

Documents

The Battle of Corydon

*Contributed by Arville L. Funk**

Although Confederates and their sympathizers made various raids across the Ohio River into southern Indiana during the Civil War, the one led by General John Hunt Morgan exceeded them all in size. Moreover, it caused more excitement, resulted in more property damage, and created more legends than did any of the other raids. The objectives and results of Morgan's raid continue to be interpreted with much diversity of opinion; for instance, see the article by Professor William E. Wilson in this issue of the *Indiana Magazine of History*.

General Morgan's cavalry division included approximately 2,400 troops when it arrived at the little Ohio River town of Brandenburg, Kentucky, on the morning of July 7, 1863. During the previous day advance scouts had captured two steamers, the "J. T. McCombs" and the "Alice Dean," for use in crossing the river. Meanwhile, the Indiana Legion (Home Guards) and local volunteers called for reinforcements and girded for conflict.

On July 8 Morgan easily crossed the Ohio despite the opposition of the Indiana Legion and local volunteers. Proceeding northward against sporadic opposition from the Hoosiers, Morgan's cavalry spent the night several miles south of Corydon and about ten miles from the Ohio.

Next morning, July 9, the Indiana Legion and the local volunteers fought the invaders at the Battle of Corydon, a mile or so south of the former state capital. Morgan's cavalry were soon victorious and immediately marched into Corydon and looted the town, then headed toward Palmyra and Salem yet that afternoon. Their route thereafter until Morgan's capture in Ohio is indicated in the article by Professor Wilson.

The account of the Battle of Corydon which follows was written by Simeon K. Wolfe, editor of the *Corydon Weekly Democrat*, and a participant in the battle. Though his estimate of 4,500 men with Morgan is about twice the actual number, Editor Wolfe frankly admitted quick defeat for the defenders.

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The original punctuation and spelling have been preserved in reproducing the editor's account from the *Weekly Democrat* of July 14, 1863. Since the newspaper was a weekly, additional items were interspersed in succeeding columns after the main account of the battle as further news was received.¹

The Morgan Raid Into Indiana.

The Battle at Corydon.

450 Home Guards and Citizens.

vs:

4,500 Rebel Cavalry and 7 Pieces of Artillery.

*The Home Guards & Citizens hold
the Rebels in Check 25 Minutes.*

Home Guards and Citizens Overpowered by
Numbers and Compelled to Surrender.

CORYDON CAPTURED

Union Losses four Killed and two Wounded.

REBEL LOSS 10 KILLED AND 40 WOUNDED.

GREAT ROBBERY OF THE PEOPLE IN TOWN AND COUNTRY.

Our town and community have been the scene of intense excitement during the whole of the past week in consequence of the invasion of the State at this point by the notorious guerrillas under the equally notorious John Morgan. A vast amount of damage by horse-stealing and other plundering has been done which it is impossible for us to detail at the present time with any great degree of accuracy, but we think it a safe estimate to put the loss to our citizens at the least at \$100,000.

We will endeavor to give a reliable account of the raid from the time the rebels crossed at Brandenburg up to the

¹ For a general account of Morgan's Raid see Cecil Fletcher Holland, *Morgan and His Raiders* (New York, 1943); Louis B. Ewbank, "Morgan's Raid in Indiana," *Indiana Historical Society Publication*, Vol. VII, No. 2 (Indianapolis, 1923); and Logan Esarey, *History of Indiana* (2nd ed., 2 vols., Indianapolis, 1918), II, 771-775.

time when they left Harrison county. But for the lack of due military organization and the consequent official information on many points, our details may not be in every particular correct, but the main features we *know* are correct, for we were present in the midst of some of the exciting scenes and have a very lively recollection of them; of the other matters we think we have reliable accounts.

THE FIGHT AT BRANDENBURG CROSSING.

