

THE PRICE OF FREEDOM:
THE BATTLE OF SALTVILLE AND THE MASSACRE
OF THE
FIFTH UNITED STATES COLORED CAVALRY

by

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(ABSTRACT)

The battle of Saltville Va. (Oct. 3, 1864) and the subsequent massacre of wounded prisoners from the 5th United States Colored Cavalry has been a neglected and misinterpreted topic. The narrative follows the Federal advance from Kentucky to southwest Virginia including Confederate delaying actions. The work studies the Southern victory and the massacre in detail and introduces new evidence that clarifies the extent of the carnage.

The study rates Saltville as the worst battlefield atrocity of the American Civil War.

This work is dedicated to the loving memory of my mother
Dr. Sylvia Bragg Mays (1934-1989)

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Introduction

On December 2, 1864, in the southwest Virginia town of Saltville, Confederate forces directed by Gen. John S. Williams met and defeated an invading army commanded by Federal Gen. Stephen Gano Burbridge. The battle would have been remembered as a small affair, confined to the footnotes of history books, if it were not for what happened the next morning. Burbridge left many of his wounded in the hands of the Confederates. As the fog cleared on the morning of December 3, a large number of captured black troops from the 5th United States Colored Cavalry (USCC) were summarily executed by their Southern captors.

By the end of 1864, battlefield atrocities had become far too common. Confederates were known to have killed Union black prisoners on several occasions, the most infamous being at Fort Pillow, Tenn. on April 12, 1864. Preeminent Civil War historian Bell Wiley, after editing a Southern confession to the executions at Saltville, noted, "It appears that Saltville deserves more than Fort Pillow to be called a massacre".¹

At Fort Pillow, all witnesses agreed that the Federal

forces had refused to surrender and that Confederates rushing the works granted no quarter to black troops defending the fort. While Confederate Gen. Nathan Bedford Forrest's actions at Fort Pillow are inexcusable, his men committed the murders during the heat of battle after the garrison had refused to surrender.² The situation at Saltville to which Wiley referred to was quite different. The men murdered at Saltville were mostly wounded prisoners, killed following the battle.

To date, two writers have attempted studies of the battle of Saltville and the massacre. In 1971, historian William C. Davis published a short account of the battle for the popular magazine Civil War Times Illustrated.³ Davis noted that Confederate Generals John C. Breckinridge and Robert E. Lee condemned the treatment of black prisoners and attempted to charge the Confederate officer most directly responsible. In a later work, Davis alleged that Confederate Gen. Felix H. Robertson was likely behind the slaughter. Exactly what Robertson did at Saltville may never be known. Davis did however find evidence that both Lee and Breckinridge wanted Robertson brought before a court of inquiry for his actions on October 3.

Within the last year, a second writer has produced a controversial account of Saltville. In the August, 1991, issue of Blue & Gray Magazine, William Marvel called Saltville a "Civil War myth" with no basis in fact.⁴ To

support his thesis, Marvel branded as liars all but one of the Federal and Confederate eyewitnesses to the massacre. Then he relied upon interesting research to come to the conclusion that "five black soldiers, wounded and helpless, were definitely murdered at Saltville . . ." Marvel concludes by asking; "Can we then still call it a 'massacre'?"

Yes. After a detailed review of the records of the 5th USCC, a conservative estimate of the number of black men murdered at Saltville is nearly ten times the number Marvel tabulated. Not only did many Federal survivors record the massacre, but several Confederates gave their views of the butchery as well. Marvel attacked each Union and Confederate account and concluded that almost all of them were fabricated for a wide viriaty of motivations. Yet there is no reason to question the validity of such a wide assortment of witnesses. Both the eyewitness accounts and the regimental records demonstrate that the murders at Saltville were one of the worst atrocities of the American Civil War.⁵

By late 1864, the Civil War had become far more terrible than anyone had imagined. The concept of total war that the Federals were waging upon the Southern economic base and civilian population began wearing down Confederate supplies and morale. Burnt homes and barns littered the Shenandoah Valley and would soon create a path

from Atlanta to the sea.

As Gen. Ulysses S. Grant's noose tightened around the Confederacy in the fall of 1864, the natural resources of southwest Virginia gained in importance as supplies became short. The Confederacy depended upon the Virginia and Tennessee Railroad. The line ran from Tennessee and points south to Lynchburg then connecting with Richmond. Salt from the area was vital to the Confederacy. One Southerner noted that loss of the saltworks "would have been a dire disaster to the Confederacy. A person who had never seen them could scarcely conceive of the huge piles."⁶

The Southerners used salt to preserve leather as well as the beef and pork needed to feed the armies and civilian population. This commodity became so valuable to the Confederacy that its price rose from a few pennies to one dollar a pint by the end of the war.

Southwest Virginia had other valuable resources. The Wytheville area contained the only lead mines in the Confederacy, and with the tightening blockade, the loss of the mines could shorten the war considerably. The region also became vital to the feeding of Robert E. Lee's Army of Northern Virginia. The district produced a great deal of corn as well as beef. Confederates butchered beef at Wytheville and sent it directly to the troops around Richmond by rail. The loss of southwest Virginia would be a catastrophe to the South.⁷

Notes

1. George Dallas Mosgrove, Kentucky Cavaliers in Dixie: Reminiscences of a Confederate Cavalryman (Jackson, Tenn. 1957), xix.
2. For an interesting comparison of contrasting interpretations, see Robert Castle, "The Fort Pillow Massacre: A Fresh Examination of the Evidence," Civil War History, IV (1958), 37-50; John Cimprich, and Robert C. Mainfort, "Fort Pillow Revisited: New Evidence about and Old Controversy," Civil War History, XXVIII (1982), 293-306. For an overall view see Brainerd Dyer, "The Treatment of Colored Union Troops by the Confederates, 1861-1865," Journal of Negro History XX (1935), 273-86.
3. William C. Davis, "Massacre at Saltville," Civil War Times Illustrated, (Feb., 1971), 4-48.
4. William Marvel, "The Battle of Saltville: Massacre or Myth?" Blue and Gray Magazine, VIII (1991), 10-19, 46-60.
5. U.S. War Dept. (comp.), War of Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies (Washington, 1880-1902), 1:49, pt. 1, 765. Hereafter cited as O.R., 1880-1901.
6. Mosgrove, Kentucky Cavaliers, 197.
7. Stoddard Johnstone, "Sketches of Operations of General John C. Breckinridge," The Southern Historical Society Papers, XVII (1879), 386. For a complete study of salt during the Civil War, see Ella Lot, Salt as a Factor in the Confederacy, (New York, 1933).

Chapter II

"Grave Yard Whistling"

In the fall of 1864 Federal authorities in Kentucky had just begun to enlist black troops when Gen. Stephen G. Burbrige proposed making a raid into southwest Virginia. Almost as an afterthought, the Federal army picked up 600 untrained Kentucky black troops and made a dash for the saltworks of southwest Virginia. Anticipating an attack, the Confederates moved to delay the Federal advance at each opportunity. Yet by the night of October 1, 1864, Gen. Burbrige stood at the gates of Saltville within easy reach of his objective.

Even though Lincoln's program of arming ex-slaves to fight their former masters had moved to high gear by the summer of 1864, Kentucky presented a special problem to the Lincoln government. It was a "loyal" slave state. The Emancipation Proclamation failed to free any Kentucky slaves; still, many abolitionists pressed for the arming of blacks in the state. Given the task of raising black units for the U.S. government, Adjutant General Lorenzo Thomas took a personal hand in forming units.

No discussion of blacks in the war would be complete

without mentioning Thomas. Thomas traveled the theaters of war and created the United States Colored Troops (USCT). By enlisting the support of white units and offering promotions to members who would officer the blacks, Thomas disarmed some of the negative reaction blacks would receive in the army. He established boards to test the qualifications of potential officers in the USCT, thereby creating possibly the best qualified officer corps in the army. Thomas also took a hand in organizing many of the new black units. By late 1864, he was personally responsible for almost half of the black regiments raised.¹

In early 1864, the Federal commander of the District of Kentucky, Gen. Stephen Gano Burbridge, issued General Order No. 24, which authorized the raising of black units composed of freedmen and slaves. The order admitted slaves at the "request" of their owners.

Whites in the state reacted violently to the arming of the slaves. Captain James Fidler, the Provost Marshal in Lebanon, Kentucky, witnessed his black enlistees mobbed and beaten in the streets. When the 13th Kentucky Cavalry arrived in Lebanon on June 2, Fidler found that he too, became the target of violence. On June 10, Fidler narrowly missed being killed by a shot fired at him from a sniper in the town.² Later, one of Fidler's black recruits recorded his experience in poem:

Captain Fidler's come to town,
 With his abolition papers;
 He swears he is one of Lincoln's men,
 He's cutting almighty capers.

