

George Spahr Diary, p. 364-369, entries for January 10-12, 1863
Transcribed by Mary Z. Rose 11/17/2017

10th. Night cool. Morning same – clear. Breeze light.

Issued a few articles of clothing this morning, and did a few other duties.

A messenger came in about eight or nine o'clock this morning, from Col. Merrill, of the 21st Iowa, commander of the expedition that went out yesterday. Reinforcements, from the cavalry, were ordered out on the double-quick. Some thirteen of our company – including myself – rigged up and went out under O. Serg't Wolf. Our detachment turned out one hundred and twenty, or more; and the 3rd Iowa Cav. some sixty or eighty men. We were all ready mounted, by eleven o'clock or a little earlier, and started southward, under Capt. Black, the commander of our detachment.

We made a rapid march toward Hartsville [i.e. Hartville], and halted to feed lunch and rest a little, about two miles beyond Beaver Creek, where the train was burned, about four p.m. After a rest of about two hours we started on again, as rapidly as before. We passed through Hartville, and ascertained that the rebels, under Col. Porter, had been there, in considerable numbers, a day or two ago. They had pulled down and burned the pickets, round the court house square, put there, some time ago, by the militia, for defense. We pushed on toward Springfield and came up with Col. Merrill's command, in camp, some eight miles southwest of Hartville, about eleven night. We made a march of forty-five miles in ten hours, on the road.

My horse behaved himself very unseemly all the way to Beaver Creek. He could not be kept in the column. He twisted his tail first one way then the other. He kicked, bucked, ran sideways, ran backwards, off into the woods – now this side of the road then on that side, sometimes ahead of our column sometimes several paces behind. In all his efforts he failed to unseat me or to elicit from me any signs of fear, or unfirmness. He showed no signs of fatigue or surrender. He appeared as fresh and sound of wind at night as in the morning. He moved in his place in the column, quietly after feeding near Beaver Creek.

Several persons along the road hailed us and announced that there was danger of us getting hurt this time. They said there were plenty of them “down thar.” We replied there were not enough to damage us. They thought we would hardly “afford amusement.”

Day pleasant, clear. Breeze light.

11th – Sunday. Night cool. Morning same, clear. Breeze light.

On getting into camp last night our command scattered out in different directions, every company, and part of a company for itself. We tied up at the first place that seemed to be at all suitable, secured forage for our horses from a wagon near by, spread out blankets on the leaves, in the bush, close by, and lay down for a nap, using our saddles for pillows. We rested very well till about two o'clock, when the reveille was sounded. Soon the camp was all astir, and fires lighted all about us. We got up, shook ourselves, saddled our horses, and sent a man to hunt up

our company. He soon returned and reported the company on our left and only three or four rods distant. We went to them, got some breakfast and a little feed for our horses.

About three o'clock our pickets, on the west end of the road fired upon an approaching body of men, who failed to answer their challenge satisfactorily, and ran in. The men fired upon put back. The fires were all darkened in a twinkling, almost. A line of battle was formed by the infantry across the road fronting westward. The artillery was unlimbered for action in the road, and every one was on the qui vive for the next move.

Our company was ordered to the front to reconnoiter. We were divided into three platoons, and I was at the head of the third. The Capt. gave order to follow him, and we all started out on a fast trot. In front of the infantry line my horse began his tricks and I could not get him forward. He came near overriding some of the infantry. We got lost from the company in the melee, and returned to quarters in the camp. Co. H was ordered to the rear to form a line to prevent being surrounded or surprised in that direction. I formed my platoon on their left, and went to the rear with them. We remained in the rear till day break, when one of our sergeants came back on the hunt of us, and we moved to the front, and re-joined the company.

While in the rear we heard considerable firing and became quite anxious. We now learned that as our boys were passing out along the road they saw considerable of a body of cavalry approaching. The Capt. challenged, asking "whose cavalry is that?" The answer came back: "Col. Porter's cavalry!" The Capt. ordered "front line – fire," but the boys had anticipated the command, and delivered their volley simultaneously with the order. They were in line almost before the challenge was answered. They put back in a hurry. We learned afterward that the volley from our boys killed three and wounded four of the rebels.

Our Capt. put back to camp for reinforcements and about all the cavalry, excepting the rear guard, went forward. Scouts and skirmishes were sent out, but no enemy found for some time. After a little Capt. Bradway, at the head of a platoon of his Co., E, dashed off to the front, past all the others. Capt. Lennon and others called to him to move cautiously, and look out sharply. He answered back in derision: "There is nothing there! You are firing at the wind?" There was a small field on his right and brushwood on the left. At the head of the field there was thick brush on both sides of the road. Just as Capt. B. passed the field he was fired upon by a heavy line posted there in ambush. Several volleys were poured into him at short ranges. He never came back, but part of his men got back in a short time, most of them wounded.

