

turbulent, and the men frequently waded breast deep for hours together, pushing the keel and Mackinaw boats against the rapid current and lifting them over the rapids; while in the swamps along the trail the baggage wagons were often mired, and the horsemen obliged to do rough service in pushing and hauling freight through and over the black muck and tangled roots. For many days the troops had not a dry thread upon them, and the tents were found to be of poor quality and but meagre protection from the driving storms on the Illinois prairies.<sup>1</sup>

Whiteside was enabled to out-distance Atkinson. Arriving at the prophet's town he found it deserted and the trail up the river fresh, so he pushed on as rapidly as possible to Dixon's, where he arrived on the twelfth of May. Here he found two independent battalions, three hundred and forty-one men all told, under Majors Isaiah Stillman and David Bailey.<sup>2</sup> They had been at the ferry for some days, with abundance of ammunition and supplies, in which latter Whiteside was now deficient. These commands were not of the regular levy, and objected to joining the main army except on detached service as rangers. The men were imbued with reckless enthusiasm, impatient at the slow advance of the army, and anxious at once to do something brilliant, feeling confident that all that was necessary to end the war was for them to be given a chance to meet the enemy in open battle.

They obtained Whiteside's permission to go forward in the capacity of a scouting party, and set out on the morning of the thirteenth, under Stillman. Late in the afternoon of the fourteenth they went into camp in a small clump of open timber, three miles southwest of the mouth of Sycamore creek. It was a peculiarly strong position for defense. The troop completely filled the grove, which was

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<sup>1</sup> A great portion of the volunteers had been raised in the backwoods, and rafting and swimming streams were familiar to them.—Reynolds's *My Own Times*, p. 226.

<sup>2</sup> This made the total volunteer force 1,935 men. The Stillman and Bailey battalions were afterwards organized as the Fifth regiment, under Colonel James Johnson.