within four miles of Grenada. Here, the officers were taken aback by the sight of dense clouds of black smoke rolling up from the trees near the river. It was apparent that Rebel demolition teams were already at work. Phillips ordered the pace quickened. The column thundered forward at a gallop. As they neared the Yalobusha, it was apparent to the Federals that the Southerners had fired the two railroad bridges.

By this time, the Union advance was within 1,300 yards of the river. Confederate resistance stiffened. Coon shouted for two battalions to dismount. With carbines in hand, the rugged troopers deployed on the run—a battalion of the 3d Michigan Cavalry to the right and a battalion of the 9th Illinois Mounted Infantry to the left of the road. To guard against an ambush, Coon posted a company of "sabers" on each flank to reconnoiter the timber. Surging ahead on the double, the Federals hurled the Rebels back toward the Yalobusha.

To try to check the onrushing Yankees, the cannoneers of the Quitman Light Artillery opened fire with a 6- and 10-pounder which they had unlimbered on the south side of the river. The shelling slowed, but failed to check, the bluecoats. Slemons took advantage of this respite to disengage his command. The Confederates crossed the river only moments before Coon's cheering bluecoats gained the north bank.

At 2 p.m. Phillips was notified that Wallace's brigade was close at hand. Reports brought in by scouts indicated that the Rebels had massed most of their strength to cover the upper ferry. Three guns, one of them rifled, had been pinpointed. The Rebel guns were protected by an emplacement, while the supporting troops were sheltered by rifle pits. Orders were issued for the Federals to force their way across the Yalobusha. Coon's brigade was to attack the foe at the upper ferry; two of Wallace's mountain howitzers and three companies of the 9th Illinois Cavalry were to cooperate with Coon's column. While Coon demonstrated and kept the Rebels pinned down at the upper ferry, Wallace's brigade was to sweep to the right and effect a crossing at the ferry two miles below town.

Covered by Coon's demonstration, Wallace's troopers beat their way through the woods. Just as Wallace's vanguard reached the bank of the river, a staff officer thundered up. The aide told Wallace he was to push into Grenada and destroy the rolling stock. When Wallace gave the word, the bugler sounded the charge. Wallace's troopers crossed the Yalobusha unopposed. As soon as the last of his men had gained the left bank, Wallace re-formed his column and closed in on Grenada from the west. Dashing into the town, Wallace's bluecoats surprised and disarmed about 60 butter-nuts.

Phillips was pleased with the way the engagement was developing. Observing that the Rebels were abandoning their fortifications covering the upper ferry, Phillips called for Coon to take up the attack. A patrol from Coon's command had found a ferryboat moored to the north bank of the river. The boat was used to sneak across several dismounted companies. At the same time, one of Coon's mounted units moved forward. Covered by the fire of their comrades, the troopers drove their horses into the muddy Yalobusha. The crossing was effected with surprising ease. Slemons' Confederates evacuated Grenada and retired down the Mississippi Central Railroad.

Two hundred men, led by Coon, entered Grenada at 3:30 p.m. Phillips realized that with the bridges destroyed it would be impossible to remove to Federal territory the vast amount of rolling stock in the Grenada yards. Orders were issued for Coon to organize demolition teams. These groups were to burn the railroad shops. Lieut. James H. Cardy of the 3d Michigan was told to count and report the number of engines and cars. Phillips now decided that there was no need to keep most of his command south of the Yalobusha. In accordance with instructions from the expedition commander, Wallace's troopers recrossed the river and camped at Statham's Station. There, they were rejoined during the night by the 3d Illinois.

Coon and his demolition men were amazed at the vast amount of rolling stock. The locomotives and cars were "so closely packed together as to make a small town of themselves."

While a count was being made of the engines and cars, a team of demolition experts set fire to the two depots, two machine shops and two large steam powered flour mills. Cardy, having completed his assignment, reported that the Federals had captured a tremendous amount of rolling stock in the Grenada yards—51 engines and about 500 cars of all kinds and descriptions: box, coaches, sleepers, and flats. Ten of the flats were loaded with army wagons.

