

B. H. Liddell Hart, eminent British author, in his book Sherman-Soldier, realist, American, writes:

As he (Sherman) marched through the Carolinas even his language tended to moderate as the conviction grew upon him that the end of the war was drawing near, and with it the need for the reconstruction of peace. He was on occasion relentless, as for example, when a number of murdered foragers were found with the label "Death to all foragers" pinned on their mutilated bodies, and he ordered an equal number of prisoners to be disposed of in like manner.

Hart is entitled to his opinion about Sherman's moderation, but a decent regard for the whole truth should have led him to add that the order to kill an equal number of prisoners was never carried out.

The incident of the killing of the foragers took place in the northwest corner of Fairfield County in the vicinity of Peaserville. Several days later and after considerable correspondence General Kilpatrick lined up eighteen Confederate prisoners at the Lancaster County Courthouse to be killed in reprisal.

But let this narrative go back for a few weeks when General Sherman was still in Savannah. General Halleck, Chief of Staff at Washington, wrote to Sherman expressing the hope that if Charleston should be captured, the place should "by some accident" be destroyed and a little salt be sewed upon its site. Sherman in reply in reply to Halleck wrote:

I will bear in mind your hint as to Charleston and don't think salt will be necessary. When I move, the 15th Corps will be on the right wing and their position will bring them into Charleston first. And if you have studied the history of that corps, you will have remarked that they generally do their work up pretty well.

Please note that the commander of the 15th Corps was Major General John A. Logan of Illinois.

4/2/00  
from the files  
of Mary Rice  
McMaster

When the Union Army crossed the Savannah River into South Carolina it became necessary to subsist upon the country. This involved the use of hundreds of small foraging groups, which under lax discipline fitted in well with Sherman's philosophy of war as applied to the South:

To make its inhabitants feel that war and individual ruin are synonymous terms-to make them so sick of war that generations would pass away before they would again appeal to it.

Sherman intentionally drove his army with a loose rein. Major Henry Hitchcock, a lawyer from St. Louis who joined the march as a member of his staff, wrote in his personal diary:

Soldiers out all the time foraging and straggling. There seems much more of this consistent with good discipline-the fact is the men are reckless, and every place we go to is occupied by scouts and stragglers ahead of the advance guard.

There was a distinct impression among the soldiers that Sherman approved of looting and burning. Hitchcock wrote that Generals Slocum and Jeff Davis condemned the straggling and looting, and that Davis told him "the belief in the Army is that General Sherman favors and desires it."

The march through the Low Country of South Carolina is not part of this story. It has been described by others. On February 17 came the capture of Columbia, the state capital, and its occupation by the RIGHT WING of the Army. General Slocum with the Left Wing, did not enter Columbia but moved up the west side of the broad River to Alston where he laid his pontoons to cross into Fairfield County. He was preceded by the Cavalry Division under command of Major General Judson Kilpatrick.

Sherman wrote in his memoirs:

"aving utterly ruined Columbia, the right wing began in march northward toward Winnsboro which it reached on the 21st, and found General Slocum with the left wing which had come by way of Alston.

The entry of Slocum's troops into Winnsboro is described by Captain Conyngham, the war correspondent of the New York World, as follows:

General Slocum double-quickened the advance guard of his column into the village of Winnsboro to save the town from the torches of foragers. General Pardee's brigade of Geary's division was in advance, and every effort was made to beat the stragglers from the Grand Army into town. They were not successful. The town was pillaged and set on fire before any organized body of troops got in. Generals Slocum, Williams, Geary, Pardee, and Burnum all worked, turned their whiskers, and scorched their clothes to prevent the repetition of Columbia scenes--guards were posted in every house in town, and other fires were quenched as they broke out. Two days before this General Slocum had issued new disciplinary orders: No foraging will be allowed in advance of the troops, and any person found in front of the advance guard will be arrested and severely punished. No property will be burned except by the rear guard, in obedience to the orders of a corps or division commander.

General Williams, commanding the 20th Corps, arrested five of Kilpatrick's cavalymen and tied them to trees, with labels on the breast "House breakers." When Williams rode into Winnsboro, he told Doctor Madden "I am utterly opposed to this burning from beginning to end".

General Kilpatrick led his Cavalry across the broad River on the pontoons at Alston. He then turned left and headed north, his march paralleling the river. His mission was to cover the left flank and front of the Army. This western part of the county proved to be a rich field for pillage by patrols, foragers, and straggler.

Kilpatrick established his headquarters at the Douglas house near the Chester County line, from which on February 22 he wrote Sherman:

I am now encamped at Springwell on the railroad, and across to J. I. Mills' house on Little Rocky Creek. My advance has been to within five miles of Chesterville. A portion of Wheeler's Cavalry is at that point, but he and seven men were murdered yesterday by Eighth Texas Cavalry after they had surrendered. We found their bodies all together and mutilated with paper on their breasts saying "Death to all 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 their cowardly act is repeated, will burn every house along my line of march, and that came reached by my scouting parties."

