

Capture of Lexington.

On the approach of the Yankees to Lexington General McCausland had the bridge which spans North river burned in order to cause delay. While the Yankees were making pontoons, a section of their artillery amused themselves by shelling the Virginia Military Institute, Washington College, and other portions of the town. The residence of the Misses Baxter, Professor John L. Campbell, and others were struck, and two shells pierced the walls of the county jail, but, fortunately, there was no loss of life. On the 13th the enemy entered Lexington, and their whole force camped immediately around the [186] town. The house occupied by the Superintendent, General F. H. Smith, of the Virginia Military Institute, was used as General Hunter's headquarters, while the Presbyterian parsonage was put to a similar purpose by General Averill.

It was sad to me to leave Lexington, the scene of my boyhood, and have it turned over to pillage and plunder. In its confines were the most hospitable and cultured people the sun ever shone on, and now I had to turn my back upon them when they were in despair. In this town was then, and is now, located the Virginia Military Institute, which had sent many gallant men to the armies of the Confederacy, and probably the greatest American soldier that ever trod its soil—Thomas J. Jackson. This school, 'the West Point of the Confederacy,' was an object of intense hatred, and to destroy it would be the acme of all good.

Hunter came with fire and sword, and most effectually did he accomplish his purpose. The barracks, mess-hall, officers' quarters, a library containing 10,000 volumes, and all the apparatus and instruments of the various departments of the school were quickly reduced to ashes. From providential causes the home of Superintendent Smith escaped destruction, and was the only building left standing upon the grounds. The statue of General Washington, which stood in front of the institute, erected by resolution of the General Assembly, was taken down and hauled away. Some ancient cannons, of no use whatever, except as ornaments, taken from a stranded French man-of-war more than one hundred years ago, were also hauled away. The statue and cannons were recovered after the war, and to-day stand where they formerly stood.

For some reason the enemy did not burn Washington College. At the first alarm of war a company had been raised here, largely from among the students of the college, and known as the Liberty Hall volunteers, the germ of the college having been old Liberty Hall Academy. This company was a part of the Stonewall brigade. The enemy was content with destroying the chemical apparatus of the institution and a number of valuable books, principally scientific works, but which would be of little value now, except as relics, as science has left them in the rear. The Federals used the lecture-rooms of the college as stables for their horses and in many ways defaced the antiquated buildings. Through the efforts of Hon. John Randolph Tucker, after the war a claim for \$17,000 damages was allowed and paid. The home of Virginia's war Governor, John Letcher, was burned to the ground, the family not being allowed to [187] take anything out of the building, and barely escaping with their lives. This ended the burning in Lexington.

the most prominent and devoted members of the Presbyterian church of Lewisburg, of which the Rev. Dr. McElhenny was so long the pastor. Mr. Creigh had held several positions of trust and responsibility.

The story of Hunter's crime is brief. Mr. Creigh, being beyond the age for service in the army, was residing on his farm at the time of arrest. A short time before, a camp-follower of the Federal army came to his house, intent on plunder, and after forcibly entering several rooms, was about to continue his search, when he was forbidden to open the door. Regardless of protestation, he persisted in making his way further, when Mr. Creigh stopped him. A desperate struggle ensued. Mr. Creigh was unarmed when they grappled, but he saved his life by taking that of the ruffian with an axe that was handed him by 'Old Aunt Sally,' a family servant. The hostility between the Southern people and the Federal soldiery being bitter at the time, it was deemed best to hide the deed. It is said that a white man, who had learned the fact, communicated it to a negro, who some time afterwards ran away to the Federal army and disclosed the secret. When the army passed through Greenbrier the next time, Mr. Creigh was arrested and brought along to Rockbridge county. He was given no opportunity for defence, but was hanged simply by Hunter's order. That Creigh had slain the invader of his home and the assailant of his own life was not a sufficient plea. Thus was this good man made the victim of unmilitary brutality by this Weyler of the Federal army. His body was taken to Lewisburg and interred in the Presbyterian burying-ground, and at the head of his grave stands a tombstone on which are inscribed these words: 'Sacred to the memory of David S. Creigh, who died as a martyr in defence of his rights and in the performance of his duty as husband and father. Born May 1, 1809, and yielded to his unjust fate June 11, 1864, near Brownsburg, Va.' I have often [\[184\]](#) seen the tree upon which this good man was hanged in the meadow of the Rev. James Morrison, and an uncontrollable desire seizes me to see his judge dangling at the end of a rope from one of its limbs. But Hunter has gone to his reward, having died in March, 1886.

It is said as the Federal army under Hunter, shattered and starving, was passing through Lewisburg on its disastrous retreat from Lynchburg, the Rev. Mr. Osborne, a Federal chaplain, called at the residence of Rev. Dr. McElhenny, pastor of the Presbyterian church in that place, and related the circumstances attending the murder of Mr. Creigh. Dinner coming on, he was pressed by the Doctor to join in a family meal. The chaplain declined, declaring that since that atrocious murder he could not 'consent to break bread under a Southern roof.'