Captain Fidler's come to town,
 With his abolition triggers,
 He swears he's one of Lincoln's men,
 "Enlisting all the niggers"...

You'll see the rebels on the street,
 Their noses like a bee gum;
 I Don't care what in thunder they say,
 I'm fighting for my freedom!...

My old massa's come to town,
 Cutting a Southern figure;
 What's the matter with the man?
 Lincoln's got his niggers?

Some folks say this "almighty fuss
 Is getting worse and bigger";
 Some folks say "its worse and worse,"
 Because I am a "nigger."

We'll get our colored regiments strung
 Out in a line of battle;
 I'll bet my money agin the South
 The rebels will skedaddle.³

Pressure on recruiting officers began to ease in the state when the white population realized that black units would help offset Kentucky's draft quota for the year. Possibly taking advantage of the shifting winds of popular opinion, the Provost Marshall General for the state, Col. William H. Sidell, orderd slaves in the state enroled without regard to the wishes of their owners.⁴ On June 30, Gen. Thomas gave permission for the officers of the 5th United States Colored Cavalry (USCC) to start selecting

recruits for the regiment.⁵

Colonel James Brisbin, a well-known abolitionist, eventually became commander of the 5th. His first duty with the unit was as head of Camp Nelson, a camp of instruction south of Louisville, where he trained the new volunteers for the regiment. The work proceeded slowly in the summer and fall of 1864. Many of the companies of the 5th were recruited at Camp Nelson, while others were inlisted in nearby towns such as Lebanon and Louisville.

With only a handful of free skilled workers, the regiment consisted almost completely of ex-slaves.⁶ Volunteers who had enlisted for three years made up the majority of the regiment, but one company became a dumping-ground for draftees and conscripts. Of 83 men in Company L, in October 1864, 53 were substitutes and 10 were draftees.⁷

Under Thomas' organizational plans, the officers of the 5th USCC were to be whites selected by a board; the noncommissioned officers were to be chosen from black men in the ranks. Yet with an entire regiment of ex-slaves, the officers found it difficult to find men literate enough to handle the tasks assigned to sergeants. Lieutenant Col. L. Henry Carpenter asked for special permission to appoint experienced white soldiers as noncommissioned officers. "Scarcely any of the Coloredmen [sic] enlisted into this regiment can read or write," he stated. It would be months

before the regiment would find and train the men they needed to efficiently operate.⁸

While many Kentuckians continued to harass Federal authorities in their efforts in recruiting black troops, some Union officers made matters worse. Captain Thomas Branch of the 5th contributed to the problem by confiscating slaves for the regiment and then accepting bribes from their owners for their return. Slave owners would pay Branch \$100. for the return of their property. He then gave the slaves' enlistment papers to the owners and kept the slaves for the regiment. Branch was eventually punished but not without threatening many slave owners with violence if they failed to accept his terms and disenfranchising many "loyal" Kentuckians.⁹

While Gen. Burbridge faced numerous problems attempting to keep Kentucky in the Union, the Confederates met many setbacks as well. On September 2, Gen. William T. Sherman's forces had captured the vital transportation hub of Atlanta, Georgia. In Virginia, Confederate Gen. Jubal A. Early's small army operating in the Shenandoah Valley had met stunning defeat at Winchester and Fisher's Hill. These setbacks opened the way for Gen. Philip H. Sheridan's Union army to advance up the valley. At Petersburg, Gen. Ulysses S. Grant tightened his headlock on Gen. Robert E. Lee's Army of Northern Virginia.

In southwest Virginia, Confederate Gen. John Echols

was recuperating from wounds received in battle. He recognized that the fall of Atlanta would free Federal forces for a possible raid on the area. Arriving in the department Echols "found everything in the worst possible condition." Many of the troops in the department were unarmed and mutinous and lacked regimental organization. Should the Federals advance, Echols stated he would "have serious fears of the result".¹⁰

During the fall of 1864, Echols did all in his power to organize the defenses in southwest Virginia. He mobilized and reorganized the local reserve forces, noting in the process that they would make good troops "if they had not had the power to select their own officers".¹¹ In addition to the threat of a Federal attack pro-Union sentiment was strong in both southwest Virginia and in East Tennessee. The area had become a refuge for hundreds of Confederate deserters.¹²

Authorities in Richmond heeded Gen. Echols' warnings. On September 27, Confederate Sec. of War James A. Seddon ordered Gen. John C. Breckinridge to return to southwest Virginia and take personal command.¹³ Although a political general, Breckinridge had proven himself a competent military commander. In May, 1864 he had saved the Shenandoah Valley from destruction at the battle of New Market. There his ragtag army, including the Cadets of the Virginia Military Institute had defeated a Federal

invading army of superior numbers.

In mid-September, Echols' prediction of a raid into his department became reality. Possibly in an effort to save his failing reputation, Federal Gen. Burbridge had pressed for permission to lead an expedition against the saltworks of southwest Virginia. His commander, Gen. John M. Schofield, approved the request.¹⁴ The Federal plan called for an advance from Mt. Sterling, Ky. On September 20, the main force of three brigades of Kentucky cavalry and mounted infantry, the 12th Ohio Cavalry and 11th Michigan Cavalry headed east. Four days later 600 men of the 5th United States Colored Cavalry (USCC) joined Burbridge's army at Prestonburg, Ky.¹⁵

When word reached Camp Nelson of the impending invasion, the men of the 5th USCC had not yet been officially organized into a regiment. Some of the men had not even enlisted; only a handful of their officers had been appointed and fewer non-commissioned officers were at their posts. Command of the group went to Col. James. F. Wade, who would eventually command the 6th USCC. With the assistance of Col. Brisbin, the officers hastily attempted to organize an untrained mob of recruits into an effective fighting force.¹⁶ The men of the 5th were issued Enfield infantry rifles, (a weapon useless to the cavalry as it cannot be loaded from horseback), untrained horses and supplies.¹⁷

Upon joining the main force at Prestonburg, Brisbin observed that his men "were made the subject of much ridicule and many insulting remarks by the white troops, and in some instances petty outrages, such as pulling off the caps of the colored soldiers, stealing their horses etc."¹⁸ The antagonists included the 5th's old nemesis, the 13th Kentucky Cavalry, whose men had attacked the recruits in Lebanon, Kentucky. While it was common for veteran regiments to tease green troops, the harassment of the 5th included an ugly racial element. Brisbin concluded that "these insults, as well as the jeers and taunts that they would not fight, were born by the colored soldiers patiently . . . in no instance did I hear colored soldiers make any reply to insulting language used toward [them] by white troops."¹⁹

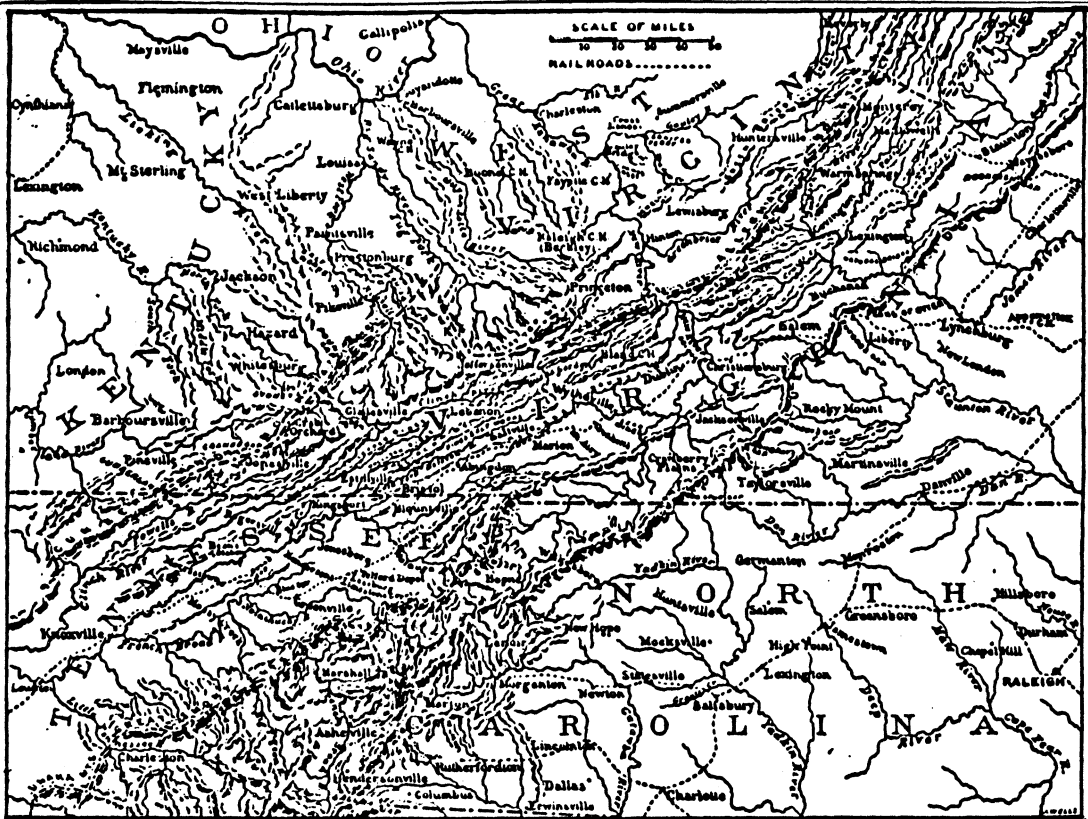
Burbridge's plan called for an advance by three separate routes. He personally took command of Gen. Nathaniel C. McLean's Kentucky division of mounted infantry and cavalry and six mountain howitzers--in all over 4,000 men. He planned to march directly on the saltworks with McLean's division while two other commands would act as a diversion. General Jacob Ammen would hold Bull's Gap, Tenn. blocking the Virginia and Tennessee Railroad with 800 troops, while Gen. Alvan C. Gillem with 1,650 men would advance on Jonesboro, Tenn. The two would then link up and join Burbridge for the assault on Saltville.²⁰

