

## **Incidents at Shelton-Laurel, N.C.** and related documents

On February 24, 1863, in a letter to Zebulon V. Vance, the North Carolina Governor, Augustus S. Merrimon, wrote:

Thirteen prisoners, at least, were killed by order of Lieut. Col. J. A. Keith. Most of them were taken at their homes, and none of them made resistance when taken; perhaps some of them ran. After they were taken prisoners the soldiers took them off to a secluded place, made them kneel down, and shot them. They were buried in a trench dug for the purpose. Some two weeks since their bodies were removed to a grave-yard. I learned that probably 8 of the 13 killed were not in the company that robbed Marshall and other places. I suppose they were shot on suspicion. I cannot learn the names of the soldiers who shot them. Some of them shrank from the barbarous and brutal transaction at first, but were compelled to act.

Early in 1863, thirteen men and boys were executed after being taken prisoner by the Confederate Sixty-Fourth North Carolina Volunteer Infantry. This document is a compilation of two 19<sup>th</sup> century accounts of the affair and material from the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies—primarily Confederate communications and reports.

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

### Contents:

<b>The Cruelties of War</b> .....	<b>3</b>
<b>The Horrible Massacre at Shelton Laurel, North Carolina</b> .....	<b>6</b>
<b>Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies</b> .....	<b>12</b>
<i>Confederate Records</i> .....	12
April 6-11, 1862.— Expedition from Greeneville, Tenn., into Laurel Valley, N.C., Reports of Maj. Gen. E. Kirby Smith, C. S. Army, with congratulatory letter .....	12
January 1863, Warm Springs, N.C. Brigadier General W. G. M. Davis to Governor Zebulon B. Vance .....	14
January 21, 1863, Knoxville, TN Brigadier General H. Heth to Governor Zebulon B. Vance, with inclosure from Brigadier General W. G. M. Davis .....	15
January 21, 1863, Raleigh, N.C., Governor Z. B. Vance to General Henry Heth.....	16
February 2, 1863, Mars Hill College, Madison County, N.C., Brigadier General J. W. McElroy to Governor Z.B. Vance.....	16
February 2, 1863, Raleigh, N.C. Governor Zebulon B. Vance to Brigadier General W. G. M. Davis .....	17
February 16, 1863, Ashville, N.C., Letter from A.S. Merrimon to Governor Vance .....	18
February 24, 1863, Ashville, N.C., Letter from A.S. Merrimon to Governor Vance .....	19
February 27, 1863, Raleigh, N.C., Governor Z.B. Vance to Brigadier General Davis .....	20
February 28, 1863, Raleigh, N.C., Governor Z. B. Vance to Secretary of War James A. Seddon ....	20
March 5, 1863, Richmond, Va., Secretary of War James A. Seddon to Governor Z. B. Vance .....	21
May 18, 1863, Raleigh N.C., Governor Z. B. Vance to Secretary of War James A. Seddon .....	21
May 18, 1863, Richmond, Va., Secretary of War James A. Seddon to Governor Z. B. Vance .....	22
November 27, 1864—The East Tennessee Campaign, No. 26.—Report of Brig. Gen. John W. Frazer, C. S: Army, commanding, forces at Cumberland Gap.....	22
December 8, 1864, Augusta; Lieutenant Colonel David Urquhart to General S. Cooper .....	23
<i>Union Records</i> .....	24
January 5, 1865, Neil House, Columbus, Ohio Major A. J. Bahney to Brigadier General H. W. Wessells (with indorsements) .....	24
<b>Names Mentioned in this Work</b> .....	<b>25</b>

## 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,

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

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.

## **The Horrible Massacre at Shelton Laurel, North Carolina<sup>2</sup>**

THE next thing I have to relate is the horrible massacre at Shelton Laurel, North Carolina. The place where this dreadful slaughter occurred is located in Madison County, North Carolina, adjoining Washington and Greene Counties, in Tennessee, and my road, when I was traveling backward and forward to Knoxville, passed directly through it. This settlement lies between two large mountains, one of which is called Sugar-loaf, and the other one is called White-rock Mountain, and it is twenty-five miles from any place of trade; it is situated far out in the recesses of the mountains, and a beautiful valley it was before the dark and dismal cloud of rebellion arose up in our beloved and happy country. It was first settled by several old hunters, whose names were Shelton, Heusley, and Tweede; and in order to enjoy their favorite amusement of hunting to the fullest extent, they sought an abode in this remote and desolate mountainous region of country. The population in this valley had increased very rapidly; and before the rebellion there were between eighty and one hundred voters in the settlement, and all of them being strong Union men, they totally discountenanced the idea of enlisting in the rebel service. Shortly after the passage of the notorious conscript law by the rebel government, a heartless and blood-thirsty wretch, by the name of James Keith, came into this retired settlement with a small number of rebel soldiers, and told the citizens if they would submit to the authority of the Southern Confederacy and give up their arms they should never be troubled any more, and that they might go forward in the pursuit of their usual avocations without any farther molestation during the continuance of the war. This scoundrel, at the time of his first visit to this settlement, was occupying the position of a rebel colonel, and, consequently, the doomed citizens of this valley were the more easily circumvented by his lying tongue; doubtless thinking that a man who occupied such an elevated position in the rebel service could not possibly be so perfectly destitute of every feeling of humanity as he afterward proved himself to be.

On this occasion Keith succeeded, by his persuasive and false promises, to induce forty of these hard mountaineers to come to his encampment and deliver up their old rifles; these unfortunate men were immediately put into an old house, and a strong guard stationed around them, where they remained until he had enticed all the unsuspecting men to enter his trap that he possibly could, and then started with them to Ashville, North Carolina, where they were confined in a gloomy prison-house until a number of them were released from their miserable bondage by the hand of death, and the balance of them enlisted in the rebel army, from which they afterward deserted and made their way to the Federal lines.

On the 19th of January, 1863, Keith made another visit to this section of country for the purpose of hunting conscripts, accompanied by some four or five hundred rebel soldiers, and Samuel E. Irving, who lives in Washington County, near the red banks of Chucky River, was one of his officers. He now ordered his men to kill all the men and boys they might capture, and his companion in wickedness and infamy, Samuel E. Irving, at once sanctioned the terrible order, saying that "it was right to kill all the boys, in order to prevent them from growing up to be Federal soldiers and bushwhackers for the Southern soldiers to have to fight." These reckless fiends soon succeeded in capturing seven men

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<sup>2</sup> Ellis, Daniel; *Thrilling Adventures of Daniel Ellis*, Chapter XLVII, Harper & Brothers, 1867

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



HORRIBLE SCENES DURING THE REBELLION.

and six boys, and some of these men were far beyond the age which the conscript law had designated for the performance of military service, and, besides all this, they were not captured while scouting in the mountains, but they were arrested while they were engaged in their peaceful domestic employments.