Murder of Captain White.

An incident occurred here during Hunter's occupancy of the town that stirred it from centre to circumference. It was the deliberate murder of Captain Matthew X. White. It was so atrocious and unwarranted that many generations will not forgive or forget Hunter. Captain White belonged to one of the most highly-respected families of the town, and was a man of wealth and social influence. Before the war he was captain of the local cavalry company here, and his company was the first to leave the county when it was known that actual hostilities could not be avoided, being mustered into service at Harper's Ferry, April 25, 1861. He was made Company C, 1st Virginia cavalry. During the summer of 1861 he resigned, and returned home and joined a company from this county in my regiment as a private—Company H, 14th Virginia cavalry. For several days previous to the coming of Hunter he was at home.

For two weeks previous to the raid and invasion two men were boarding at the Lexington House, claiming to be from the far South, and ostensibly enjoying a furlough. The sequel shows they were Yankee spies. On the day Hunter came to the suburbs of the town, Captain White had scouted about four miles out, and until he met an armed man dressed in citizen's clothing. I do not know whether Captain White knew him or not, but it was John Thorn, who was thought to have led the Yankees through the lower end of the county and on towards Lexington up to the time he met his death. Thorn was a man well known by people

of that time, and a citizen of Rockbridge, a farm laborer by occupation. From the statement made by the toll-gate keeper, in front of whose house the tragedy occurred, and from a description the woman gave of the man and the little white mare he rode, it was evidently Captain White who killed Thorn. When Captain White returned from his scout he met at the hotel his supposed friends, and, enjoying together a glass of whiskey he incidentally mentioned to them that he had been scouting and had shot a man at the toll-gate. Captain White went to his farm, three miles west of the town, that night, and next day the Yankees entered the town. It was a surprise to the people of Lexington to see these two men who had been at the hotel for several weeks riding at the head of the column, having left the night before and joined the [188] Yankee forces. Next morning Captain White was arrested at his farm, and taken through the town, and three miles beyond, near to the place where Thorn was killed, and there murdered.

It was said that he was first hung and then shot, but the testimony of the two men who prepared his body for burial—Major John W. Houghawout and Alexander McCown—who are living to-day, is that he was shot in the back, the large ball going entirely through his body. He was told to walk in front of the two men, who were his guards, and they evidently shot him when he was not aware of their intentions.

These two men returned to Lexington and informed Captain White's mother that her son was safe and would not be harmed, and after having, not an hour before, assassinated him. His body was left where it fell, and but for an accident would not have been found. An Irishman named O'Brien, who lived near by, having never been naturalized, and claiming to be a British subject, kept his horses at home: but the old man having two sons in the Confederate service, the Yankees paid no regard to his protestations and the British lion, and took his stock. The bridge that spanned the river between him and town had been burned, and he went down through an unfrequented wood to where he knew there was a canoe, which he intended using to get to Lexington and see Hunter and get his horses back. He, however, never got them, as Hunter's and Averill's uppermost idea was to denude the country of stock. On his way down through this dense forest he came upon the body of Captain White, and went back and informed the Misses Cameron, on whose land and near whose home this murder had been committed. The Yankees had left the place and gone towards Lynchburg the same day. A messenger was dispatched to Lexington, informing Captain White's aged mother and father of the murder of their son, and Dr. James McCleery, with the assistance of several colored men, brought the body to town and interred it in the Lexington cemetery.

Poor Mat, friend of my youth and boyhood days, you deserved a better fate. When he passed through Lexington he seemed to be aware of his fate, for as he went by the residence of his old friend, Houghawout, he said to him, 'Good-by, Huck, I am gone up,' and marched on to the place of his assassination with the firmness and fortitude of a stoic. He had no trial, and it is presumed that he was shot by the order of David Hunter.

The fight at Lynchburg.

After remaining in Lexington three days, the Yankees departed, with Lynchburg as their objective point. We annoyed and harassed them, and made their march as tedious as possible. When we got to Buchanan we burned the bridge across James river, which did not delay them as much as we expected. They found a ford a mile above, and crossed by wading. Here we turned to the left and crossed the mountain by the Peaks of Otter, and camped that night at Fancy Farm, about eight miles north of Liberty. Next day we pursued our journey through Liberty, and on the high hill south of the town we gave the Yankees much trouble with our four six-pounders, with which we shelled them and made further progress impossible for

a time. About night they struck both our flanks, and we had to give back. While in the vicinity of Liberty they burned the residence of Colonel Leftwich, a Confederate soldier, and prominent citizen of Bedford county in ante-bellum times.