As the Federals prepared for the raid, Confederate Gen. Echols did his best to consolidate his forces. Confederate Sec. of War Seddon dispatched Gen. John S. Williams' 1,700-man cavalry division to Saltville. Originally Williams had been part of an unsuccessful raid with Gen. Joseph Wheeler's cavalry. Williams had been cut off from Wheeler and moved out on a forced march from Bristol, Tenn. into southwest Virginia.²¹

Among the first to arrive in Abingdon was Col. Henry L. Giltner's small Kentucky cavalry brigade. Numbering around 300 men, these veterans belonged to what had been Gen. John Hunt Morgan's renowned cavalry command. Following Morgan's death at Greeneville, Tenn. in September 1864, Giltner's command had received orders to report to Gen. Echols in Abingdon.

The Adjutant of Giltner's brigade, Capt. Edwin O. Guerrant, noted in his diary that the welcome his men received in Virginia did not impress him favorably. On September 22, Gurrant and some officers stopped for supper in Abingdon at "Mr H's (his name is not worthy of even my immortality) and got a 4\$ snack--each. The change from E [East] Tenn to Va. is very sudden & unpleasant. The E [East] Tennesseans are far more hospitable than Wn Va's [Western Virginians]"²²

The next day the Confederates at Abingdon learned some of the details of Burbridge's advance. Guerrant noted that



MAP OF OPERATIONS AGAINST THE VIRGINIA AND TENNESSEE RAILROAD, LYNCHBURG, VA., TO KNOXVILLE, TENN.

(Robert U. Johnson and Clarence C. Buel, Battles and Leaders of the Civil War, [New York, 1884-1887] Vol. 1, 478.)

"Mr E. just out from Kentucky" reported the approach of 8,000 Federals toward the saltworks. Echols then dispatched Giltner's brigade to slow the main force advancing on Saltville. In order to counter the combined threat of Ammen and Gillem, Gen. John C. Vaughn and 600 Tenn. cavalrymen headed for Bull's Gap Tenn. Echols also sent all the reserves in the area to cover the approaches to Saltville.²³

At 3 P.M. on September 23, Giltner's brigade left Abingdon on the way to picket Hayter's Gap and the Lousia Fork of the Big Sandy River. Forcing their way through rain and muddy roads, the troopers halted halfway between Saltville and the gap at a farm owned by the Logan family. That night Guerrant complained that "Some of our officers on too intimate terms today with John Barlycorn--." ²⁴

After a night of heavy socializing by the men, Giltner formed his brigade the next morning to hear a speech from Kentucky Congressmen and ex-general Humphrey Marshall. The Congressman's reputation for overindulgence and fraternization had led to his leaving the Confederate army and going into politics.²⁵ Marshall then confessed in his remarks that "tho' absent in body he was always present with them [Kentucky troops] in spirit--and yesterday evening got too much 'in the spirit' & 'was absent without leave' last night."²⁶

Guerrant and his messmate, Capt. Barney Giltner Col.

Giltner's young cousin, listened as Marshall filled the brigade in on all the news from Richmond. The orator borrowed a line from Gen. U. S. Grant by stating that the Confederacy should "fight it out on this line if it took forever". Marshall then told the Kentucky troops that it was their duty to take their home state back from the Federal government. "We would have to fight a year or more longer, up to our ears in blood," he warned. Captain Barney Giltner then interrupted Marshall and insisted that he had only contracted to fight with the army until he was "knee deep" in blood.²⁷

At 3 P.M. the brigade resumed its march to Hayter's Gap. Giltner's command consisted of the 4th Kentucky Cavalry, 10th Kentucky Cavalry, 10th Kentucky Mounted Rifles (MR), 64th Virginia Mounted Infantry (MI) and two unattached companies. In all, Giltner had about 300 men available to slow Burbrige's 4,000 man division. While most of the soldiers were veterans of Morgan's famous cavalry, some were less than dependable. Only a month before, Giltner had complained that the 64th Va. had a desertion rate of over 50% and had become completely insubordinate.²⁸

The command marched through the rugged country down the "Devils Stair Steps." The Troopers then dismounted and walked their horses to the top of Clinch Mountain. After dark the command halted and bivouacked three miles from the

crest of the mountain near Bethel Baptist Church.²⁹

That night, in a complete contrast to the previous evening's activities, members of the brigade joined in with the locals for a religious revival at the church. Guerrant (who would become a minister himself) commented that the mountain revival contained "such shouting I never heard." After dinner with the mountain preachers, Guerrant and young Giltner spent a rough night sleeping in the pulpit. Early on September 26, Guerrant wrote in his diary that "Barney [Giltner] discoursed feelingly this morning on the virtues of feather beds. --[it seems he] Could never outlive his attachment to them."³⁰

Later in the day Col. Giltner received word from Gen. Echols on the Federal advance. Echols had dispatched the local Tazewell militia under Gen. Rees P. Bowen to block the passes through Buchanan. Echols also informed Giltner that the Union force included "600 Yankee Negroes [sic]". Guerrant noted that "these great preparations indicate an invasion on a scale surpassing anything yet undertaken [by the Federals into southwest Virginia]." Giltner then sent the 10th Kentucky MR to picket the Richlands and Fincastle crossroads and the old court house at Russell.³¹

On September 27, Burbrige's Federal army left Prestonburg. Passing over roads that had been severely neglected during the war, the command advanced through Pikeville, pushed a small party of Confederate pickets from

their path, and camped for the evening. This would be their last full night's rest during the operation. Here Burbridge prepared his men for the campaign. He first ordered the baggage train to the rear; each horse was then loaded with two bushels of corn to be carried behind the saddles. Burbridge's force would travel without any wagons or ambulances. Each man would be mounted. Mules would carry the six small mountain howitzers that would serve as artillery.³²

Confederate Col. Giltner remained at his headquarters at Bethel Baptist Church near Hayter's Gap for the next several days. He was aware of the Federal approach. On September 27, several members of the brigade reached headquarters from Kentucky. They informed the command of the latest atrocities in their home state. Burbridge had "ordered that anyone Traveling by night should be fired on as a Thief or a robber."³³ The men of Giltner's Kentucky brigade had many personal scores to settle with Burbridge. Rather than fighting an unknown army from the North, most of the Federal army they faced were Kentucky Union troops. The Yankees were their neighbors, relatives, and ex-slaves, and any fight would likely become a personal affair. Yet Giltner's men remained far from optimistic. They knew that their little 300-man brigade could do little to slow Burbridge's thousands.

Giltner also received word that more local militia

were being summoned up and that Gen. Williams' cavalry brigade would soon be in Virginia. One over-optimistic message ended by stating that "everything working well as Great resources in Dept . . ." After reading the dispatch and receiving more information on the scope to the Federal advance, Capt. Barney Giltner passed off the optimistic talk as being little more than "Grave Yard Whistling."³⁴

On the night of September 29, the Federal force crested Laurel Mountain. A severe storm battered the column. Captain Mason of the 12th Ohio Cavalry reported that "the horrors of that night march eclipsed all previous experiences of the regiment." With treacherous footing and zero visibility, the path across Laurel Mountain became perilous to soldiers and their mounts. Mason added that "from time to time a hapless horse would step beyond the narrow brink, and a cry of despair, followed by a dull crash many feet below would be the only requiem of beast and rider. In this way eight men were lost." Several men were rescued with ropes.³⁵

That night Guerrant learned the Federals had pushed the Southern pickets into Virginia and noted in his diary that the "Yankee Column-8,000 strong, rushing into the state. Will be in Richlands in 40 miles of the Saltwork tonight."