These prisoners were retained in custody for three days, subjected to the insults and foul abuse of their rebel captors, and then Keith informed them that he was going to send them to Knoxville. When they started with their prisoners through the mountains, one of the little boys said to his father, "They are taking us a near way to Knoxville, are they not?" His father replied, "My son, they are going to kill us." The little, trembling captive then said, "Oh, father, surely they are not going to kill us; these men have been raised in a Christian land, and I hope they have better hearts than to murder us without any provocation!" This poor little innocent boy did not know that human feeling and human sympathy had been expelled from the hearts of his oppressors. Ah! little did he think that the young flower of his existence was doomed to be so early blighted by the cold and chilling frost of death!

The rebels marched their prisoners along the main road for a distance of three miles, and then turned up a hollow and went to a sinkhole about three hundred yards from the main road, where they stopped. They now told their prisoners that they might have ten minutes to pray, and, when the time had expired, they at once tied the poor men two and two together, placed them in a line to shoot them, and pulled their hats down over their eyes. They were now ordered to kneel down, and all of them obeyed the order, with the exception of David Shelton, who, when the order was given for him to kneel, indignantly replied, "I would kneel to my God, but I shall not kneel to devils!" The shooting now began, and thirteen men and boys were recklessly and brutally murdered by this inhuman

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

gang of rebel desperadoes.

One of the little boys, when his turn came to be shot, said to the rebel murderers, "Oh, do not shoot me in my forehead, for I do not wish my blood to spoil these little curls, which my dear mother has combed and kissed so often, while she called me her darling boy." One of the fiends now shot him in the breast, but the ball failed to kill him; he crawled toward his murderers, begging them in the most piteous and heart-rending manner to have mercy on him, and to spare his life. Keith now ordered them to fire again, and several of them shot at him, but none of them hit him, for they declared that, when they presented their guns, they became so blind they could not see the little boy. Keith, with his black heart inflated to the utmost extent, with devilish malignity drew out his pistol, stepped toward him, and shot him in the head, holding the pistol so close that the very curls were burned off, which the little boy, in the simplicity of childish innocence, so earnestly desired to save from destruction. Oh, how can the miserable wretch who perpetrated this flagrant outrage expect to escape the frowns of the Almighty in this world, and also in the world to come! If he has succeeded in escaping from the measure of punishment which his monstrous crimes in this world so richly merit, he may rest assured that he will meet with his just reward when death shall have terminated his earthly existence, and transferred his guilty soul into the awful presence of the great Eternal, whose infinite mind can alone comprehend the infinitude of eternity. Truly has it been said by an eminent poet, that

"Man, proud man, dressed in a little brief authority,  
Plays such fantastic tricks before high heaven's throne  
That make the angels weep."

And the truth of this sentiment is most admirably verified in the conduct of Keith on this occasion ; for, during the period of his "brief authority," he perpetrated numerous crimes, sufficient in atrocity not only to excite the tears of pitying angels, but also to cause the whole angelic host to plead with all their eloquence for his vile name to be erased from the everlasting records of heaven, and for his soul to be cast into the dismal lake which burns with fire and brimstone, where there shall forever be " weeping, wailing, and gnashing of teeth."

While several of the men and boys who were murdered on this occasion were struggling in the last agonies of death, one of the rebel demons in human shape, who was armed with a hoe instead of a gun, would chop them on their heads with it, saying, "I never saw men so hard to kill." And, before they had ceased to struggle, the rebel soldiers began to throw them into the sinkhole, where they piled them up in a promiscuous heap, and covered them over with leaves. Some of the poor men who had not yet expired convulsively stretched out their feet from beneath the covering of the leaves, at which time some of the murderers would say, "Lay still, you old Lincolnite!" while others would say, "Where is the man with the hoe?" At this suggestion, the hardened wretch, true to the instincts of his vile nature, coolly walked up and commenced chopping with his hoe on the heads and the legs of the slaughtered victims; and my informant, who was an eye-witness, and one of the party, told me that, when the unfeeling monster discontinued his bloody work, the hoe was completely covered with the blood and brains of the murdered men and boys!

The dead bodies remained in the sinkhole for three weeks, and they were then taken out for the purpose of being more decently interred. The hogs had mangled them in a



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

shocking manner, and they would have devoured them entirely, had not the people in the neighborhood put them up in order to prevent such a dreadful result. The frightened citizens were afraid to remove the bodies of the murdered victims until the rebel Jupiter, in the person of the villain Keith, gave his permission for them to have the rites of burial. It was during the season of winter, and the weather was very cold when this massacre occurred; but notwithstanding, when a few weeping mourners went to remove the bodies of their murdered relatives and friends, they found that all their joints and limbs were as flexible and pliant as if the warm blood of life was still coursing through their veins. This occasioned a great deal of astonishment; and it was certainly a very remarkable phenomenon in natural science to witness the life-like appearance of these dead bodies after they had been reposing in the cold and icy arms of death for a period of three weeks. And now the terrible fate which was meted out to the wives and mothers of these poor men and boys remains to be related. They had followed on after the rebel murderers to learn the fate of their sons and husbands, and after the massacre was accomplished, they were then caught by the rebels. Some of these poor defenseless women were then stripped of their clothing, they were tied up, and their naked backs were lashed until the blood trickled down to their feet, while the balance of them were hung up by the neck until they were nearly dead. They were then taken down, and their tormentors then left them tied until their feet and hands were frozen to such a degree that their nails all came off.

When the wives and mothers of these murdered men and boys approached the demon Keith to request him that they might be permitted to remove the dead bodies, so that they might bestow upon them the last sad rites of burial, he spoke to them in a very angry manner, saying, "You may go and remove the bodies, but you shall not put them in coffins nor in boxes." They then asked him if they might wrap them in blankets before they committed them to the cold embrace of the grave. He answered them in a very peremptory manner, "No, you shall not take a single blanket to wrap one of them in, for I want all the blankets I can get for my soldiers."

The poor women, with their heads bowed down with sorrow and grief, went on to engage in their melancholy task, followed by two degraded and brutal rebel soldiers, one of whom called himself Doctor Roberts, and the other villain passed under the name of Williams. And while the women were removing the mangled bodies of the murdered men and boys, these two rebel barbarians employed themselves in singing indecent and unbecoming songs; they also told the women that, if they pretended to shed a tear, they would run their bayonets through them. Some of the women fainted while they were engaged in this dreadful task.

The following are the names of the men and boys who were murdered on this occasion by the black-hearted Keith and his reckless outlaws : James Shelton, David Shelton, Azariah Shelton, William Chandler, Wade H. Moore (fifty-four years of age), Roderick Shelton, David Shelton, Jr., James Shelton, Jr., William Shelton, Joseph Woods, Allison King, Halen Moore, and James Metcalfe.