The next stopping place was in full view of Lynchburg, where we determined that if any Yankees got into Lynchburg somebody would certainly be hurt. The Yankee infantry marched slowly, as it was very hot weather, and we realized the difficulty of 1,000 Confederates resisting 5,000 cavalry. But we stopped them and held our line until their 20,000 infantry came up; and as yet General Early had not put in an appearance, but was expected every moment. Hope had given way to despair, when we heard the whistle of locomotives in the distance. We knew who it was. Well do I recollect standing on a high hill overlooking the city and seeing the black columns of smoke rising from the engines, away down on the Southside railroad. Engines those days used pine wood to make steam, and a locomotive, if constantly fed with seasoned wood, could get a hustle on it. I had seen men go into battle before, but never had the opportunity of viewing the sight from a distance as I had now. Heretofore I was one of the soldiers, and now, safe from molestation and harm, I could view a battle not circumscribed by what was in my immediate front. I could see both the offensive and defensive armies.

The trains came in full view, plastered over sides and tops with men. A halt was made, and out swarmed men like blackbirds, piling their knapsacks into huge piles. Quickly forming, a 'double-quick' was made towards the firing line. Up hill and down they rushed, [\[190\]](#) eager to get there. I do not know how many there were of them, but several thousand. They cheered all the time, especially loudly when they neared our cavalry line and could hear the whistle of the bullets. On they came, and took the places of our dismounted cavalry, which withdrew and remounted. The reinforcements were about seven or eight hundred yards from the Yankee infantry, but they kept moving closer. The Yankees outnumbered our men and were constantly trying to flank, but every effort was repulsed. The enemy, too, was very stubborn, and held their ground well, but in an hour or more they had been driven from the first position back several hundred yards.

At this juncture, about 4 o'clock in the evening, our brigade galloped off to the right of the infantry, and went towards Forest Depot, where we vigorously attacked their wagon train, guarded by a brigade of infantry.

I thought we had secured this train, but our men got disorganized from some cause, probably from a disposition to see what was in these wagons, and those who were in front were driven back upon those behind them, confusion ensued, and we had to abandon all we had already taken except a few prisoners and a small number of wagons and horses.

We lost a few men, probably eight or ten, among them Captain Smith, of the Seventeenth cavalry, whom we brought out, and the last I ever saw of him was a citizen of the community carrying water from a near-by well bathing his face, when he was practically dead.

We could still hear the rattle of musketry towards Lynchburg, which did not cease until the stars were visible, and then it stopped.

Napoleon never looked upon his 'Old Guard,' or Caesar his 'Tenth Legion,' with more pride than I did that evening upon the advance of Early's men through those fields of golden grain. I once had been a part

of it, serving one year in the 27th Virginia infantry, 'Stonewall Brigade.' Among these men were the comrades of my boyhood, and I could not help, even if I wished otherwise, but feel proud of such heroism. Verily, I believe, if old Leonidas and his Spartans were allowed to come back to earth, they would raise their hats in deference to the survivors of Early's division. I had seen a great deal of fighting, but had never seen such bulldog tenacity. They seemed to say: 'If you don't go, I'll make you.' And, as the sequel shows, they 'made them.'

During the night, in company with a portion of my regiment, we stood guard at a bridge near Forest Depot, and about 10 o'clock [191] there was great commotion in the Yankee camp. We could tell this from the rumbling wagons and the peculiar jolting of artillery over rough roads. Headquarters was informed of this incident, and about 11 o'clock an order was sent our brigade. What it was or where we were going, we knew not, but in a short time we were plunging through forests, across rivers and creeks, and when daylight came, we were near Buchanan, from which place we went in a trot to a point close to Salem, where we cut Hunter's retreating army in two for a short time, capturing seven pieces of artillery and destroying a portion of his wagon train. The Yankees were almost famished. One consumptive looking fellow whom I captured, looked so pitiful when he told me that for some time he had nothing to eat but sassafras leaves and birch bark, that I handed him a couple of crackers and a slice of raw meat from my haversack, which he devoured very greedily. I told him if he wished he might go on with his companions, as he was not armed. General Early was pressing them in the rear, and picked up a large number of men nearly starved to death. We followed them to the top of Sweet Spring Mountain, where we left them, and McCausland came back down the Valley through Lexington, Staunton, Harrisonburg, and Winchester, and crossed the Potomac at Shepherdstown on our way to fight General Lew Wallace at Monocacy.

This was a disastrous raid for the Yankees. I had it from one of them that of those who reached Charleston, West Virginia, escaping the perils of starvation and capture, many died from overeating when plenty of food could be had.

This is the story of this raid as I saw it, and is drawn entirely from personal recollection. Others may have seen it differently, but what I have stated, I regard as 'the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth.'

J. Scott Moore, 14th Virginia Cavalry, C. S. A. Lexington, Va.
Richmond, VA. 1899.

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