

## CHAPTER XXIX.

VAN DORN'S MOVEMENTS—BATTLE OF CORINTH—COMMAND OF THE DEPARTMENT OF THE TENNESSEE.

ON the 19th of September General Geo. H. Thomas was ordered east to reinforce Buell. This threw the army at my command still more on the defensive. The Memphis and Charleston railroad was abandoned, except at Corinth, and small forces were left at Chewalla and Grand Junction. Soon afterwards the latter of these two places was given up and Bolivar became our most advanced position on the Mississippi Central railroad. Our cavalry was kept well to the front and frequent expeditions were sent out to watch the movements of the enemy. We were in a country where nearly all the people, except the negroes, were hostile to us and friendly to the cause we were trying to suppress. It was easy, therefore, for the enemy to get early information of our every move. We, on the contrary, had to go after our information in force, and then often returned without it.

On the 22d Bolivar was threatened by a large force from south of Grand Junction, supposed to be

twenty regiments of infantry with cavalry and artillery. I reinforced Bolivar, and went to Jackson in person to superintend the movement of troops to whatever point the attack might be made upon. The troops from Corinth were brought up in time to repel the threatened movement without a battle. Our cavalry followed the enemy south of Davis' mills in Mississippi.

On the 30th I found that Van Dorn was apparently endeavoring to strike the Mississippi River above Memphis. At the same time other points within my command were so threatened that it was impossible to concentrate a force to drive him away. There was at this juncture a large Union force at Helena, Arkansas, which, had it been within my command, I could have ordered across the river to attack and break up the Mississippi Central railroad far to the south. This would not only have called Van Dorn back, but would have compelled the retention of a large rebel force far to the south to prevent a repetition of such raids on the enemy's line of supplies. Geographical lines between the commands during the rebellion were not always well chosen, or they were too rigidly adhered to.

Van Dorn did not attempt to get upon the line above Memphis, as had apparently been his intention. He was simply covering a deeper design; one much more important to his cause. By the 1st

of October it was fully apparent that Corinth was to be attacked with great force and determination, and that Van Dorn, Lovell, Price, Villepigue and Rust had joined their strength for this purpose. There was some skirmishing outside of Corinth with the advance of the enemy on the 3d. The rebels massed in the north-west angle of the Memphis and Charleston and the Mobile and Ohio railroads, and were thus between the troops at Corinth and all possible reinforcements. Any fresh troops for us must come by a circuitous route.

On the night of the 3d, accordingly, I ordered General McPherson, who was at Jackson, to join Rosecrans at Corinth with reinforcements picked up along the line of the railroad equal to a brigade. Hurlbut had been ordered from Bolivar to march for the same destination; and as Van Dorn was coming upon Corinth from the north-west some of his men fell in with the advance of Hurlbut's and some skirmishing ensued on the evening of the 3d. On the 4th Van Dorn made a dashing attack, hoping, no doubt, to capture Rosecrans before his reinforcements could come up. In that case the enemy himself could have occupied the defences of Corinth and held at bay all the Union troops that arrived. In fact he could have taken the offensive against the reinforcements with three or four times their number and still left a sufficient garrison in the works about Corinth to hold

them. He came near success, some of his troops penetrating the National lines at least once, but the works that were built after Halleck's departure enabled Rosecrans to hold his position until the troops of both McPherson and Hurlbut approached towards the rebel front and rear. The enemy was finally driven back with great slaughter: all their charges, made with great gallantry, were repulsed. The loss on our side was heavy, but nothing to compare with Van Dorn's. McPherson came up with the train of cars bearing his command as close to the enemy as was prudent, debarked on the rebel flank and got in to the support of Rosecrans just after the repulse. His approach, as well as that of Hurlbut, was known to the enemy and had a moral effect. General Rosecrans, however, failed to follow up the victory, although I had given specific orders in advance of the battle for him to pursue the moment the enemy was repelled. He did not do so, and I repeated the order after the battle. In the first order he was notified that the force of 4,000 men which was going to his assistance would be in great peril if the enemy was not pursued.