The following are the names of the women who were hung up by their necks until they were nearly dead by these merciless scoundrels: Mrs. Riddle, who was seventy years of age ; Mrs. Moore, who was fifty-four years of age ; Nancy Hall, and Nancy Shelton. After Keith and his band of murderers had almost entirely ruined the people of Shelton Laurel, he left the country ; and I have been informed by a number of the citizens who

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

reside in that neighborhood that the next rebel destroyer that visited that doomed section of country was the redoubtable General Alfred E. Jackson, or General "Mudwall" Jackson, which is the title under which he was generally known during his military career in the rebellion. In his expedition to this section of country he was accompanied by his son, who passed under the appellation of Captain Jackson. When Jackson arrived, he ordered eight or ten families to be moved into one house, and in this way he had nearly all the houses vacated, with the exception of a few which contained the women and children, and these he had closely guarded. He ordered all the vacant houses to be burned to ashes, and he also gave orders for all the stock in the country to be destroyed. He adopted this method, he said, in order to starve the Union men out of the mountains, so that they would be compelled to come in and join the Confederate army. It was now February, the snow was deep, and the weather was extremely cold.

The rebel soldiers would build up large fires out of fence-rails, and lay around them, while the shivering women and children in the houses were not permitted to have any fire at all. Sometimes the little children would go to the fires where the rebel soldiers were, to warm their aching hands and feet; the rebels would then compel them to stand so close to the burning flames that the little innocent creatures would scream out in severe agony of suffering; and, when their mothers would approach to rescue them, the rebels would present their pistols, and tell them, if they attempted to relieve their children, they would blow a ball through them. The poor women would therefore be compelled to stand and witness the dreadful suffering and the cruel torture of their children without being able to afford them any relief, while the rebel miscreants would laugh loudly, and exhibit the utmost demonstrations of delight at the shocking and savage spectacle which the suffering children presented when the hot flames of fire were burning their tender flesh. The women and children suffered greatly for something to eat, for the rebels devoured all their provisions. At times, while the rebel soldiers would be cooking and eating, the poor little famished children would softly approach them and beg for a piece of bread; but they would receive an abrupt denial, and the rebel scoundrels would say to them, "You must do without bread, or else you must go to Old Abe for it ; we want all that we have for ourselves!" Very frequently it occurred that, for a whole day together, these poor women and children could not obtain any thing at all to eat.

This gang of rebel soldiers remained in this neighborhood for eighteen or twenty days, and then returned to Greenville. After all their active operations, they only succeeded in murdering one man. But before leaving they went to the house of a poor widow by the name of Lucinda Carter, and killed fourteen hogs, and laid them in a pile on the floor of her dwelling-house ; they then killed her house-dog, and laid it on the top of the pile of hogs. They arrested several women, and took them on to Greenville with them, where they were detained for several days, subjected to gross abuse and indignity, while their little children remained at their gloomy and desolate homes, suffering all the terrible afflictions which cold and hunger could produce.

Shelton Laurel having now been thoroughly ravaged and despoiled of all its internal resources, the people who resided there were consequently in a dreadful extremity, for nearly all of their humble habitations were burned to the ground, the grain and stock were all destroyed, and many poor families were left in a perfect state of starvation.

After Jackson left this section of country in the winter of 1863, the notorious Colonel James Keith, Captain William Keith, and Riley Keith, were detailed in the fall of the

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

same year to hunt for conscripts in the mountains of North Carolina, and also in the adjoining counties in the State of Tennessee. These scoundrels visited Shelton Laurel again in the month of September, and burned a number of houses belonging to Union men. They murdered John Metcalfe by shooting him in the head and running their bayonets through him six times. They also murdered Robert Hare by shooting him three times. Their next victim was Marion Franklin. He was plowing in the field, perfectly unconscious of his dreadful doom, when one of the rebel outlaws walked up to the fence and shot him in the hip. When the ball struck him, he ran to a large stump which was surrounded with bushes and laid down ; there he remained for a short time, writhing and groaning with severe agony of pain, until his murderers came up, and relieved him from his misery by shooting him in the breast.

These infamous murderers went coolly and calmly along in their horrible work of destruction and death. The next victims who had the misfortune of falling into their hands were Tilman Landers, Absalom Brucks, and a little boy, all of whom they caught at Mrs. Ruth Shelton's stable, and were unceremoniously murdered on the spot. They caught David Shelton at his house, and hung him until he was dead, and then dragged him to a laurel thicket, where they covered him over with leaves. A few women afterward removed his body, and gave it a more humane burial. In the month of July, 1864, these rebel demons caught five more men in Shelton Laurel, and murdered all of them in a most shocking and barbarous manner. The five men whom they murdered on this occasion were Isaac Shelton, Hampton Burget, old David Shelton, William Shelton, Jr., and William Fillmore, making, in all, forty-seven men and boys who were brutally murdered by Keith and his vile assassins at different times during the progress of the iniquitous rebellion. The reader will doubtless think that this depraved scoundrel run the conscript law with a vengeance. Oh, what a terrible record this will be for him to meet with in eternity, where he will have to appear before the great Omnipotent Judge of the universe, confronted by forty-seven immortal souls, who by him, and through his instrumentality, were deprived of their earthly existence, and suddenly hurled into the eternal world! The awful groans of his murdered victims will surely haunt him while he lives in the world, plant thorns upon his death-bed, and, when he sinks down into the dismal regions of everlasting despair, they will forever afford a keen torture to his guilty and never-dying soul. When he was engaged in his abominable work of murdering his fellow-men, he doubtless forgot to remember that

"There's a divinity that shapes our ends, Rough hew them as we may;"

and when he shall have been summoned to appear before the inflexible bar of the infinite Jehovah, where he will meet his murdered victims face to face, and when they shall severally arise and reproach him with the awful crime of murder, he will then stand, like a convicted criminal, trembling beneath his oppressive load of guilt; and the only response which he will then be able to make to the dreadful accusations of his accusers will be, guilty ! guilty!! guilty!!!

## Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies.

### *Confederate Records*

**April 6-11, 1862.— Expedition from Greeneville, Tenn., into Laurel Valley, N.C., Reports of Maj. Gen. E. Kirby Smith, C. S. Army, with congratulatory letter.**

HEADQUARTERS DEPARTMENT OF EAST TENNESSEE,  
*Knoxville, Tenn., April 17, 1862.*

SIR: I have the honor to submit the following report of an expedition sent by my order into a portion of the State of North Carolina known as Laurel Valley, lying near the Tennessee border, and in the vicinity of Bald Mountain:

A detachment of troops, composed of three companies of the Forty-third Tennessee Regiment, Lieutenant-Colonel Key commanding, moved from the town of Greeneville, in this department, on the 6th instant, arriving on the 7th at a point on Bald Mountain which had been occupied as a camping ground by a party of outlaws, who had decamped two days previous to that time.

On the morning of the 8th our force moved down into Laurel Valley, a district long known as a general resort and hiding place for outlaws, who have been accustomed to send out from this point marauding parties into the adjoining counties of Tennessee and North Carolina, greatly annoying the people in those sections.

Directing his march through this valley, Colonel Key met no regularly-organized force, but his command was repeatedly fired on by parties of from 4 to 10 men, who would then immediately retreat beyond his reach, the country being particularly favorable to this mode of warfare. A portion of the force was deployed on either side of the line of march, the column being thus protected in a measure, and the enemy driven from their hiding places. Owing, however, to the impenetrability of the thickets, few of them could be killed and none captured.