Colonel Giltner did all he could to slow the Federals. During the night he attempted to reenforce his pickets by

sending Col. Ed Trimble's 10th Kentucky Cavalry with 150 men through the storm to Richlands.³⁶ On the morning of the 30th, Burbrige's army rested until noon before resuming its advance.³⁷ Giltner used the opportunity to withdraw his command back to Liberty Hill. He also prepared for the worse-case scenario by sending his lead horses, cattle, and baggage train south of the Virginia and Tennessee Railroad. This action protected his supplies in case the brigade was overrun.³⁸

That afternoon Trimble's small command attempted to make a stand at Cedar Bluff. Federals used numbers to their advantage and easily flanked Trimble with 100 dismounted men of the 11th Michigan Cavalry.³⁹ The overwhelmed Confederates then fell back to Hayter's Gap. Trimble held the pass until word arrived that Burbrige had flanked him a second time by traveling north through Jeffersonville (now Tazewell). Giltner then consolidated his entire brigade at the foot of Clinch Mountain near the farm of militia Gen. Reese T. Bowen.⁴⁰

Establishing his headquarters at George Gillespie's farm, Giltner sent 100 men to Paint Lick Gap. He also sent Capt. Jenkins' independent company toward Jeffersonville. Giltner next dispatched Capt. Gose and his Burks Garden militia to picket the Lebanon road. He left Guerrant at headquarters and departed for Liberty Hill Gap. Around midnight, the sound of gunfire from the direction of Gen.

Bowen's place awakened Guerrant. Knowing that Gose's untrained militia were at Bowen's, Guerrant decided to ignore the firing by chalking it up to nervous and inexperienced militia. Yet the gunfire soon increased, and Guerrant shortly received the order to "move out". Federal troops had overrun Giltner's brigade in the darkness.⁴¹

At Bowen's, Gose and his militia had been surprised in the darkness. They managed to kill at least one Federal before falling back.⁴² Guerrant retreated up Clinch Mountain and sent word to Giltner of the attack. He also attempted to recall all the pickets, but Capt. Jenkins' company would remain cut off from the rest of the Confederate forces for the next two days.⁴³

The Federals halted at Gen. Bowen's for the night. Aware that the General commanded some of the militia in the area, the Federals striped his farm of food and forage.⁴⁴ Late that night, Guerrant found Col. Giltner in a dilapidated cabin on the side of the mountain. Guerrant found the shack to be about as clean as a nearby pig-sty and elected to sleep out on the side of a cliff.⁴⁵

The next morning, the brigade awakened in the rain to find Burbrige's army in full view below them. Guerrant used his telescope to watch the Federals as they continued to loot Bowen's farm and cook their breakfast. He estimated the size of the Union force and noted that it included "400 negro soldiers."

Giltner used the early morning hours to deploy his small brigade. The road going up Clinch mountain takes a cutback course with many zig-zags as it travels up the northwestern face of the mountain. Giltner sent the 10th Kentucky Cavalry to the next gap and dismounted the remainder of the brigade along the side of the mountain. The Colonel then placed 64th Va. on the flank and the 4th and 10th Kentucky MR held the road.⁴⁶

At 9 A.M. Burbridge left camp and advanced toward the foot of Clinch Mountain. One Confederate, George Dallas Mosgrove of the 4th Kentucky Cavalry was impressed at the Union approach. "The long, blue columns as they debouched from their camps made a magnificent panoramic display. On they came on a serpentine course, bugles sounding and panoplied in all the pomp and circumstance of war."⁴⁷ Knowing they comprised the only force between Burbridge and Saltville, the 300-man force of Col. Giltner's command realized that they had to slow the Federal advance until more support could arrive.⁴⁸

At 10 A.M. the head of the Federal column came within range of the Confederate line. A quick volley emptied several saddles and sent the head of the column scurrying off to dismount and prepare to fight on foot. The Federals reorganized, advanced, and opened fire on the Confederates in the cut-back road above them. The 12th Ohio Cavalry suffered one man killed and two men wounded as they pushed

up the mountain.⁴⁹ The skirmish continued at a distance of 300 yards with little progress made by either side. After a half-hour, Giltner ordered his Confederate brigade to fall back.

Upon hearing the order, Capt. Guerrant lost his temper. He protested to Col. Giltner that his troops could hold the road longer. Guerrant contended that the brigade needed to put up a stronger resistance if the saltworks were to survive. He added that "we had heard nothing from Echols or anybody since [the] 28th [and he] knew there was nobody at the Saltworks but [the] . . . militia led by that old imbecile 'Mudfence Jackson'." Giltner explained that he believed the Confederates in danger of being flanked, and "concluded to go along free & easy, & let things take their course." He ordered trees cut across the road as the men fell back to their horses and moved to the next mountaintop.⁵⁰

The Confederates retreated to the crest of Flat Top Mountain and dismounted again astride the road. Giltner placed the 64th Va. and 10th Kentucky Cavalry across the main road and sent the 4th Kentucky Cavalry and 10th Kentucky MR. along a second approach. At 2 P.M. the Federals attacked again. Giltner's brigade held its position until the dismounted Federals overran the Confederate left flank. This time the Confederates retreated to Laurel Gap, (known today as Low Gap). This was

their final position of the day.⁵¹

At Laurel Gap, Giltner found Col. Robert H. Smith's militia battalion from Tazewell guarding the position. Giltner ordered Smith and his 250 "old men & boys" to guard the smaller gaps towards the saltworks while he organized his command for a third stand. Guerrant described the gap as "the strongest natural position in this country; but like all others liable to be flanked."

The gap is a narrow gorge surrounded on each side by high cliffs. On the left side of the gap, Giltner sent the 4th Kentucky Cavalry and 10th Kentucky MR on the right he posted the 64th Va. Finally, Giltner sent Trimble's 10th Kentucky Cavalry down the valley behind the mountains to prevent the brigade from being cut off from the saltworks in case they were flanked.⁵²

The Confederates received a short period of rest to feed their horses. Guerrant took the opportunity to find a meal for himself. He arrived at the home of William C. Sexton, who was either with the militia or hiding in the mountains.⁵³ His wife and children remained at the house. Guerrant found that her capitalist spirit was not at all dampened by the prospect of a battle on her doorstep. He sarcastically noted that "the 'ruling passion strong in death' made the good oldlady [sic] charge [only] \$3. for dinner."⁵⁴

Around 5 P.M. the Federals arrived at the gap. This

time they lost no time in dismounting and assaulting the position. Once again the Northerners' had no intention of scaling the cliffs directly in front. They held their position and sent a flanking force around the Confederate right. The 37th Kentucky (Federal) MI took the lead in a flank attack on the 64th Va. MI.⁵⁵ The Virginians lived up to their poor reputation and ran from the field. In the attack the 37th lost one man killed and several wounded as Giltner's entire brigade then fell back in the direction of Saltville.⁵⁶

Now finding her home surrounded by Burbrige's army, Mrs. Sexton made a deal with a Federal officer to prevent them from ransacking her home. She agreed to take care of one of the more seriously wounded men, (likely a member of the 37th Kentucky MI) if the Federals would not violate her home.⁵⁷ Burbrige's army then went into camp along the Holston River, only two miles from Saltville.

The order to camp for the night surprised men on both sides. As Giltner retreated toward the saltworks, he split his command at a fork in the road. The road leading from the gap and Broadford area split across the Holston with both roads then following a parallel path to Saltville. Giltner personally crossed the river with the 64th Va. MI and 10th Kentucky MR and sent Trimble with Guerrant and the 10th and 4th Kentucky Cavalry regiments down the main river road. About a mile and a half from the Federal camp,

Trimble stopped and sent pickets forward to watch Burbrige. The men began tearing up a bridge over the Holston to slow Burbrige the next morning.⁵⁸ Confederate George Mosgrove noted that the Federals were "arrogant and jubilant"⁵⁹ at their easy victory, yet they made no effort to press their advantage by taking Saltville that evening.⁶⁰

During the day in Saltville, Gen. Alfred E. "Mudwall" Jackson attempted to distribute the militia as they arrived. Jackson had a poor reputation with the troops; his problems were exacerbated when he attempted to control the disorganized commands as they arrived. Jackson sent 400 unarmed men, who had recently enlisted in Dibrell's cavalry brigade, to Abingdon for weapons. His troubles compounded, the enlistees had no desire to follow Jackson or any other "militia" officer and promptly mutinied.⁶¹

Throughout the day Jackson deployed various militia units to the gaps surrounding the saltworks. At McCready's Gap, Col. Robert Preston of the militia reported that 300 of the men sent to him were in a "state of perfect insubordination" and sent them out of the way to Tumbling Creek Gap.⁶² After Giltner retreated from Laurel Gap, the militia consolidated at Saltville.

The country around Saltville became a scene of panic with news of the Federal invasion. The entire militia of southwest Virginia from Roanoke County and west had been called up, while the rest of the civilian population

attempted to stay clear of the Federal path. One witness noted: "The roads were crammed and blocked with cattle, sheep, negroes, wagons, buggies and great numbers of citizens and their families." Even Abingdon was deserted, "with the exception of a very few old men, women and children."⁶³ The roads leading from Saltville were packed with civilians attempting to leave as the militia tried to consolidate at the town.

