

THE BEEFSTEAK RAID OF 14-17 SEPTEMBER, 1864

THE SLICKEST PIECE OF CATTLE-STEALING

In the overland campaign of 1864, the Union armies pushed the Confederate forces back to their capital at Richmond, Virginia. After the Battle of Cold Harbor, the Army of the Potomac pressed on to attack Petersburg in an attempt to outflank the capital from the south. The city was a vital supply and communications hub, and well defended with trenches, forts and defence lines.

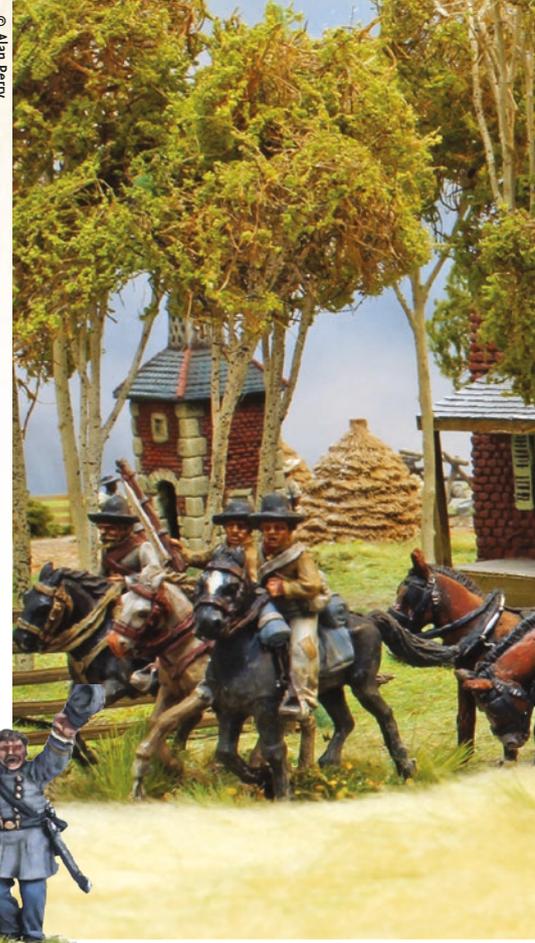
By Ian Beal and Guy Bowers

The defences, built in 1863-1864, proved to be too strong, and thus in late June 1864, Union general Ulysses S. Grant settled down to a siege. His siege lines around both Richmond and Petersburg were never fully complete, and thus the Confederate supply chains never entirely cut until April 1865. But by mid-August 1864, Lee's forces were feeling the pinch. The food supplies were bare, and the situation was beginning to look desperate.

In early September, a scout called Shadburne of the Jefferson Davis Legion reported about a large number of cattle at Ruffin's plantation near Coggin's Point, and on the Union defences in the area. General Hampton reported this to Lee and devised a plan to go around the Union lines, attack the defenders (estimated at just over 100 soldiers), and

return with the cattle. While Lee approved the plan, he warned Hampton to be careful on his return in case he was intercepted and 'embarrassed' with wagons and cattle. A circuitous route was planned and a force of cavalry was gathered. This consisted of W.H.F. Lee's cavalry brigades (Rufus Barringer's North Carolinians and Col. Lucius Davis' 10th Virginians) plus Rosser's brigade and Dearing's brigade, making a total of four brigades. By this stage of the war, there were probably only 250-500 cavalry per brigade. A small force of pioneers was also taken to repair Cook's Bridge, destroyed earlier by Union troops.

The Confederate force left on 14 September and travelled south and east to Wilkinson's Bridge, where they camped for the night. The next morning, they rode on to repair Cook's Bridge, crossing the Blackwater. The



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cavalry then split before turning north; Lee took a brigade towards the Union camp at Prince George's Court House, while Dearing raided the landing at Coggin's Point. A small force was left to guard the crossing, presumably the pioneers. That left two brigades for the attack, which started at 5 a.m. on the 16th.

The Confederates' intelligence was faulty: there were 500 Union soldiers at the plantation, not a mere 100...

