

Chapter Four

Soon after its formation, the Milwaukee Cavalry traveled to St. Louis, where the unit served as the bodyguard for General John C. Fremont, commanding general of the Department of Missouri. By this time, Fremont had attained a solid reputation for himself. He had been a Government surveyor, a senator from California, and founder of the Republican Party. “In 1856 Fremont was chosen as the Republican Party’s first presidential candidate.”⁹ Fremont did well in the 1856 Election though he was defeated by James Buchanan. When the Civil War broke out, President Lincoln assigned Fremont to St. Louis as Major General in command of the Western Department.

Soon after the Milwaukee Cavalry arrived in St. Louis for its assignment in early September 1861, Bernhard and his fellow cavalrymen learned that General Fremont had been relieved of his duty because of a controversial proclamation he had issued concerning the slaves of Missouri. As a strong opponent of slavery, Fremont’s proclamation did not come as a surprise. “On August 30, 1861 Fremont proclaimed that all slaves owned by Confederates in Missouri were free.”¹⁰ Fremont’s proclamation infuriated Lincoln because he feared that when the borderline states in the Union heard Fremont’s emancipation proclamation that they too would be persuaded to secede from

⁹ *John C. Fremont*, in the National Archives Learning Curve, <http://www.spartacus.schoolnet.co.uk/USAfremont.htm> 2

¹⁰ *Fremont*, 2.

the Union. Lincoln tried to have Fremont rescind his proclamation, but the General refused, claiming, "It would imply that I myself thought it was wrong and that I had acted without reflection which the gravity of the point demanded."¹¹ Under the advisement of his cabinet, President Lincoln relieved General Fremont of his command, replacing him with the more conservative General Henry Halleck.

The unit did not have to wait long for its next assignment. Bernhard recalled, "Captain Gustav Von Deutsch and First Lieutenant Charles Lehmann came back from headquarters with the glad tidings that a German cavalry regiment, the "Benton Hussars", was being organized and that we would join. We did so as Company G."¹²

The newly formed Company G of the Fifth Missouri Cavalry made camp at Carondelet, on the banks of the Mississippi River. Few provisions were available in camp because secessionists had depleted the nearby U. S. arsenals of all saddles, serviceable arms and accouterments. For six weeks the troops drilled with makeshift equipment, including rope, blanket, saddles and wooden sabers. The shabby equipment helped turn Company G into near perfect horsemen pretty quickly. After making a favorable impression on General Samuel Curtis during review, the troops received a much needed upgrade in equipment at General Curtis's insistence.¹³

At Carondelet Company G provided the guard for the first iron-clad gunboats that were built. From Carondelet, Company G marched to Jefferson Barracks and then were sent to camp at Sulpher Springs, Missouri. From there Company G went to Benton Barracks at St. Louis. Company G left Benton Barracks in January, 1862, as part of an

¹¹ *Fremont*, 2.

¹² Hennes, Eiring, 8.

¹³ Hennes, Eiring, 9.

army of 13,000 men under the command of General Curtis, assigned as General Franz Sigel's bodyguard. The army then marched southwest into Arkansas in pursuit of Confederate General Sterling Price and his forces.

The army encamped at Fayetteville, Arkansas for several days. While on a foraging party, Bernhard recalled hearing a lady on a plantation say, "Don't you know Price is coming with 50,000 men?" The detachment, surprised by the lady's question, quickly returned to camp to find the army preparing for retreat. Union spies had learned that Price was indeed marching upon them with a force far superior in numbers to that of General Curtis's. "The next day, four companies of infantry and two companies of the Benton Hussars, including Company G with two pieces of artillery, formed a rear guard of 600 men under General Sigel."¹⁴ During the general retreat, Union detachment met the enemy on March 6, 1862, near Bentonville, Ark. The Battle of Pea Ridge had begun. At the first crossroad at Bentonville, two pieces of artillery went into action, blasting a gap in the Southern lines that the remainder of the detachment advanced through. After marching several more miles, the rebels attacked the Union detachment at the next Bentonville crossroad, but again Company G cut through the enemy line causing 300 Confederate casualties, sustaining only one casualty and few wounded. In his official report, Colonel Joseph Nemmett, of the Fifth Missouri Cavalry cited the members of Company G of the Benton Hussars for their bravery and had this to say about the encounter, "Company G, under the command of Captain Lehmann, had the advance

¹⁴ Hennes, Eiring, 9.

guard, and, as I understand, at one time made a spirited charge and cleared the road in front near Bentonville.”¹⁵

After the initial skirmish near Bentonville, Bernhard, along with two of his fellow cavalymen named Daevel and Thiel, who had the fastest horses, were ordered to ride full speed to General Curtis for reinforcements. After riding two miles in Sugar Creek Hollow, Eiring, Daevel, and Thiel reached the 12th Missouri Infantry. The 12th Missouri then marched back to Bentonville to assist General Sigel, who with the necessary reinforcements, defeated the Confederate force in the first stage of a battle that lasted three days.