At daylight our line of battle was advanced to the foot of the field, or rather to the opening of the farm below the small field. Reconnoitering parties were sent out in different directions. I was sent with my platoon to the right to make observations. After scouting about on the hills for some time without seeing anything worthy of notice, I called for a man to climb a tree. Our roughest character stepped out and said he could climb. I pointed out a tree that overtopped those around it, and commanded the country, or afforded a good view of it for a couple of miles to the front. My man was soon in the top of the tree. He reported that there was a rather narrow strip of woods between the farm we were on and the next. That there was considerable of a line of men drawn up in front of the house there, with one or two pieces of

artillery. After getting this information I called him down, and rejoining the command, on the low ground, reported to the Capt. the information I had obtained.

Our artillery was employed much of the time throwing shells mostly at random. After this they dropped a few in the right place, but with what effect we could not ascertain.

Soon after I reported our company were all together, and we started forward along the road Capt. Bradway had taken. When we passed the field we saw a ghastly sight. Capt. B. lay in the road dead, and stripped of nearly every article of clothing. His horse lay dead near him. Beyond, a few rods, lay two or three company horses dead; and by the side of the road one of Capt. B's men. We were moving in a column of fours and nearly or quite every eye bent forward to catch the first intimation of danger. Soon after passing the scene of Capt. B's disaster, we came into a straight, and rather beautiful avenue, with a thick growth of small timber, or saplings, on either side some twenty or thirty feet in height. On entering this we had a full view of the farm buildings beyond, where my climber had seen the men and artillery. We caught sight of the enemy and saw the officer in command of the gun – an iron howitzer – throw up his hands. We also heard his command to fire. Our Capt. gave a hurried order: "fours right," but we had "fours righted" and not a moment too soon. A shower of canister came sweeping through that avenue, that must have sent several of us to our last accounts, if we had been a moment later wheeling into the shelter of the brush. Three shots were fired at us but our cover was secure. We had one man wounded, a deep flesh wound in the thigh. He was a little fellow and rode a pony. Both were very slow motioned. If he had moved as quickly as the rest of us did he would not have been touched. He was also rather heedless, and perhaps did not see the danger as most of us saw it. He turned back toward the rear, and was taken to the field hospital.

We turned back, keeping clear of the road, and soon gained about the position we had just before starting past the field. Our artillerists now poured in a pretty heavy shower of shot and shell, for some minutes. We started on again, but this time in a different direction. We moved to the right, through the woods, and came into the road on that farm from another direction. If the rebels had remained in line as they were, we should have struck them in the flank, on their left, but they were not there. We came into their camp before reaching the road, and picked up several guns and other articles which proved that they had left in a hurry. We soon after found out that this was only their advance camp, and had contained but a small portion of their forces.

Our detachment was soon altogether again, and we moved on down the road past the next farm. Here we came into their main camp, finding it deserted, except by a few lame horses. A body of men moved down the road a mile or two, and brought up some prisoners, re-captured from them, and a few of their men taken in out of the wet. They also captured one or two wagon loads of plunder that they had taken from stores in Marshfield and other places. Some of their picket and other parties came in, not knowing they had abandoned their camp, and we took care of them. One party, consisting of twenty-five or thirty men, with a Lieut. and a surgeon riding at the head, came in along the road. We were in line in the edge of the woods, alongside the road. They came in at our right and passed on till their front was within a few paces of the left of our lines. Eddie Herron, a saucy little Irish boy, Second bugler of our company, and every inch a soldier, called out to the Lieut. and asked: "are you going all the way today?" The Lieut. replied that he did not know whether he was or not. Just then one of our officers spoke, and said, "My

friend, do you know where you are?" The two at the head then looked about them rather hurriedly, as did the whole party, and the Lieut. said: "Well, I guess I have got into the wrong pew this time! I suppose we might as well hand over! You are too many for us!" They handed over their arms and effects, and were marched rearward under a sufficient guard. We took in about fifty prisoners, besides some dozen or more union – citizens and soldiers – prisoners retaken from them.