PLAYING THE RAID

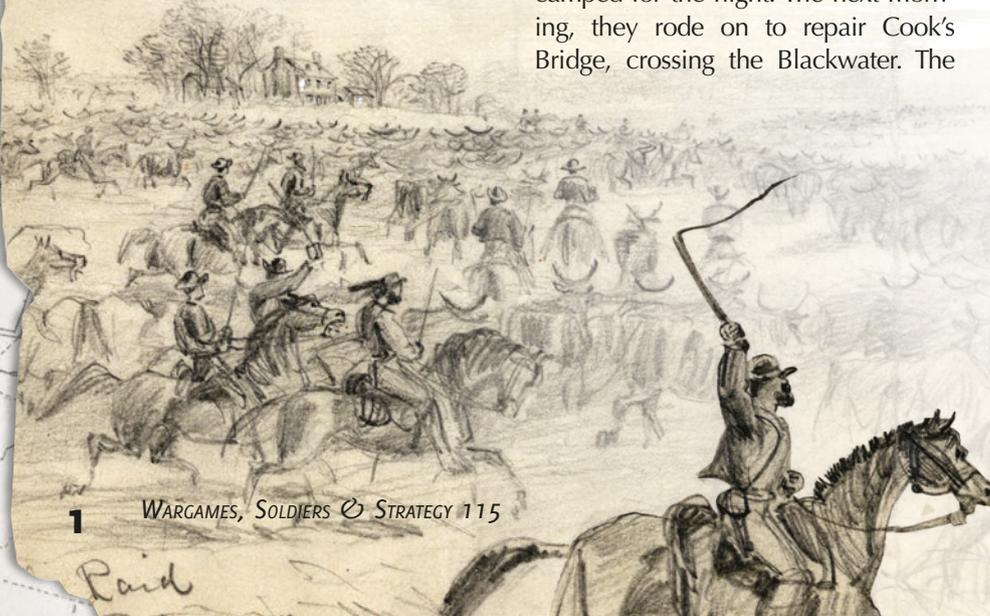
The raid itself is worthy of a mini campaign or Kriegsspiel with several players, pitching Union sentry and cavalry forces against an unknown enemy. Both sides should be effectively blind to each other's movements and the Union players should (hopefully) be ignorant of the history of the raid. Make sure only the umpire reads this PDF!

Lee's raid on Prince George's Court House or Dearing's raid on Coggin's Point could both be recreated on the tabletop. Here, however, we will focus on the raid on Ruffin's plantation itself.

This scenario has been written with Osprey Games' *Rebels and Patriots*

Confederate cavalry drive the stolen cattle, in this contemporary sketch of the Beefsteak Raid by artist Alfred R. Waud.

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Confederate raiders lead a convoy of stolen supplies back to their camp. An army marches on its stomach!

in mind, but the scenario can be adapted to any of the many other ACW rulesets out there. Use the force lists as a rough guide.

Confederate forces

- 3x aggressive veteran light cavalry, poor shots, 18 points
- 2x mounted skirmishers, good shooters, 12 points

(The option above assumes some Confederate cavalry choose to use skirmish tactics. If the Confederate player wishes, all the cavalry can be taken of the same type.)

Union forces

- 1x mounted skirmishers, good shooters, 6 points
- 2x green line infantry, 6 points
- 1x veteran line infantry, 6 points
- 1x sharpshooter light infantry, 6 points

Table setup and deployment

The game should be played on a 6' x 4' table. One long edge should be designated the Union edge, where a farm complex should be placed in the middle two feet and up to 2' into the table. A large pen containing the cattle (at

least 12" square) should be placed in this plantation complex. The entire plantation should be surrounded by fencing (light cover). All buildings are wooden. There were over 3000 cattle at the ranch, but players should manage realistically with whatever models they have and / or throw in the odd unbridled horse. The rest of the board should be made up of fields and fences coming out from the plantation, plus woods at the board edges.

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Confederate forces cross the Blackwater at Cook's Bridge, after having been forced to first make repairs.

The Union troops will start barracked in the buildings. Two units act as sentries and may be placed along any fence bordering the plantation.

The Confederate cavalry have the first turn and can come in from any board edge except for the Union table edge.

Special rules

No shooting the cattle! – Neither side can shoot through the cattle.

Objectives

The Confederates have to drive the Union forces from the table to win. Any other result is a Union victory.

CONCLUSION

The Confederate cavalry took over 2000 cattle and eleven wagons with prisoners. Despite a Union attempt to intercept the raiders, they made it back to Petersburg on the night of the 17th.

While undoubtedly a complete success for the Confederacy, it had little long-term effect. The Confederates had neither the grain to sustain the cattle nor the salt to preserve most of the meat. In effect, the raid solved their food supply issues for only a few weeks.

President Lincoln described the raid as "the slickest piece of cattle-stealing" he'd ever heard of. **WS&S**

More on this raid can be found at:
<https://bit.ly/3jsRzxr>

