



The Battle of Folck's Mill

Written by: **Harold L. Scott, Sr.**

Cumberland, Maryland's only Civil War skirmish occurred on August 1, 1864, just east of the City at Folck's Mill. A large 19th century brick structure, originally built as a tavern, still stands near where the battle of Folck's Mill was fought. It is reported that wounded Union and Confederate were hospitalized there on the top floor following the battle. Today, this historic old building houses two restaurants (Uncle Tucker's Woodfired Pizza and JB's Steak Cellar) and a Microbrewery, all owned by the Ed Mason family, off I-68 at Exit 46. The following is an account of how the Battle of Folck's Mill came about.

The city of Cumberland was in a near state of panic. It was Sunday, July 31, 1864, and an intense excitement and apprehension prevailed throughout the community. "It was known that a Rebel raiding force was operating in Pennsylvania, and it was deemed highly probable that in returning to Virginia they might strike for the upper fords of the Potomac." Anticipating this, during the previous week, all roads leading into Cumberland had been strongly picketed by Union forces in the area, and "ingress and egress prohibited." Then during the early morning hours of Sunday some frightening news reached the city. It was reported that Chambersburg, Pennsylvania, just two days ride away, had been captured and burned by Rebel soldiers. In addition, it was said that the Rebels, driven out of Chambersburg by Union General Averill's forces, were now moving towards Maryland. Another intelligence report delivered by a soldier to Cumberland confirmed the worst. It revealed that "a strong force of Confederates" had crossed the river at Hancock and was definitely headed for Cumberland.

The previous day on July 30, 1864, Rebel forces under the command of Brig. General John McCausland and Brig. General Bradley T. Johnson had entered Chambersburg, Pennsylvania. There McCausland ordered the residents to pay \$500,000 in currency and \$100,000 in gold to save the town. One of the town officials reportedly told the Rebel leader that there was probably not \$50,000 in currency

available in the town. The Rebels knew Union troops were advancing from the south and that they had no time for bargaining. Shortly before 11 am the order was issued to burn the town.

It was rumored later "that McCausland knew the people of Chambersburg could not raise the ransom, and that the town was fired in retaliation for the burning of the Virginia Military Institute in Lexington, Virginia the previous month by Union troops under Major General David Hunter." Before the war McCausland had been "a mathematics teacher at Virginia Military Institute," and also "had commanded a group of cadets from V.M.I. at John Brown's execution."

However, the truth of the matter is that McCausland was under orders of Confederate Lieutenant General Jubal Early who had ordered him to burn Chambersburg if a demand for ransom could not be met. General Early had decided to retaliate in order to "open the eyes of the people of the North" to the calamity caused by the unwonted and unnecessary destruction of private property after "a number of towns in the South, as well as private country homes, had been burned by Federal troops" in the area of the country covered by his command. In addition, Early had also directed McCausland "to proceed from Chambersburg towards Cumberland, Maryland and levy contributions in money upon that and other towns able to bear them, and if possible destroy the machinery of the coal pits near Cumberland and the machine shops, depots, and bridges on the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad as far as practicable."

On Sunday, July 31, the Rebels broke camp and moved toward Hancock, Maryland. While there "Brigadier General McCausland demanded of the town authorities a ransom of \$30,000 and 5,000 cooked rations." This demand by McCausland "aroused so much resentment from Marylanders in his command that for a brief period it looked as if the Confederates were going to fight among themselves." Johnson advised the town authorities "to get every dollar they could raise and pay it," in order to save their community.

This they attempted to do, but before the Rebels could receive any of the money, Union General Averill “appeared on the outskirts of the town and dropped several shells” into the midst of the Confederate “rear guard and drove it in, and the fight became general in the main street of Hancock.” After a lively engagement, “McCausland and Johnson placed their batteries” at the western edge of town, and “drove the Federals back.” The Rebels then left Hancock and proceeded along the National Road toward Cumberland. The Confederate column marched well into the night. At sunrise on Monday, August 1, 1864 they were on the move again with Cumberland as their objective.

Brigadier General Benjamin F. Kelley, commander of Union forces in the area, marched his command out the Baltimore Pike some two and one-half miles, and placed them in positions blocking the turnpike near Folck’s Mill. The One Hundred and Fifty-Third Ohio National Guards, Colonel I. Stough (commanding), was sent to Oldtown, Maryland, to blockade the road and to dispute the passage of the river in case the enemy should attempt to move into Virginia by that route before attacking Cumberland, or in case of a failure before the city, should endeavor to effect a retreat in that direction.”

