

# Death To All Foragers-A Fairfield Incident

During the march through Fairfield County, there were several incidents that transpired involving Yankee bodies being found along the roadside with their throats cut. There was also a note attached bearing the words, "Death to All Foragers". General Sherman was horrified when he received the news of these incidents. One incident took place somewhere in the vicinity of Feasterville, in which nine men were found. Nine more were found elsewhere throughout the county. The following is a dispatch from General Kirpatrick of the Yankee cavalry to General Wheeler of the Rebel cavalry: (Sent out under flags of truce.)

## Headquarters Cavalry Command, Army of Invasion

In the Field, S.C., February 22, 1865

**Major-General WHEELER,**

Commanding C.S. Cavalry:

General: Yesterday a lieutenant and seven men and a sergeant of a battery were taken prisoners by one of your regiments-if I am correctly informed, a Texas regiment-armed with spencer carbines and commanded by a lieutenant colonel. This officer and his men, after surrendering and being disarmed, were inhumanly and cowardly murdered. Nine of my cavalymen were also found murdered yesterday, five in a barnyard, three in a open field, and one in the road. Two had their throats cut from ear to ear. This makes in all eighteen Federal soldiers murdered yesterday by your people. Unless some satisfactory explanation be made to me before sundown, February 23, I will cause eighteen of your soldiers, now my prisoners, to be shot at that hour, and if this cowardly act be repeated, if my people when taken are not treated in all cases as prisoners of war should be, I will not only retaliate as I have already mentioned, but there shall not be a house left standing within reach of my scouting parties along my line of march, nor will I be responsible for the conduct of my soldiers, who not only be allowed, but encouraged to take a fearful revenge. I know of no other way to intimidate cowards.

I am, general, very respectfully, your obedient servant,

**J. KILPATRICK**

Brevet Major-General, Commanding Cavalry

This dispatch was received by General Wheeler, and a reply was sent back as follows:

**Headquarters, Cavalry Corps,**

Chesterfield, S.C., February 22, 1865.

**Major-General KILPATRICK, U. S. Army,**

Commanding Cavalry, & c.:

GENERAL: Your dispatch of this date is received, and I am much shocked at the statements which it contains. I am satisfied that you are mistaken in this matter. I have no Texas regiments armed with spencer rifles, and none headed by a Lieutenant-colonel. The two Texas regiments which belong to my command are commanded by captains, and neither were in any engagement yesterday. If any of my regiments were engaged with the enemy yesterday that fact has not been reported to me. I will have the matter promptly investigated and see that full justice is done. Should the report, however, by any means prove correct, I prefer that the retaliation may be inflicted upon the parties guilty of the misdeeds, and not upon innocent persons. I have no desire to make counter threat in response to which those you have thought proper to address to me, but should you cause eighteen of my men to be shot because you chanced to find that number of your men dead, I shall regard them as so many murders committed by you, and act accordingly. I trust, however, such a painful necessity will not be forced upon me.

Your threat "to burn every house as far as your scouts can extend" is too brutal a character for me, and I think for my Government, to reply to.

Respectfully, sir, your obedient servant,

**J. WHEELER**

Major-General, C. S. Army

General Kirpatrick's reply was sent back, it read as follows:

**Headquarters Cavalry Command, Army of Invasion,**

In the Field, S.C., February 22, 1865

**Major-General WHEELER,**

Commanding Cavalry, C.S. Army:

General: Your dispatch dated February 22, has just been received and I feel satisfied that you will so fully investigate the circumstances attending the murder

of my men that the guilty parties will be discovered and punished. The regiment being referred to as being commanded by a lieutenant-colonel may have been commanded by a captain, but certain it is that the force was mostly composed of Texans, many armed with spencer rifles, and my people were shot by order of the officer in command. One of my scouts, a reliable man, was with this force all day, and testified to the fact that not only were these men referred to murdered, but that the general conversation of your men was that they would take no more prisoners. I hope that you may be able to furnish some reason that may in a degree may justify the course taken by your men.

You speak in your communication of my threat to burn houses, &c., as being "too brutal for your Government to entertain." No matter how brutal it may seem I have the power, and will enforce it to the letter, and more, if this course is persisted in, I will not only allow but encourage my people to retaliate man for man. I shall take no action for the present. If stragglers from my command are found the houses of citizens committing any outrages whatever, my own people are directed to shoot them on the spot, and I expect officers and soldiers of your command to do the same.

