

# The Woodruff Gun

## Annotations to the Margreiter Article

### Woodruffs at the Battle of Kirksville, Mo.

*Official Records of the War of the Rebellion*, Series I, Volume 13, pp. 578-579.

Correspondence, Orders, and Returns Relating Especially to Operations in Missouri, Arkansas, Kansas, the Indian Territory, and the Department of the Northwest from April 10 to November 29, 1862.

Union Correspondence, Etc.

Brig. Gen. Lewis Merrill to Lt. Col. C. W. Marsh:

On page 578, Merrill lists in his “First sub-division”: “Schuyler, Scotland, Clarke, Lewis, Knox, Adair, Marion, Shelby, Ralls, and Monroe Counties, under immediate command of McNeil. Troops: McNeil’s and Lipscomb’s regiments, with **one section of 2-pounder steel guns belonging to the Saint Joseph battery.**” (Emphasis added.)

This would be a section of the 1st Battery of Artillery, Missouri State Militia, which at this time operated Woodruff guns (often referred to in the *OR* as “steel 2-pounders”).

dered here will be sufficient. Let me know what you can do in the other direction.

J. M. SCHOFIELD,  
*Brigadier-General.*

HEADQUARTERS NORTHEAST MISSOURI DIVISION,  
*Macon City, August 17, 1862.*

Lieut. Col. C. W. MARSH,  
*Assistant Adjutant-General:*

COLONEL: I have already informed the general somewhat by telegraph of the disposition of troops I have made to cover the necessity for larger forces at or near Lexington. These dispositions are in detail as follows, and will be carried out as near as the necessities of the case will permit, except so far as circumstances make their modification necessary.

The division to be sub-divided as follows:

*First sub-division.*—Schuyler, Scotland, Clarke, Lewis, Knox, Adair, Marion, Shelby, Ralls, and Monroe Counties, under immediate command of McNeil. Troops: McNeil's and Lipscomb's regiments, with one section of 2-pounder steel guns belonging to the Saint Joseph battery.

*Second sub-division.*—Macon County, Colonel Robinson's Twenty-third Missouri, and Enrolled Militia.

*Third sub-division.*—Chariton, Randolph, Boone, and Howard, Lieutenant-Colonel Shaffer, Merrill's Horse, and one company of Gray's regiment.

*Fourth sub-division.*—Callaway, Audrain, Pike, and Montgomery, Colonel Smart's regiment, and Enrolled Militia, part of Third Iowa Cavalry.

*Fifth sub-division.*—Lincoln, Warren, and Saint Charles, Colonel Krekel's regiment and Enrolled Militia.

This, with one section of the Indiana battery and the whole of Colonel Winter's regiment, to be used as circumstances may dictate and to the end that they may be disposed so as to be used for the support of the forces south of the river. I have ordered the section of the Indiana battery to be sent at once from Paris to Sturgeon, thence to Columbia, and as soon as I can spare Colonel Guitar will order his forces to Glasgow and Booneville.

I have been seriously embarrassed by Colonel Guitar neglecting to make any report of his whereabouts, strength, or line of operations, and the results of his marches and actions would have been much more fruitful had I known, as I should, what he knew of the enemy. In the case of the attack at Yellow Creek I would have been enabled to cut off any chance of Poindexter's retreat had I known what Guitar knew of the enemy when he left Laclede.

I find a very great degree of demoralization and disorder existing among nearly all the troops in the district. This requires time to remedy, and will probably require summary dealing with some of the officers. I shall not hesitate to apply the remedy when necessary, and have already done so at Palmyra.

My plans for the future, following the dispersion of the large bands, will be more fully set out for the general's approval in a following communication, to be forwarded as soon as my mind is fully made up as to the proper course to be pursued. The main features of this plan I have

already decided upon, and the disposition of troops proposed is very considerably subordinated to the workings of this plan.

I am, colonel, very respectfully, your obedient servant,  
LEWIS MERRILL,  
*Brigadier-General, Commanding.*

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SPRINGFIELD, August 17, 1862.