On Tuesday evening (July the 7th) the steamboat T. J. McCombs landed at Brandenburg, and was immediately captured by Morgan's advance guard then in possession of the town. The McCombs was taken by the rebels to the middle of the river and there she hoisted the sign of distress. Soon after the Alice Dean coming up was hailed to give relief. For that purpose she approached the McCombs and was thus also captured by the rebels. The news of the capture of these boats was communicated by some Union men of Brandenburg to Lieut Col: Wm. J. Irvin, of the Indiana Legion, then at Mauckport. A short time after receiving this intelligence the Lady Pike coming up was hailed by Col. Irvin at Mauckport, and turned back to Leavenworth for a six-pound gun und [*sic*] assistance; a dispatch was also sent to Col. Jordan at Corydon for reinforcements to intercept the rebels crossing. At midnight the Lady Pike returned with the Leavenworth gun and a small company to man it under command of Capt Lyons and Col. Woodbury. Before daylight, on Wednesday morning the gun was in position on the bank opposite Brandenburg, and as soon as daylight and the disappearance of the fog would render it practicable the gun was directed by Col. Irvin to be fired upon the boilers of the vessels with a view of sinking or disabling them and thus prevent the crossing of the raiders. This command, we are informed by Colonel Irvin, was countermanded by Provost Marshall [*sic*] John Timberlake who claimed precedence in command on the occasion, and an order was given by the latter officer, to shell the rebel cavalry on the bank. Another and different version, however, of this matter, we understand is given by Provost Timberlake; but we have not been able to see him and obtain it. This shelling was done for a short time with some success, causing the rascals to skedaddle to the rear of the town in fine style but before getting out of the way some thirty of them were killed and wounded. Soon, however, after our gun opened fire, two rebel batteries, one at the Court House at Brandenburg and the other towards the lower part of

town, began to play with terrific force upon our gun with shells, making it too hot for our boys to hold their position. They abandoned the gun, but afterwards retook it and carried it farther to the rear. The rebel infantry from the Kentucky shore also kept up a brisk fire across at our forces; and our infantry, consisting of Capts. Farquar's Huffman's and Hays' companies of the Legion, in all not exceeding 100 men, returned the fire briskly.

But the superior artillery force of the enemy soon compelled our small force to abandon the gun again, and then under the cover of his batteries, the enemy began to cross their thieving forces to the Indiana side. Our boys held the ground as long as it was prudent or safe in the face of the forces coming against them, and then retired.

In this gallant little fight we lost two men killed and three or four wounded.—The killed were, Georgia Nance of Laconia and James Currant of Heth township. Capt Farquar was pretty badly injured by his horse running him against a tree. The names of our wounded in this fight we have been unable to obtain.

SKIRMISHING ON THE ROAD.

Failing in the effort to prevent the rebels crossing Col. Irvin and provost Timberlake ordered the men to fall back on the road to Corydon and by skirmishing and falling trees to obstruct the passage of the enemy as much as possible until reinforcements with artillery could be had from New Albany, to which place dispatches were repeatedly sent for help; but for some reason, which we hope the authorities of that post will be able to explain, *we never got a man or a gun!*

Not deterred however by this neglect, or the overpowering forces in our front, the people went to work and by great exertions a force of Home Guards and citizens, number about 300 effective men, were got together on Wednesday evening and marched out on the Mauckport road to skirmish with the enemy and impede his progress as much as possible. The main body of these under command of Col. Jordan, went as far as Glenn's house four miles south of Corydon. Here the infantry remained until about 10 o'clock at night and returned to the neighborhood of Corydon, while the cavalry and mounted citizens to the number of over one hundred men were sent on the roads running south of Corydon as scouts to watch the operations of the enemy. Several small engagements between the skirmishers occurred on Wednesday evening and Thursday morning; in one of these one rebel was

killed near Glenn's house, and two prisoners were captured. The rebels, shortly afterwards at the same place shot John Glenn, a son of Peter, through both thighs, and about the same time—shot and killed Peter Glenn, an old and well known citizen, and burnt his dwelling and barn. In their progress to Corydon they also burn Peter Lopp's Mills on Buck creek, which is all the burning of property we have heard of them doing in the county. Their principal depredations being in horse stealing and robbing houses and citizens of everything valuable.

Many "hair-breadth escapes" and gallant charges are reported by these skirmishers, but we have not the space for detailing them at this time.

THE BATTLE AT CORYDON.

About 11 ½ o'clock on Thursday morning our scouts brought the report that the enemy was approaching in strong force up the Mauckport road toward Corydon. Our forces, consisting of about 450 Home Guards and citizens under command of Col. Lewis Jordan of the Legion, assisted by Provost Timberlake (late Col. of the 81st Indiana regiment) and Maj. Jacob Pfrimmer (who up to this time had been engaged with the cavalry in scouting) formed a line of battle on the hill one mile south of town, the extreme right wing resting at the Amsterdam road and the left near the Laconia road, making the Mauckport road, along which the main body of the enemy would approach, about one third of the distance of the entire length of the line from the right wing. The ground on the left of the Mauckport road is a heavy woods and though not hilly is somewhat uneven, which with the logs and underbrush made it difficult for a cavalry charge. This portion of the line was well selected for the purpose of saving our men from the rebel fire, but bad for the purpose of enabling our men to operate effectively against them, the line being at least fifty yards too far north, being that distance from an elevation in the ground which prevented either party from seeing the other before the enemy arrived to that distance from our line. Temporary breastworks composed of logs and fence rails were hastily thrown up by our forces which did good service in impeding the charge of the enemy.