Upon enquiry, we learned that the rebels in our front were the commands of Gen. Marmaduke, Col's Porter, Burbridge, and two or three others. That their combined force numbered some four to five thousand men, with four or five pieces of artillery. We learned that Marmaduke made an attack upon Springfield a few days ago and captured one piece of artillery, but that he was defeated and driven away with heavy loss. We also learned that on his retreat back into Arkansas, Marmaduke met with Porter, Burbridge, &c. who were well supplied with ammunition, his own having been expended at Springfield, and that they had united their forces for the purpose of capturing and plundering Lebanon. Marmaduke, being the ranking officer, commanded the whole force.

Upon observation we ascertained that their camp and ours were not more than a mile, or a mile and a half apart, and that their pickets and ours had stood within two hundred yards of each other. Neither was aware of the close proximity of the other. Our bugles waked up both camps, and they had sent out first a small party to ascertain whence came those bugle notes, or what foe it was that barred their way to Lebanon. That party ran against our pickets. Then they sent a larger party and that ran against our company.

About nine o'clock our columns were were [sic] turned about and we moved at a moderate pace toward Hartville. When we were within two or three miles of that place it was ascertained that the rebels were on another road using every exertion to get in first. Our artillery was ordered forward on the run, and we followed in part and in part led the advance. The cavalry kept the front, then the artillery, then the infantry. The train, prisoners, etc., came on the rear. We had an exciting race into Hartville, and we won the heat by about five minutes. My horse behaved well, and has done so ever since his first flurry before daylight, when I got lost from the company.

We drew up in column of squadrons in an open space on the hill, overlooking the village, westward. Our artillery unlimbered for action on the face of the hill just below us. We were scarce on the ground till we saw the enemy forming their line of battle along the bank of the Gasconade, away to the south east about a mile distant, or near that. The village lay nearly or quite on a line between us. Our artillery opened on them with shell and it appeared to me that every shell exploded right above their heads. Their artillery was planted on the top of the bluff, on the opposite side of the river. They opened on us with a two-and-half inch bore steel rifle, and an iron piece. They threw solid shot with the rifle, and a few shells, perhaps, with the other. Presently the Lieut. of our section pierced a shell for a long range, elevated the piece, and fired. I watched the result. I saw the shell explode. It appeared to me that it exploded about six inches above that iron gun, and right between the wheels. That piece was effectually silenced, for this time, at least.

The enemy, after forming their lines along the river bank, re-formed in column of platoons, so it appeared to me, and marched up to within a short distance of the court house. Here about two-thirds of them dismounted, tied up their horses, and reforming, came on afoot, the other third coming up in the rear mounted. We saw that something was going to be done, and that very soon.

Our infantry were up and in their places but what could, or would, they do? They had never been under fire. They had never fired a shot, perhaps except at mark, or game. Would the [sic] they stand in the face of such game as now approached? and which outnumbered them and us, six to one? We knew one another, that is the cavalry. We knew the cavalry would stand in the face of ten to one, even, if called upon, and then most of [them?] get away if overpowered, but here we had slim chance to get away, if we were overpowered, on account of the thick scraggy brush and narrow roads. We retired behind the crest of the hill, tied our horses to the brush, and forming on foot marched to our position in the line.

Our line of battle was formed on the face of the hill in the form of an extended v. The artillery a little advanced in the apex. The 99th Illinois Inf. occupied the extreme right, the 21st Iowa inf. the right-center to the apex of the formation; Co's G, I, and part of D, and part of E formed the left-center, from the apex downward and Co. C, and part of the 3rd Iowa Cav. the extreme left, dropping nearly to the bottom of the ravine to the north of us.

We moved forward to our position feeling somewhat queer. All partook of the same feeling, as appeared from appearance of countenances, and from confessions. It was not a sense of fear, nor of distrust, but merely one of anxiety, as to what the infantry would do. We knew the shock of the battle would fall upon them first, and that they would have to bear it alone for a short time, as it would fall before we could possibly gain our position in the line of battle. As we moved on all ears were open to catch the ring of the first volley. We could not see the enemy, for the brush, but we had a kind of inward feeling that seemed to tell us where they were. That came from a kind of unconscious measurement of space compared with time. We all knew where they were when we went back to tie up our horses, and we knew how far we moved, and we unconsciously, at the time, compared the two, and knew where they were.

Presently a full volley rang out from the infantry, almost as one shot, no jarring; then another, then a third, with little less jar than the first. All our anxiety was gone. We felt that the victory was ours. We knew that men who could stand and deliver three such clear volleys, and all in less than a minute's time, would stick to the end and force the victory, no matter what the odds might be. By the time their fourth volley was delivered we were in position, and the enemy were wavering a little toward our side. We poured into them three or four volleys, which struck them quartering in the flank. This was a shock too heavy for them to bear. They broke and ran back in the utmost confusion. The scene was terrible, horses running in crazy fright some with their riders unhorsed and dragging at their sides, their feet fast in the stirrups, some capering off almost as if in play on the pasture. Many were riderless, and many more almost or quite unmanageable.

