

The Events in Farmville

With the disasters of the previous day, Lee realized that he could no longer hope to move south from Farmville to reach the Richmond & Danville. Any time gained by the night march of the 5th-6th had been lost when it became apparent the Federals were right behind him. Lee tentatively decided to continue a westward march to Campbell Court House (now Rustburg), at which point he could see how things were transpiring. In an attempt to once again gain some time on the Yankees, he would cross the Appomattox at Farmville and burn all the bridges behind him. In the area were four such structures: a covered and a railroad right at the town; plus the wagon and High Bridge four miles further upriver. The Appomattox was generally un-fordable in this part of the country and it was high because of the rains.



Photo Courtesy of Chris Calkins, Sailor's Creek State Park

Those first into Farmville picked up their rations and crossed to the north side of the river. They would join up soon with the contingent that had crossed during the night at High Bridge. Back in Farmville, which is situated in a valley of low hills, the high ridge circling off to the east was alive with blue troopers under General George Crook. Realizing the Yankees were upon them, the commissary officials at the railroad depot quickly closed up the boxcars as the trains began moving westward toward Lynchburg (they would be captured the next day at Pamplin's Station). Orders were given to fire the two bridges at the town which were successfully carried out as the last Confederates crossed over. By 1:30 p.m. the Town of Farmville was in Federal hands.

Lee gave instructions for his commanders to move onto Appomattox Station on the South Side, about 38 miles to the west to claim the rest of their supplies. More trains of supplies had been sent there from Lynchburg for his men. If he could actually gain some time on the Yankees, maybe these would be issued with no problems. About this time, he was approached by one of his artillery chiefs, General Edward P. Alexander, who pointed out their situation. By staying north of the river and marching to the station via Appomattox Court House, they were taking the long road. If they stayed south of the river and followed a road pretty much parallel to the railroad itself, it would be much shorter, only about 30 miles. Before Lee could alter his situation, word came in that the Federals were across at High Bridge and quickly coming on the scene. Lee, becoming visibly upset, ordered his men to set up a defensive position to stop them. Choosing the high ground three miles north of town around a rural Presbyterian edifice, Cumberland Church, the men started throwing up works. Constructing a line in somewhat of a fish hook fashion, facing north and east, the Southerners awaited the bluecoats.¹

General Nelson A Miles' II Corps division was first on the field as the Federals began forming for an assault. His plans were to turn the rebels left flank if he could. He also assumed that Federal infantry

¹ The Fox and Hound: On the Road to Appomattox by Chris Calkins, Sailor's Creek Battlefield Historic State Park

moving into Farmville were crossing the river at that point and would attack the Southerners in their rear. What he didn't know was that the bridges there were knocked out and it would be awhile before a pontoon bridge could arrive.

After Crook's small cavalry division moved into Farmville, they were able to swim the Appomattox and ride up on the Confederate rear. As they came upon the enemy, grey horsemen jumped them first, capturing General J. Irwin Gregg. The sound of this skirmish caused Miles to think it was Wright's VI Corps and he accordingly made his attack. General Mahone's Confederate troops had no trouble mauling those who made it to the works, capturing most. They even took the flag of the 5th New Hampshire, only to have to give it back in a few days. Nightfall once again ended any further efforts by the Yankees to deal with Lee's men on this day.

Back in Farmville, the Federal commander, Grant, prepared his headquarters in the Prince Edward Hotel. He watched members of the VI Corps march by in a torchlight parade as they went across the newly laid



Photo courtesy of Bob Flippen, PE Historical Society

pontoon bridge over the Appomattox. Ord's Army of the James was already in the town and would spend the night there. To the south of town, Sheridan's two divisions, followed by General Charles Griffin's V Corps (who took over after Warren was relieved of command at Five Forks), rode into the Prince Edward Court House area and went into bivouac. Realizing the time had come, Grant wrote out a letter to Lee concerning the possibility of surrender.

"General R.E. Lee, Commanding C.S.A.:
5 P.M., April 7th, 1865.

The results of the last week must convince you of the hopelessness of further resistance on the part of the Army of Northern Virginia in this struggle. I feel that it is so, and regard it as my duty to shift from myself the responsibility of any further effusion of blood by asking of you the surrender of that portion of the Confederate States army known as the Army of Northern Virginia.

U.S. Grant, Lieutenant-General"²

When it was later delivered to the Confederate General that night, he handed it to his subordinate, Longstreet. "Not yet" was the reply. Once again the Southerners pulled out and began their third night march in a row to gain more distance on the Yankees. It would be their last, as the Army of the Northern Virginia had but thirty-six hours to live.

² Ulysses S. Grant, Lieutenant-General United States Army