This skirmishing was kept up on the 8th, 9th, and 10th, during which time about 15 of the enemy were killed. The casualties on our side were 3 men wounded— Privates Smith, Morgan, and Higdon, of Company A, the latter two mortally.

On the 11th the expedition returned to Greeneville.

The lieutenant-colonel commanding reports that there seems to be a regular organization among the inhabitants of that portion of the country. The whole population is openly hostile to our cause, and all who are able to serve are under arms.

Lieutenant-Colonel Key reports the officers and men to have behaved themselves well on this tedious and difficult march, and it is but justice to him to say that he evinced unusual energy and forethought, conducting the expedition in a highly creditable manner.

Respectfully, your obedient servant,

**E. KIRBY SMITH,**  
*Major-General, Commanding.*

General S. COOPER,  
*Adjutant and Inspector General.*

Incidents at Shelton-Laurel, N.C.

HEADQUARTERS DEPARTMENT OF EAST TENNESSEE,  
*Knoxville, Tenn., April 16, 1862.*

SIR: With the hope that the information herein contained may be of service, the commanding general of this department begs leave to call your attention to the condition of affairs in a portion of North Carolina lying near the Tennessee line and in the vicinity of Bald Mountain, known as Laurel Valley.

Repeated depredations having been committed on this side of the mountain by armed parties of marauders from that quarter, the commanding general ordered, about the 5th of this month, a detachment of troops to proceed from Greeneville, in the State of Tennessee, into Laurel Valley, with instructions to put down any illegal organization of armed men that might be found there. These instructions were carried out as far as the circumstances of the case would permit, but as it was impossible to scour the country thoroughly, owing to the thickness of the undergrowth, many outlaws probably remain there. The commanding officer of the expedition reports that there seems to be a regular organization among them, and that the entire population who are able to bear arms are arrayed against us. He reports killing about 15 of them, with a loss on our part of 2 killed and 1 wounded.

Notwithstanding the universal hostility of the people to our cause no private property was molested, except what was necessary for our troops while there.

The commanding general respectfully recommends that some measures be taken by the authorities of North Carolina to put a stop to these depredations.

I am, sir, most respectfully, your obedient servant,  
By order of Maj. Gen. E. Kirby Smith:

**E. CUNNINGHAM,**  
*Acting Aide-de-Camp.*

His Excellency the GOVERNOR OF NORTH CAROLINA,

*Raleigh, N. C.*

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HEADQUARTERS DEPARTMENT OF EAST TENNESSEE,  
*Knoxville, Tenn., April 17, 1862.*

Lieut. Col. D. M. KEY,  
*Forty-third Regiment Tennessee Volunteers:*

COLONEL: The major-general commanding directs me to express to you his appreciation of the energy and judgment displayed in the conduct of the late expedition into North Carolina, communicated in your report of the 14th instant. He desires also that this shall be communicated to the men then under your command in such terms as will assure them of his confidence in their zeal in the prompt discharge of their military duties and in their patriotism.

Very respectfully, your obedient servant,

**H. L. CLAY,**  
*Assisant Adjutant-General.*

**January 1863, Warm Springs, N.C.**

**Brigadier General W. G. M. Davis to Governor Zebulon B. Vance**

HEADQUARTERS PROVISIONAL FORCES, *C. S. A.*,  
*Warm Springs, N.C., January —, 1863.*

His Excellency ZEBULON B. VANCE,  
*Governor of the State of North Carolina:*

SIR: I have the honor to inform Your Excellency that upon full investigation I am convinced that the late attack on Marshall was made by a band of men numbering about 50 only, who were instigated by desire of plunder, and that there is no treasonable organization of citizens of North Carolina in the mountain region having in view the injury of the Government of the Confederate States or the giving aid to that of the United States. Having an ample force of Confederate soldiers I have informed Colonel McElroy that he can disband his militia, who will be no doubt of more service at home attending to their own domestic affairs, there not being any necessity for keeping them longer in the field. I am pleased to hear that they have been active and zealous in searching for the outlaws, and would no doubt have been very efficient had the trouble been as serious as reported. I have directed all the citizen prisoners to be turned over to the civil authorities of Madison, requesting Colonel McElroy to guard them to such safe jail as they may be committed to. You will be furnished, I suppose, by Colonel McElroy with a list of the prisoners and the evidence against them. They are all implicated in the [burning of the] town of Marshall. I have placed Maj. [W. N.] Garrett, Sixty-fourth North Carolina Volunteers, in charge of a force of about 200 of his regiment, one company of cavalry, and 30 Indians, which force is now on Laurel Creek. Major Garrett has orders to pursue and arrest every man in the mountains, of known bad character, whether engaged in any of the late outrages or not. They will be aided by six companies of cavalry, scouring the mountain regions in Washington, Carter, and Johnson Counties, Tennessee. Col. W. H. Thomas, with 200 whites and Indians of his legion, is operating in Madison, and will go into Harwood, Jackson, and Cherokee Counties, North Carolina, and Clay County, Georgia, with orders to arrest all deserters and recusant conscripts and all tories who have been engaged in unlawful practices on the Tennessee line of the mountains. He will be aided by cavalry and infantry. I have ordered Major Garrett to arrest all deserters he may find and to clear the counties lying adjacent to the mountains of them before he returns to his command. I am satisfied they are leagued with disloyal men frequently and perpetrate many of the crimes which are committed in this part of the State. Believing that it will be of service to your State to get rid of such a population as that inhabiting the Laurel region I have proposed to allow all who are not implicated in any crime to leave the State and to aid them in crossing into Kentucky. I am informed that nearly the whole population are desirous of accepting this offer. They will be driven to do so from necessity, as I learn our troops have consumed all the corn and meat in the settlement. If the people alluded to agree to emigrate I will cause them to be paid for their property used by our troops. Those who are of good character and who have not been guilty of any offense have not been molested by our troops, and will not of course be included among the number who are to be induced to emigrate as mentioned. I propose to give all tories of bad character who may be arrested the option of going to prison (unless they find security for good behavior) or of enlisting in the army. If they enlist they will be sent to Mississippi, from

Incidents at Shelton-Laurel, N.C.

whence they will not find it so easy to desert. I am in hopes the measures adopted will secure peace and security to the families of our soldiers and to the good citizens living in this region of the State. I feel gratified in being able to assist in producing such results, and shall at any future trial be glad to serve your State, which has become endeared to the army by the patriotism exhibited by her children at home and the valor of her soldiers in the field.

I have the honor to be, very respectfully, Your Excellency's obedient servant,

**W. G. M. DAVIS,**

*Brigadier-General, Comman*

**January 21, 1863, Knoxville, TN**  
**Brigadier General H. Heth to Governor Zebulon B. Vance,**  
**with inclosure from Brigadier General W. G. M. Davis**

HEADQUARTERS DEPARTMENT OF EAST TENNESSEE,  
*Knoxville, Tenn., January 21, 1863.*

His Excellency Gov. ZEBULON B. VANCE:

GOVERNOR: Inclosed please find an extract from a letter received this morning from Brig. Gen. W. G. M. Davis. From his statement I think the outbreak in Madison has been greatly exaggerated, and, as telegraphed you this morning, I think there is no present need of the State force called out by you. The outbreak has, I think, been suppressed, but an adequate force will be kept in the mountains as long as necessary for the protection of loyal citizens and their property.

