

CHAPTER IX

Buckner's Trap

Thus it had been demonstrated that East Tennessee was most vulnerable to the predatory attacks of the enemy marching through Kentucky. It had become evident, too, that a large number, perhaps a majority, of our citizens were so disaffected to the Southern cause as to be only waiting for a suitable opportunity to abandon it and declare for the old government. No pronouncement to this effect had yet been made public, but I had received information from sources I could not question that if East Tennessee should be invaded by a respectable force, that would be considered as the signal for the rally of such of our military as were concealing themselves in the woods and mountain fastnesses and of the return to their homes of the thousands of them who had fled to Kentucky. I sought an early opportunity of an interview with General Simon B. Buckner at his office and of making such representations to him of the perilous condition of our section of the Confederacy as might awaken his zeal, stimulate his vigilance, and prompt his earnest efforts in our protection and defense. I went so far as to say that if the invaders were not met and repulsed at the three gaps between us and Kentucky all the trenches he was then digging around Knoxville, and all the fortifications he was erecting there and at other points of the country, were not only valueless and inefficient as defenses, but that these works of our soldiery was so much work done for our invaders. I said further to him, while looking at the maps and drawings before us, that ten thousand men properly distributed along the Cumberland chain could prevent any invasion by an army with artillery and other stores. That nature had made East Tennessee impregnable, not certainly to such a raid as the recent one under Sanders but to one which would expect after invading to overcome and hold the country, and which could only secure that object by bringing with them not only their field and besieging artillery but carry with them at the same all their military supplies and their means of subsistence. I went further, and said to him earnestly that if our line of communication through East Tennessee

were once tapped successfully the Confederacy would be bisected and our cause hopelessly lost. I failed to get even the serious attention of General Buckner. He said with some levity—and more vanity—“if the enemy succeed in getting across the Cumberland heights we will then have them in a trap just where we would like to have them.” I said to him I was too much his senior to let such a puerility be a becoming reply to argument and legitimate inference and truth. This much I had already written, but at greater length and more earnestly, to the president and some of his cabinet, and told them plainly that if East Tennessee were abandoned now (July and August) 1863 the Confederacy was already lost. To these earnest remonstrances I received a reply that the country should never be abandoned and every effort be continued to hold and defend it. At this time I was a state director of the East Tennessee and Georgia Railroad, and conferring one day with one of its principal officers was informed that an order had been received to dismantle its principal workshops and fall back with them south of the Tennessee River and perhaps south of the Hiwassee. This was only a few days after the *official* assurance from Richmond had reached me. I made one more earnest protest against this fatal policy and prepared as best I could for subsequent events, disasters.

I had informed General Buckner's adjutant that I wished to be informed of the time he would evacuate Knoxville, as the secretary of the treasury had left it to my own discretion what disposition to make of my office and my Confederate States assets and that the authorities of the state of Tennessee, the mother bank and my own board had given me the same discretion as to the branch bank at Knoxville. Some days after this, being at his headquarters at the Bell House, I heard the General had gone and his staff all seemed rather busy and confused packing up for a hasty departure. I returned to the bank and told my cashier, Strong, and clerk, Faxon, that the time had arrived: that my official duties were primary, and that I was determined to take my office and assets in the direction of Richmond, leave them in a place of safety, and return to Knoxville, and, if necessary, fall back with the army wherever it might go. Before leaving town for my residence, I went into the office of J. L. Moses, Esquire, near to the bank, and telling him what were my purposes, requested him to take charge of three closely packed leather trunks which were in the counting room of my office at Mecklenburg—where he would also find my historical and other manuscripts, collections of antiquities, my correspondence, etc., etc. These all I requested him to take care of and