The next day, March 7, 1862, Company G and two Indian brigades engaged the enemy once again, but were forced to stop near a wooded area that Bernhard and a scouting party had found to be full of hostile Native-Americans. The Indians then tried to trap Company G's scouting party. In order to plan their escape, Bernhard and his fellow troops were forced to converse in their native German so that the Indians would not be able to understand them. The scouting party then made a break for it. They entered an open field and received several shots from the Indians. Miraculously, not one man in Company G's scouting party was wounded. However when the men unrolled their blankets and tents, several of them found a number of bullets were found embedded in their equipment. In his Memoirs, Bernhard recalled, “ But such bad shooting! Had those

¹⁵ Number 16. Report of Colonel Joseph Nemett, Fifth Missouri Cavalry (Benton Hussars). Page 244 Operations In Mo., Ark., Kans., and Ind. Chapter XVIII. <http://www.ehistory.com/uscw/library/or/008/0244.cfm>

Indians been the good marksmen they are described to be in fiction, nearly all of us would have been killed or wounded.”¹⁶

The next day, March 8, proved decisive. General Sigel had taken command and had massed the artillery at one point, supported by the Fifth Missouri Cavalry. Shortly after noon the Union Forces won the Battle of Pea Ridge and the enemy was totally routed. When the cavalry pursued, they met no organized Confederate force, and Company G alone captured about 150 prisoners.

After the Battle of Pea Ridge, Bernhard and his fellow troops received some much needed rest and set up camp at Cassville, Missouri. The months after the Pea Ridge engagement were tough on Company G. They made several expeditions into Arkansas but had no significant results. From Arkansas, the Fifth Missouri Cavalry was ordered to march east to the Mississippi River, and arrived at Helena, Arkansas sometime in July, 1862. Bernhard remembered the trying march,” The march was strenuous because of the intense heat and lack of drinking water. We were not allowed to take any water from the wells, which were said to be poisoned.”¹⁷ While in camp in Helena, most of the army became sick for a time. Funeral volleys pierced the air from morning until night. “Company G lost eight men to malaria, and in the entire regiment, there were no more than seventy fit men for duty at one time.”¹⁸ What remained of the Fifth Missouri Cavalry spent the rest of 1862 along the Mississippi River fighting off disease and Confederate guerrillas.

¹⁶ Hennes, Eiring, 10.

¹⁷ Hennes, Eiring, 11.

¹⁸ Hennes, Eiring, 11.

In March, 1863, at Ironton, Missouri, what was left of the Fifth Missouri Cavalry was consolidated with the Fourth Missouri Cavalry and the Milwaukee Cavalry was designated as Company M of that regiment. From Ironton, The Fourth Missouri Cavalry marched to Columbus, Kentucky, to serve east of the Mississippi River. At Columbus, the troops on night watch were frequently attacked and killed by Confederate guerrillas. Because of these attacks, several scouting forays were made into the interiors of Kentucky and Tennessee to find those responsible for the night attacks. Bernhard Eiring participated in one of the scouting trips that traveled to Walnut Forks, Tennessee. Bernhard recalled this mission,

“Capt. Hansen, the commander of this detachment of about fifty men, engaged the services of a negro in that neighborhood. On the promise we were to take him in our lines, he was to lead us to the camp of a band of guerillas who harassed Union troops and were believed to be responsible for attacks on our night pickets. We had hardly entered the woods near the plantation from which we took the negro when we saw three guerilla pickets quietly playing cards. In our charge upon them, two escaped into the woods, but the third was captured and shot since we had orders not to bring in any guerillas as prisoners. This young man had just been shot when we noticed about fifteen on a side road above us. Each of them had a watermelon on the pommel of his saddle. We charged up the hill at the guerillas and they fled into an open field. We followed and all of them were killed; none escaping. From then on, the night attacks ceased almost entirely.”¹⁹

¹⁹ Hennes, *Eiring*, 12.