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

**H. HETH,**

*Brigadier-General, Commanding.*

[Inclosure.]

HEADQUARTERS,  
*Greenville, Tenn., January 20, 1863.*

GENERAL: As I informed you by telegraph on yesterday, Captain Nelson has returned and reports that his company went into Laurel Valley, N.C., and had a brush with the tories, in which he killed 12 and subsequently captured 20. From information I have received from all quarters from men of intelligence and reliable character, I am satisfied there is no organization in the mountains of armed men banded together for the purpose of making efforts to destroy bridges or to burn towns or property of Confederate officers and soldiers. I think the attack on Marshall was gotten up to obtain salt, for want of which there is great suffering in the mountains. Plunder of other property followed as a matter of course. Col. [L. M.] Allen's Sixty-fourth North Carolina Regiment and the men of his command are said to have been hostile to the Laurel men and they to the former for a long time—a kind of feud existing between them. Of the men killed by Nelson's cavalry all but one or two were deserters from Colonel Allen's regiment. They formed part of the expedition against Marshall and no doubt plundered Allen's house. There has been no [attack] made on parties traveling on the Asheville road; the stage has not been destroyed and no acts of hostility committed that I can hear of but the plunder of Marshall and of

Incidents at Shelton-Laurel, N.C.

Allen's house. The whole force that went to Marshall did not exceed 50 men. All the reports stating the existence of organized bands of armed men numbering 300 or 400 are false beyond a doubt. The attack on Marshall has given rise to wild rumors of organizations of armed Tories throughout the mountains, bent on sacking towns and the plunder of loyal men. The reports, greatly magnified as they went to Raleigh, have no doubt led the Governor of North Carolina to call on the Confederate Government for a protecting force. I think you can safely assure him that the militia are not needed.

\* \* \* \* \*

Very respectfully, your obedient servant,

**W. G. M. DAVIS,**

*Brigadier-General.*

**January 21, 1863, Raleigh, N.C.,  
Governor Z. B. Vance to General Henry Heth**

RALEIGH, N.C., *January 21, 1863.*

General [HENRY] HETH, *Knoxville, Tenn.:*

Yours received. I hope you will not relax until the Tories are crushed. But do not let our excited people deal too harshly with these misguided men. Please have the captured delivered to the proper authorities for trial.

**Z. B. VANCE.**

**February 2, 1863, Mars Hill College, Madison County, N.C.,  
Brigadier General J. W. McElroy to Governor Z.B. Vance**

HDQRS. FIRST BRIGADE, *NORTH CAROLINA HOME GUARDS,  
Mars Hill College, Madison County, N. C., April 12, 1864.*

Governor Z. B. VANCE:

A dispatch reached me last night that a band of Tories, said to be headed by Montreval Ray, numbering about seventy-five men, came into Burnsville, Yancey County, on Sunday night last, the 10th instant, surprised the guard, broke open the magazine, and took all the arms and ammunition; broke open Brayly's store and carried off the contents; attacked Captain Lyons, the local enrolling officer, in his room, shot him in the arm slightly, but accidentally he made his escape. They carried off all the guns they could carry; the balance they broke. They took, I suppose, about 100 State guns. To one else wounded. They also took off the bacon brought in by my commissary—about 500 pounds. On the day before about fifty women assembled together, of said county, and marched in a body to a store-house near David Proffitt's and pressed about sixty bushels of Government wheat and carried it off. I very much regret the loss of the arms. On Monday previous to the robbery I wrote to one of the captains in that county and to the ordnance officer to either remove the guns and ammunition or see that a sufficient guard was placed there to protect them. It seems that neither was done. I also urged on the citizens to lay to a helping hand in this hour of danger, but all done no good. The county



Incidents at Shelton-Laurel, N.C.

is gone up. It has got to be impossible to get any man out there unless he is dragged out, with but very few exceptions. There was but a small guard there, and the citizens all ran on the first approach of the tories. I have 100 men at this place to guard against Kirk, of Laurel, and cannot reduce the force, and to call out any more home guards at this time is only certain destruction to the country eventually. In fact, it seems to me that there is a determination of the people in the country generally to do no more service in the cause.

Swarms of men liable to conscription are gone to the tories or to the Yankees—some men that you would have no idea of—while many others are fleeing east of the Blue Ridge for refuge. John S. McElroy and all the cavalry, J. W. Anderson and many others, are gone to Burke for refuge. This discourages those who are left behind, and on the back of that conscription [is] now going on, and a very tyrannical course pursued by the officers charged with the business, and men conscribed and cleaned out as raked with a fine-toothed comb, and if any are left if they are called upon to do a little home-guard service, they at once apply for a writ of habeas corpus and get off. Some three or four cases [have] been tried by Judge Read the last two weeks and the men released. What are we to do? There are no Confederate troops scarcely in the western district of North Carolina. Longstreet is said to have left Tennessee. This emboldens the tories, and they are now largely recruited by conscript renegades and very soon it is possible our country may be full of Yankees. Give me your advice and orders. I have been doing as I thought the best I could under all circumstances. How far you may consider me culpable for the loss of the Yancey guns, &c., I cannot say. I am sorry I did not act more promptly in their removal, but I thought when the citizens were warned of their danger, as I had warned them and told them it was impossible for me to send them any force, that they would at once rally to their own defense and use the guns against their foes, but alas, I was sadly mistaken; if I had not believed that I would have brought the arms and ammunition to these headquarters. If something is not done immediately for this country we will all be ruined, for the home guards now will not do to depend on. I have written you several times on subjects of importance to me, and received no answer. I know your time is valuable to you and that you are pressed to death with business, but some instructions from you would be of great benefit to me and some encouragement to our citizens. Do let me hear from you at once.

Very respectfully, your obedient servant,

**J. W. McELROY,**

*Brigadier-General, Commanding First Brigade,  
North Carolina Home Guards.*

**February 2, 1863, Raleigh, N.C.**

**Governor Zebulon B. Vance to Brigadier General W. G. M. Davis**

STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA,  
*EXECUTIVE DEPARTMENT,  
Raleigh, N.C., February 2, 1863.*

General W. G. M. DAVIS, *Warm Springs, N.C.:*

SIR: Yours, giving an account of operations in your command in the mountains of this State, has been received. The result is quite satisfactory, and I am especially pleased to

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

learn that there appears to be no regular organization of enemies to the Government in that country. I was loath to believe so, and from the first was of the opinion that the raid was only for plunder and that the whole matter was probably exaggerated. I hope now that quiet and order are restored in that region, and have to return you my thanks for the very prompt and energetic aid afforded by your command in producing this state of things. I was fearful in the great excitement prevailing among our people that the misguided people of Laurel might be dealt too harshly with, and warned the officers to be civil and just. I was therefore sorry to learn this morning that Colonel Allen had hanged several of the captured prisoners. I hope this is not true, as it would be much better to have them dealt with by the law. In regard to running them into Kentucky I approve of the plan, provided they desire to go. I would not wish, however, to exile the women and children or old men if they desire to remain, as the law ought to be strong enough to keep them in subjection. I hope Colonel McElroy will take proper steps to prevent the escape of his prisoners.