preserve. He promised to do so. He was, I believe, an honorary member of the E. T. H. & A. Society, fond of letters, and I believed my trustworthy friend. On my return home the same evening I sent for my neighbor, Dr. Anderson, and asked him to take care of and preserve my shop, medicine shop, furniture, medical library, and my ledger and book accounts. He also promised to do so. My son, Francis Alexander Ramsey, was that night at home. I requested my ladies to prepare in a few days to move out of our house, taking with them such things as they might consider most valuable and necessary for their comfort and to stay a few days with our daughter, Mrs. Dickson, till a comfortable house could be rented and occupied temporarily by them. I left it to themselves and to contingencies that might thereafter arise whether to return to our house, remain in town, or join me wherever I might float to in exile. I sent a servant after a son, Arthur Crozier Ramsey, who was a student of perhaps sixteen then at school in Jefferson County under Mr. Wilson. I went to town early next morning, got passports and transportation again, and took my depository to Abingdon. Not knowing when I could see them again, I left them in the hands of the depository there, wrote also to Mr. Memminger to that effect, and I and my guard again on the same evening got on the train on my return home. All went on well till we reached a point below Morristown. Some emissaries, as was believed, from the invading Federal army had during the night fired the cross-ties in several places and thus rendered the road impassable till repaired. I was glad to hear the Holston bridge was still safe. I accompanied a small squad of railroad section hands down the road before the train, removing obstructions and extinguishing the fires at several points. After a delay in all probably six or eight hours we met at New Market, I believe, a long train filled with refugees from Knoxville. From them I learned that General Ambrose E. Burnside expected to reach Knoxville the next day. Colonel Sneed, Colonel Crozier, and others were aboard. Not they, but others, attempted to persuade me not to go further. I had determined to follow the army and hastened forward. We were several hours behind time and my son Robert M. Ramsey, who had been half the day waiting for me at the depot, had given me out. But he had not left town a mile when our whistle announced the approach of the car in which I was. It was now after sunset. The depot was deserted, not a single person could I see on the street. I went right to the bank—met there my son, General Ramsey, Dr. Strong, and two or three of the directors. On inquiry I found that all our books and paper

money were already boxed up and ready for the transportation wagons promised to us by Major Glover, the quartermaster. My advice was renewed, to load up that night, taking aboard General Ramsey's trunks and Judge Humphreys' official papers and himself, cross the river and go in the direction of Maryville. I told them I would go by home, say farewell to my family, cross the French Broad, and by private roads which I knew well overtake them before they reached Maryville.

At this very moment my son Robert came to the bank door with a led horse for me. With him I returned home. J. Crozier Ramsey could not then accompany us. His trunk and papers he wished to put aboard of our bank wagon. I found my family all well, a little uneasy about me, and also about our little "Benjamin" who, on his return from school, was compelled to pass through some of the least loyal neighborhoods in East Tennessee. (Loyal to the Confederate States, I mean.) My good wife put her ring on my finger. I never felt before that I was really leaving home. She preserved her equanimity well, regretted that as I had no way to carry a trunk she could put me up so small an outfit from my wardrobe. She filled a large carpetbag with my clothes, and I was ready to start before day. I had gone to bed but not to sleep. For all night long people from Knoxville, in wagons, on horseback, and on foot were constantly passing my ferry—some we suspected to join the invading enemy, others we knew to avoid him. My son, Colonel F. A. Ramsey, mounted and armed, accompanied me. General Ramsey and Captain Ramsey remained behind to give their advice and assistance to their mother and sisters, who expected that to be the last day they would remain in their own house. I had left home for Abingdon on the twenty-fifth of August. I had gone there and returned home and now on the twenty-eighth [?] of August, 1863 I was on my horse, and bade adieu to my family, to Mecklenburg—to my home in youth and the home of my old age. We left rather before daylight. After crossing the French Broad we took a near road through the country over which I had often ridden night and day. We fell into the Maryville road at the nearest point. There we met Mr. Corley *walking to* Knoxville. I sent by him a renewal of my request to I. L. Moses, Esquire about preserving my manuscripts. I never heard that the message was received. We overtook, about noon, Major Glover's whole cavalcade, our wagon, etc., etc. My party was at the hotel. Dr. Strong and Judge Humphreys were reclining on the floors perfectly exhausted. Here I was told some unwelcome news about the route before us—that it was in-