I am alive to the fact that I am surrounded by citizens as well as soldiers, whose bitter hatred to the men I have the honor to command did not originate with this war, and I expect that some of my men will be killed elsewhere than on the battlefield, but I know and shall not hesitate to apply a sure remedy in each case.

Very respectfully, your obedient servant,

**J. KILPATRICK**

Brevet Major-General, Commanding Cavalry

P860-861

General Sherman had already sent an order for Kirpatrick to kill eighteen prisoners. This order was observed when the army between Gladdens Grove and Rocky Mount Post Office. The prisoners were made to draw straws to see which ones would die. It is generally believed among historians that this hanging took place at Dr. Scott's house, where they were camped.

Mrs. Furman in her diary talked of the deaths of the Yankees as being due to the fact that they "tied Mrs. Rhabb up, stripped her of her clothes, had their way with her daughter, and burned her house in front of her."

Some of the deaths could be attributed to the "notorious" Nick Myers from the

Longtown section of Fairfield. He was known to be wearing a Yankee uniform during the invasion. He saved a few houses from being burned by ordering guards to be attached to them. Mrs. Bowler of the Flint Hill section of the county stated in her diary that she saw Nick Myers in her yard with the Yankee soldiers. She went on to say that he had lured many soldiers away from their commands and then would kill them, covering their bodies with brush. At the plantation house where Nick lived at, there were Yankee skulls that were kept in the attic after the war. This must have been trophies to him. After the war he was the most wanted man in Fairfield, and was said to evade capture and moved to Florida, where it's said that Fort Myers was named after him.

Additional orders and correspondence from Part II concerning this incident are as follows:

**HDQRS. Cavalry Command, Army of Invasion,**

Douglass' House, near Black Stocks Station, February 22, 1865

**Maj. L.M. Dayton, A.A.G.,** Military Division of the Mississippi:

An infantry lieutenant and seven men were murdered yesterday by the Eighth Texas Cavalry after they had surrendered. We found their bodies all together and mutilated, with paper on their breasts saying, "Death to Foragers." Eighteen of my men were killed yesterday and some had their throats cut. There is no doubt about this, general, and I have sent Wheeler word that I intend to hang eighteen of his men, and if the cowardly act is repeated, will burn every house along my line of march, and that can be reached by my scouting parties. I have a number of prisoners, and shall take a fearful revenge. My people were deliberately murdered and by a scouting party of 300 men commanded by a lieutenant-colonel. I will try and see the general-in-chief at the bridge (Rocky Mount).

Very respectfully, &c.,

**J. KILPATRICK**

Brevet Major-General

P533-II

**HDQRS. MILITARY DIVISION OF THE MISSISSIPPI,**

In the Field, Rocky Mount, February 23, 1865-10 a.m.

**Major-General Howard,**

Commanding Right Wing:

General: Kilpatrick reports that two of his foraging parties were murdered by the enemy after capture and labeled "Death to all foragers." Now it is clearly our war right to subsist our army off the enemy. Napoleon always did it, but could avail himself of the civil powers he found in existence to collect forage and provisions by regular impressments. We can not do that here, and I contend if the enemy fails to defend his country we may rightfully appropriate what we want. If our foragers act under mine, yours, or other proper orders they must be protected. I have ordered Kilpatrick to select of his prisoners man for man, shoot them, and leave them by the roadside labeled, so that our enemy will see that for every man he executes he takes the life of one of his own. I want the foragers, however, to be kept within reasonable bounds for the sake of discipline. I will not protect them when they enter dwellings and commit wanton waste, such as women's apparel, jewelry, and such things not needed by our army: but they may destroy cotton or tobacco, because these are assumed by the Rebel Government to belong to it, and are used as a valuable source of revenue. Nor will I consent to the enemy taking the lives of our men on their judgement. They have lost all title to property, and can lose nothing not already forfeited; but we should punish for a departure from our orders, and if the people resist our foragers, I will not deem it wrong, but the Confederate army must not be supposed the champion of any people. I lay down these general rules and wish you to be governed by them. If any of your foragers are murdered, take life for life, leaving a record of each case.