General Ord had joined Hurlbut on the 4th and being senior took command of his troops. This force encountered the head of Van Dorn's retreating column just as it was crossing the Hatchie by a bridge some ten miles out from Corinth. The bottom land

here was swampy and bad for the operations of troops, making a good place to get an enemy into. Ord attacked the troops that had crossed the bridge and drove them back in a panic. Many were killed, and others were drowned by being pushed off the bridge in their hurried retreat. Ord followed and met the main force. He was too weak in numbers to assault, but he held the bridge and compelled the enemy to resume his retreat by another bridge higher up the stream. Ord was wounded in this engagement and the command devolved on Hurlbut.

Rosecrans did not start in pursuit till the morning of the 5th and then took the wrong road. Moving in the enemy's country he travelled with a wagon train to carry his provisions and munitions of war. His march was therefore slower than that of the enemy, who was moving towards his supplies. Two or three hours of pursuit on the day of battle, without anything except what the men carried on their persons, would have been worth more than any pursuit commenced the next day could have possibly been. Even when he did start, if Rosecrans had followed the route taken by the enemy, he would have come upon Van Dorn in a swamp with a stream in front and Ord holding the only bridge; but he took the road leading north and towards Chewalla instead of west, and, after having marched as far as the enemy had moved to get to the Hatchie, he was as far from

battle as when he started. Hurlbut had not the numbers to meet any such force as Van Dorn's if they had been in any mood for fighting, and he might have been in great peril.

I now regarded the time to accomplish anything by pursuit as past and, after Rosecrans reached Jonesboro, I ordered him to return. He kept on to Ripley, however, and was persistent in wanting to go farther. I thereupon ordered him to halt and submitted the matter to the general-in-chief, who allowed me to exercise my judgment in the matter, but inquired "why not pursue?" Upon this I ordered Rosecrans back. Had he gone much farther he would have met a greater force than Van Dorn had at Corinth and behind intrenchments or on chosen ground, and the probabilities are he would have lost his army.

The battle of Corinth was bloody, our loss being 315 killed, 1,812 wounded and 232 missing. The enemy lost many more. Rosecrans reported 1,423 dead and 2,225 prisoners. We fought behind breastworks, which accounts in some degree for the disparity. Among the killed on our side was General Hackelman. General Oglesby was badly, it was for some time supposed mortally, wounded. I received a congratulatory letter from the President, which expressed also his sorrow for the losses.

This battle was recognized by me as being a

decided victory, though not so complete as I had hoped for, nor nearly so complete as I now think was within the easy grasp of the commanding officer at Corinth. Since the war it is known that the result, as it was, was a crushing blow to the enemy, and felt by him much more than it was appreciated at the North. The battle relieved me from any further anxiety for the safety of the territory within my jurisdiction, and soon after receiving reinforcements I suggested to the general-in-chief a forward movement against Vicksburg.

On the 23d of October I learned of Pemberton's being in command at Holly Springs and much reinforced by conscripts and troops from Alabama and Texas. The same day General Rosecrans was relieved from duty with my command, and shortly after he succeeded Buell in the command of the army in Middle Tennessee. I was delighted at the promotion of General Rosecrans to a separate command, because I still believed that when independent of an immediate superior the qualities which I, at that time, credited him with possessing, would show themselves. As a subordinate I found that I could not make him do as I wished, and had determined to relieve him from duty that very day.

At the close of the operations just described my force, in round numbers, was 48,500. Of these 4,800 were in Kentucky and Illinois, 7,000 in Memphis,

19,200 from Mound City south, and 17,500 at Corinth. General McClernand had been authorized from Washington to go north and organize troops to be used in opening the Mississippi. These new levies with other reinforcements now began to come in.

On the 25th of October I was placed in command of the Department of the Tennessee. Reinforcements continued to come from the north and by the 2d of November I was prepared to take the initiative. This was a great relief after the two and a half months of continued defence over a large district of country, and where nearly every citizen was an enemy ready to give information of our every move. I have described very imperfectly a few of the battles and skirmishes that took place during this time. To describe all would take more space than I can allot to the purpose; to make special mention of all the officers and troops who distinguished themselves, would take a volume.

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NOTE.—For gallantry in the various engagements, from the time I was left in command down to 26th of October and on my recommendation, Generals McPherson and C. S. Hamilton were promoted to be Major-Generals, and Colonels C. C. Marsh, 20th Illinois, M. M. Crocker, 13th Iowa, J. A. Mower, 11th Missouri, M. D. Leggett, 78th Ohio, J. D. Stevenson, 7th Missouri, and John E. Smith, 45th Illinois, to be Brigadiers.