fested, as it had been all summer, by a set of free-booters under command of Captain Duncan and others on Piney. I thought our best policy would be to push directly ahead, so as not to give time for intelligence to reach the country that Knoxville was evacuated. I made this suggestion to Major Glover and he put our wagon trains immediately in motion. Late at night we made our camp at Malcolm's, a confirmed and bigoted union man. The encampment was formed near the water and beyond his house. I came back on foot and asked leave for three of us to sleep in his house and, Judge Humphreys, Dr. Strong and myself were very comfortably entertained, but none of us let him know that Knoxville had been left an easy prey to the invaders. Next day, in fording Tennessee near Morganton, some of the vehicles were upset and some mules drowned. My son hastened to the ferry above, and, seeing the boat on the opposite bank, and being an expert water-man, jumped into a canoe, crossed the river, and brought back the boat. The craft was sufficiently capacious to carry the hospital stores (under charge of my brother, Dr. Frank A. Ramsey, Medical Director in Chief of East Tennessee) and also of the *army chest* under Dr. Strong and myself. As we passed over the stream the owner, Mr. Tipton I believe, who seemed to know the value of a part of our cargo, warned us to go by Madisonville as it was unsafe and dangerous to go to our destination Loudon, by the way of Piney. Judge Humphreys, overhearing this, asked me to request Major Glover to send an express through to Loudon for a guard. When we reached the bank a paymaster from Virginia was found ready to go to Loudon for a guard to meet us at Piney. He started off in a gallop, leaving a verbal request from me to Buckner to furnish a guard. (I learned afterwards from the paymaster—perhaps his name was Clarke—that near Piney he was met by the marauding party under Duncan, was arrested, robbed of his money, \$6000.00, clothes, watch, horse, boots, everything, and to conceal their robbery most effectually the party made him go a private road in towards Louisville. It was in this way they happened not to be on our road so as to intercept or molest us. We arrived safely at Loudon. But a guard had to be kept over our effects, as camp followers were all around that place. Next morning was the Sabbath, and there being no train towards Athens, we put our boxes into a strong car and placed a guard around it.

At dinner that day General Buckner bowed to me. As his intention was next day to fall back south of Hiwassee I inquired nothing about the *trap* he had set at Knoxville in which to catch the Yankee invaders. He

seemed anxious to keep his own army out of the trap. I suppose, however, he was acting in obedience to superior officers, Bragg, or Davis, or both. I never knew. The policy was a fatal one to us as I had always said.

The bridge across the Tennessee was to be burned the next day. It had, ever since its erection, been one of my idols (—strange that inanimate things ever should become the objects of our idolatry) and I wished to ride over it once more so as to see my amiable and beloved daughter, Mrs. Henrietta Rutledge Lenoir, and her two interesting boys, James Ramsey Lenoir and William B. Lenoir. After dinner, therefore, Colonel F. A. Ramsey and myself got the countersign, crossed the river on the bridge, and rode up to Lenoir's, and spent the afternoon with our relations there. A detachment of the Confederate troops was still there. The quiet and stillness of that holy day I had never seen disturbed there before. Everything around the place was noise, profanity, intemperance, and tumult. Mrs. Lenoir was herself sad, disconsolate, uneasy about the situation and exposure of the family at Mecklenburg,—their exposure there at Lenoirs. She had acted the lady and the heroine when Sanders and his raiders passed her house on the morning of the 19th of June of the present year. She had often told me of all the details of the raiders there. . . .¹

But on the occasion of this last Sunday visit she seemed dejected and sad, feeling an ominous presentiment of future disaster and overwhelming bereavement. She did not say this in words but I plainly discerned that she apprehended and felt it. Bidding her and her children a sorrowful adieu, and leaving with her a message for her mother and sisters at home, we mounted and returned rapidly to Loudon.² We were the last Confederates that passed that bridge. Next morning, by direction of General Buckner, the whole wooden structure was fired and destroyed.

The hotel at Loudon was of course crowded—the room in which I slept was full of officers. After the lights were extinguished I heard one of them reciting the story of his wrongs. I found him to be the paymaster of the

¹ See above, Chapter VIII, page 110.

² The next day, August 31, 1863, Dr. Ramsey received a pass. On the back was a pledge of loyalty which he filled in with a personal description:

“Residence, Knox Co. Tenn. Age, 66
Hair, Dark and gray. Eyes, Dark
Occupation, Physician
Height, 5-11 Beard, Dark and gray
Complexion, Dark

“I, Dr. J. G. M. Ramsey, above described, hereby
pledge my loyalty to the Confederate States.

