

THE ROAD TO GLORIETA



**COLONEL
JAMES REILY**



"Of the nine regimental field officers in the three regiments that left San Antonio, every one, except Lieut. Col. McNeil, was either killed or made a general." - William Lott Davidson

Always at the front of their troops, leading by example, Confederate service claimed a heavy toll from the field officers of the Sibley Brigade. Lieutenant Colonel John Schuyler Sutton and Major Samuel A. Lockridge fell at Valverde on February 21, 1862. Majors Henry Raguet and John S. Shropshire died among the thick pines and cedar bushes of Glorieta Pass. In the years succeeding the New Mexico campaign, three of the brigade's four regimental commanders also lost their lives.

The first to die was, General Sibley's erstwhile diplomat, Colonel James Reily. During the defense of Bisland, Louisiana (See Epilogues for The Confederate Army of New Mexico and Henry Hopkins Sibley), General Richard Taylor assigned Colonel Reily the critical duty of guarding against a Federal landing to the Confederate rear. At around 9 o'clock on the morning of April 13, 1863, Reily reported to Taylor that the enemy had indeed landed at Indian Bend on Grand Lake above Bisland. Several thousand strong, the Federals were supported by artillery. The Union force, commanded by General Cuvier Grover, advanced to the Teche bayou and pushed Reily's people back towards Franklin. Fearing that the Federals would capture the New Iberia road and cut off his retreat, General Taylor gathered up Reily and immediately headed for the scene of the action. (1)

The two men passed through Franklin sometime around 2 A.M. To his great surprise and relief, Taylor discovered that the town "was as silent as a grave," and a small Confederate force was in control of the critical Yokely Causeway and Bridge. From the farther edge of some nearby woods, Federal camp fires could be seen in the open woods beyond. Taylor couldn't believe his luck. "Grover had stopped just short of the prize." Another thirty minutes of advance and the Union troops would have controlled the Yokely Bridge, and all would have been lost. Hurriedly, Colonel

Reily's forces were brought forward and deployed. Placing his artillery in the road near the Teche, Reily quietly formed his men at the edge of the woods. The Federal camp was a mere 200 yards away. The 4th Regiment Texas Mounted Volunteers, now commanded by Major George Hampton, formed the right and center of Reily's battle line. The left was held by Lieutenant Colonel William G. Vincent commanding, the 2nd Louisiana, a part of the "Yellow Jacket" Battalion, and a remnant of the 18th Louisiana Infantry. (2)

As the first light of dawn made objects visible, the Federals began to stir in their camp. Reily ordered his men to attack. With a shout the Confederates advanced rapidly from the wood, and poured a line of fire into the enemy camp. Taken by surprise the Federals reeled back, leaving a battery exposed on their right. "To prevent the sleepy gunners from opening," General Taylor who was still escorting Colonel Reily, personally charged the battery. "I rode straight on the guns," recalled Taylor, "followed by my staff and four mounted couriers, and the gunners made off."

For a few moments, while the engagement became general, everything looked easy to the Confederates. Surprise and uncertain light had favored their attack. Broad daylight, however, exposed the weakness of the Rebel force and General Grover's men immediately counterattacked. A heavy line of Union skirmishers hurled themselves against Hampton's 4th Regiment, and the Texans were forced back to the woods. Here, wrote Julius Giesecke; "we held our position until the Yankees succeeded in gaining a position from where they fired into our right flank." It was during this move that Colonel Reily was killed. Exposing himself, "while in the act of reconnoitering the enemy's lines with his glass," he died instantly. Colonel Vincent was shot through the neck and grievously wounded. Many others went down, and for a time there was confusion in the Confederate ranks. "That moment was terrible," remembered Giesecke, "we were whipped and badly scattered." Just when things looked their worst the peculiar whistle of a Parrott shell was heard and a captured Union gunboat, now in Confederate hands, appeared on the Teche. With the support of the gunboat "Diana" and reinforcements arriving from Bisland, Reily's men rallied and managed to hold Grover in check. (3)

"Thus another noble, brave, and generous officer was called from hence," lamented one of Reily's troopers. "Requiescat in pace." Major General Taylor deeply regretted the loss of Colonel Reily and wrote in his after action report that the Colonel "was a gallant and chivalrous soldier." (4)

Footnotes (See *The Road to Glorieta* for bibliography)

1. Taylor, *Destruction and Reconstruction*, p.132.

2. An important role in the ensuing action was also taken by Major E.F. Clack and his "Confederate Guards Response Battalion." During the night, these troops force marched the 20 miles from New Iberia, and joined Taylor and Reily about daybreak. Taylor wrote that they "entered into the engagement near Franklin on Tuesday morning like fresh troops and bore themselves like invincible soldiers. To their courage is added thorough discipline, which they kept during the whole retreat." Taylor, *Destruction and Reconstruction*, p.133; Noel, *Campaign from Santa Fe*, p.74; OR,I,XV,p.395, Report of Maj. Gen. Richard Taylor.

3. Captain Giescke and several men from his company were captured, when their position was flanked. In his initial after action report, General Taylor did not mention the sleepy Union camp. Instead, he wrote; "Immediately after daylight the enemy's skirmishers appeared in the upper portion of the field in front of our line, and were quickly followed by his forces, consisting of four regiments of infantry, a battalion of cavalry, and a battery of artillery, on the left, in line of battle. We opened with our artillery and infantry upon them and checked their advance." Taylor, *Destruction and Reconstruction*, p.133; Haas, "The Diary of Giesecke, Julius," April 14, 1863; Noel, *Campaign from Santa Fe*, p.74; Collard, *Reminiscences*, p.27; OR,I,XV,pp.391-392, Report of Maj. Gen. Richard Taylor.

4. Noel, *Campaign from Santa Fe*, pp.74-75; OR,I,XV,p.395, Report of Maj. Gen. Richard Taylor.



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