In reply to this Sherman wrote, on February 23, from the Johnston house at Rock Mount:

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-you will therefore at once shoot and leave by the roadside an equal number of their prisoners, and append a label to their bodies stating that man for man shall be killer for everyone 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. February 22, Kilpatrick had written to Wheeler:

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 rifles, and commanded by a lieutenant colonel. This officer and his men, after surrendering and being disarmed, were inhumanly and cowardly murdered, five in a barnyard, and three in an 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 23rd,

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 will not only be allowed but encouraged to take a fearful revenge. I know of no other way to intimidate cowards.

Kilpatrick at this time was twenty-nine years old. He and Wheeler were well acquainted, having been cadets together at West Point. Wheeler, the same day, replied by letter from Chesterville:

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 the matter. I have no Texas regiments armed with Spencer rifles, and none commanded by a lieutenant colonel. The two Texas regiments which belong to my command are commanded by captains. Neither were in any engagements yesterday. If any of my regiments were engaged with the enemy yesterday that fact has not yet 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 threats in response to those which you have thought proper to address to me, but should you cause eighteen of my men to be shot because you chance to find that many of your men dead, I shall consider 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 treat to burn every house as far as your scouts can extend is of too brutal a character for me, and I think for my government, to reply to.

February 23, Kilpatrick to Wheeler:

I shall take no action for the present. If stragglers from my command are found in the houses of citizens committing any outrages whatever, my own people are directed to shoot them on the spot, and of course I expect officers and soldiers of your command to do the same.

February 24, Kilpatrick to Sherman:

Report that Private Charles Wright came in from about Peaskeville—reports having found twenty-one of our infantrymen in a ravine about eighty rods from the main road and about three miles from Peaskeville—Major General Wade Hampton is now at Lancaster. I can forward for you any communication to or through him—regarding the facts mentioned.

On February 24 General Sherman wrote to General Hampton:

It is officially reported to me that our foraging parties are murdered after capture and labelled "Death to all foragers". One instance of a lieutenant and seven men near Chesterville, and another of twenty from Peaskeville. I have ordered a similar number of prisoners in our hands to be disposed of in like manner. I hold about 1000 prisoners captured in various ways, and can stand it as long as you; but I hardly think that these murders are committed with your knowledge, and would suggest that you give notice to the people at large that every like taken of them simply results in the death of one of your Confederates. Of course you can not 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 civil authorities will supply my requisitions I will forbid all foraging. But I find no civil authorities who can respond to calls for forage or provisions, there I must collect directly of the people.

I have no doubt this is the occasion of much mistbehavior on the part of our men, but I can not permit the 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 to the extend of life for life.

This brought from Hampton, on February 27, his one and only communication. General Hampton, politically, was a conservative. He had been a union Man, opposed to secession. His ancestral home, Millwood, situated about seven miles east of Columbia, had been burned a week before by a group of Federal soldiers.

Your communication the 24th instant reached me today. In it you state that it has been officially reported that your foraging parties are "murdered" after capture. You do on to say that you have ordered a similar number of prisoners in your hands to be disposed of in like manner-that is to say you have ordered a number of Confederate soldiers to be "murdered". You characterize your order in proper terms, for the public voice, even in your own country where it seldom dares to express itself in vindication of truth, honor, or justice, will surely agree with you in pronouncing you guilty of murder if your order is carried out. Before dismissing this part of your letter, I beg to assure you that for every soldier of mine "Murdered" by you, I shall have executed at one two of yours, giving in all cases preference to any officers who may be in my hands.

In reference to the statement you make regarding the death of your foragers, I have only to say that I know nothing of it, that no orders from me authorize the killing of prisoners after capture, and that I do not believe that my men killed any of yours except under circumstances in which it was perfectly legitimate and proper that they should kill them. It is part of the system of the thieves whom you designate as your foragers to fire the dwellings of those citizens whom they have robbed. To check this inhuman system, which is justly execrated by every civilized nation, I have directed my men to

to shoot down all your men who are caught burning houses. This order shall remain in force as long as you disgrace the profession of arms by allowing your men to destroy private dwellings.

You say that I cannot, of course, question your right to forage on the country--"it is a right as old as history". I do not, sir, question that right. But there is a right even older than this, and one more inalienable--the right that every man has to defend his home and to protect those who are dependent on him; and from my heart I wish that every man and boy in my country who can fire a gun, would shoot down, as he would a wild beast, the men who are desolating their land, burning their homes, and insulting their women.

You are particular in defining and claiming "war rights". May I ask if you enumerate among those the right to fire a defenseless city without notice; to burn that city to the ground after it had surrendered by the inhabitants, who claimed, though in vain, that protection which is always accorded in civilized warfare to non-combatants; to fire the dwelling houses of citizens after robbing them; and to perpetrate even darker crimes than these, crimes too black to be mentioned. You have permitted, if you have not ordered, the commission of these offenses against humanity and the rules of war. You fired into the city of Columbia without a word of warning, after its surrender by the mayor, who demanded protection to private property. You laid the whole city in ashes, leaving amidst the ruins thousands of old men and helpless women and children, who are likely to perish of starvation and exposure.