“Loudon Aug 31 1863”

Virginia regiment, Clarke, I believe, or at least the one who was entrusted with \$6000.00 for its use and who was robbed of everything he had when going as courier to Loudon for a guard. He was giving the details of the whole affair. The bushwhackers halted him, demanded his money first,—afterwards leading him off into an obscure path where no one passed they prepared to hang him, and had a halter made for the purpose, and were on the point of putting it around his neck when one of the banditti said: "Boys we have had pretty good picking out of him already. Let us strip him to his stockings and turn him loose." The leader gave his consent. The prisoner was released with the injunction to go in an opposite course—straight towards the Tennessee River. On his way he found some Confederates who supplied him with a few clothes and brought him to Loudon with them.

At this place also we were overtaken by others from Knoxville. Amongst these were my two sons, General J. Crozier Ramsey and Captain Robert M. Ramsey. From these we learned that the former had remained in town till his trunk and his papers were securely stowed away in Dr. Strong's money-wagon, and saw that wagon start in the boat across the river: that he then, nearly at midnight, took the road to my ferry and came to the house, Riverside, of his sister, Mrs. Dickson. Finding no one at home and everything deserted he rode down to the ferry and halloed for the ferryman across the river, but failed to awaken him. Hitching his horse on the bank he laid down amongst the weeds beside him, fell asleep, but not long after was aroused by the arrival of a crowd of refugees escaping from town and going towards Dandridge. Day had not yet dawned, but soon the ferryman was heard putting some horsemen across to the south side of French Broad (probably Colonel F. A. Ramsey and myself). He and others were soon after taken across the Holston. He acquiesced in the advice I had given to my family for them all to remove the most portable and valuable of our effects over to Riverside with Mrs. Dickson. His brother, Robert M. Ramsey, and himself remained half the day putting this plan into effect and then bidding a farewell to their mother and sisters. Amidst these gloomy surroundings they crossed the French Broad and, striking the road leading towards Louisville, fell in with Colonel James White Humes, sick and exhausted, unable to travel. They assisted him and got him at last to the house of Talbot Cox at Louisville, where the weary, sick, and exhausted refugees were hospitably entertained. Reaching Loudon Sunday at night they gave me the last informa-

tion I was to receive directly from my family and from Knoxville. They were at Riverside and comfortable, buoyant and determined as ever. The last rumor at Knoxville was that Burnside was camped at Beaver Creek eight or ten miles from town, and that his army would in a few hours be in undisputed possession of that important strategic position—controlling the river and the two railroads connecting at Knoxville.

Our bank effects were put on some platform cars, under the care of Dr. Strong, destined for the vault of the branch at Athens. I remained with the troops on horseback part of the time, but occasionally on the train—open flats. As we left Loudon and saw the blazing bridge, Captain Kain said: "*Sic transit gloria mundi*. Dr. Ramsey, we will never see our homes again." Less despondent than he, I said; "I will yet return with the army and try to recapture Knoxville," though I concurred with the Captain in condemning and ridiculing the silly policy of Buckner in laying this *trap* to catch the Yankees in.

At Sweetwater I met J. T. Lenoir Esquire, Reverend _____ Sneed, my cousin and once my classmate, Colonel R. A. Ramsey, all of that place. On seeing the latter I said, "*Nos patriae fines and dulcia linguimus arva*." He was a good Latinist, and knowing the fertile bottoms I had left, he repeated with emphasis, "*Dulcia arva, dulcia arva*." He was one of the most amiable, inoffensive, public-spirited, moderate and pious men I ever knew—but having two or three gallant sons in the Confederate service, he became a doomed man. I understood afterwards that when the enemy under, I believe, Sherman invaded his section he was arrested late in the P.M. and hurried off in the night in inclement weather to Kingston to answer for his *disloyalty*. *Loyalty*—true to one's own country, own people, own home! May I and mine ever be thus considered *disloyal*!

At the same place, too, I met my old neighbor, Captain James Campbell of Knox County—an aged gentleman, one of General Jackson's soldiers in 1814, and a peaceable, quiet citizen—a noncombatant from his age and infirmity. The loyal in his neighborhood, many of whom had subsisted on his bounty and his profusion, gave him notice that if he did not abandon his home and quit the country his house and mills should be burned. As threatened, these loyalists did burn his mills. When I saw him at Sweetwater the old veteran looked feeble, disconsolate and careworn, but he was afterwards permitted to return to his home. He still survives. (1870).