With sentiments of regard, I am, sir, your obedient servant,

**Z. B. VANCE.**

### **February 16, 1863, Asheville, N.C., Letter from A.S. Merrimon to Governor Vance**

ASHEVILLE, N.C., *February 16, 1863.*

. GOVERNOR: Your letter of the 9th instant is just received. I beg to assure you that I shall at the next term of the court prosecute vigorously such of the prisoners to whom you direct my attention as may be turned over to the civil authorities. The late expedition to Laurel sent only four prisoners to jail, and one of them was admitted to bail on yesterday by Judge Bailey. I understand there are no more to send. I have no knowledge of my own touching the shooting of several prisoners in Laurel. I have learned, however, from a most reliable source that 13 of them were killed; that some of them were not taken in arms but at their homes; that all the men shot (13, if not more) were prisoners at the time they were shot; that they were taken off to a secluded cave or gorge in the mountains and then made to kneel down and were thus shot. One man was badly and mortally shot in the bowels, and while he was writhing in agony and praying to God for mercy a soldier mercilessly and brutally shot him in the head with his pistol. Several women were whipped; this I learned from one who got his information from some of the guilty parties. I learned that all this was done by order of Lieut. Col. James A. Keith. I know not what you intend doing with the guilty parties, but I suggest they are all guilty of murder. I do not suppose they had any order to do so barbarous a deed; but if they had the order was void absolutely, no matter by whom issued. Such savage and barbarous cruelty is without a parallel in the State, and I hope in every other. I am gratified that you intend to take the matter in hand. I will make such investigation as I can, but I have no means of compelling any one to disclose facts to me. It will not be difficult, I learn, to prove that the prisoners were killed. I assure you that I will prosecute all persons who have committed criminal offenses in this circuit at the next term of the court, and in the mean time I will do all in my power to suppress crime and violence. These are fearfully on the increase in this section of the State. A report might be made that would astonish you. I

Incidents at Shelton-Laurel, N.C.

have done all I could in reference to the complaints made to you from Jackson and Cherokee Counties.

\* \* \* \* \*

I am, &c., yours, truly,

**A. S. MERRIMON.**

(At the time of the incidents, Merrimon was NC Attorney General After the war, he became a North Carolina Superior Court Judge, served 6 years as a U.S. Senator and Chief Justice of the North Carolina Supreme Court in Raleigh, N.C.)

**February 24, 1863, Asheville, N.C.,  
Letter from A.S. Merrimon to Governor Vance**

ASHEVILLE, N.C., *February 24, 1863.*

[Hon. ZEBULON B. VANCE:]

GOVERNOR: In obedience to your directions so to do, I have made inquiries and gathered facts such as I could in reference to the shooting of certain prisoners in Laurel Creek, in Madison County. I have to report to you that I learned that the militia troops had nothing to do with what was done in Laurel. Thirteen prisoners, at least, were killed by order of Lieut. Col. J. A. Keith. Most of them were taken at their homes, and none of them made resistance when taken; perhaps some of them ran. After they were taken prisoners the soldiers took them off to a secluded place, made them kneel down, and shot them. They were buried in a trench dug for the purpose. Some two weeks since their bodies were removed to a grave-yard. I learned that probably 8 of the 13 killed were not in the company that robbed Marshall and other places. I suppose they were shot on suspicion. I cannot learn the names of the soldiers who shot them. Some of them shrank from the barbarous and brutal transaction at first, but were compelled to act. This is a list of the names of those killed: Elison King (desperate man); Jo Woods (desperate man); Will Shelton, twenty years old (of Sipus); Aronnata Shelton, fourteen years old (was not at Marshall); James Shelton (old Jim), about fifty-six years old; James Shelton, jr., seventeen years old; David Shelton, thirteen years old (was not in the raid); James Madcap, forty years old; Rod Shelton (Stob Rod); David Shelton (brother of Stob Rod); Joseph Cleandon, fifteen or sixteen years old; Helen Moore, twenty-five or thirty years old; Wade Moore, twenty or twenty-five years old. It is said that those whose names I have so marked did not go to Marshall. The prisoners were captured on one Friday and killed the next Monday. Several women were severely whipped and ropes were tied around their necks. It is said Col. L. M. Allen was not in command and that Keith commanded. Four prisoners are now in jail, sent here, as I learned, by order of General Davis. These are Sipus Shelton, Isaac Shelton, William Morton, and David Shelton, son of Sipus. I think the facts stated are about true. One thing is certain, 13 prisoners were shot without trial or any hearing whatever and in the most cruel manner. I have no means of compelling witnesses to disclose facts to me, and I do not know that I shall be able to make a fuller report to Your Excellency at any early day. I hope these facts will enable

Incidents at Shelton-Laurel, N.C.

you to take such steps as will result in a more satisfactory development of the true state of the matter.

I am, &c., yours, truly,

**A. S. MERRIMON.**

**February 27, 1863, Raleigh, N.C.,  
Governor Z.B. Vance to Brigadier General Davis**

STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA, *EXECUTIVE DEPARTMENT,*  
*Raleigh, N.C., February 27, 1863.*

Brigadier-General DAVIS, *Knoxville, Tenn.:*

GENERAL: In my last letter to you I referred to a report that a number of prisoners taken on Laurel had been shot in cold blood, and expressed the hope it might not prove true. I fear, however, that it is even worse than was first reported. I beg leave to ask your attention to the copy inclosed of a part of a letter from A. S. Merrimon, esq., attorney for the State in that district, and to respectfully request you to make inquiry into the truth of the statements within, with a view to proceedings against the guilty parties. While expressing again my thanks for the prompt aid rendered by your command in quieting the troubles in that region, I cannot reconcile it to my sense of duty to pass by in silence such cruel and barbarous conduct as is alleged to have characterized a portion of them, and more especially as the officers mentioned are citizens of this State.

Very respectfully, your obedient servant,

**Z. B. VANCE.**

**February 28, 1863, Raleigh, N.C.,  
Governor Z. B. Vance to Secretary of War James A. Seddon**

STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA,  
*EXECUTIVE DEPARTMENT.,*  
*Raleigh, N.C., February 28, 1863.*

Hon. JAMES A. SEDDON, *Secretary of War:*

SIR: Some six months since a disturbance occurred in Madison County, North Carolina, near the Tennessee border, by some disloyal persons capturing the little county town and seizing a lot of salt and other plunder. An armed force was promptly sent from Knoxville, under command of General Davis, to suppress the insurrection, which was accomplished before the local militia could get there, though ordered out immediately. But in doing so a degree of cruelty and barbarity was displayed, shocking and outrageous in the extreme, on the part of Lieut. Col. J. A. Keith, Sixty-fourth North Carolina Troops, who seems to have been in command, and to have acted in this respect without orders from his superiors, so far as I can learn. I beg leave to ask you to read the inclosed letter (copy) from A. S. Merrimon, State's attorney for that judicial district, which you will see discloses a scene of horror disgraceful to civilization. I desire you to have proceedings

Incidents at Shelton-Laurel, N.C.

instituted at once against this officer, who, if the half be true, is a disgrace to the service and to North Carolina. You may depend upon the respectability and fairness of Mr. Merrimon, who made an investigation officially by my order. I have also written General Davis.

