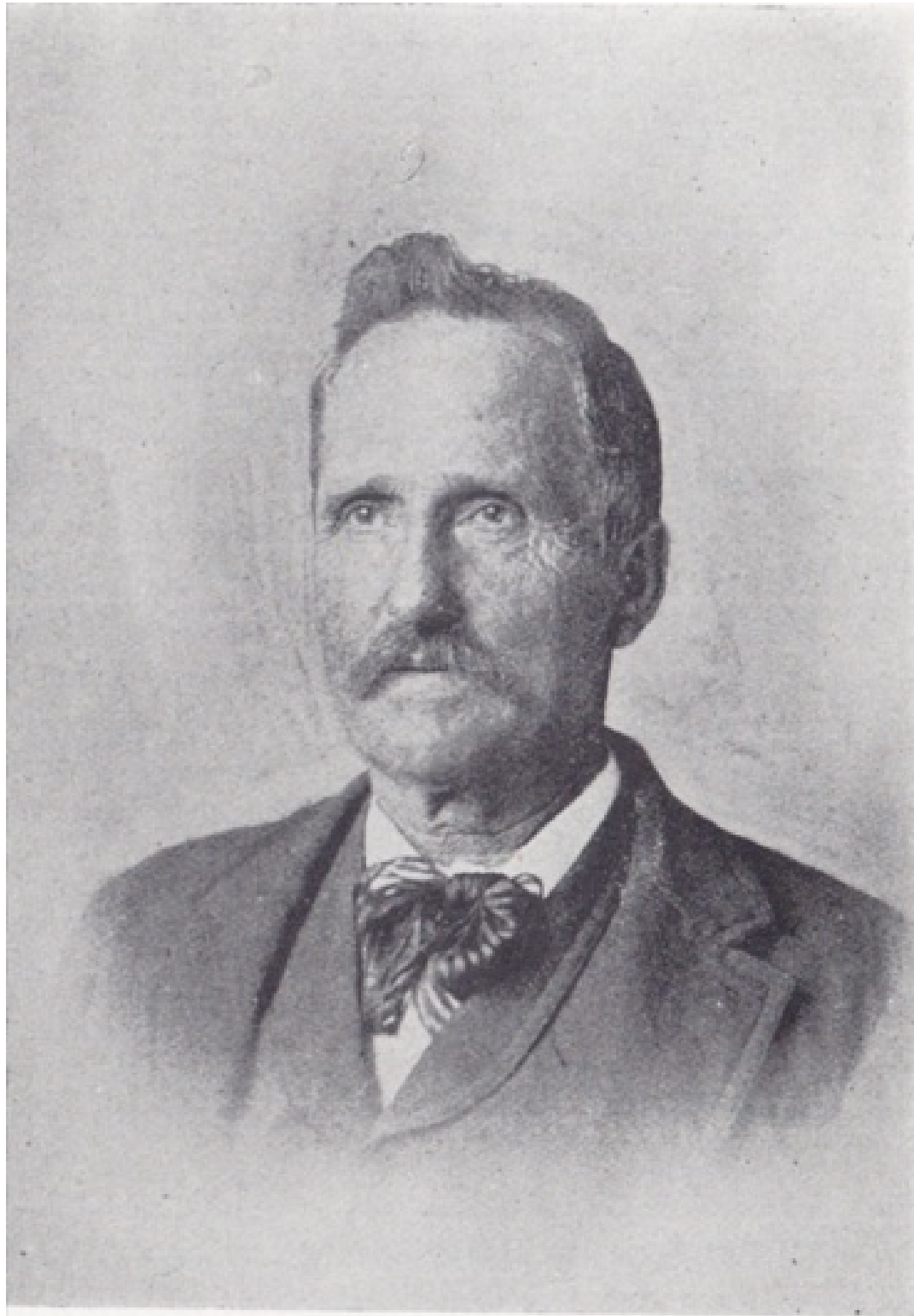


## Lt. Col. George M. Jessee

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### LIEUTENANT-COLONEL GEORGE M. JESSEE.

In the spring of 1862 George M. Jessee, of Henry County, recruited a company of one hundred gallant young men from the counties of Henry, Carroll and Trimble. After a short time spent in drilling and arming his youthful volunteers Captain Jessee started with them in an attempt to run the gauntlet of Federal troops to reach the Southland. He had proceeded to Scott County, when he was joined by another company, which had been recruited in Boone County. This company was officered as follows: Captain Boyd, First Lieutenant L. C. Norman and Second Lieutenant Marion Corbin. The two companies remained in Scott County several days, and then started on the march for Virginia. At Mt. Sterling they were attacked by about three hundred Federals, commanded by an officer named Brooks. In the endeavor to evade the Federals they attempted to pass through the town, where they were fired upon by Home Guards, who had made a fortress of the court-house—many private residences being also occupied by them. While the Home Guards were pouring a galling fire into them from the buildings the Federal cavalry were pressing them in the rear,



LIEUT.-COL. GEO. M. JESSE.

the result being a running fight, which lasted until late in the afternoon, the engagement having begun at sunrise. In or near the town four young men, Holmes, Abbott, Beasley and Holbrook, were killed and several were wounded. The entire command was captured and taken to Winchester.