The diary does not trace the actions of Bernhard Eiring from this time until February, 1864. It is likely that he and Company M remained near Columbus, Kentucky in camp drilling during this period. In February 1864, the Fourth Missouri Cavalry, as part of the Union force under the command of General William Sooy Smith, marched south through Tennessee and Mississippi in order to join General William Tecumseh Sherman's army. During the march, the unit took on an excess of 1000 former slaves. "Smith was supposed to rendezvous with Sherman at Meridian, Miss. On the 10th, but never got there."²⁰ The two Union forces never met up, and Smith found his army being pursued by a Confederate force commanded by General Nathaniel Bedford Forrest.

Forrest is generally considered to be the greatest cavalry leader in the history of warfare, which is quite remarkable, considering he had no formal military education. His contemporaries, especially General William Tecumseh Sherman admired his skill greatly and wanted him to serve the United States Army after the Civil War ended. In 1867, General Forrest would go on to gain notoriety as the first Grand Wizard of the Ku Klux Klan. "Spokesman for the Klan first asked General Robert E. Lee if he would head the organization. Lee declined citing old age and poor health."²¹ Lee in turn recommended the younger General Forrest. Forrest would run the Klan until 1869, when the Ku Klux Klan temporarily disbanded.

After a few minor skirmishes, General Smith, concerned about the safety of the former slaves with him and not knowing the number of General Forrest's army ordered a

²⁰ *Okolona (Ivey Hill) (1864)* <http://www.ehistory.com/uscw/battleview.cfm?bid=582&wid=2>

²¹ *A Brief History of the Ku Klux Klan: 1865-1869*, 5.
<http://www.kkklsn.com/briefhist.htm>

retreat to Memphis, Tennessee. The Fourth Missouri Cavalry formed the rear guard on this retreat and met a Confederate Cavalry regiment at Okolona (Ivey Hill) on February 22, 1864. Bernhard recalled the actions of his unit with great detail,

“Our battery took a position in an open field, from where it shelled the enemy.

On this occasion, our 2nd Lieutenant Wiese, a young Austrian artillery officer on leave, saw his opportunity when a group of high enemy officers gathered on the edge of that field. He dismounted and aimed one of the guns at the group. In the next minute a shell exploded in their midst, killing Colonel Jeffery Forrest, brother of the General, and killing and wounding a number of others.”²²

The Fourth Missouri Cavalry made one final charge before hastily retreating themselves. In the Battle of Okolona (Ivey Hill), “the losses were light, about 100 Union and maybe 50 Confederates.”²³ Smith’s army successfully retreated to Memphis reaching the city on March 1, 1864.

While in Memphis, Bernhard, who by this time had attained the rank of Sergeant, had a very tough decision to make. His tour of duty was close to ending and he had to decide whether to re-enlist or go back home to Milwaukee. Bernhard chose to re-enlist and did so soon after his initial discharge from the United States Army on March 30, 1864.²⁴

Early in June 1864, an army of 12,000 men under the command of General Samuel D. Sturgis, including Bernhard, marched from Memphis and engaged the enemy at Brice’s Crossroads, Mississippi. Once again, the Union force was fighting the army of

²² Hennes, *Eiring*, 12.

²³ EHistory, *Okolona*, 1.

²⁴ Official Discharge Paper for Bernhard Eiring, March 30, 1864.

General N. B. Forrest. Though Sturgis's Forces heavily outnumbered that of Forrest's, the Confederate Army slaughtered the Union force in this battle. Bernhard remembered this battle well,

“Because of an incompetent commander, our army was totally routed—except our Fourth Missouri Cavalry with its battery, which did some of the fighting. Our Fourth Missouri was the only regiment returning in perfect order as the rear guard of the routed army. Altogether, eighteen artillery pieces were lost. Our battery, after expending all its ammunition, retired in good order.”²⁵

At the Battle of Brice's Crossroads, Union casualties were staggering. It is estimated that “Union losses were about five times Forrest's 500 men.”²⁶

General Sturgis's force spent the rest of the Summer of 1864 pursuing General Forrest's Confederate Army in Mississippi. In September of 1864, the men of the Fourth Missouri Cavalry who had not re-enlisted were mustered out in Memphis. Bernhard and other re-enlistments went on scouting parties and a few minor expeditions until they joined other regiments in the brigade commanded by Colonel Karge, of the Second New Jersey Cavalry.