During the day, seventeen-year-old 2nd Lt. John H. Wise joined Col. Robert Preston's militia. Wise had attended the Virginia Military Institute and had seen combat with the cadets at the battle of New Market. Using the political connections of his father who was an ex-governor and general, Wise had secured a commission as a Lieutenant and drillmaster of Virginia militia.⁶⁴ When Wise reported to Col. Preston, he found that "Colonel Bob" was "short, thick-set, and had an immense snow-white beard, extending nearly to his sword-belt." Wise concluded that Preston's "appearance, figure beard, marry twinkling eye, and ruddy face instantly suggested Santa Claus."⁶⁵

Wise also commented upon the appearance of Preston's battalion of southwest Virginia militia. He found them in "every stage of manhood, from immature boyhood to decrepit old age. One of his companies drawn up in line looked as irregular as a pile of barrel-hoops. There was no pretense of uniform; they wore everything, from straw hats to coon-

skin caps." Their Belgian rifles and cartridge boxes provided the only vestige of military appearance the unit had.⁶⁶

That evening, Col. Robert Preston's battalion arrived in Saltville. Upon reporting to Gen. Alfred E. "Mudwall" Jackson, the general informed Preston: "Kernel, ... my men tell me the Yanks have a lot of niger soldiers along. Do you think your reserves will fight niggers?"

"Fight'em?" replied Preston, "by _____, Sir, they'll eat'em up! No! Not eat'em up! That's too much! By _____, Sir, we'll cut'em up!"⁶⁷

Jackson knew how close the Federals were and hurried off a dispatch to Gen. Echols in Abingdon: "Doubtless an attack will be made on this place early to-morrow. If reinforcements are not sent to-night it will probably be too late."⁶⁸

That night, as Wise bivouacked on the field with Preston, the Colonel asked the boy "What the devil did they send you here for any-how?" The old Colonel then answered his own question: "Oh I know! They sent you to keep my back warm. I told [Maj. Gen. James L.] Kemper I had rheumatics, and he sent you to snuggle up to me o'nights. Come on to bed."⁶⁹

Like Burbrige, Federal Gen. Gillem's force also enjoyed success on October 1. Gillem had united with Ammen's command in order to push the Confederates from

Jonesborough, Tenn. After a brief skirmish at Jonesborough on September 29, the Federals pushed Vaughn's command to Carter's Station along the Watauga River. On October 1, Gillem forced the Confederates from works along the river. He was preparing to join Burbridge's main force at Saltville when a courier arrived from Gen. William T. Sherman. Confederate Gen. Nathan Bedford Forrest's command was threatening Sherman's supply line to Atlanta. Sherman canceled Burbridge's entire operation and ordered them to move into Tennessee to block Forrest. Gillem started for Tennessee on October 1, yet Burbridge would not receive the order for another two days.⁷⁰

Perhaps Burbridge was content that night to rest upon his laurels. He had just crossed some of the most rugged terrain in the east coast, and had gotten closer to the saltworks than any previous Union commander. Although opposed by Col. Giltner's veterans, Burbridge had brushed all resistance aside easily. The next morning, Burbridge expected to find only the remnants of Giltner's beaten brigade along with the local militia. He had no reason to anticipate much resistance from the "old men and boys" of southwest Virginia.

Notes

1. Dudley Taylor Cornish, The Sable Arm: Black Troops in the Union Army, 1861-1865 (Kansas, 1956), 205-6.

2. Morris J. MacGregor and Bernard C. Nalty (eds.), Blacks in the United States Armed Forces; Basic Documents, (Wilmington, 1977), I, 7-9.

3. James M. McPherson, The Negro's Civil War, (New York, 1965, 1991 ed.), 211-12. Originally published in the Anglo-African, 24 Sept. 1864.

4. Ibid.

5. O.R. 3:5, 122.

6. National Archives, Military Record Group 94, "Regimental Personal Descriptions, Orders, Letters, Guard Reports, Council of Administration, Fund Accounts, Telegrams and Clothing accounts of Noncommissioned staff, Vol. 1. 5th United States Colored Cavalry." Hereafter cited as N.A. R.G. 94.

7. Ibid.

8. N.A. R.G. 94. Lt. Col. L. Henry Carpenter 5th USCC to Capt. O. Bates Dickson.

9. Joseph T. Glatthaar, Forged in Battle: The Civil War Alliance of Black Soldiers and White Officers (New York, 1991), 68.

10. O.R. 1:43, pt. 2, 864.

11. Ibid.

12. O.R. 1:43, pt. 2, 864.

13. O.R. 1:39, pt. 2. 887.

14. Davis, "Massacre" 4.

15. O.R. 1:39, pt. 1, 556.

16. N.A. R.G. 94, Box 5317, Muster Roll of the Field and Staff of the 5th United States Colored Cavalry.

17. N.A. R.G. 94. 28 Oct 1864. Burbridge order stating that all men not previously armed were to be supplied with Enfield rifles, an infantry weapon.

18. O.R. 1:39, pt. 1, 557.

19. Ibid.

20. Ibid., 556.

21. O.R. 1:39, pt. 2, 877. While Seddon's order is dated Sept. 27, 1864, Guerrant noted in his diary on the 19th "that Williams was on the way." Edward Owings Guerrant, "Edward Owings Guerrant Diary," in Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina Library.

22. Guerrant diary, Sept. 23, 1864.

23. O.R. 1:39, pt. 1, 560; Davis, "Massacre," 6.

24. Guerrant diary, Sept. 23, 1864.

25. Mark M. Boatner III, The Civil War Dictionary (New York, 1987), 512.

26. Guerrant diary, Sept. 14, 1864.

27. Ibid.

28. O.R. 1:39 pt. 2. 877.

29. Guerrant diary, Sept. 26, 1864.

30. Ibid.

31. Ibid.

32. F.H. Mason, The Twelfth Ohio Cavalry; A record of its Organization, and Services in the War of the Rebellion, Together with a Complete Roster of the Regiment, (Cleveland, 1871), 59-61.

33. Guerrant diary, Sept. 27, 1864.

34. Ibid.

35. Mason, 12th Ohio Cavalry, 61.

36. Guerrant diary, Sept. 29, 1864.

37. Mason, 12th Ohio Cavalry, 62.

38. Guerrant diary, Sept. 30, 1864.

39. John Robertson (comp.), Michigan in the Civil War, (Lansing, 1882), 572. The 11th lost one man killed and two wounded in the fight.

40. Guerrant diary, Sept. 30, 1864. General Reese Tate Bowen commanded the 28th Brigade of militia. The brigade consisted of 112th Regt. (Tazewell County), 182nd Regt. (Buchanan County) and the 177th Regt. (Russell County). Lee A. Wallace Jr. A Guide to Virginia Military Organizations, (2nd Ed. Lynchburg, Va. 1986.) 276.

41. Guerrant diary, Sept. 30, 1864.

42. Robertson, Michigan in the War, 572. The 11th Michigan Cavalry had one man killed and one wounded in the midnight fight. They also had 1 killed and two wounded in the skirmishing earlier in the day.

43. Guerrant diary, Sept. 30, 1864.

44. Mason, 12th Ohio Cavalry, 63.

45. Guerrant diary, Oct. 1, 1864.

46. Ibid.

47. Mosgrove, Kentucky Cavaliers, 198.

48. Ibid.

49. Mason, 12th Ohio Cavalry, 63.

50. Guerrant diary, Oct. 1, 1864.

51. Ibid.

52. Ibid.

53. Mrs. Mary Sexton Fellers, "Burbrige Raid on Saltville," presented to the Holston Chapter, U.D.C. in 1913, Smyth County Museum Archives. Photocopy courtesy of Michael E. Holmes, Saltville, Va.

54. Guerrant diary, Oct. 1, 1864.

55. Robertson, Michigan in the War, 572.

56. Guerrant diary, Oct. 1, 1864. Mason, 12th Ohio Cavalry, 66, stated that Burbrige's entire command felt they had missed their only chance at Saltville by not taking the works on the night of Oct. 1.