Your line of march can be traced by the lurid light of burning houses, and in more than one household there is an agony far more bitter than that of death. The Indian scalped his victim regardless of age or sex, but with all his barbarity he always respected the persons of his female captives. Your soldiers, more savage than the Indian, insult those whose natural protectors are absent.



In conclusion, I have only to request that whenever you have any of my men "murdered" or "disposed of", for the terms appear to be synonymous with you, you will let me hear of it, that I may know what action to take in the matter.

In the meantime I shall hold fifty-six of your men as hostages for those whom you have ordered to be executed.

The Confederate prisoners of war were not killed by either Kilpatrick or Sherman. The wanton turning and looting diminished, and as the army approached the North Carolina line the turning of dwellings practically ceased.

The probability is that the long delayed admonition to stop burning dwellings came down verbally from General Sherman, and that it stopped.

The time had come when their old men, their disabled, their women and children, and their black people looked down from their hills at the glare of their burning capital city, and wondered.

They are fortunate in that the Left Wing, an Army in itself under the command of Major General Henry W. Slocum, marched through the wide central corridor from the south-west corner of the county to the extreme north-east corner, where the falls of the Catawba River flattened out. This command happily had no stomach for burning family dwellings.

General Slocum assigned General Geary and his division to garrison Winnsboro during the passage of the army. They got Sherman's irregulars out of the town, directed the work of fighting the flames and preventing new fires, and preserved order during the next two days.

General Geary's official report follows, somewhat abbreviated:

Winnsboro is a pretty town of about 2500 population, the seat of justice of Fairfield District. Among its residents were many refugees from Charleston.

The surrounding country is well farmed and furnished abundance of supplies, the inhabitants of this region were more energetic and intelligent than in the lower country. During our occupation of Winnsboro the best of order was preserved and private property protected. Lieutenant General Wade Hampton, Commanding the enemy's Cavalry, had left with the mayor a note pledging his word that any men of our army who might be left in town as a safe guard after the departure of the

main forces, should be protected from arrest or inquiry if overtaken by any of his troops.

At the urgent request of the mayor and citizens I left two mounted men from the provost guard. The citizens of the town, after our departure, organized themselves under these two men, drove out a few stragglers from our army who came to the place, and preserved good order and security in the town until a detachment of Butler's Rebel Cavalry entered the town the next morning, who showed every courtesy in their power. When the two guards left, the people of the town crowded around them to express their gratitude. The two men rejoined me safely the next morning.

This incident was a very remarkable one in the midst of such a campaign as that of our Army in South Carolina.

Those that knew of General Slocum's orders and actions were grateful to him. They esteemed him as a humane commander, worthy of a place in the company of their old friends Lord Cornwallis and General Nathaniel Greene. They compared him favorably with his contemporaries, their own knightly Matthew Calbraith Butler and Georgia's John B. Gordon, the Bayard of the South.

Henry W. Slocum was born in Delphi, Onondage County, New York. After graduation at West Point he was assigned to the Artillery. While stationed at Fort Moultrie he prepared himself in law, and later resigned from the service. When war came he went out in command of a New York regiment, and when the war was over he lived in Brooklyn. There he was elected several times to Congress as a Democrat. He served in the House of Representatives while Hampton and Butler represented South Carolina in the Senate.

The Right Wing of the Army under Major General G. O. Howard, traversed only the south-eastern part of the county. General Howard could not expect his sobriquet of "The Christian Soldier" to exonerate him from responsibility for the excesses committed by the 15th Corps under Logan.

Major General Frank P. Blair commanding the 17th Corps, Right Wing, entered Fairfield principally along the railroad. He had the laborious task of tearing up the railroad, turning the ties, and twisting the rails. He protected from burning the homes within his reach, including the aristocratic community of Ridgeway with a considerable population.

Not so fortunate was Longtown, seven miles to the east, which came within the sector of Major General John A. Logan. The 15th Corps was, to quote Sherman "doing their work up pretty well." The Nicholas Peay mansion was burned, as were family dwellings along the route to Peay's Ferry where pontoons were laid across the Wateree River.

The reputation of Major General Judson Kilpatrick and his independent cavalry was well established on both sides. Chaplain John J. Hight, 58th Indiana Regiment, wrote in his diary before entering Fairfield:

We are marching on the trail of Kilpatrick's cavalry. Though they passed several days since and a heavy rain intervened, many of the houses are still burning. Among the tales of the camp is one that "Kill", as he is familiarly called, fitted all the boy's saddle bags with matches before leaving Savannah. Nearly all the dwelling houses along our route were burned before we came up. Here and there can be seen two or more magnificent chimneys left standing to tell the story of departed joys. The chaplain was not insensitive to suffering of a kind for he wrote further: Thousands of bushels of corn, in roaring heaps, are burned by thoughtless soldiers. This will cause suffering among the stock of many trains yet to come.

Richard H. McMaster The News and Herald 1930

Submitted by Mary Rice McMaster

John Bratton Chapter #929

United Daughters of the Confederacy

Route 2: Box 102

Winnsboro, South Carolina 29180