With Parson Sneed I had been many years familiarly acquainted as one of the directors of the East Tennessee and Georgia Railroad. He was

benignant, kind, and exemplary in all the relations of life—a skillful and industrious farmer, a very humane and indulgent master. None more so. His Negro cabins were models of cleanliness and comfort. The rations for his slaves were furnished without stint and were substantially the same eaten at his own table. In sickness and in health, the care and supervision of their humane owners were never withheld. This care extended to their moral training and culture, and especially of the young—not only bought with his money but born in his house and treated with paternal kindness. When opportunities offered for public worship—not only in his own (Baptist) church but in all others which they might prefer—his slaves were permitted, often required, to attend. He furnishing in many instances the facilities of such attendance. Withal Parson Sneed was a conscientious and unwavering Whig, Union Man, and utterly opposed both to the policy and the doctrine of secession, states' rights, etc., etc. Two months after this when I was on the return march with the army to recapture Knoxville, I was informed that when the Federal army reached Mr. Sneed's neighborhood under, I believe, Sherman—certainly some Federal general—the reverend and venerable slaveholder Sneed was unceremoniously driven from his house. Each Negro family was then called up and directed to load, each one of them, a wagon belonging to the plantation with the amount of grain, meal, flour, meat, etc., etc., such furniture, bedding, clothing,—even books—as each Negro chose to claim and appropriate as his or her own. This they were required to do, and forced to do by the threats of the gang perpetrating this outrage: that if it were not done these effects should be burned or otherwise destroyed. Some of the Negroes were unwilling to leave their old master and old mistress, or the old place where they had lived happily and contented all their lives. Finally the ox teams (the horses were claimed by the conquerors) were put to the wagons and driven some to one place and some to another. Dissatisfied with their new homes and their new condition, some of the Negroes came back furtively to Parson Sneed's, desiring to remain with him. These were rearrested, taken away again to their new bondage, and threatened by their captors and new friends that if they returned to their former masters the severest punishment should be inflicted on them. Afterwards I was told in Atlanta, Georgia, that in one case, that of a house-servant of Mrs. Sneed, a cook or a nurse, she insisted on going back to her old mistress and did effect that object. She was by military authority forced again to leave her and go back to (I believe) Receville. She ab-

sconded again, and though dissuaded from it by Mrs. Sneed, insisted on it as her right and duty to live at the old place and in the employment and care of her former owners, her natural protectors and guardians. Force was resorted to to prevent her third return, and from the effect of injuries inflicted by that force the poor but faithful Negress died when almost in sight of her master's gate. While I vouch for the substantial truth of all I have said before, I do not assert that the tragic finale of this incident is true. For the credit of the Federal officers who commanded in the South and for sake of those humanitarians of the North who presume to claim a higher civilization and a more humane form of servitude than the slaveholding South has exhibited in all our past, let it be hoped that the oppression, injustice, and cruelty of the Yankee army in Tennessee in the fall of 1863, as here detailed, have been exaggerated. It was told to this writer just as above stated.

The command of General Buckner continued to fall back. I reached Athens with it. Dr. Strong had our bank and its assets safe in a good vault. But there were various rumors among the officials: One was today that Burnside was in pursuit of us enroute by Maryville, McGhee's ferry, and Madisonville, determined to capture us and our stores. Tomorrow it was that the Federal troops deflecting around Chattanooga would dash against the Western and Atlantic Railroad at Dalton or above and cut off our retreat by that channel. Mr. T. A. Cleage, the cashier of the Athens branch, thought this latter policy the more probable and feasible, and acting on this belief packed the more valuable and least ponderous of his assets in a United States mail bag, and being very familiar with a lateral and nearer route through the Ocoee district placed his mail bag on a mule and on horseback himself led his mule through safely. He tapped the W. & A. Road beyond Dalton, perhaps at Calhoun. With us he left part of his treasure, and having carefully concealed his branch books in a place where they were never found, the keys were handed to us. I could ascertain nothing positive about the movement of the enemy and was at some loss to decide what my own should be. Very early next morning an officer with his aides rode up to Bridge's Hotel and, without alighting from his saddle, conferred for a minute with his comrades. Someone told me the officer was General Forrest. I had never seen him, but knowing him to be a matter-of-fact man and a reliable officer I walked over to him and ascertained the way was still clear behind us, and inquired how long could he promise that the enemy should not intercept our passage on the