57. Fellers, "Burbrige Raid."
58. Mosgrove, Kentucky Cavaliers, 119; Guerrant diary, Oct. 1, 1864.
59. Ibid.
60. Ibid.
61. John Berrien Lindsley (ed.) The Military Annals of Tennessee, Confederate, (Nashville, 1886), 671.
62. O.R. 39:1, 560.
63. Unknown author "The Battle of Saltville" United Daughters of the Confederacy, Smyth County Historical Society Archives, ca. 1913. Photocopies from the collection of Mr. Michael E. Holmes, Saltville, Va.
64. John S. Wise, The End of an Era, (Boston, 1901), 317.
65. Ibid, 343-4. Colonel Robert Taylor Preston had been colonel of the 28th Virginia during the first year of the war. Frank Fields, Jr. 28th Virginia Infantry, (Lynchburg, Va. 1985), 11.
66. Wise, End of an Era, 374-5.
67. Ibid., 379. Saltville marked the end of Gen. Alfred E. "Mudwall" Jackson's lackluster career. Guerrant spoke for many Confederates when he referred to "that old imbecile 'Mudfence Jackson'." Shortly after Saltville (for unspecified reasons), Jackson was declared unfit for field service in the Confederate army. Boatner, Civil War Dictionary, 430.
68. O.R. 1:39, pt. 1, 560.
69. Wise, End of an Era, 380.
70. O.R. 1:39, pt. 1, 558.

Chapter III

"We surely slew negroes that day." ¹

A foggy and cold morning greeted both sides as they prepared for the impending struggle. General Burbrige's hopes were high. As far as he knew, the only Confederate troops between his army and the saltworks were Giltner's weary command and a few "old men and boys" from the local militia. Yet even as his Federals were cooking their breakfast, the Confederates were reinforcing Saltville.

The Federals quickly organized and advanced down the two roads leading to Saltville. Along the Saltville road following the river, Trimble, Guerrant, the 10th Kentucky Cavalry, and 4th Kentucky Cavalry were in the process of saddling when they heard the sound of firing. The sound came from the right, where Col. Giltner and the 64th Virginia Mounted Infantry and 10th Kentucky Mounted Rifles had spent the night. Trimble ordered his 10th Kentucky to mount up; and leaving the 4th along the river road, he then traveled back up the river to support the rest of the brigade.²

The road travels north from Saltville along a flat clear area of Broady Bottom, following the North Fork of the Holston river as it narrows into a steep gorge. Here the road follows the river in making a sharp turn to the east.

The Federals drove Giltner from the field. When Trimble and the 10th Kentucky Cavalry arrived, they stood alone in the face of Burbrige's thousands. As the 10th came around the corner, it met a terrific fire from Federals and quickly wheeled to the right up the steep slope of the right bank. The regiment became disorganized as men panicked and retreated into the woods.³

Once out of the direct line of fire, Trimble reformed his regiment. He managed to countercharge and drive some of the Federals who had overrun their units back to the main body. Bypassing Trimble on the hillside, a Federal brigade then charged down the Saltville Road and into the 4th Kentucky Cavalry. Against overwhelming odds, the men of the 4th managed to hold their ground for about twenty minutes before retiring. This action gave Col. Giltner an opportunity to consolidate the rest of his brigade on Sanders' Hill.⁴

As the 4th Kentucky Cavalry held the river road, Giltner placed the 10th Kentucky Mounted Rifles and the 64th Virginia Mounted Infantry in line of battle along the crest of Sanders' Hill. Immediately behind Giltner's

brigade were 400 "old men and boys" of Col. Robert H. Smith's 13th Battalion of Virginia Reserves from Smyth, Washington, Tazewell and Russell counties. The reserves were barricading themselves in "Governor" Sanders' house, located halfway down a steep ravine leading to Cedar Branch. Noting the strength of his position on Sanders' Hill, Giltner attempted to entice Smith's men to join him. Yet the reserves refused and left Giltner alone once again to face Burbrige's army.⁵

The Confederate defensive line followed the rough terrain surrounding Saltville. Northeast of town Sanders' Hill and Chestnut Ridge dominate the area. Between the two hills runs Cedar Branch, a small stream in a deep ravine that passes close to "Governor" James Sanders' house and empties into the North Fork of the Holston River near the river road ford. To the left of the ford, the Confederates had fortified the yard of a small log church near Elizabeth Cemetery.

As the 4th Kentucky Cavalry crossed the ford after its delaying action, Federals took the opportunity to charge. Coming to the aid of the 4th, Tremble's 10th Kentucky Cavalry delivered a fierce volley from Sanders' Hill into the Federal flank while the 4th dismounted to fight on foot. Trimble's flank attack forced the enemy back.⁶

The Federals then focused their attention on the 64th Virginia Mounted Infantry and 10th Kentucky Mounted Rifles,

still holding Sanders' Hill. Giltner sent for the 4th Kentucky; but before they could climb the hill, the Federals forced him to fall back. Giltner then formed his brigade on Chestnut Ridge.⁷

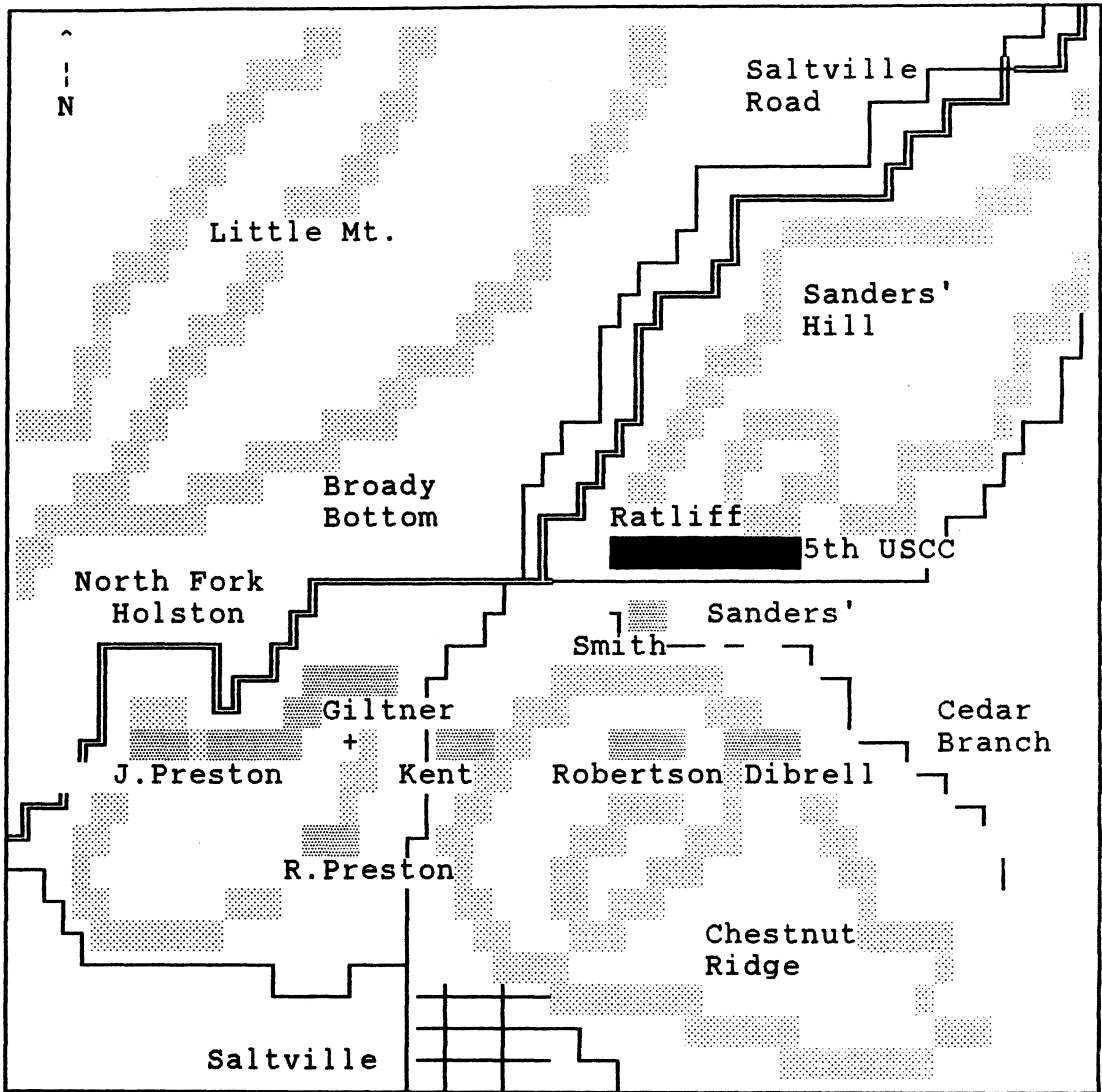
As Giltner's brigade fell back to Chestnut Ridge, a cheer rang up and down the Confederate line. General "Cerro Gordo" Williams had arrived with two brigades from his cavalry division.⁸ "Old Cerro Gordo" (a nickname he earned for his heroism during the Mexican War) began directing the troops as his men dismounted with every fourth man designated as a horse holder. Mosgrove noted Williams' appearance as being "massive, tall and commanding, the picture of robust health."⁹ The Confederates considered him a "fighter" and believed that "he never ran away so long as he could get a man to stand. He went into a fight storming and swearing; stormed and swore during the battle. And after the fight he swore all the same, in victory or defeat."¹⁰ As Williams directed the positioning of troops, he began to swear and did not let up for the remainder of the day.¹¹