Very respectfully, your obedient servant,

**Z. B. VANCE.**

**March 5, 1863, Richmond, Va.,  
Secretary of War James A. Seddon to Governor Z. B. Vance**

WAR DEPARTMENT, *Richmond, March 5, 1863.*

His Excellency Z. B. VANCE,  
*Governor of North Carolina, Raleigh, N. C.*

SIR: I received your letter of the 28th ultimo in reference to the conduct of Lieut. Col. J. A. Keith, Sixty-fourth North Carolina Regiment, and have directed General Donelson, commanding at Knoxville, to investigate the matter and report the facts to the Department.

Very respectfully, your obedient servant,

**JAS. A. SEDDON,**  
*Secretary of War.*

**May 18, 1863, Raleigh N.C.,  
Governor Z. B. Vance to Secretary of War James A. Seddon**

EXECUTIVE DEPARTMENT, *Raleigh, May 18, 1863.*

Hon. JAMES A. SEDDON, *Secretary of War, Richmond, Va.*

SIR: I had the honor to request of you some time since an examination into the case of Lieut. Col. J. A. Keith, Sixty-fourth North Carolina Troops, charged with the murder of some unarmed prisoners and little boys during the recent troubles in the mountains of this State. I have heard by rumor only that he was brought before a court-martial and honorably acquitted by producing an order for his conduct from General Davis, commanding in East Tennessee. I have also been officially notified of his resignation. Will it be consistent with your sense of duty to furnish me a copy of the proceedings of the court-martial in his case? Murder is a crime against the common law in this State and he is now subject to that law.

Very respectfully, &c.,

**Z. B. VANCE**

**May 18, 1863, Richmond, Va.,  
Secretary of War James A. Seddon to Governor Z. B. Vance**

WAR DEPARTMENT, *Richmond, Va., May 23, 1863.*

His Excellency Z. B. VANCE, *Governor of North Carolina.*

SIR: Your letter of the 18th instant has been received. The resignation of Lieutenant-Colonel Keith was accepted at the office of the Adjutant and Inspector General the 15th instant. No proceedings of court-martial in his case have been received. His resignation was accepted on the recommendation of Colonel Palmer, commanding the brigade, and Major-General Maury, the examining board having reported against his competency. The Adjutant and Inspector General was not aware of the facts of the alleged murder as applying to this officer at the time of his action on the resignation, there being no reference to the facts in the papers before him. In a communication to the Department by Lieutenant-Colonel Keith he claims that Brigadier-General Heth gave him a verbal order to this effect: "I want no reports from you about your course at Laurel. I do not want to be troubled with any prisoners and the last one of them should be killed;" that he went on further to state that he had been troubled with several prisoners from Laurel, N. C., and he did not want any more brought to Knoxville. This statement is supported by the deposition of a Doctor Thompson, and Keith states in his letter that he can prove it by another witness. The communication of Keith and the deposition of Thompson were submitted to General Heth for remarks. He says that he gave written instructions to Keith which will be found on the books of the Department of East Tennessee. He admits that he told Keith that those found in arms ought not to be treated as enemies, and in the event of an engagement with them to take no prisoners as he considered that they had forfeited all such claims, but he denies in strong terms the making use of any remarks which would authorize maltreatment of prisoners who had been accepted as such or to women and children.

Very respectfully, your obedient servant,

**JAMES A. SEDDON,**  
*Secretary of War.*

**November 27, 1864—The East Tennessee Campaign,  
No. 26.—Report of Brig. Gen. John W. Frazer, C. S: Army, commanding,  
forces at Cumberland Gap.**

FORT WARREN, *Boston Harbor, November 27, 1864.*  
(excerpt)

The Sixty-fourth North Carolina Regiment was small, having been reduced by desertions; at one time 300 in a body. The colonel and lieutenant-colonel had left in disgrace for dishonorable conduct. (See muster-rolls and officers of the regiment.) Major Garrett was left in command, but had been suspended by the examining board for incompetency. I afterward restored him to command temporarily, as I could find no one in the regiment any better qualified.

**December 8, 1864, Augusta;  
Lieutenant Colonel David Urquhart to General S. Cooper**

AUGUSTA, *December 8, 1864.*

General S. COOPER,  
*Adjutant and Inspector General, Richmond:*

GENERAL: I have just returned from the Western District of North Carolina. I regret to report a bad state of affairs prevailing there. The country is full of deserters and tories, who are growing bolder every day and committing great outrages, defying the Government and openly avowing that they are acting under orders from the enemy. If active measures are not adopted before the leaves come out, it will be impossible to disperse and capture them. The troops in Colonel Palmer's command are all North Carolinians. He has part of Sixty-second and Sixty-fourth Regiments North Carolina Volunteers, who are really deserters and stragglers, as they were absent when these regiments were captured at Cumberland Gap. They will not answer to hunt down these deserters and tories. I recommend that a Virginia regiment be sent up there as soon as it can be spared to clear the mountains near the North Carolina line. Soldiers from all the different armies are finding their way up to these mountains and never return to their commands. As an instance, I will quote the case of a Captain Poor, who has fifty men in his company, all from the Twenty-fifth North Carolina Regiment, of the Army of Northern Virginia. He says he is hunting up deserters. Every one of these men are deserters. They must be taken by compulsion, for they will never return willingly. All the deserters are harbored by the natives, especially by the women. A rigid system of police should be established, and the houses of all these harborers of deserters burnt down, and no soldier or individual liable to military duty should be allowed to remain in the district without a pass from the commanding officer. When these malefactors and deserters are taken they are sent to Asheville and tried, and the proceedings of the court having to be revised by Lieutenant-General Holmes, causes great delay, and many of these criminals who ought to be disposed of at once find their way back to the mountains. I feel very confident that unless a force is kept actively engaged in the work of dislodging these deserters and making the mountains untenable for them, that it will be an invitation to all the deserters and stragglers to make the mountains their place of refuge from the army. Colonel Palmer understands the nature of the country, and if the department would call him to Richmond and hear his views I feel confident his suggestions would be valuable.