About an hour later, the enemy made his appearance in small force, probably one company, about three quarters of a mile a little to the left and in front of our line where they were handsomely whipped by the infantry under the command of Captain G. W. Lahue which had been placed there for

picket duty. In that fight we lost one man killed, named Steepleton, and had none wounded. The rebels had several killed and six or seven wounded. Before this skirmish was fairly over, the enemy made their appearance in front of our main line along the Mauckport road in strong force. We (the editor) were with a squad of the Henry Rifles under command of Maj. McGrain, at the extreme right of the line on the Amsterdam road and had a full view of the approaching enemy. They completely filled the road for nearly one mile. As soon as they approached in range the Henry Rifles opened fire and did good work, the enemy being in full view. Soon the fire became general along the entire right wing, which checked the advancing column of the enemy, and compelled them to undertake to flank both our wings at the same time, a performance which the great disparity of forces enabled them easily to do.

Shortly after the flank movement was began [*sic*] and before it was executed, the enemy opened upon our forces with three pieces of artillery, making the shells sing the ugly kind of music over our heads. This shelling operation, together with the known fact that our line would be strongly flanked on both wings at the same time made it necessary for the safety of our men, for them to fall back. This was done, not with the best of order it is true, for our forces were mostly undrilled, but with excellent speed. From this time the fight was converted into a series of skirmishes in which each man seemed to fight upon his own hook mostly after the manner of bushwhackers.

In the meantime the enemy had completely flanked the town, having, before a gun was fired, taken possession of the plank road one mile east of town, where our men in their retreat were intercepted. Upon the right wing a large flanking force was sent against our lines and the fighting was very sharp for the space of 20 minutes in that quarter; twelve Henry Rifles and a squad of 30 or 40, some 100 yards to their left, armed with the ordinary rifle musket holding a heavy body of flankers in check for ten or fifteen minutes and compelling them to dismount.

Being completely overpowered by numbers our forces gradually fell back to Corydon and the cavalry and mounted infantry generally made their escape. After the field was taken by the enemy they moved forward, and planted a battery on the hill south of the town, and threw two shells into the town, both of them striking near the center of main

street, one exploded but did no damage. Seeing the contest was hopeless and that a continuance of the fight would only result in unnecessary loss of life and the destruction of the town, Col. Jordan wisely hoisted the white flag and surrendered.

The enemy immediately marched in and took military possession of the town; and then the work of pillage soon began. Everything the rebels wanted in the eating and wearing line and horses and buggies they took. The two stores of Douglass, Denbo & Co., and S. J. Wright and the two Steam Mills were the heaviest losers. The two stores were robbed of about \$300 each and a contribution of \$700 each in cash was levied upon the two mills in town and a like sum upon Mauck's mill near town. This large sum Messrs. Leffler & Applegate, Wright & Brown and John J. Mauck were compelled to pay to save their Mills from the flames. Many other citizens lost in horses and other property from 100 to \$600, Mr. Hisey was robbed of \$690 in cash. But we have not space enough to enumerate the pecuniary losses—few or none escaped entirely.

LOSSES.

The Union losses, beside property, are as follows:

KILLED:

Wm. Heth; Nathan McKinzie and Harry Steepleton —3.

WOUNDED:

Jacob Ferree and Caleb Thomas —2.

Our loss in prisoners was about 300 all of whom were paroled.

The rebels admitted their loss to be 8 killed and 33 wounded.

FORCES ENGAGED.

The number of forces engaged was 4500 commanded by Gen. Morgan with 7 pieces of artillery. The Union forces, consisting of raw militia [*sic*] and citizens, did not exceed 450. With these raw troops — *one* yank to *ten* rebs — Morgan's progress was impeded about five hours, which we hope will result in his capture.

Under all the circumstances we think our boys did exceedingly well. It was not expected at the start that so small a force could whip Morgan, but it was expected we could punish him some and impede his progress so that somebody

else more nearly equal his strength could catch him and do him justice. That this will soon be done we have every reason to hope.

HIS LEAVING THE COUNTY.

About 5 o'clock, P. M., after robbing the town to his heart's contents, the King of American Freebooters left, moving north on the Salem road, stealing, as a matter of course, as he went. In Blue River township the rebels shot two young men named McKinstry and at Bradford they shot a German whose name we did not learn.

Morgan's Whereabouts.

It isn't safe to say one hour where Morgan will be the next. Our latest intelligence placed him in the neighborhood of Vernon in Jennings Co., on Saturday where he had a fight with Lew. Wallace. A small squad of the raiders were whipped and scattered at Perkin in Clark county, a portion of their scattered men were seen in the north part of this county on Sunday.