Captain Jessee at once made his escape from Federal clutches and returned to Henry County, where he recruited another company of one hundred and three men, and once more started South, going through Shelby and Nelson Counties. At Bloomfield, in the latter county, he was joined by Lieutenant Allston with fifty men recruited in Shelby and Oldham Counties. On the next night, while taking supper and feeding their horses on the farm of a man named Shelby, the little band was attacked by the Federals, and fought them all night, losing five men killed and several wounded.

The enemy having retreated to Danville, Jessee resumed his march, reaching Knoxville, Tenn., without further serious adventure. At Knoxville Jessee and his men were mustered into the Confederate army.

General E. Kirby Smith having just entered Kentucky Captain Jessee was immediately ordered back into the State as an escort for a number of prominent Confederate officers whom General Smith had left behind. At Big Creek Gap Jessee and his followers encountered two Federal regiments, commanded by Shelly and Cooper, belonging to the army of General George W. Morgan, who then held Cumberland Gap. In the engagement that ensued Jessee's men were surrounded, and again he lost his soldiers—more than one hundred men, the captain himself escaping with two men.

Captain Jessee proceeded to Lexington, Ky., where he reported to General Kirby Smith, giving him the first authentic information of General George W. Morgan's evacuation of Cumberland Gap. The captain requested General Smith to give him a detachment to go to Henry County to regulate Provost Marshal George Dickens and a band of soldiers under Colonel Robert Morris, who were arresting and intimidating citizens of Southern proclivities. General Smith complied by giving Captain Jessee an order to Colonel Maxwell, commanding a Floridian regiment, stationed at

Frankfort. Colonel Maxwell being anxious to make a raid gladly complied with the order, and detailing one hundred men obtained permission from General Smith to accompany Jessee himself. They extended their raid to Bedford, near the Ohio River, and upon their return they encountered Morris and Dickens at Newcastle, captured Dickens and thirty men, one cannon and one hundred and forty stands of arms—completely routing the Federals.

Returning to Frankfort, Captain Jessee accompanied the army to the Perryville battlefield, recruited a few more men, thirty-five or forty, joined General Humphrey Marshall's column and retreated from the State, going to Abingdon, Va., where he was soon joined by the men of his other two companies, who had been exchanged. When his men were reorganized Captain Jessee found himself in command of four Kentucky companies, including Captain Rowan's company which then joined him. The organization was as follows: Company A, Captain W. O. Stewart; Company B, Captain L. C. Norman; Company C, Captain W. Rowan; Company D, Captain Warren Montfort; known as the Third Kentucky Battalion.

Having received from the secretary of war authority to raise a regiment, and not being able to get into Kentucky to recruit troops, two companies of Virginians, one under Captain Boyd, the other under Captain McFarlane, joined Jessee's little battalion, which then became known as the Sixth Confederate Battalion. This was in 1863.

It will be seen in another chapter that, after the battle of Cynthiana, Jessee was detached by order of Colonel Giltner and directed to remain in Kentucky and rally as many of the men, who had been scattered over the State by that disaster, as possible and lead them to Virginia. This was a difficult task to perform and was never thoroughly accomplished. The Confederacy was tottering, in imminent danger of collapse, and Jessee was far away from base, in a country overrun by the enemy. His position was extremely dangerous, requiring the most consummate *finesse* to avoid capture. The hair-breadth escapes of Jessee and his men, and the thrilling episodes that went to make up their career in Ken-

tucky, would, of themselves, furnish material for a most interesting and romantic chapter of partisan warfare.

Adjutant-General Edward O. Guerrant pays the following tribute to Jesse and his men :

"Of Colonel Jesse's conduct on the ill-fated field at Cynthiana nothing but praise can justly be spoken. His command of Spartans was placed on the left wing, by the side of the Fourth Kentucky, and with that gallant regiment left the field when valor could no longer contend with overwhelming numbers. He was among the last who crossed the river, and everything appearing to be lost, and every one inspired with but one idea, that of *saving himself*, Colonel Jesse rallied the remnant of his command and offered an effectual resistance to the repeated assaults of the enemy made on the rear of our broken and flying forces. So soon as the enemy stopped the pursuit, Colonel Giltner ordered Colonel Jesse to repair to the counties of Henry, Owen, etc., for the purpose of collecting together and leading back to the Confederate lines all Confederate soldiers scattered throughout said counties, the best time and manner of accomplishing said object being of course left to the discretion of Colonel Jesse. This order I wrote myself."