Up to the time that his men had entered Grenada, Phillips had heard nothing of the whereabouts of Winslow's column. Phillips' uncertainty concerning the activity of Winslow's command increased. When questioned by the Federals, several of the inhabitants reported that the Yankees had captured a train at Durant and another at Vaiden. Other citizens said that shortly after the bluecoats had swept into Vaiden, Jackson's Rebel cavalry had recaptured the trains and scattered Winslow's horsemen. Phillips didn't know which tale to believe. If Jackson had defeated Winslow, it wouldn't be long before the greyclads reached the Grenada area and reinforced Slemons. Phillips didn't feel that his command could cope with such a formidable Confederate force. Since the Yalobusha bridges had been burned, it would be impossible to run off the rolling stock. Orders were issued for Coon to begin destroying the locomotives and cars.

While the demolition teams were setting fire to the rolling stock, another interesting report reached Phillips. A man told the colonel that a train of 100 wagons had left Grenada for West Point shortly before the Federals appeared. This train was said to be loaded with ordnance and commissary supplies. Phillips determined to pursue and capture the train in the morning.

By sundown on August 17, Coon notified Phillips that his men had completed their work. One fun loving group fired up one of the locomotives. After releasing the throttle, the Federals leaped off, as the engine thundered southward. The ironhorse raced out of the yards, and traveled several miles before jumping the tracks. The fires set by the Federals roared through the yards. After raiding the corn cribs for forage, Coon's troopers recrossed the Yalobusha and bivouacked.



Winslow's vanguard entered Grenada at 9:30 p.m. Winslow, as senior officer, assumed charge of all the Union troops in the area.

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At daybreak on August 14, Winslow's officers formed and mustered their troopers. Evacuating Yazoo City, the Federal horsemen took the Lexington road. Winslow realized that his command would be called on to make hard marches, consequently, he held down the pace. On the other hand, the colonel knew that he would have to get the jump on the Confederates. Winslow therefore kept his men in the saddle until well after dark. The bluecoats, after having made 30 miles, camped for the night on Harland Creek, eight miles southwest of Lexington.

Winslow's column was on the road early on the 15th. By 8 o'clock the Federals occupied Lexington, meeting no resistance beyond the sullen glances of the citizens. Before pushing on, Winslow called for the commander of the 3d Iowa, Maj. John W. Noble. The major and his command were to remain at Lexington to procure rations, while Winslow led the remainder of the brigade eastward toward the Mississippi Central Railroad. After obtaining the desired supplies, the 3d Iowa would rejoin the main column.

Marching by way of Castilian Springs, the Union horsemen thundered into Durant at noon. Unfortunately for the Confederates, a southbound engine with a number of cars had just rumbled into the station. After a patrol had cut the telegraph, Winslow sent for Capt. John H. Peters of the 4th Iowa. Peters was placed in charge of the train.

Meantime, Winslow had learned from several of the inhabitants that another southbound train (an engine and 10 cars) had recently passed through Durant *en route* to Canton. The informants announced that Confederate working parties had just finished rebuilding the railroad bridge over the Big Black at Way's Bluff. (This bridge had been burned by the 4th Iowa on July 18, during the brief occupation of Canton.)

Peters decided to try to overtake this train. The captain ordered a large detachment aboard the captured train. Peters

and several of his officers climbed into the cab of the locomotive. At a word from Peters, the engineer put the train into motion. After having proceeded five miles, they were unable to see any signs of the first train. Peters had the engineer stop the locomotive. To check a pursuit by the Canton Confederates, Peters decided to destroy the bridge across Box Creek. A demolition team was organized and the railroad bridge burned. As soon as the bridge was burning fiercely, the blueclads reboarded the cars. Peters ordered the engineer to throw his engine into reverse; the train returned to Durant.

