

## The Cruelties of War<sup>1</sup>

*Memphis Bulletin.*

In the month of January, 1863, at Laurel, N. C., near the Tennessee border, all the salt was seized for distribution by Confederate Commissioners. Salt was selling at seventy-five to one hundred dollars a sack. The Commissioners declared that the "Tories" should have none, and positively refused to give Union men their portion of the quantity to be distributed in that vicinity: This palpable injustice roused the Union men, they assembled together and determined to seize their proportion of the salt by force. They did so, taking at Marshall, N. C., what they deemed to be their share, and which had been withheld from them, simply because they adhered with unconquerable devotion to the government of their fathers.

Immediately afterward the Sixty-fifth N. C. regiment, under command of Lieu. Col. Jas. Keith, was ordered to Laurel, to arrest the offenders.

L. M. Allen was Colonel of the regiment, but had been suspended for six months for crime and drunkenness. Many of the men engaged in the salt seizure left their homes. Those who did not participate in it became the sufferers. Among those arrested were Joseph Wood, about sixty years of age; Day Shelton, sixty; James Shelton, fifty; Roddy Shelton, forty-five; Ellison King, forty; Halen Moore, forty; Wade Moore, thirty-five; Isaiah Shelton, fifteen; Wm. Shelton, twelve; James Medcalf, ten; Jasper Channel, fourteen; Sam Shelton, nineteen, and his brother aged seventeen, sons of Lifus Shelton, — in all thirteen men and boys. Nearly all of them declared they were innocent, and had taken no part in appropriating the salt. They begged for a trial, asserting that they could prove their innocence.

Col. Allen who was with his troops, but not in command, told them they should have a trial but that they would be taken to Tennessee for that purpose. They bid farewell to their wives, daughters and sisters, directing them to procure the witnesses and bring them to the Court in Tennessee, where they supposed their trial would take place. Alas! how little they dreamed what a fate awaited them! The poor fellows had proceeded but a few miles when they were turned from the road into a gorge in the mountain, and halted. Without any warning of what was to be done with them, five of them were ordered to kneel down. Ten paces in front of these five a file of soldiers were placed with loaded muskets. The terrible reality flashed upon the minds of the doomed patriots.

Old man Wood (sixty years of age,) cried out: "For God's sake men, you are not going to shoot us? If you are going to murder us, give us at least time to pray." Col. Allen was reminded of his promise to give them a trial. They were informed that Allen had no authority; that Keith was in command; and that there was no time for praying.— The order was given to fire; the old man and boys put their hands to their faces and rent the air with agonizing cries of despair; the soldiers wavered and hesitated to obey the command. Keith said, if they did not fire instantly, he would make them change places with the prisoners.— The soldiers raised their guns. The victims shuddered convulsively, the word fire was given and the five men fell pierced with rebel bullets. Old man Wood and Shelton were shot in the head, and their brains scattered upon the ground, and they died, without a struggle. The other three lived only a few minutes.

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<sup>1</sup> Moore, Frank; *Anecdotes, Poetry and Incidents of the War: North and South; 1860 – 1865*, collected and abridged by Frank Moore, Publication House, New York, 1867

## Incidents at Shelton-Laurel, N.C.

Five others were ordered to kneel, among them little Billy Shelton, a mere child, only twelve years old. He implored the men not to shoot him in the face. — "You have killed my father and brothers," said he, "you have shot my father in the face; do not shoot me in the face." He covered his face with his hands. The soldiers received the order to fire, and five more fell. Poor little Billy was wounded in both arms. He ran to an officer, clasped him around the legs, and besought him to spare his life. "You have killed my old father and my three brothers; you have shot me in both arms—I forgive you all this—I can get well. Let me go home to my mother and sisters." What a heart of adamant the man must have had who could disregard such an appeal! The little boy was dragged back to the place of execution; again the terrible word, "fire!" was given, and he fell dead, eight balls having entered his body. The remaining three were murdered in the same manner. Those in whom life was not entirely extinct, the heartless officers dispatched with their pistols. A hole was then dug, and the thirteen bodies were pitched into it.

The grave was scarcely large enough; some of the bodies lay about the ground. A wretch, named Sergeant N. B. D. Jay, a Virginian, but attached to a Tennessee company of the Sixty-fifth North Carolina regiment, jumped upon the bleeding bodies, and said to some of the men: "Pat Juba for me while I dance the damned scoundrels down to and through hell." The grave was covered lightly with earth, and the next day when the wives and families of the murdered men heard of their fate, searched for, and found their grave, the hogs had rooted up one man's body, and eaten his head off. Oh, heavens! What must have been the agony of their wives and children on beholding that sight! — When the awful reality burst upon them, what great drops of affliction must have oozed from their bleeding hearts! Yet all this was done in the cause of freedom" O Liberty! What crimes are committed in thy name!"