Williams used the mountains and the Holston River as a natural defence. The Confederate right rested on Chestnut Ridge, along it he placed Dibrell's brigade with the 8th Tennessee Cavalry on the far right. To Dibrell's left he placed Robertson's 250-man brigade. In addition to Smith's reserves at Sanders' house, Williams also had three other

local reserve battalions, for a total of close to 700 of the local troops. Williams placed Colonel Joseph F. Kent's battalion from Wythe, Carroll and Grayson counties at the base of Chestnut ridge at the log church along the Saltville road. Next he ordered Giltner's brigade to defend the bluffs commanding the river.¹²

Giltner positioned his battalion starting with the 10th Kentucky Cavalry dismounting at the ford. To the left of the ford, along the bluffs of the Holston, Giltner put the 10th Kentucky Mounted Rifles, 64th Virginia Mounted Infantry, 4th Kentucky Cavalry. To the left of Giltner, Williams sent 120 men of Col. James T. Preston's reserves from the Saltville area.¹³ The final battalion of reserves belonged to Col. Robert Preston. Williams sent his reserves to the rear of Giltner's line in a ravine out of the line of fire.¹⁴

Two batteries also supported the Confederate line. Captain Hugh L. W. McClung's Tennessee battery dug in along the crest of Chestnut Ridge, while Capt. John W. Barr's Virginia battery fortified the yard of the log church where their fire could dominate the ford. The Confederates quickly attempted to find the range of Burbrige's men. One observer noted that the sound of the artillery in the valley had an interesting effect, "the roar of one cannon



Map not to scale.

- | | | | |
|---|---------|---|-------------|
| — | Road | ▨ | Confederate |
| — | River | ■ | Federal |
| ▨ | Contour | | |

sounded like a full battery of columbards."¹⁵ The Federals, however, quickly found that their six inefficient mountain howitzers were no match for the Confederate 12- and 6 pound howitzers.¹⁶

While many had great expectations of "Cerro Gordo" Williams, Guerrant in his diary recorded that "Our commanding officer [Williams] posted the men & let them fight it out. No generalship was displayed afterwards."

While Old Cerro Gordo "Stormed & swore [and] nothing more," Mudwall Jackson passively watched the battle with his telescope from the crest of Chestnut Ridge. For the Confederates, the battle would be fought by battalion and brigade commanders.¹⁷

After pushing in Giltner's battalion, Federals concentrated their efforts on Smith's exposed position at Sanders' house. Known as "Governor" because of his position in the community, the 60 year old Sanders joined the reserves outside. His wife and children barricaded themselves in a large fireplace in the house-using feather mattresses and pillows to cover the opening¹⁸.

Smith's reserves defiantly refused suggestions to retreat to the Confederate line along Chestnut Ridge. Over 2,000 Federals charged and overwhelmed Smith's exposed command. Attacking in three columns, with both mounted and dismounted troops, the Federals overran the 400 reserves at the house. The scene amazed all who witnessed it. Old men

and boys who were hardly expected to fight, attempted to hold their ground and even engaged in hand-to-hand fighting with the Federals.¹⁹

The sight astonished Guerrant; it was one of the most stubborn conflicts he had ever witnessed. The reserves fought with "more courage than prudence" before they fell back from Sanders' house to the Confederate line along Chestnut Ridge. The 400 reserves in Smith's 13th battalion lost 85 men killed, wounded, and missing in the action.

The scene moved Mosgrove as well. He "beheld gray-haired men and fair-haired boys lying side by side pale in death, slain at the threshold of their homes, on their native Virginia soil."²⁰

Although the fighting riddled the Sanders home, the family remained unharmed in its fortified fireplace. The Governor became a prisoner and, according to one witness, his captors brought him before Gen. Burbrige. When the General asked Sanders what unit had occupied his property, the answer amazed him. Burbrige refused to believe it was only the local men of Smith's reserves.²¹

The Confederates had been able to scrape together around 2,800 troops to face a force of 4,500 Federals. Yet Burbrige never used his full force. Instead, he broke up the units to make several unsupported attacks on the Confederate works without ever bringing into battle over 2,500 men at one time.²²

The first attack came on the Confederate right along Chestnut Ridge. About halfway up, Confederates had dug a series of rifle pits. Their main works being along the crest of the ridge. The attack on the forward line came as the Federals continued their advance down Sanders' Hill and up Chestnut Ridge in front of Felix H. Robertson's and George D. Dibrell's small brigades.

While small parts of regular Confederate cavalry regiments made up Robertson's unit, Dibrell's brigade had a more interesting past. His regiments were actually General Nathan Bedford Forrest's "Old Brigade". Forrest had raised, equipped and trained the unit in the fall of 1862 and led it for a year. In the fall of 1863, Dibrell became commander of the brigade. It was soon detached from Forrest to become part of Wheeler's cavalry corps. At Saltville the brigade formed the van of William's division.²³

The battle began in earnest at round 10 A.M. as Federals made a series of dismounted charges upon Chestnut Ridge. The Yankees decided to attack on foot after seeing the strength of the Confederate position. After two unsuccessful attempts to take the works, Ratliff's brigade prepared to make a final assault up the ridge. This time the 5th USCC, 12th Ohio Cavalry, and 11th Michigan Cavalry would make a dismounted assault up the hill. ²⁴

Accounting for horse holders and stragglers, around

400 men of the 5th USCC fell in line with the rest of the brigade.²⁵ The 5th formed on the Federal left.²⁶ As the Federal battle line formed, Dibrell's Confederate scouts could hear a speech given to Ratliff's brigade by an officer whom they assumed to be Burbrige. The officer encouraged the men in their efforts and stated that depriving the Confederates of the saltworks would do more to bring down the Confederacy than the capture of Richmond.²⁷

Ratliff's brigade advanced down an overgrown ravine behind Sanders' farm, crossed Cedar Branch, then moved up Chestnut Ridge. Confederate and Federal skirmishers met in the dense undergrowth in the ravine. One Federal observed: "More than once duels took place between individuals at a distance of not more than half-a-dozen paces-each firing at a noise heard beyond until a groan or a cessation of the firing announced that the heard but not unseen enemy was dead. At other times a rebel would pop out from behind a tree or rock only a few feet from an advancing Yankee, and then it was the quickest and surest shot of the two who lived to tell the story." ²⁸

Sergeant Jeremiah Davis, the guidon bearer for Company H, 12th Ohio Cavalry, found himself in a hand-to-hand fight for his colors with a Confederate. With no help in sight, and only the flag for a weapon, Davis "harpooned his enemy with the sharp spear head of the flagstaff-the brazen point

passing through the rebel and appearing between his lower ribs on the opposite side."²⁹ After much in-close fighting, the Federals emerged from the undergrowth in front of the Confederate works.

As Ratliff's line appeared at the base of Chestnut Ridge, Confederates in the works recognized that many of the advancing Federals were black troops. Several of the Southerners became enraged. Lieutenant John Web, his brother Thomas Web and several others of the 8th Tennessee Cavalry (Forrest's Old Brigade) jumped from the protection of the Confederate breastworks and attacked the blacks with their pistols. The men of the 5th USCC killed John Web and wounded Thomas and the others.³⁰

As the Federals advanced, they found a space in the line between Robertson's left and Kent's reserves on the right. Robertson withdrew his brigade without warning and left Dibrell with Forrest's Old Brigade almost surrounded. This move also created a large gap in the center of the Confederate line. The Federal attackers took full advantage of the opportunity and pressed the Confederates to the top of the ridge.³¹

The fight then moved to the main Confederate works along the crest of Chestnut Ridge. Armed with Spencer repeating carbines, the men of the 11th Michigan Cavalry and 12th Ohio Cavalry had an extra advantage as they faced Robertson's and Dibrell's men. The 12th Ohio Cavalry

managed to capture a 12-pound howitzer before the Southerners could remove it from the line. Yet the Confederates counterattacked and managed to take it back. While the men in Ratliff's brigade were able to hold onto a section of the main Confederate line, their ammunition began to run low.³²

Many were impressed with the performance of the blacks in the charge. An officer in the 13th Kentucky Cavalry, stated that he "never thought they would fight until he saw them there." He added that he "never saw troops fight like they did. The rebels were firing on them with grape and canister and were mowing them down by the scores but others kept straight on."³³ Leading the blacks as they took the Confederate works, Col. James S. Brisbon of the 5th noted: "I have seen white troops fight in twenty-seven battles and I never saw any fight better".³⁴

Several of the young boys in Col. Robert Preston's reserves had been "sighting their guns and showing on how they would shoot a nigger, if they had a chance."³⁵ With the breach in the left of the line, the boys had their opportunity. Half of Preston's reserves were brought across the road and up to Chestnut Ridge. The militia fought with Ratliff's brigade for fifteen minutes until the crisis had passed. They were then returned to their place as reserves with the loss of one or two men.³⁶

