

a man who told us that Wade and his men were waiting for us and that he had said he could whip a thousand of us. We stopped and held a consultation and decided to send one of our men into Iredell County to ask Colonel Robert V. Cowan, who had commanded the Thirty-third Regiment of North Carolina Troops in the late war, to get together all the men that he could and to come to Holman's Ford with all possible speed. It was also decided to send another of our men to the headquarters of some Federal Troops encamped near Lexington, N. C., to inform them of the condition of things in Wilkes and to ask them to relieve the situation as quickly as possible. Leaving Moravian Falls about midnight, we moved cautiously up the road toward Holman's Ford. The night was dark and all felt that the march was fraught with danger. As we neared the ford a voice rang out sharp and clear: "Halt! Who comes there?" Col. Sharpe replied: "Men from Alexander. Who are you?" The reply came: "Oxford's men from Caldwell, Advance." This was good news to us and when we reached them we found them all sleeping in the woods near the road with the exception of two or three who were walking the sentinel's beat. We were soon sleeping beside these men in their beds of leaves.

At break of day the next morning the two companies, which now numbered about forty men, arose from their beds of leaves and started on their way. We left the road leading to the ford and turned up the river to the left and crossed it at a small ford on the farm of a Mister Tolbert. We then ascended the hill and on to the valley road where we dismounted, fed our horses, and ate our breakfast from our haversacks in the yard of Mr. Tolbert's home. Inside a woman lay dying. As she and her husband were approaching the ford the day before in a wagon, she was shot by one of the robbers from the fort more than a quarter of a mile away. While here Mr. Tolbert said to us: "You can easily judge what my fears of these robbers are and what my feelings toward them are; but I dare not say a word. My advice to you is that you go back home for you will not be able to take them with the small force which you have. They are on the lookout for you and have no doubt sent out for recruits and, should they capture you, they will surely put you to death. No doubt they are right now lying in those thickets and no sooner than you cross the top of yonder hill you will be fired upon." We held a counsel of war and while a few of our bravest men were in favor of going back and waiting until we could rally a stronger force, it was decided by a large majority that we go on.

After passing the top of the hill and coming to a narrow path leading through a long stretch of old field pines, the Colonel said to me: "You take these five men with you and follow this path until you come to the hill which is on the west of the fort. Feel your way carefully through the thicket and when you come to the hill, search it to see if any one is on it. I will take the rest of the men and station them on the north and east of the fort. As soon as the men are stationed a gun will be fired so that you may know we are in position." I took the five men and we went single file, one after the other, expecting every moment to be shot down. We didn't draw a free breath until we had reached the hill and found no one upon it. We had been in many places of danger during the war, but never had our courage been tried as it was in our march through that thicket. We had been on the hill only a few minutes when one of the robbers was seen leaving the fort and going into the field below where several fine horses were grazing. While