Brig. Gen. JOHN M. SCHOFIELD:

Express from Greenfield just arrived. Colonel Wright has a scout from Coffee's camp. The combined forces of Coffee, joined by Hancock, Poindexter, Quantrill, Tracy, Taylor, now in camp at the mouth of the Little Osage, are about 3,000. Scout says they intend to go south as soon as joined by 1,000 from the north. Blunt's movement in their rear has alarmed them, and they are expecting Rains up from their rear to assist them, and from reports received at the west I think he is moving in Newton County. Coffee thinks he is cut off. This force of Coffee and company is organized into companies made secretly before his raid and were prepared to join him. They are mostly armed, but have no ammunition—prisoners after being with them a week and who have escaped say not 3 rounds. They are in a constant state of alarm, prepared to run and not to fight, and more afraid of the Feds than they are of the devil. They have no artillery. I do not believe, with Blunt and Wright in their rear, that they will leave the Osage Hills in force, but will double-step by them, and leave the State by the route they came, or through south of Rolla, or by dividing their forces by both routes, though a rebel officer on parole in his corps told me last night that their destination was north of the Osage River. Your instructions will be fully carried out.

E. B. BROWN.

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HEADQUARTERS POST OF GREENFIELD,  
August 17, 1862.

General BLUNT:

I leave this post at 9 a. m. this morning, moving with 1,000 men, four pieces of artillery. I will move directly north. Please inform the Kansas column of my movements. My information is that Coffee is at the mouth of the Little Osage 3,000 strong, looking for re-enforcements from the north.

CLARK WRIGHT,  
*Colonel, Commanding.*

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SAINT LOUIS, Mo., August 17, 1862.

General BROWN, *Springfield, Mo. :*

The rebel force north of the Osage is much stronger than you suppose, and they are making a desperate effort to gain a permanent foothold there. If Rains is southwest of you, as you suppose, learn his strength and movements if possible.

J. M. SCHOFIELD,  
*Brigadier-General.*

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*Official Records of the War of the Rebellion*, Series I, Volume 13, pp. 212-216.

August 6, 1862.—Action at Kirksville, Mo.

Reports: Col. John McNeil, Second Missouri Cavalry (Militia)

On p. 212, McNeil lists among his command a “section of steel 2-pounder battery, Lieutenant McLaren”.

On p. 213, describing the opening of the Battle of Kirksville, McNeil states:

“A section of a steel battery of 2-pounder howitzer, in charge of Sergeant West and 10 men, of Company C, Second Missouri State Militia, acted, as did the Indiana artillery, by my order, under the direction of Captain Barr, of the Merrill Horse.”

On p. 216, McNeil praises the Woodruff battery:

“Lieutenant McLaren, of the section of steel battery, gave them ‘grape’ in good style...”

The town was taken after a fight of two hours and fifty minutes, with a loss of 5 killed, including Capt. Emanuel Mayne, of the Third Iowa, and 25 wounded.

We have captured about 200 horses, as many arms of all descriptions, many of them being recently captured Government arms. The loss of the enemy in killed and wounded may be safely stated at 150, and 40 prisoners.

We are out of rations and our horses worn-out, but will take up the pursuit as soon as we can seize subsistence enough to keep us up.

I have the honor to be, your obedient servant,

JOHN MCNEIL,  
*Colonel, Commanding.*

HEADQUARTERS MCNEIL'S COLUMN,  
*Palmyra, September 17, 1862.*

MAJOR: I have the honor to send you herewith report of Lieutenant-Colonel Shaffer, commanding Merrill's Horse, and of Major Caldwell,\* commanding detachment of Third Iowa Cavalry, and of Major Benjamin, commanding detachment of the Eleventh Cavalry, Missouri State Militia, of their operations in the action of August 6, 1862, between the force under my command and the army under the guerrilla chief Joseph C. Porter.

I also append as brief a narrative of the events of the march and engagement as I deem their importance to allow, with such mention of the conduct of individuals as their merits justly entitle them to.

My command was composed of a detachment of the Merrill Horse, under Lieutenant-Colonel Shaffer, of 14 officers and 320 men; detachment of Second Cavalry, Missouri State Militia, under command of Captains McClanahan and Edwards, 5 officers and 117 men; detachment of Eleventh Cavalry, Missouri State Militia, Major Benjamin, 320 men; the command of Major Caldwell, Third Iowa Volunteers, composed of detachments of his own regiment, the Ninth Cavalry, Missouri State Militia, and Red Rovers, Missouri State Militia; detachment of the First Cavalry, Missouri State Militia, under Major Cox, 5 officers and 132 men; section of Third Indiana Battery, Lieutenant Armington; section of steel 2-pounder battery, Lieutenant McLaren; Sergeant West, with a 12-pounder howitzer, Second Missouri State Militia; making an aggregate of — officers and — men.

