



GEN. WILLIAM J. PALMER



Quaker Warrior



STONEMAN'S RAID

On March 24, 1865, Union Gen. George Stoneman led 6,000 cavalrymen from Tennessee into southwestern Virginia and western North Carolina to disrupt the Confederate supply line by destroying sections of the Virginia and Tennessee Railroad, the North Carolina Railroad, and the Piedmont Railroad. He struck at Boone on March 28, headed into Virginia on April 2, and returned to North Carolina a week later. Stoneman's Raid ended at Asheville on April 26, the day that Confederate Gen. Joseph E. Johnston surrendered to Union Gen. William T. Sherman near Durham.

Col. William J. Palmer, commanding one of Gen. George Stoneman's brigades (about 1,300 cavalrymen of the 15th Pennsylvania, 12th Ohio, and 10th Michigan Regiments), made his headquarters here at Sherrill's Inn on April 27, 1865. The Sherrill family fed the officers, and one of the daughters is said to have shaken her stocking over the eggs as they cooked and declared, "Those



Gen. William J. Palmer
Courtesy Colorado Springs
Pioneers Museum

Yankees can eat the dust off my feet and think it's pepper."

Palmer was brevetted (temporarily promoted) to brigadier general, probably while at Sherrill's Inn. The promotion gave him the command of two brigades already in Asheville that had participat-

ed in pillaging there on April 26. A "Quaker warrior," Palmer had joined the army as a way to express his abolitionist views. He was later awarded the Medal of Honor for his role in defeating a larger Confederate force at Red Hill, Alabama, on January 14, 1865, "without losing a man."

According to tradition, an "underground railroad" operated here and ran through Hickory Nut Gap. Local residents helped Union sympathizers, slaves, and Federal soldiers escaping from prisons in Columbia, South Carolina, and Salisbury, North Carolina, to travel to Union-controlled Tennessee.



Mural by Elizabeth Cramer McClure shows Stoneman's raiders in Hickory Nut Gap. Photography by Ken Abbot

Our March today was through the grandest scenery we have looked on during our term of service. We went up through the Hickory Nut Gap in the mountains, along the Broad River, up to its source. Towering above us, almost to the clouds, were the precipitous crags of the Hickory Mountains, and at High Falls the water drops 300 feet from the summit. It was so imposing that the usual chat of the riders was hushed, as they gazed with awe on the sight. As we rode along we plucked the fragrant Magnolia from the forest trees, and the wish of all was to stay longer with it, but that could not be done, and we went on up to the top, where plenty of forage was found. — Capt. Harry Weand, 15th Pennsylvania Cavalry