The 3d Iowa by this time had arrived from Lexington with several wagon loads of rations and forage. As soon as Noble and Peters had reported, Winslow again turned the brigade out. Peters' detachment would remain in charge of the captured train. Any additional locomotives and rolling stock encountered as the column pushed up the Mississippi Central toward Grenada would also be turned over to Peters.

It was 6 p.m. on the 15th when the raiders rode out of Durant. The train with Peters' detachment kept pace with the column. A five-hour march brought the Unionists to West. Here, the Yankees discovered 12 engines and about 50 cars. These were turned over to Peters' command. To run the trains, it was necessary to call for volunteers from the brigade who had railroading experience. While the volunteers were being organized into crews, it started to rain. Many years afterward, one of the troopers recalled:

To this day the men who were in that storm speak of it as a marvel in nature. The terrific, continuous crashing of thunder, the incessant, fearful flashing of lightning on all sides, the torrents of falling water, and the dense darkness in the intervals of blinding light exceeded anything they have ever known.

Winslow had planned to march all night. The storm necessitated a change in plans. The order to halt went out and the troopers camped for the night on Jordan Creek.

On the morning of the 16th, the captured rolling stock (now numbering 13 engines and 60 cars) was made up into trains. It was 5 p.m. before the last train had been manned and chugged out of the West yards. The need to detach personnel to man the trains created a problem. Whenever a



cavalryman was assigned to one of the trains, it left a horse in the column to be cared for by one of his comrades. Before leaving West, Winslow had a demolition team destroy the bridge across Jordan Creek. In case the Federals were compelled to abandon the rolling stock, the colonel didn't want the Confederates to recover the engines and cars and run them into Canton.

Since he had lost so much time at West, Winslow determined to make a night march. Darkness had blanketed the area when the head of the column entered Vaiden. Winslow directed Peters to take the trains to Winona, then the Federal horsemen pushed on. Meanwhile, a demolition team had set fire to the railroad bridge spanning Peachahala Creek.

The raiders reached Winona at daybreak on the 17th. Winslow was distressed to discover that a Confederate patrol had burned the bridge across a small creek just north of town. Unless the Yankees rebuilt the structure, it would be impossible to take the captured trains into Grenada. In addition, Winslow's scouts, who had been questioning the townspeople, were told that there was a strong force of Confederates at Grenada.

To make matters worse, the Yankees were unable to pick up any information regarding the Union column which was supposed to be pushing southward from the Tennessee border. Winslow realized that if the Confederates were able to hold Grenada, not only would he lose the captured trains, but his raiding column would be in deadly peril. Winslow decided to leave the rolling stock at Winona and press on to take Grenada. After occupying Grenada, and while awaiting the arrival of the cooperating column, he would send a detachment to repair the bridge across the creek north of Winona and bring up the trains.

To hinder the Confederates' efforts to remove the rolling stock in case they reached it first, Winslow had his men wreck the bridges across two small tributaries of Hays Creek, south of Winona. As soon as Peters' troopers had rejoined their units, the march was resumed. Spearheaded by the 3d Iowa Cavalry, the Yankees occupied Duck Hill at 11 a.m., where they found four engines and 20 cars.

Since many of the horses were badly jaded, Winslow purposely held down the pace of the march. A four-hour halt was made on Jackson Creek, while the troopers rested and fed their mounts. At 3 p.m. the column again moved off.

Before proceeding very far, the 3d Iowa established contact with a Confederate patrol. These Confederates belonged to Slemmons-command. At the same time, Rebel partisans were sighted hovering on the flanks and rear of the brigade. This discouraged straggling, and the officers experienced little difficulty in keeping their men closed up.

Skirmishing briskly with Slemmons' patrols, the 3d Iowa pushed rapidly on. Many of the Union officers were disturbed to notice that when forced to give ground, the Southerners always retired up the Grenada road. The Federals began to wonder if perhaps the Confederates had concentrated a sufficient force to defend the town. If the Southerners could hold Grenada, the Yankees realized they would probably prevent the junction of the two Union columns. As the 3d Iowa approached Payne's plantation, five miles south of Grenada, these fears seemed justified. The blueclad scouts reported that the Rebels had massed a strong force behind Berry Creek. Suddenly, the greyclads abandoned their strong position and moved off toward the east.