Colonel J. Stoddard Johnston, adjutant-general to General John C. Breckinridge, says that while Colonel Jesse was in Kentucky he was in communication with headquarters and in receipt of orders therefrom ; that he not only sent out a number of recruits, but all officers sent into Kentucky on recruiting or other service were instructed to communicate and co-operate with him. Toward the close of the year 1864 the Confederate Government determined to concentrate all its forces for the struggle evidently before them, and to that end it was deemed proper to call in all troops on detached service.

The following order was sent to Colonel Jesse :

HEADQUARTERS DEPARTMENT VIRGINIA AND  
EAST TENNESSEE,  
WYTHEVILLE, VA., December 4, 1864.

TO COLONEL GEORGE M. JESSE, *Commanding, etc., in Kentucky :*

I am directed by Major-General Breckinridge to convey to you his orders. He directs that upon receipt of this you will make your preparations to return to this department with your command. Whatever may be the obstacles to bringing out the men composing

your command he directs that you report in person with or without them at these headquarters on or before February 1, 1865. And if opportunity offers report by letter prior to that time.

I am, colonel, very respectfully, your obedient servant,

J. STODDARD JOHNSTON, *A. A. G.*

Colonel Johnston says that in obedience to this order Colonel Jessee reported in person to General Breckinridge before the time specified—the difficulty of bringing troops from Kentucky through the mountains to Virginia being sufficient to account for his failure to bring his command; that Colonel Jessee's report of affairs and of his own operations were perfectly satisfactory to General Breckinridge and to General Echols, who succeeded him a few days after Colonel Jessee's arrival. In fact that the colonel's report was so satisfactory that he was ordered back to Kentucky with increased authority, and directed to bring back with him, not only his own command, but all Confederate soldiers in Kentucky.

General Echols issued the following order:

Leave of absence for ten days is granted to Lieutenant-Colonel George M. Jessee, Sixth Confederate Battalion, at the expiration of which time he will be permitted to pass into Kentucky with ten men on business defined in special order No. 35.

By command of

BRIGADIER-GENERAL ECHOLS.

J. STODDARD JOHNSTON, *A. A. G.*

At the expiration of his leave of absence Colonel Jessee, in obedience to the foregoing order, returned to Kentucky, but the war closed almost immediately thereafter, and of course he could operate no longer under the terms of the order.

Early in the war, and probably at intervals later, a part of the organization known as the Sixth Confederate Battalion was commanded by Major Allen L. McAfee, a gallant and soldierly-looking officer, large and of commanding appearance. He was a member of the McAfee family famous in Kentucky annals, and was captured during one of General Morgan's raids—in 1864, I believe.

## GENERAL SIMON B. BUCKNER.

This most accomplished officer, the hero of the battle of Fort Donelson, was the immediate predecessor of General John H. Morgan in command of the troops in Southwestern Virginia and East Tennessee.

General Buckner's review of the troops, an imposing array of infantry, cavalry and artillery, massed at Bull's Gap, I shall never forget.

Sitting upon a noble charger, showily caparisoned, General Buckner appeared the model soldier. I never saw a more graceful figure on horseback. Erect and handsome, the general sat his horse and held the reins exactly as prescribed by cavalry tactics and army regulations. The stately, elegantly attired general and the regiments and battalions, with burnished guns and gleaming sabers, passing in review before him made up a most attractive pageant. The bands played inspiring airs, among them the "Southern Marseillaise," and the general gracefully returned the salutes of the marching divisions.

Upon leaving the department for other fields General Buckner addressed the following letter to his successor, General Morgan :

HEADQUARTERS DEPARTMENT EAST TENNESSEE,  
ABINGDON, VA., May 2, 1864.

GENERAL: I have been ordered to distant service, and have relinquished the command of this department.

I can not part from my gallant compatriots from Kentucky without expressing through you my regrets at the separation. Assure them that wherever I may be I will watch their career with the deepest interest.

Though exiled for a time from a land which is so dear to us we should not lose sight of the fact that in whatever part of the Confederacy we may be called upon to serve, every blow which is struck tends to strike off the fetters which bind our fair land to Northern tyranny.

The day will surely come when those of the gallant band who may survive the coming campaign will look upon our beloved State enfranchised and happy.

Say to your troops that I have taken steps which will, I hope, very soon supply them with the equipments necessary to their effi-

ciency and comfort. I look to them to furnish an example of discipline, as well as of gallantry, under whatever officers they may be called upon to obey; for obedience to our officers is a duty we all owe to our country, to our cause, to our State and to those cherished ones for whose freedom and happiness we are contending.

For yourself, general, and for the gallant men under your command receive the assurances of the regard of

Your friend truly,

S. B. BUCKNER, *Major-General.*

BRIGADIER-GENERAL JOHN H. MORGAN,  
*Commanding Kentucky Cavalry.*