The train guard and those required to hold and guard horses while combatants dismounted for action, the support of the artillery and reserve deducted, left us about 500 men with which to engage the enemy.

The pursuit which had preceded and led to this action had been long and arduous, and most of the troops engaged had been constantly on the march since the middle of July. I had hung on the trail of the enemy from the time I struck it, on the 29th of July. Beginning the chase with 120 men and a 12-pounder howitzer, with which I marched from Palmyra on July 29, augmented at Clinton, in Monroe County, by Major Cox with 160 men and two small steel guns, I marched to Paris at night, expecting to find Porter in that place, as he had sacked it that evening. Finding that he had moved to the Elk Fork of Salt River, we prepared to attack him there, when suddenly he made a feint of an attack on us in Paris. This kept my men on the *qui vive* all day, our

\*Not found.

skirmishers driving the attacking party in every direction. But finding that this feint was only to cover his retreat across the railroad, and that he had broken up his camp at noon, we marched in pursuit all the next night, arriving at Hunnewell at 5 o'clock next morning. We moved as soon as possible, after resting our men and horses, worn-out with forty-eight hours' constant pursuit, camping that night at 10 o'clock at a farm some 4 miles east of Shelbyville. Hearing during the night that Porter had taken Newark the evening before, we marched next morning for Bethel, where we were joined by Major Benjamin, of the Eleventh Missouri State Militia, with 80 men, making our entire force 360 men. With this small force we pushed on to Newark, expecting to find it occupied by Porter, with his entire force of 2,000 men. Our advance guard entered one side of the town while the retreating enemy's rear was still in sight from the other. Such pursuit was made as the worn-out condition of our men and horses and the character of the country made prudent against so numerous an enemy.

We marched at 12 m. next day and continued pursuit of the enemy over a most difficult country, following his devious and eccentric windings through brake and bottom and across fields, often where no wheel had ever turned before. He had destroyed bridges and obstructed the fords by felling trees. Notwithstanding this we kept well up with him, driving in his pickets, beating up his camps, and left many of his men prone upon the track.

We came up with him at Kirksville about 10 o'clock Wednesday morning, August 6, and learning that he had expelled the people from the town, concluded that he would occupy the houses and defend the place.

Kirksville is situated on a prairie ridge, surrounded completely by timber and corn fields, with open ground on the northeast, from which direction we approached. The advanced guard, comprising detachments of the Second and Eleventh Missouri State Militia, under Major Benjamin, had been gallantly pushed forward, and held the northeastern approach of the town long in advance of the arrival of the main column and artillery.

Upon information that the enemy held the town everything was hurried up, without regard for horse-flesh, leaving the train to the care of the rear guard. I deployed columns on the northern and eastern faces of the town, the ground on the northeast being highly favorable for attack. Lieutenant-Colonel Shaffer was put in command of the right wing, composed of the Merrill Horse, under Major Clopper; detachments of Second and Eleventh Cavalry, Missouri State Militia, under Major Benjamin, and the section of the battery of the Third Indiana Artillery, under Lieutenant Armington. The left wing was put in charge of Major Caldwell, of the Third Iowa Volunteers, and was composed of his own command, as stated above, and the detachment of the First Cavalry, Missouri Volunteers, under Major Cox. A section of a steel battery of 2-pounder howitzer, in charge of Sergeant West and 10 men, of Company C, Second Missouri State Militia, acted, as did the Indiana artillery, by my order, under the direction of Captain Barr, of the Merrill Horse.

These dispositions having been rapidly made, I concluded to ascertain the position of the enemy, as nothing could be seen or heard of him, except one man in the cupola of the court-house, who retired at the bidding of a Sharps rifle; and a rifle-shot from a house at an officer, who appeared too curious about what was going on in town. For this reason I called for an officer and squad, who should charge

mentation. It is an instance of devotion to duty that I would respectfully call to the attention of the commanding general as worthy of reward.