I have the honor to remain, general, your obedient servant,

**DAVID URQUHART,**  
*Lieutenant-Colonel and Assistant  
Adjutant-General*

**Union Records**

**January 5, 1865, Neil House, Columbus, Ohio**  
**Major A. J. Bahney to Brigadier General H. W. Wessells (with indorsements)**

NEIL HOUSE, *Columbus, Ohio, January 5, 1865.*

Brig. Gen. H. W. WESSELLS,  
*Washington City, D.C.:*

GENERAL: I was ordered here to recruit for the Second Regiment North Carolina Mounted Infantry from the prisoners captured at Cumberland Gap, Tenn., in September, 1863, by Major-General Burnside, consisting of the Twenty-ninth, Sixty-second, and Sixty-fourth North Carolina Infantry, C. S. Army. The larger number of those men were and now are Union men and have written from time to time to me to come and get them out of prison. I am here with six of my men who are acquainted with nearly all of the Union men of those three regiments who were conscripted in the rebel army. Some are here, others at Camp Douglas, and some at Johnson's Island. I would most respectfully ask permission to enter the three camps and recruit all the men who are willing to enlist and that I can prove are true, loyal men now and before the war. I saw General Thomas at Lexington and the general said he would telegraph to the Secretary of War and that I would be notified at Camp Chase. I shall anxiously wait an answer.

I have the honor to be, very respectfully, your obedient servant,

**A. J. BAHNEY,**

*Major Second Regiment North Carolina Mounted Infantry.*

[First indorsement.]

OFFICE COMMISSARY-GENERAL OF PRISONERS,  
*Washington, D.C., January 10, 1865.*

Respectfully submitted to the Secretary of War for instructions.

**H. W. WESSELLS,**

*Brig. Gen., U. S. Vols., Insp. and Com. Gen. of Prisoners.*

[Second indorsement.]

WAR DEPARTMENT,  
*January 13, 1865.*

Respectfully referred to the commissioner for the exchange of prisoners.

By order of the Secretary of War:

**LOUIS H. PELOUZE,**

*Assistant Adjutant-General.*

[Third indorsement.]

JANUARY 14, 1865.

It is not believed to be expedient to adopt the policy here urged. Approved by the Secretary of War:

**E. A. HITCHCOCK,**

*Major-General of Volunteers.*



## Names Mentioned in this Work

Allen, Colonel L. M....	3, 4, 15, 16, 18, 19	Keith, Riley .....	10
Anderson, J. W.....	17	Key, D.M (Lieutenant-Colonel)....	12, 13
Bahney, Major A. J. ....	24	King, Allison.....	9
Bailey, — (Judge).....	18	King, Elison .....	19
Brayly, —.....	16	King, Ellison .....	3
Brucks, Absalom.....	11	Kirk, — (of Laurel).....	17
Burget, Hampton.....	11	Landers, Tilman .....	11
Burnside, General Ambrose Everett ...	24	Longstreet, General James 'Old Pete'..	17
Carter, Lucinda .....	10	Lyons, — (Captain) .....	16
Chandler, William.....	9	Mauzy, General Dabney Herndon.....	22
Channel, Jasper .....	3	McCollum, James .....	5
Clay, H. L. (Assisant Adjutant-General)	13	McElroy, — (Colonel).....	14, 18
.....	13	McElroy, General John W. (home	
Cleandon, Joseph .....	19	guards).....	16, 17
Cooper, General Samuel .....	12, 23	McElroy, John S.....	17
Cunningham, E. (Acting Aide-de-Camp)	13	Medcalf, James .....	3
.....	13	Merrimon, Augustus Summerfield ....	18,
Davis, General William George Mackey	15, 16, 17, 19, 20, 21	19, 20, 21	
.....	15, 16, 17, 19, 20, 21	Metcalf, James.....	9
Davis, Jefferson.....	5	Metcalf, John.....	11
Deever, Lieut B. M.....	5	Moore, — (Mrs.).....	9
Donelson, General Daniel Smith.....	5, 21	Moore, Frank.....	3
Ellis, Daniel.....	6	Moore, Halen .....	3, 9
Fillmore, William.....	11	Moore, Helen .....	19
Fouke, — (Colonel) .....	5	Moore, Mrs. Sallie .....	4
Franklin, Marion .....	11	Moore, Wade .....	3, 19
Frazer, General John W. ....	22	Moore, Wade H.....	9
Garrett, Major W. N.....	14, 22	Moorley, — (Captain) .....	4
Hall, Nancy .....	9	Morgan, — (Private).....	12
Hare, Robert.....	11	Morton, William .....	19
Heth, General Henry .....	15, 16, 22	Nelson, — (Captain) .....	15
Heusley, — .....	6	Palmer, — (Colonel).....	22, 23
Higdon, — (Private).....	12	Pelouze, Louis H.....	24
Hitchcock, General Ethan Allen .....	24	Poor, — (Captain).....	23
Holmes, General Theophilus Hunter ..	23	Price, Jesse .....	5
Ignole, — (rebel soldier) .....	5	Proffitt, David .....	16
Irving, Samuel E. ....	6	Ray, Montreval .....	16
Jackson, (Captain).....	10	Read, — (Judge) .....	17
Jackson, General Alfred E.....	5, 10	Reynolds, — (Captain) .....	5
James, Madcap.....	19	Rhea, Mrs. Ruth Ann .....	5
Jay, Sergeant N. B. D.....	4, 5	Riddle, — (Mrs.).....	9
Keith, Captain William .....	10	Riddle, Mrs. Unus .....	4
Keith, Colonel James A. 1, 3, 4, 6, 7, 8, 9,	10, 11, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22	Roberts, — ("Doctor").....	9

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

Seddon, James A. (Confederate Secretary of War).....	20, 21, 22	Shelton, Rob (Stob Rod).....	19
Shelton, — .....	6	Shelton, Roddy.....	3
Shelton, Aronnata .....	19	Shelton, Roderick.....	9
Shelton, Azariah.....	9	Shelton, Sam .....	3
Shelton, Billy .....	4	Shelton, Sipus .....	19
Shelton, David.....	7, 9, 11, 19	Shelton, Will .....	19
Shelton, David (brother of Stob Rod).....	19	Shelton, William .....	3, 4, 9
Shelton, David (son of Sipus).....	19	Shelton, William, Jr. ....	11
Shelton, David, Jr.....	9	Smith, — (Private).....	12
Shelton, Day .....	3	Smith, General E. Kirby.....	12, 13
Shelton, Ezra.....	4	Thomas, — (General) .....	24
Shelton, Isaac .....	11, 19	Thomas, Col. W. H. ....	4, 14
Shelton, Isaiah.....	3	Thompson, (Doctor).....	22
Shelton, James.....	3, 9	Tweede, — .....	6
Shelton, James (old Jim} .....	19	Urquhart, Lieutenant Colonel David... ..	23
Shelton, James, Jr.....	9, 19	Vance, Governor Zebulon. B. 14, 15, 16, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22	
Shelton, Lifus .....	3, 4	Wessells, General Henry Walton .....	24
Shelton, Mrs. Mary .....	4	White, Martha .....	4
Shelton, Mrs. Ruth .....	11	Wood, — (rebel soldier).....	5
Shelton, Mrs. Sarah .....	4	Wood, Joseph .....	3
Shelton, Nancy .....	9	Woods, Jo.....	19
Shelton, old David .....	11	Woods, Joseph .....	9