“About noon the scouts reported that a heavy body of rebel cavalry and mounted infantry was approaching Cumberland upon the Baltimore Turnpike, and was then distant but about six miles.” A squadron of the enemy cavalry appeared about 3:00 p.m. near Folck’s Mill. A portion of them crossed the covered bridge at that place and came within range of the muskets of Kelley’s forces. At this juncture the artillery “on the heights opened fire upon them, which was the first intimation they (the Rebels) had of the presence” of Kelley’s command. “After their recovery from the surprise they took shelter behind the bridge, Folck’s Mill, house, barn, etc., and from this cover their sharpshooters opened a galling fire” upon Kelley’s artillery. This, however, was soon “rendered ineffectual” by Union skirmishers. The Rebels themselves, “then rapidly deployed a line of skirmishers, placed four pieces of artillery in position and brought up the main part of their command. A sharp engagement ensued lasting for several hours.” “The dwelling, mill, and barn of John Folck,” being within range of the Union guns, “were struck several times” by exploding shells. The barn caught fire and along with its contents was entirely destroyed.

Following cessation of the hostilities General McCausland conferred with General Johnson. The two mutually agreed that because of “the force displayed, with the position and unknown country,” it would be “inexpedient” to continue the attack. At this point, General McCausland sent Major Harry Gilmore and his cavalry command to “find a road to the river by which he (McCausland) could cross into Virginia and save his ammunition wagons and artillery.”

Gilmore had not gone more than half-a-mile before he obtained from a citizen all he wished to know about a way to the Potomac River via Oldtown, Maryland. Finding it narrow, mountainous in spots, but very firm, the Confederate force withdrew during the night. With General Johnson’s brigade in advance, they took this “obscure road across the mountains” toward the Potomac River at Oldtown. The Rebels abandoned their dead, 8 in number, some 30 odd wounded, 2 caissons, several carriages, and a large quantity of ammunition. Union losses reported by General Kelley were 1 killed and 1 wounded.

The Rebels reached their destination at daybreak, about 5:00 am, Tuesday, August 2nd. There, the Confederates encountered Colonel Stough and the 153rd Ohio National Guards, a unit of a hundred days men. Colonel Stough had burned the canal bridges and “posted himself on a hill between the canal and the Potomac.” After quickly building a temporary bridge over the canal, Brigadier General Bradley T. Johnson, immediately attacked Colonel Stough’s front and flanks, at the same time opening up vigorously with his two pieces of artillery. When the Rebels succeeded in flanking him, Colonel Stough and his force crossed over the Potomac River to the Virginia side. “By the time he had reached the Virginia side, his men had become so demoralized that all but five officers and seventy-seven enlisted men took the cars which had carried them down, and moved out of reach of the enemy.” Eventually Colonel Stough surrendered with stipulations: First, that his men should be immediately paroled; second, that private

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property should be respected; third, that the men should retain canteens, haversacks, blankets, and rations; fourth, that he should have a hand-car with which to transport his wounded men to Cumberland. The propositions made by Colonel Stough were accepted and his command at once paroled."

The official report submitted by General Kelley following the Oldtown skirmish revealed that, "The enemy lost from 20 to 25 killed in the engagement and from 40 to 50 wounded." Union losses were reported as "2 killed and 3 wounded, with 10 missing."

Following their success at Oldtown the Confederates moved to Springfield, West Virginia, where they camped and rested their horses. On the 3rd of August they moved on to Romney, West Virginia, where "all the wagons, dismounted men, and crippled horses were sent to the Valley." Leaving Romney they attacked New Creek (Keyser) in Mineral County, West Virginia in an attempt to disrupt operations of the B&O Railroad at that location. After a sharp battle there, they were repulsed "by Union troops commanded by Colonel Robert Stevenson." The Rebels then "fled south toward Moorefield."

At Moorefield on the morning of August 7, 1864 the Confederates were surprised and badly beaten by Union troops led by Brigadier General W.W. Averill. The confused Confederates were sent "fleeing toward Mount Jackson and Winchester, Virginia."

With the success of Union forces at the Battle of Folck's Mill the citizens of Cumberland were deeply relieved and thankful that their city and personal property was still safe. Cumberland had been saved from possible destruction, and had survived intact, one of the few major military threats she would face during the war.



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