On the morning of the 9th we moved, on information from headquarters, toward Stockton, hoping to cut the enemy off from the road; but hearing at Bloomington that Colonel McFerran's forces had met and dispersed the remainder of Porter's army, we marched to the railroad. I here directed such disposition of the different commands as I considered efficient to prevent their crossing the road to rally again in Monroe County.

Our loss in the engagement at Kirksville will be found by the surgeon's report to be 5 killed and 32 wounded. That of the enemy may be stated, without any exaggeration, at 150 killed and between 300 and 400 wounded and 47 prisoners.

Finding that 15 of the persons captured had been prisoners before, and upon their own admissions had been discharged on their solemn oath and parole of honor not again to take arms against their country under penalty of death, I enforced the penalty of the bond by ordering them shot. Most of these guerrillas have certificates of parole from some provost-marshal or post commandant with them, for use at any time they may be out of camp. These paltering tokens of pocket loyalty were found on the persons of nearly all the men so executed. Disposed that an evidence of clemency and mercy of the country toward the erring and misguided should go hand-in-hand with unrelenting justice, I discharged on parole all the prisoners who had not violated parole and who were in arms for the first time against their country and Government.

I cannot close this report without commending the conduct of the officers and men under my command. Each corps seemed to vie with the other in the noble competition of duty. Brave men fell, and we mourn their loss. But as brave men live to receive the thanks of their country for gallantry and good conduct in the face of a vastly outnumbering enemy, I would beg leave to mention my immediate attendants, Lieut. Alexander McFarlane, acting assistant adjutant-general, and Capt. H. Clay Gentry, Eleventh Regiment. The first was wounded early in the action and carried to the rear, but not until he had given evidence of coolness and courage that promise well for him wherever he shall meet an enemy. Captain Gentry continued throughout the action to carry my orders to all parts of the field and through heavy lines of fire without apparently losing a moment to think of himself. His bravery is worthy the name he bears.

Lieutenant-Colonel Shaffer and Majors Clopper, Benjamin, Caldwell, and Cox each did their duty like brave officers, and especially would I mention Lieutenant-Colonel Shaffer and Major Benjamin as having shown distinguished gallantry and a faithful discharge of duty while under a galling fire of the enemy in entering the town.

To Captain Barr, of the Merrill Horse, I am indebted for directing the fire of the section of the Third Indiana Battery. His services were truly valuable, and I found him there, as I have found him everywhere, the best of soldiers and the most modest of gentlemen. The non-commissioned officers and men of this battery behaved in a way which even Indiana, who has so much to be proud of in this war, may applaud.

Captain Rice, commanding that gallant little company the Red Rovers, demeaned himself like a true soldier, remaining on the field during the entire action after having received a severe wound in the face.



Lieutenant McLaren, of the section of steel battery, gave them "grape" in good style; and Sergeant West did good execution with the howitzer until the axle broke, rendering it useless for the rest of the day. Captains Leonard and Garth, of the Ninth Missouri, and Captains McClanahan and Edwards, of the Second, and Lieutenant Donahoo, of the Eleventh Regiment, came under my immediate notice as acting with soldierly bearing and gallantry, as did Lieutenant Piper, of the Merrill Horse, who led the first attack to seize the houses under a deadly fire, and did the work like a true soldier.

I might be deemed partial or extravagant if I were to attempt the expression of the admiration I feel for my young friend Lieutenant Cowdrey, of the Merrill Horse, for his gallant dash into the town to discover the enemy. It well entitles him to official notice, and when promotion comes to him it will fall on a capable officer—one proud of the service and devoted to duty. There were other instances of individual bravery that came under my notice which I would be glad to mention, but the limits of this report deprive me of the privilege.

The full effect and importance of our action in this pursuit and engagement will be better estimated by those who shall hereafter chronicle the events of the time than by the actors. But I think events will prove that it will have broken up recruiting for the rebel Government in Northern Missouri under the guerrilla flag, and if vigorously followed up by a prompt application of force, with unrelenting and prompt execution of military justice, Northeast Missouri will hereafter refer to that day as a point in her history.