They had made a charge upon our artillery with full confidence in themselves, as to their ability to capture it. They got within thirty or forty feet of the coveted prize, but were obliged to get back without it. Many a revel was sent to his last account, and many a horse bore away an empty saddle. Nor did we escape unhurt. Four of our company were wounded in that charge. We moved down to the edge of the brush, almost into the open ground, and one of our boys – Young – was left there severely wounded. The other three were not very seriously hurt.

They rallied, after getting out of range of our guns, and came up again, but were repulsed, as before, with heavy loss. They did not come nearer than about a hundred yards of us this time. They rallied again and again, but could not be brought within close range of our guns again. They had enough of that.

They occupied the court house in considerable force and sent many a bullet whistling about our ears from the windows. A shell or two exploded in the midst of the court room among them admonished them that it was unhealthy in there, and sent what was left out in a hurry. They occupied the front yard now and kept up a constant fire upon us from round the corners. While one was firing another was loading, with the building between them and us. A shell or two driven through the house, and exploded among them there, sent them, in haste, to more healthy quarters. They occupied other houses, sheds and barricades, and kept up a constant fire upon our lines from these coverts. They would have given much now if they had left the pickets round the court house square unmolested. More than one of them lost his life for want of the protection they would have afforded.

Our line fell back a couple of rods from the edge of the brush, and there remained till the close of the fight. The action as commenced, by our artillery, about eleven o'clock. The first – and principal – charge was made about noon, and the others followed as rapidly as they could be rallied and brought forward. About one or half past, they settled down to regular hard work from behind coverts of various kinds. Nor were we idle we took our position after the first charge and there we remained doing what we could. They brought two pieces of artillery as near our lines as they dared, and kept them belching out at us shower after shower of grape and canister, but they did not hurt us very much. One piece was an iron howitzer, and the other was a little brass mountain howitzer. The brass piece was brought up to the court house, and worked a while with canister shot, but the location as too warm. The horses were killed and they had to leave it and get away, but they spiked it before leaving it. It remained there some considerable time for a bait, but we were not strong enough to bite, much! They finally rallied and took it away, by hand, I believe.

The firing began to grow weaker about four o'clock, when they commenced to withdraw from the field. We could see their columns forming and moving out on the opposite side of the river. The firing continued till dusk, growing weaker and weaker all the time, till it finally ceased altogether, when their rear guard took up their line of march on the retreat southward.

Our hero (?), Col. Merrill, who was not visible during the fight, and who gave no orders till the danger was past, rallied from his fright sufficiently to send an orderly round with orders for the different detachments to withdraw from the field, and march toward Lebanon. He started far enough in advance to keep out of the way of any danger that might occur. We started off

about sunset. The 21st Iowa was left behind without orders. The orderly being, perhaps, afflicted with the same disease that troubled the Col. failed to deliver the order to the commander of that detachment. They remained till dusk firing an occasional shot, when finding themselves left alone they followed the train and overtook us before we had gone very far. The question was asked by many of the boys: "where are we going?" and "what does this movement mean?" No one surmised anything more than that we were going to camp as soon as we could find forage and water. We were forced to believe after a while that we were ingloriously running away from victory, but a soldier's duty is to obey orders.

From all we could see we had gained circumstances considered, one of the most glorious victories of the war, and spoiled it by making one of the most cowardly retreats.

Our loss during the whole action – morning and day – was eight killed, including Capt. Bradway; and twenty-five or thirty wounded. The rebel loss was heavy.

Our boys – and all engaged, as far as I could see – behaved well, with – so far as I know – only two exceptions. Capt. Lennon did much better than many expected. The action was conducted principally by the company officers. Capt. Black, our detachment commander, was somewhat conspicuous, and passed along the lines several times, but the only order we heard from him, after the fight commenced, was when we left the field. Officers and all were very angry when they found we were running away. All were anxious to remain on the field, and hold what we had gained.

During the fight – so reported – the rebels sent a regiment, clothed principally in union blue, to turn out right flank. The first made slow progress, and they sent another to reinforce it, clothed in rebel gray and butternut. This second regiment coming up with the first, mistook them for our lads and poured several volleys into them, killing and wounding a large number of their men. So much for wearing false colors.