After the Confederates' withdrawal, the column pushed rapidly on. As they approached Grenada, the Federals observed several large fires. Entering the town, Winslow was hailed by Phillips.

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After being briefed by Phillips, Winslow countermanded the orders to burn the rolling stock. Winslow wanted to wait until morning, when he would make a personal investigation into the possibility of repairing the Yalobusha bridges. Winslow's troopers were set to work putting out the fires. It was fortunate for the townspeople that Winslow arrived when he did, because the fires set by Coon's men were spreading rapidly. Already, two blocks of private buildings had been burned. Making the transition from cavalymen to fire fighters, Winslow's troopers prevented the spread of the "conflagration which threatened to destroy the town."

Since both his and Phillips' commands were short of rations, Winslow determined to remain at Grenada 24 hours to allow his commissary and quartermaster people to procure supplies. Except for the provost guard (the 3d Iowa Cavalry), the outposts, and the commissary detail, Winslow crossed his brigade to the north side of the Yalobusha early on the 18th.

During the day, Winslow and his staff examined the bridges and the captured rolling stock. The colonel was disappointed to see that the bridges had been so badly damaged that it would take more time than he had to spare to repair them. A team was put to work tabulating the damage to the locomotives and cars in the Grenada yards. Since time was becoming critical, Winslow decided against putting the demolition teams back to work. He felt certain that Jackson's troopers would soon overtake them, and it was reported that Brig. Gen. Daniel Duggles had reached the Panola area from northeast Mississippi with a strong force of cavalry and was waiting to intercept the Federals as they marched for Memphis. Phillips protested that the Rebels would put many of these engines and cars back into operation, and with the rolling stock abandoned by Winslow's troopers at Winona soon have the means of shipping the great quantities of corn and wheat that had been grown in north Mississippi during the year. He argued that "these engines and cars will be of immense benefit to our enemies." Winslow, however, disagreed, and Phillips was overruled.

Inside of 30 hours, the men and horses had caught their second wind; forage and food had been collected and issued to the units by the quartermaster people; while the demolition teams had completed their work. Long before daybreak on August 19, the buglers had sounded reveille and the men had been mustered and fed. The column moved out at 4:30 a.m. taking the Panola road; Wallace's brigade had the lead.

The information reaching the Federals that the Texas Cavalry Brigade led by Brig. Gen. John W. Whitfield had been sent in pursuit of Winslow's column was correct. Winslow's troopers, however, were able to steal a march on the



hard-riding Texans. Leaving Canton late on August 14, the Texans entered Durant the next night. There, they were drenched by the same storm that delayed Winslow's bluecoats at West, nine miles to the northeast. To escape the rain the officers dismissed their troopers "to hunt shelter in the dark" as best they could. The Texans "had a great time getting into vacant houses, under sheds, awnings, in stables or any available place" that they might protect their ammunition from the elements.

It was late the next morning, the 16th, before Whitfield resumed the chase. At Old Shongolo, near Vaiden, the ladies had learned that the Texans were coming. They accordingly "prepared a splendid picnic dinner" for them. Since time was all important, Whitfield refused to call a halt. Undaunted, the ladies took position by the side of the road with trays "loaded with chicken, ham, biscuit, cake, pies, and other tempting viands." As the mud-spattered Texans rode along, they helped themselves.

Whitfield's troopers reached Winona on the 17th, where they recovered the 13 engines and 60 cars which the destruction of the bridge had compelled Winslow's bluecoats to abandon. After detailing a force to guard the rolling stock, Whitfield pushed on. The morning of the 18th, found the Texans camped at Duck Hill, 12 miles south of Grenada.