I am, with respect,

**W.T. SHERMAN**

Major-General, Commanding

P537-II

**HEADQUARTERS, MILITARY DIVISION OF THE MISSISSIPPI,**  
Colonel Ballard's Farm, S.C., February 23, 1865.

**Major-General KILPATRICK,**

Commanding Cavalry:

GENERAL: I regret the matter you report, that eighteen of your men have been murdered after surrender, and marked that the enemy intended to kill all foragers. It leaves no alternative: you must retaliate man for man and mark them in like manner. Let it be done at once. We have a perfect war right to the product of the country we overrun, and may collect them by foragers or otherwise. Let the whole people know that the war is now against them, because their armies now flee before us and do not defend their country or their frontier as they should. It is petty nonsense for Wheeler and Beauregard and such vain heroes to talk of our warring against women and children. If they claim to be men then they should defend their women and children and prevent us reaching their homes. Instead of maintaining their armies let them turn their attention to their families, or we will follow them to the death. They should know that we will use the produce of the country as we please. I want the foragers to be regulated and systematized so as not to degenerate into common robbers, but foragers, as such, to collect corn, bacon, beef, and such other products as we need, are as much entitled to our protection as our skirmisher and flankers. You will therefore, at once shoot and leave by the roadside an equal number of prisoners, and append a label to their bodies stating that man for man shall be killed for every one of our men they kill. If our foragers commit excesses punish them yourself, but never let an enemy judge between our men and the law. For my part I want the people of the South to realize the fact that they shall not dictate laws of war or peace to us. If there is to be any dictation we want our full share.

Yours, truly,

**W.T. SHERMAN**

Major-General Commanding

P544-II

**HEADQUARTERS CAVALRY COMMAND,**

February 24, 1865

**Maj. Gen. W.T. SHERMAN,**

Commanding Military Division of the Mississippi:

GENERAL: I have the honor to report that Private Charles Wright, Ninth Ohio Volunteer Cavalry, General Atkins' headquarters, came in last evening from scout near Feasterville, below and west of Chester. He reports having found twenty-one of our infantrymen in a ravine, about eighty rods from the main road and about three miles from Feasterville, with their throats cut and stripped of their clothing. The evidence the enemy has resolved upon murdering our men is fast accumulating. Another report has just come in that a soldier belonging to the Ninety Second Illinois Mounted Infantry was found hung to the limb of a tree near the roadside. I shall retaliate as far as my own people are concerned, as you have directed. Major-General Wade Hampton is now at Lancaster. I can forward for you any communication to or through him to any higher rebel authorities you may desire regarding the facts mentioned.

I am, general, your obedient servant,

**J. KILPATRICK**

Brevet Major-General, Commanding

**HDQRS. MILITARY DIVISION OF THE MISSISSIPPI,**

In The Field, February 24, 1865.

**Lieut. Gen. WADE HAMPTON,**

Commanding Cavalry Forces, C.S. Army:

GENERAL: It is officially reported to me that our foraging parties are murdered after capture and labeled "Death to all foragers." One instance of a lieutenant and seven men near Chester, and another of twenty "near a ravine eighty rods from the main road" about three miles from Feasterville. I have ordered a similar number of prisoners in our hands to be disposed of in like manner. I hold about 1,000 prisoners captured in various ways, and can stand it as long as you; but I hardly think these murders are committed with your knowledge, and would suggest that you give notice to the people at large that every life taken by them simply results in the death of one of your Confederates. Of course you cannot question my right to forage on the country. It is a war right as old as history. The manner of exercising it varies with circumstances, and if the civil authorities will supply my requisitions I will forbid all foraging. But I can find no civil authorities who can respond to calls for forage or provisions, therefore must collect directly of the people. I have no doubt this is the occasion of much misbehavior on the part of our men, but I cannot permit an enemy to judge or punish with wholesale murder. Personally I regret the bitter feelings engendered by this war, but they were to be expected, and I simply allege that those who struck the first blow and made war inevitable ought not, in fairness, to reproach us for the natural consequences. I merely assert our right to forage and my resolve to protect my foragers to the extent of life for life.

I am, with respect, your obedient servant,

**W.T. SHERMAN**

Major-General U.S. Army

P546-II