A young Irishman of our company after several unsuccessful efforts to fire his gun, commenced a search for a pin to pick the once, forgetting the "cone pick" in his cap pouch. This during the heat of action, after the first charge. He applied to me and several others close by. While he was hunting for a pin a rebel bullet struck him just above the ear, cutting away a lock of hair, and abrading the skin barely enough for a little blood to ooze [ooze] out. He [was] stunned for a time, and staggered about considerably for a moment, almost falling. Presently he steadied himself, put up his hand, and exclaimed "Oh! (a little profanity) I am not dead yet!" He got his cone opened and then it would not have been safe for a score of rebels to have stood "forninst" him. He fought desperately during the remainder of the day.

During the afternoon, while the shot was flying about lively, one of our men, a corporal, an Englishman of large dimensions and good nature, was sitting on a rock of considerable size in an open place. He became tired of his position and made a slight change. After making this change he began to cast about for a convenient stone on which to rest his heel. He found the desired stone presently and essayed to rest his heel upon it. Just as the heel was about to touch it – lo! and behold, the stone was not there. A grape shot from the iron howitzer had knocked [it]

into fragments. He turned all sorts of colors, and looked queer for a moment or two. We had a laugh at his expense, in which he joined.

Another incident, and best one of all, I felt, all through the fight, that if a bullet should send me out of this world, I would be forever clear of trouble, and at rest with Jesus, the blessed Savior of Sinners. I felt as happy as I could have felt under any other circumstances.

Lieut. Lacey showed the "white feather." I saw him once during the fight, bareheaded with an old fashioned holster pistol under each arm, and a revolver in his hand, to the rear of our line. He was in a state of fright almost bordering on insanity. He was looking for some imaginary enemy that he hoped he would not find. He was adjutant of our detachment. Presently he stated that he was "going for reinforcements" and left the field. We saw him no more, neither did we see his reinforcements.

A Lieut. of Co. E also showed the "white feather." He struck for the rear before we fired a shot at Hartville. He dismounted with the rest, and moved forward till we had nearly gained our position. All at once he turned back under the plea of placing a "guard over the horses," and was seen no more till the danger was over. These were the only two cases of bad behavior that came under my knowledge, among the men of our detachment.

Co. H was not in the line but did good service during the action, mostly mounted.

Day pleasant – clear. B. fair. Just right to clear away the smoke of the battle.

12th – Night cool, pleasant. Morning same – cloudy. B. light.

We marched nearly all night, Col. Merrill lead [led] the advance, and got into Lebanon about one o'clock, thirty-five miles. Our detachment was in the rear of the train. We marched about twenty miles, and then halted – just after crossing a large stream – an hour or two, to make some coffee and have a lunch, and let our horses eat something. We were, horses and all, nearly twenty-four hours without eating. Our lunch was very slim. Only a few crackers could be obtained. About half a meal.

We halted about sunrise – being in the extreme rear – within five miles of Lebanon, at a small farm house, fed our horses and had breakfast. The woman did her best, and cooked for us as rapidly as she was able, under the circumstances. We numbered about one hundred and fifty men. She had an open fireplace, an ordinary tea kettle, a one-gallon coffee boiler, and two medium sized skillets. That was her full stock of cooking utensils, and, nothing daunted, she undertook to supply all of our hungry stomachs with breakfast. To help along, she had to back corn bread and fry meat. She had no other bread. She had dishes and table room for eight or ten men at a time. She had us all filled a little before noon. That woman is a heroine!

A little afternoon we saddle up and went on to Lebanon. We went into camp in the edge of the woods north of town, drew rations and forage and prepared to live again on our own bread and meat, and cook it ourselves. We had a couple of tents along and we put them up to shelter us from the weather.

The prisoners were brought on through and turned over to the proper authorities in Lebanon. The contraband horses, arms, etc. were turned over also.

The people here are badly scared – many of them – and many a story is told of the fight. Many an eager listener is to be found on the streets. The militia have removed their tents into the brush. A flag of truce was sent to Hartville this morning.

This evening a messenger came in from Houston, with orders from the Gen. He says that some persons from Hartville had reported that we had had a fight there, been very badly defeated, and had fallen back on Lebanon. The General's orders were to the effect that all the spare cavalry return immediately to Hartville, to form a junction with him there, as he was going down with all the available men left at Houston.

I went up into town and spent some little time on the streets, taking observations. I bought a quart cup and a pint cup, for coffee purposes.

Day cool, pleasant – cloudy. B. fair.