By the 17th the situation had become so critical that Johnston was compelled to intervene. A telegram was sent to Ruggles, the Confederate commander in northeastern Mississippi. Ruggles was informed that the Yankees had crossed the Tallahatchie and were sweeping down the Mississippi Central toward Grenada. At the same time, another Federal column had advanced out of Yazoo City, reached Durant on the Mississippi Central and was driving northward toward a junction with the "first-named expedition." Ruggles was to "give all the aid" in his power to the Confederate forces opposing these Union thrusts. (This is an excellent example of the difficulties the Civil War soldiers had with communications.) The information on which Johnston based his dispatch to Ruggles was 48 hours old.

Johnston, on the preceding day, had made an administrative change that had long been needed in Mississippi. Stephen D. Lee (who had been declared exchanged following his capture at Vicksburg) was promoted to major general and named to command all Confederate cavalry in Mississippi. Formally assuming his new task, Lee issued orders at Jackson on August 18.

Lee and Johnston felt certain that the Federals, after destroying the rolling stock at Grenada, would strike for Columbus. Consequently, Lee made plans to frustrate such a thrust. Reaching Canton, Lee had Jackson recall Brig. Gen. George B. Cosby's brigade, which was watching the crossings of the Big Black east of Vicksburg. On the morning of the 21st, Lee rode out of Canton at the head of 1,300 rugged troopers. Lee directed his march toward Bankston.

Before leaving Canton, Lee had issued orders for J. R. Chalmers (who in view of the crisis had rushed back to his command), Whitfield and Brig. Gen. Samuel W. Ferguson (Ferguson commanded Ruggles' cavalry) to rendezvous with him at Bankston.

Meanwhile, Johnston had received a message from Chalmers. This dispatch had been sent on August 18 from a point 20 miles east of Grenada. Chalmers reported that on the evening of the 17th, Slemons' small command had been compelled to evacuate Grenada.

Soon after leaving Canton, Lee received a dispatch from Chalmers at Bellefontaine reporting that the Federals had evacuated Grenada on the morning of the 19th and were retiring up the Mississippi and Tennessee Railroad toward Memphis. The first Confederates to re-enter Grenada reported most of the rolling-stock and one-fourth of the town burned. In view of this development, Lee telegraphed Ruggles to recall Ferguson, who had taken position at Okalona to guard against a Union thrust toward the Mobile and Ohio Railroad via Houston or Pontotoc. Chalmers was to reoccupy the positions abandoned by his command covering the line of the Tallahatchie. As soon as he reached Grenada from Bellefontaine, Chalmers' was to see that the telegraph line linking Grenada and Canton was repaired.



A trooper in the 4th Iowa recalled that the march northward was "slower than it had been south of Grenada . . . The country was desolate. It had been harassed and swept by hostile armies for more than a year. Along the principal roads it was as if one were following the path of a great fire."

The Federals passed through Oakland during the day. After crossing the Yocona, Winslow called a halt and the column camped. Winslow, like most military commanders, rotated his lead unit. On the 20th, the 9th Illinois Mounted Infantry had the advance. Although Phillips' men kept a sharp watch no armed Rebels were seen until the vanguard approached the Tallahatchie at Panola. It was feared by many of the officers that the Confederates would mass a strong force to dispute their crossing. Shots were exchanged with several partisans as the Yankees prepared to cross. Badly outnumbered, the guerrillas withdrew. By 4:30 p.m. Winslow's rear guard had ferried the Tallahatchie. Pushing on, the Federals camped for the night on either side of the Memphis road, six miles north of the river.

When the column moved out on the morning of August 21, Wallace's brigade was in the van. About a mile north of a Dr. Wallace's plantation, the advance guard came to a fork in the road. Here, the command divided. Winslow's brigade continued up the Memphis road; Wallace's, Coon's, and Phillips' units turned into the Bucksnoth road. Soon after the column had divided, Wallace, having been notified that provisions were getting short in his brigade, sent out foragers.