Justice to those who did their whole duty would not be done should I omit to mention Dr. Lyon, surgeon of the Second Regiment, and Dr. Trader, assistant surgeon of the First Missouri. I inclose herewith Surgeon Lyon's report of killed and wounded.\*

This report has long been delayed, in consequence of my continued occupation in the field since the date of the action, rendering it impossible for me to attend to any clerical duty.

I have the honor to be, your very obedient servant,

JOHN McNEIL,  
*Colonel, Commanding Expedition.*

GEORGE M. HOUSTON,  
*Major and Assistant Adjutant-General.*

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No. 2.

*Report of Lieut. Col. William F. Shaffer, Second Missouri Cavalry.*

LIEUTENANT: It having been my good fortune to form part of the forces under command of Col. John McNeil at the recent battle of Kirksville, I have the honor to report that on the 6th instant we came upon the enemy, 3,000 strong, under command of Porter, McCulloch, and Franklin. They had taken possession of the town, the corn fields on both sides of the town, and the brush in the rear. I was assigned to the command of the right wing, which included Major Clopper, with 300 of Merrill's Horse; Major Benjamin, with part of the Second and Eleventh Missouri State Militia, and a section of the Third Indiana Battery, Lieutenant Armington commanding.

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\*Not found.

into the town. Lieutenant Cowdrey, of the Merrill Horse, with 8 men, did the business most gallantly—dashing in at the northeast corner of the town, where he drew a most terrible fire from houses and gardens and on all sides. He dashed around the square, coming out at the other corner, with small loss, considering the nature of the perilous errand. The enemy discovered, the attack commenced.

The artillery opened, throwing shot and shell into the corn fields, gardens, and houses where the enemy were ensconced. The dismounted men were thrown forward to seize the outer line of sheds and houses on the northern and eastern sides of the town. This was gallantly done by the commands of Major Benjamin and Lieutenant Piper, of Merrill's Horse; the detachment of the Ninth Missouri State Militia, under Captain Leonard; the Red Rovers, under Captain Rice, and the detachment of the Third Iowa. Major Cox with his detachment occupied and skirmished through a corn field on the southeast of the town, driving a large body of the enemy out and pursuing them with effect. The advance was steadily made, house after house being taken, the occupants killed or surrendering. In this work we lost the most of our men that were killed or wounded—including Captain Mayne, of the Third Iowa, who fell at the head of his command, leading them up as only a brave soldier can. A simultaneous charge of both wings now carried the town and court-house; but still the western line of houses and corn fields were defended with energy, our lines receiving a galling fire; but the right wing, gallantly led by Lieutenant-Colonel Shaffer and Major Benjamin, made short work of this part of the field, while the left wing took full possession of the southern line of the town.

The pursuit was continued through woods to the west of the town, where large quantities of horses, arms, clothing, and camp equipage were found, and the entire brush skirmished. Major Clopper was ordered, with a body of the Merrill Horse, to pursue the flying foe, which he did until he became convinced that they had crossed the Chariton, when he returned to camp. Further pursuit for the day, however desirable, was almost impossible in our condition. The men had for the most part had nothing to eat for two days and the horses were almost entirely used up. The enemy had been numerous, and we were still unadvised whether he had crossed the river in mass or whether part of his force had not fallen back to the northwest, from which point they might fall on our rear.

We went into camp, taking measures for the collection of forage and subsistence and putting our men and horses in condition for pursuit. I had several days previously detached Lieutenant-Colonel Morsey, with 420 men of the Tenth Cavalry, Missouri State Militia, and Major Rogers, with the Second Battalion, Eleventh Regiment Cavalry, Missouri State Militia, to move north, outflank the enemy, and prevent his getting into Scotland or Schuyler Counties; and have the best reason to believe that it was the proximity of this force, of which Porter was well advised, that obliged him to make a stand at Kirksville. This command came into camp next day, swelling our force to nearly 1,700 men, without any but the precarious means of subsistence left in a country that had been desolated by the passage of an army of nearly 3,000 men.

Happily, on the morning of the 8th, Lieutenant Hiller arrived from Palmyra, by the way of Edina, with 8,000 rations and a timely supply of horseshoes. The address and boldness of Lieutenant Hiller in moving through a hostile country, infested everywhere by marauding bands, with a guard of but 40 men, and for days, is worthy of the highest com-

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