On December 25, 1864, Colonel Karge's force arrived at Egypt Station, Mississippi. Karge's troops took on the 3,000 Confederate Troops who occupied the city. Bernhard Eiring remembered the encounter,

²⁵ Hennes, *Eiring*, 13.

²⁶ *Brice's Crossroads (1864)* <http://www.ehistory.com/uscw/battleview.cfm?bid=170&wid=2>

“The detachment of our regiment under the command of Captain Hencke was ordered to charge the battery (located on a train). But it had rained the previous day and when half way to the tracks the horses sank to their knees in the rich bottom soil. The battery on the train moved south and behind the tracks infantry appeared, giving us a volley. The horse of Captain Hencke was killed and the captain could not extricate himself and he was taken prisoner. We, of course, had to retreat with a few wounded men.”²⁷

In the meantime, the rest of Colonel Karge’s force had been successful in the siege on Egypt Station, taking some 3,000 prisoners who were paroled the same day. Soon after, Karge’s regiment started to march to Vicksburg, Mississippi.

At Vicksburg in early 1865, Bernhard and other re-enlistees who formed the Fourth Missouri Cavalry were sent to Louisville, Kentucky, where they were to join the army of General Sherman on its “march to the sea”. While at Louisville, the order to join Sherman’s army was countermanded and the Fourth Missouri Cavalry was reorganized into four companies. In his *Memoirs*, Bernhard Eiring quickly pointed out that, “Eight of the commissioned officers were former privates of the Milwaukee Cavalry.”²⁸ At around this time Bernhard received a promotion from Sergeant to Adjunct Lieutenant.

In February 1865, Captain Henke was to be involved in a prisoner exchange. This exchange took place at Black River Bridge, Miss. At this point Bernhard left his fellow troops of the newly reorganized Fourth Missouri Cavalry and traveled with an orderly to the Confederate headquarters at Jackson, Mississippi, where he escorted Union prisoners

²⁷ Hennes, *Eiring*, 14.

²⁸ Hennes, *Eiring*, 15.

of war outside of enemy territory. In his *Memoirs*, Bernhard described what he encountered,

“We carried dispatches and were in the company of two Confederate officers. On the road to Jackson, I saw the most sickening sights among our men who were still able to walk. They had been furnished with sufficient rations to Black River Bridge, but in their starved condition they devoured at once all they had and then were lying around on the road digging for wild onions and roots.”²⁹

After the delivery of dispatches to the Confederate headquarters, Bernhard accompanied an ambulance train and a small detachment of troops under his command from Jackson, Mississippi to Memphis, Tennessee. Bernhard had a hard time keeping his troops in line, probably because of his small stature. (He was five feet three inches tall and weighed about 130 pounds).

In May, 1865, Lt. Eiring, now back with the Fourth Missouri Cavalry, embarked for New Orleans, Louisiana. With the Civil War over, “American Aid became available to the Republican cause in Mexico.”³⁰ From New Orleans the regiment marched to Texas” in the event that Napoleon III would not evacuate his troops from Mexico.”³¹ After Lincoln’s assassination, Benito Juárez, the liberal Mexican president, figured that the new president, Andrew Johnson would hold an opinion on Mexico similar to Lincoln’s. “He (Johnson) is bound to share the opinion of a people that wants no European monarchy in Mexico. We shall see, and in the meanwhile we shall continue our struggle.

²⁹ Hennes, *Eiring*, 15.

³⁰ Ralph Roeder, *Juarez and His Mexico*, (New York: The Viking Press, 1947), 598.

³¹ Hennes, *Eiring*, 15.

undismayed.”³² Napoleon III did recall his troops and so the United States did not need to intervene on the side of Juarez.

Finally, on November 30, 1865, the members of the Fourth Missouri Cavalry were mustered out of the United States Army at Tangipahoa, Louisiana. At the time the Fourth Missouri Cavalry was mustered out, Lt. Bernhard Eiring was in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, on sick leave. Bernhard Eiring spent the better part of the next months involved in the process of trying to procure his discharge from the service. He finally succeeded in this endeavor and was discharged at St. Louis on March 20, 1866.³³

³² Roeder, *Juarez*, 601/

³³ Official Discharge Paper of Bernhard Eiring, March 20, 1866.