Phillips' command spent the night at Bucksnoth. Before morning, all of the foraging parties but one—Lieut. Leander L. Shattuck's—had returned. On the 22d the Federals pushed on to Wall Hill. Once again, the force divided. Wallace's brigade took the Byhalia road, Coon's and Phillips' the one to Holly Springs.

Wallace drove his men hard. By nightfall, they had returned to the Union lines—the 3d and 4th Illinois going into camp at Collierville and the 9th Illinois at Germantown. Shortly after reaching his base, Wallace received bad news.



A bedraggled member of Shattuck's 15-man detachment was brought to his headquarters. The man explained that as the patrol was preparing to ford the Coldwater, it had been attacked by Confederate partisans and all the men but him had been killed or captured.

Phillips' regiment and Coon's brigade rode together as far as Lamar. At that point Phillips directed Coon to return to his camp at La Grange. Marching via Spring Hill and Saulsbury, Phillips and the troopers of his 9th Illinois Mounted Infantry entered Pocahontas at 9 a.m. on August 23, having been absent from their base for 10 days. Coon's troopers reached their La Grange camp about the same hour.

Unlike the other commands, Winslow's ran into some excitement. As the column approached the Coldwater on the afternoon of the 21st, the scouts reported that Confederates were posted on the north bank of the river and prepared to dispute the crossing. Winslow called for Noble. With 75 picked men of the 3d Iowa, Noble was to make a demonstration to see if he could pin down the Rebels. At the same time, Maj. James Farnan of the 5th Illinois would take five companies (three from his regiment and two from the 3d Iowa) and ford the river one-half mile below the crossing to take the Rebels from the rear.

Noble and Farnan moved to carry out Winslow's orders. Dismounting, Noble and his Iowans advanced and took cover in the fallen timber along the south bank of the Coldwater. Protected by the timber, the Iowans blazed away at the Rebels on the opposite side. Unfortunately for Winslow's plan, Farnan's men made a lot of noise as they forded the river, alerting the Confederates. Outnumbered and not wishing to be trapped, the greyclads beat a hasty retreat. All this time, Rebel snipers who had infiltrated the woods south of the river were banging away at Winslow's rear guard. Since they were firing at extreme ranges, the Southerners, except for wounding several horses, did no damage.

Following the Rebels' retreat, the bluecoats repaired the ferryboat which the foe had scuttled. Winslow lost no time

in getting his brigade to the north side of the river. A detachment was sent in pursuit of the Confederates, but they had had too big a headstart. The brigade camped the night of the 21st on high ground four miles north of the Coldwater. When he checked the rolls, Winslow learned that four of Noble's men had been wounded in the day's engagement.

The next morning (August 22), the brigade resumed the march. Winslow purposely held down the pace. Long halts were made to rest the weary men and animals. Nightfall found the troopers camped on Crane Creek, four miles from Memphis. The next day, the brigade entered Memphis having ridden 265 miles since leaving the Big Black, 13 days before.

Grant was in Memphis when Winslow's column arrived. Winslow reported to him for orders, giving him a terse account of the great railroad raid. Grant was impressed, and directed that "the command return to Vicksburg by steamboats, with leave to 'take it easy.'" On the evening of August 28 Winslow was notified that the transports were ready. The next morning, the brigade marched to the levee and embarked. All the transports except the *Madison* tied up at Vicksburg on the last day of August. Before nightfall, the troopers were back in their camp at Flowers' plantation. The *Madison*, with several companies of the 4th Iowa aboard, had grounded; it was September 1 before her passengers rejoined their comrades on the Big Black.