Captain Moorley, in charge of a cavalry force, and Col. Thomas, in command of a number of Indians, accompanied Keith's men. These proceeded to Tennessee; Keith's men returned to Laurel, and were instructed to say that the cavalry had taken the prisoners with them to be tried, in accordance with the pledge of Col. Allen. In their progress through the country, many Union men were known to have been killed and scalped by the Indians. Upon the return of Keith and his men to Laurel they began systematically to torture the women of loyal men, to force them to tell where their fathers and husbands could be found, and what part each had taken in the salt raid. The women refused to divulge anything. They were then whipped with hickory switches — many of them till the blood coursed in streams down their persons to the ground; and the men who did this were called soldiers! Mrs. Sarah Shelton, wife of Ezra Shelton, who escaped from the town, and Mrs. Mary Shelton, wife of Lifus Shelton, were whipped and hung by the neck till they were almost dead; but would give no information. Martha White, an idiotic girl, was beaten and tied by the neck all day to a tree. Old Mrs. Unus Riddle, aged eighty-five years, was whipped, hung, and robbed of a considerable amount of money. Many others were treated with the same barbarity. And the men who did this were called soldiers! The daughters of William Shelton, a man of wealth and highly respectable, were requested by some of the officers to play and sing for them. They played and sang a few National airs; Keith learned of it, and ordered that the ladies be placed under arrest and sent to the guardhouse, where they remained all night.

Old Mrs. Sallie Moore, seventy years of age, was whipped with hickory rods till the blood ran in streams down her back to the ground; and the perpetrators of this were clothed in the habiliments of rebellion, and bore the name of soldiers!

One woman, who had an infant five or six weeks old, was tied in the snow to a tree, her child placed in the doorway in her sight, and, as she knew about the seizure of the salt,

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both herself and her child were allowed to perish. Sergeant N. B. D. Jay, of Capt. Reynolds' company, and Lieut B. M. Deever assisted their men in the execution of the hellish outrages. Houses were burned and torn down. All kinds of property were destroyed or carried off. All the women and children of the Union men who were shot, and of those who escaped, were ordered to General Alfred E. Jackson's headquarters at Jonesboro', to be sent through the lines by way of Knoxville. When the first of them arrived at this place, the officer in charge applied to Gen. Donelson (formerly Speaker of the House of Representatives at Nashville) to know by which route they should be sent from there, whether by Cumberland Gap or Nashville. Gen. Donelson immediately directed them to be released and sent home, saying that such a thing was unknown in civilized countries. They were then sent home, and all the refugees met on the road were also turned back.

On the 18th of February, 1863, a squad of soldiers were sent to conscript James McCollum, of Green county, Tennessee, a very respectable, industrious man thirty or thirty-five years of age. They found him feeding his cattle. When he saw some of them he ran to the back of his barn, and, without halting or attempting to arrest him, one of them shot him through the neck, killing him instantly. His three little children, who saw it, ran to the house and told their mother; she came wringing her hands in anguish, and screaming with terror and dismay.

The soldiers were sitting upon the fence. They laughed at her agony, and said they had only killed "a damned Tory." The murdered man was highly esteemed by his neighbors and was a firm Union man.

In April last, two rebel soldiers named Wood and Ignole went to the house of Mrs. Ruth Ann Rhea, living on the waters of Lick Creek county, to conscript her son. The old lady was partially deranged; she commanded the soldiers to leave her house, and raised a stick to strike one of them. He told her if she struck him, he would run her through with his bayonet; she gave the blow, and he shot her through the breast.

In the same month, Jesse Price, an old man sixty years of age, two sons and two nephews, were arrested in Johnson county, Tennessee, bordering on Virginia, by Col. Fouke's cavalry, composed of Tennessee and North Carolina men. They were taken to Ash county, North Carolina, to be tried for disloyalty to Jefferson Davis & Co. The old man had been previously arrested, taken to Knoxville, tried and acquitted.

When the five prisoners arrived in Ash county, a groggery keeper proposed to treat Fouke's men to eight gallons of brandy if they would hang the old man, his sons and nephews, without trial. The bargain was struck, and the five unfortunate men were hanged without farther ceremony. The brandy was furnished, and some of it drank before the tragedy, — the rest afterward. And it is upon the graves of such martyrs, upon the basis of such damning acts of barbarity, that the independence of a Southern Confederacy is to be established? The blood of these murdered men, women, and children, appeals to heaven against such a consummation. Read this bloody record of inhuman fiendish slaughter, ye snivelling sympathizers, and ask yourselves if the vengeance of a just God must not, sooner or later, blast the hopes and schemes of such enemies of their race. Is it possible that an inexorable idol, demanding such rivers of innocent blood, can be long worshipped in the light of the nineteenth century? Forbid it God! Forbid it, all ye mighty hosts of heaven! Christianity cries out against it. American honor demands that the monstrosity be cast into flames and destroyed forever.

All the blessed memories of the past; all the glorious anticipations of the future, call upon the noble patriots of the Union to avenge the blood of these martyrs to the cause of freedom and nationality.

**This is a partial document.**

**The full document may be found at:**

**<http://www.pddoc.com/skedaddle/events/shelton-laurel.htm>**