Skirmishes at Kingston

Only two skirmishes are known to have occurred near Kingston (Madison County) during the Civil War. The first occurred on November 10, 1863 when Col I. L. Brooks, with a force of about 650 Confederates, encountered Brig. General John McNeil, who commanded a force of about 1,000 Union soldiers and a number of mounted howitzers. Although not is much known about the skirmish, locals reported that the Union army was having difficulty in providing food for the horses and mules that were pulling the supply wagons. The first night the army was encamped, the horses and mules chewed off seventeen wagon tongues to which they had been tethered. The skirmish resulted in the Confederate troops under Brooks’ command being driven southward towards Clarksville.

One of the best known area skirmishes occurred when a detachment of the First Iowa Cavalry captured and destroyed a saltpeter works southeast of Kingston on January 12, 1863. Information in regard to the operation of these works reached General Francis J. Herron in early 1863 and he was determined to destroy them at once, thus depriving the Confederacy of the means of obtaining powder for its troops so near his lines.

He ordered Major J.W. Caldwell of the First Iowa Cavalry, then encamped at Huntsville, to take three hundred men of his regiment and proceed to Kingston and thence to the works to destroy and capture the parties engaged in the manufacture of the contraband. The Major left Huntsville on the morning of January 9th and encamped that evening four miles east of Kingston having ascertained the exact location of the saltpeter works. He resumed the march the next morning before daybreak and at daylight surprised the small force at the works capturing seventeen out of twenty of the men employed, including a lieutenant in charge. The entire plant consisting of fourteen new buildings, two steam engines, three boilers, and seven large iron kettles with half a ton of saltpeter was destroyed.

Sources

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