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The "Great Railroad Raid" had demonstrated that for the time being Union cavalry columns could go anywhere they wished in the section of Mississippi, west of the Pearl River. Although the converging columns were unable to communicate, the Federal officers had regulated their movements so that on almost every occasion they were able to rendezvous as scheduled. Of equal importance was the ability of the Union cavalry to carry out its mission and escape before the Confederates could organize an effective pursuit. The "Great Railroad Raid," along with Col. Benjamin H. Grierson's April sweep through Mississippi, proved that in the Mississippi

Valley, Federal cavalry had reached a point in efficiency where it was equal, if not superior, to the Rebel horsemen. At approximately the same time in the East, the battle of Brandy Station and cavalry operations in the Gettysburg Campaign underscored this development.

To cope with the situation in Mississippi, Johnston named Lee to command all Confederate cavalry in the Department of Mississippi and East Louisiana. While this decision came too late to affect the success of the "Great Railroad Raid," it proved to be a wise move for the Confederates. With one man, rather than several, in charge of their mounted arms in the Mississippi theater of operations, the Rebels were better able to cope with future Union raids.

Although the Federals had failed to bring away the locomotives and rolling stock, they had struck the deteriorating rail system of the Confederacy a terrible blow. Between them, Winslow's and Phillips' raiders had destroyed 34 locomotives and 172 cars (passenger, box, and flat). It might have been worse, however. The destruction of the bridge across the creek north of Winona compelled Winslow to abandon 13 engines and 59 cars at Winona. Four engines and 20 cars were left at Duck Hill. As a further blow against the Confederate economy, the Yankees arrested and brought 25 railroad engineers and mechanics to Memphis with them.

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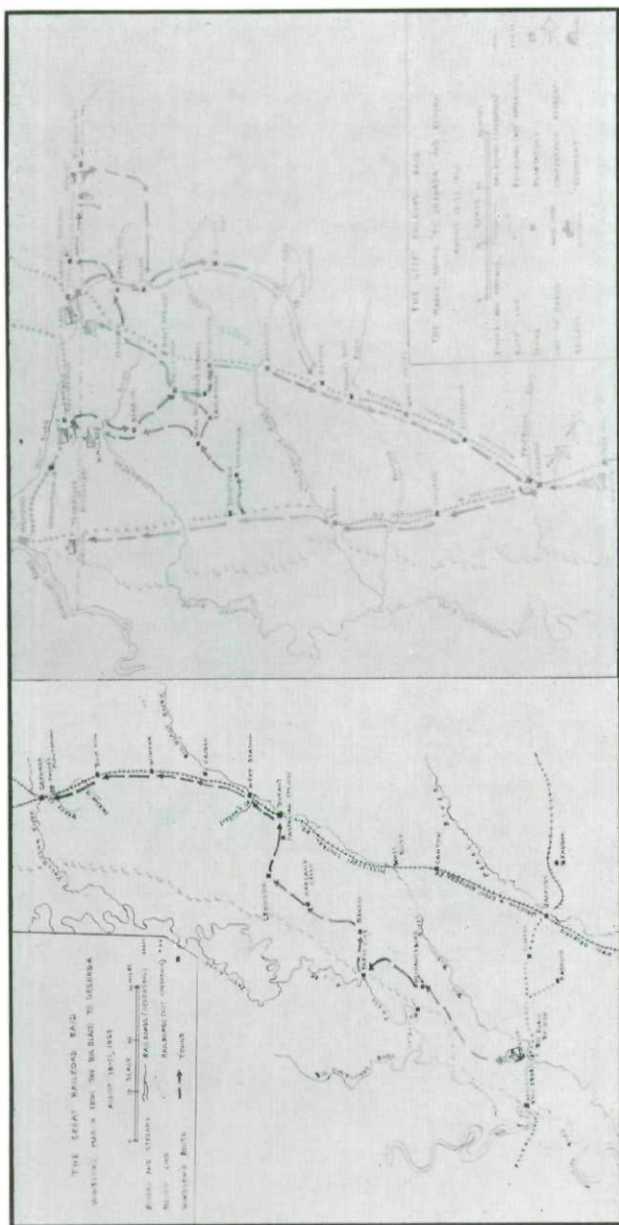
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*courtesy of the author*

Maps of Great Railroad Raid

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