railroad via Dalton? He hesitated a minute, but on learning who I was and the reason why I had asked this apparently impertinent question, he asked me how long time I wanted? I told him twenty-four hours. He replied, "I guarantee that and longer." His squadron had come up, his bugles sounded, and they dashed down the road towards Charleston. I told the proper officer what I had learned from General Forrest, asked for my passports and my transportation ticket, removed our effects to the car, and after some delay the train was in motion. At Cleveland we heard a renewal of the rumor that the Federal troops would intercept us at Red Clay or Varnells, and the train passed those places cautiously. We arrived after dark at Dalton, but owing to some cause we missed the connection. We kept guard all night but were not disturbed.

Next day we reached Atlanta. I deposited our branch monies with Mr. Clayton of the railroad bank, with whom Mr. McMahon and myself had already deposited our specie and our more available state issues. Colonel Clayton politely invited Dr. Strong and myself to use his office temporarily for the transaction of our official business. I wrote to the secretary of the treasury where I was—had informed him before where my depository was (at Abingdon)—and that I awaited his pleasure and commands. In answer he told me that as there would probably be large army disbursements made in Georgia that he would send to me by express my office at Abingdon, under the impression that I could find a suitable building in Atlanta for my depository. After this I changed my boarding house, which was nearly a mile in the northern suburbs of Atlanta, to Major Good's, not far from the First Presbyterian Church.

The town, its hotels, its private houses, were all full of refugees from Louisiana, Florida, Alabama, Arkansas, and especially from Tennessee. Major Good's was always crowded with the *elite* of Nashville, Memphis, Knoxville, and the more interior towns. Here the Knoxville (Atlanta) *Register* was again set up by Mr. J. A. Sperry, its former editor. His office was the constant rendezvous of (especially) East Tennessee refugees and army officers. Sperry and others made me write editorials and contributions for his columns. I became his army correspondent when I was in camps or hospitals as I always volunteered to be. Indeed I was usefully employed. I was actively and constantly employed. I was surrounded by my own countrymen, Tennesseans and Tennessee patriots and refugees from Tennessee.

An invalid son, General J. Crozier Ramsey, was for a while in Atlanta

with me. He had been as Aide to General J. C. Vaughn, much exposed in the trenches at Vicksburg. On one occasion a beautifully finished flag, made and presented to the brigade by my now deceased daughter, Charlotte Barton Ramsey, was placed by him on a battery in an exposed position on the Southern defences and outworks. It became a target for the enemy's artillery. A desperate effort was made to prevent its capture. The effort was successful and the flag of Miss Ramsey, though tattered and torn, was after almost superhuman efforts and heroic enterprise preserved. He brought it home with him in his trunk when, after the surrender of Vicksburg July 4, 1863 he with Vaughn's brigade was paroled. He never recovered his health after undergoing that dreadful siege. He had lumbago, rheumatism, and general debility. Being a paroled prisoner he could not till exchanged, again bear arms. He fell back with our army from Knoxville to Atlanta, hoping every day to hear of his exchange when he might again buckle on his sword and do battle for his country, its rights, and its honor. Hope deferred maketh the heart sick. He stayed near me as long as he could in our exiled state at Atlanta. Helping me, comforting me, obeying me like a dutiful son, encouraging me under trials almost without a parallel, solacing me under bereavement, soothing me in adversity, rejoicing with me when the cloud of sorrow was blown over, sympathizing with me when its darkest tints overshadowed my path, and was always the first to discern and point out to me the silver lining around the blackest cloud. He was always pleasant, never discontented, ever cheerful and radiant with hope. He was our first born son—perhaps was too much the idol of his parents and our family. At Atlanta we could hear nothing of his mother, his sisters. He was anxious for their safety and their comfort and determined to get nearer to them. Where we were then and were likely to be thereafter, the distance between us was steadily increasing. He determined that it was best for us all that he should leave Georgia, go around to Bristol or some point lower down in East Tennessee, where, being nearer to his old home, he might possibly hear something from his mother and sisters. Of course I interposed no objections, but at once gave my assent to his plans and the day was set for his early departure.