After leaving this county Morgan went to Salem and captured the town without any resistance. After burning the depot and committing all the depredation he wanted, he left, going east.

Shot and Mortally Wounded.

At Salem, Wm. Vance, a son of the late Arthur Vance of this place, was shot by the rebels and mortally wounded, but under what circumstances we have not been able to learn.

6 Rebs and 19 Horses Captured.

Six of Morgan's men and nineteen horses were captured by the citizens near Fairdale, on Monday morning, and brought to this place. They are a portion of those that crossed at Twelve Mile Island. They were cut off from their main force in a skirmish at Pekin on Saturday evening last. The 13 who had the other horses have not at this time (Monday evening) been captured, but will be, unless they dodge equal to Morgan himself. The horses are mostly very fine ones.—The Rebs came to a house unarmed, gave themselves up and told where the horses were hitched in the woods.

Hurrah for Old Harrison!

Morgan, at last accounts, was at Aurora, Dearborn county, having left Vernon. The Home Guards and citizens,

in no other county but Old Harrison. stood and gave him a fight. We faught [*sic*] him twice.

Hurrah, for Old Harrison; her sons are as true as steel doubly refined.

In the hurry and confusion with which we have been surrounded for the past few days we have not, in our account of the rebel invasion and the battle, been able to give a statement of the different companies of the Legion engaged. Nor are we able to state fully the assistance we received from other counties. We saw some gallant boys from Georgetown and Edwardsville. The "two hundred from New Albany," mentioned by the Louisville Democrat, we have not heard of.

We have every reason to believe and hope that Morgan cannot escape from the State. Ample preparations are on foot to capture him.

Another contemporary document which describes the Battle of Corydon is the following letter written by Attia Porter, a young Corydon girl, to her cousin Private John C. Andrews, Forty-third Indiana Infantry Regiment, Company C, who at the time was with the Union army in Helena, Arkansas. This letter is the property of the family of James P. Andrews of Terre Haute, and is here reproduced with the permission of the Andrews family.

Corydon Ind. July 30/63

Dear Cousin

I was just studying the other day whose time it was to write mine or yours and could not come to any satisfactory conclusion, when your letter arrived and as a matter of course I was the debtor and I have since found out I owe you two letters instead of one. I received yours with the miniature three weeks ago, but never could manage to sit down and write. We have had rather exciting times in Indiana for the last few weeks, and have had a few of the miseries of the south pictured to us though in a small degree. On the doubly memorable ninth of July a visit was paid to the citizens of Corydon and vicinity by Morgan and his herd of horse thieves. We heard Tuesday night that they had crossed the river and had disgraced the soil of Indiana with their most unhallowed

feet. Our home guards skirmished with the rebs from the river to [Corydon] and on one of the hills overlooking the town had a grand *battle*. The battle raged violently for *thirty* minutes, just think of it! and on account of the large number of the rebs we were forced to retire which our men did in good earnest every one seemed determined to get out of town first but which succeeded remains undecided to this day. After the general skedaddle, Col Jordan wisely put up the white flag—and we were prisoners to a horde of thieves and murderers. I don't want you to think I am making fun of our brave home guards for I am not in the least. But now, that all the danger is over, it is real funny to think how our men did run. Gen. Carrington awarded great praise to us and we all think that is something. What could 350 undrilled home guards and citizens do against 4,000 well drilled and disciplined soldiers (?) We did not even know Hobson was following him. We sent to New Albany time and again for help and not one man or gun did they send us. Though we have found out since that it was the fault of Gen. Boyle and not the people of New Albany. It made Morgan so mad to think a few home guards dared to fight his men. I am glad they done it just to spite him. However they captured most of the guards and paroled them and killed three of our men. Father was out fighting with his Henry rifle but they did not get him or his gun. One of Morgans spies was in town three or four weeks visiting his relatives and some of his men helped our men to build the entrenchments. I guess none of the rebels down south are that accommodating are they? One of our brave boys run three miles from the rebels, and really run himself to death. He stopped at a house and fainted and never came to. Dident he deserve a promotion? I think that was the awfulest day I ever passed in my life. The rebels reported around that they shot father because he would not surrender, but it was all a story. The rebs were pretty hard on the copperheads but they did not take a thing from us. The[y] kidnapped our little negro and kept him three weeks but he got away from them and is now at home safe. We killed six or eight of theirs and wounded twenty five or thirty. I expect you are tired of hearing about Morgan so I will stop. I forgot my letter till so late this morning, and I have not got time to write much more or I will be too late for the stage so Goodby.

Attia