Giltner's men watched the battle along Chestnut Ridge

until their attention was brought to their own front at the ford. The Federals launched a second attack on Giltner. Hobson's brigade made the advance from three angles, all converging upon Trimble's 10th Kentucky Cavalry at the ford. One column advanced down Sanders' Hill, a second advanced following the river and a third across Broady Bottom. Union troops drove Giltner from the ford as he attempted to consolidate his brigade.³⁷

As the Southerners fell back, artillery at the church helped compensate for their lack in numbers. The Confederates watched as "one shot killed a major and a captain. At another time a few well-directed shots stampeded a Federal line advancing around the end of Chestnut Ridge."³⁸

Forced back from the river, the Confederates attempted to hold a line in a clearing in front of the log church. Heavily outnumbered, Giltner galloped back to the church and ordered up a battalion of reserves to help Trimble's 10th Kentucky Cavalry. Two companies under Capt. Peter Gallagher from Joseph F. Kent's battalion of reserves responded. The reserves charged up to the grave yard and joined Trimble's line. They then advanced within fifty feet of the Federals, and fired one volley. Gallagher's men then fell back to the church in confusion, leaving fourteen dead and wounded on the field. Their disorganized attack and retreat caused even more chaos in the

Confederate line.³⁹

As Col. Trimble attempted to rally his men, he suddenly "sprang up high in the air, with arms and legs extended full length. He leaped at least five feet, and fell to the ground collapsed and stone dead."⁴⁰ Trimble had been hit in the head with the ball entering just below a star on his hat. His 10th Kentucky Cavalry lost almost all of its officers in the fight and fell back in confusion to the protection of the battery at the church. The Federals did not follow.⁴¹

During the attack at the ford, the sound of gunfire in the rear of the Federal army surprised men on both sides. It was the lost company of Capt. Bart Jenkins, who had been separated from Giltner's brigade at Jeffersonville. Although he had been out of communication with Giltner for two days, Jenkins with a company of local militia stayed with the Federal army and took the opportunity to attack Burbrige's unguarded horses and pack train. The diversion drew off 500 Federals from the attack at the ford. Burbrige repulsed the attack, but it gave him the impression that he was totally surrounded. Jenkins and the militia then retreated to a nearby gap.⁴²

The two Federal assaults now stalled. While Ratliff's brigade maintained a tenuous hold on part of the line on Chestnut Ridge, Hobson's advance came to a standstill in front of the church.⁴³ On the Confederate left, the

Federals made one final assault.

Throughout the day Southerners had watched as Col. Hanson's Federal brigade dismounted and marched up the face of Little Mountain. Hanson planned to take the Confederate's left flank; yet as his command emerged from the woods, the Federals found Southerners posted at the top of a steep cliff on the far side of the Holston River. They were the 4th Kentucky Cavalry and Col. James T. Preston's battalion of local reserves.⁴⁴

The Kentucky troopers discarded the idea of carrying short cavalry muskets and met the Federals with long-range Enfield rifles. As the 4th took aim on the attackers attempting to cross the river, the men challenged the Yankees to "come right up and draw your salt."⁴⁵ One Kentucky trooper, Silas Sims, had a reputation as an excellent marksman. He would fire and yell; "Yank, How's that? Am I shooting too high or too low?"⁴⁶

This final attack failed to dislodge the Confederates and cost the Federals over 100 casualties, including Col. Hanson. Shot in the abdomen, Hanson passed command to the colonel of the 40th Kentucky who was a half-mile in the rear with the reserves. The brigade then fell back in disorder.⁴⁷

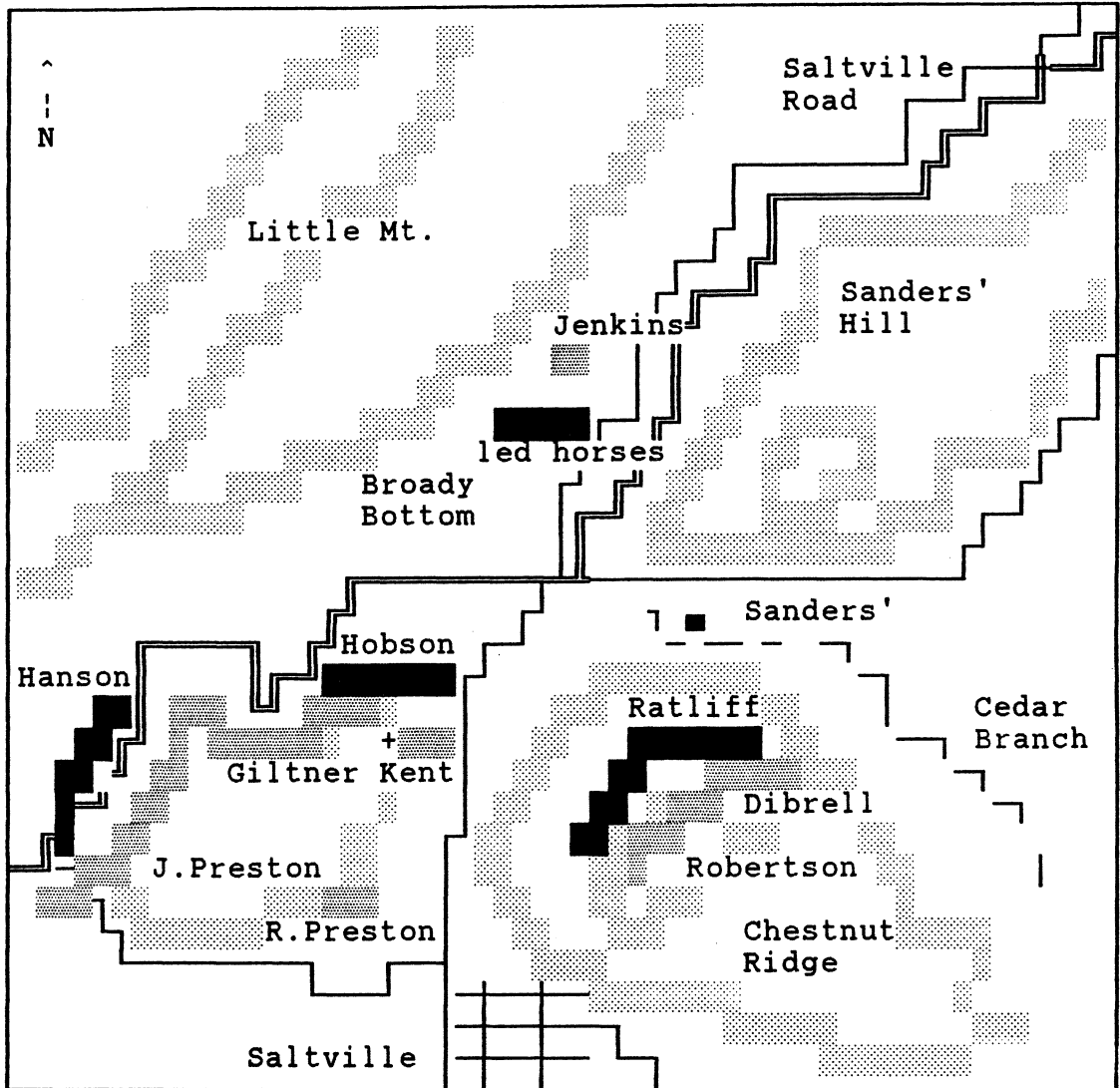
Near 5 P.M., Giltner brought the 4th Kentucky to the church in order to clear the ford of the Federals and recover Trimble's body. A cross fire from Chestnut Ridge

stopped the Confederates. When a battalion of reserves also attempted to retake the ford, it was turned away by the as well.⁴⁸

Around 5 P.M. Burbrige held a council of war at the center of his line, after listening to his officers, he determined to withdrawal his army that night.⁴⁹ The battle lasted from 10 A.M. until dusk. Ratliff's cavalry, including the black troops held the Confederate works until dark. With nightfall, the Federals, out of ammunition and energy, pulled back from their advanced line. They left many dead and wounded on the field.

As the battle ended, Generals Breckinridge and Echols arrived from Abingdon, where they had been coordinating the concentration of troops. Other reinforcements streamed in as well, including Duke's, Cosby's and Vaughn's Confederate cavalry brigades.⁵⁰

With Burbridge's withdrawal from the field, some Confederates advanced into the vacant Union position. Silas Sims of the 4th Kentucky Cavalry found near the ford a dead Federal officer who had been hit in the head by an artillery shell. Sims reached into his haversack, brought forth a handfull of salt and poured it into the open skull. "There, [he said to the corpse,] you came for some salt, now take some."⁵¹



Map not to scale.

- | | | | |
|----|---------|---|-------------|
| — | Road | ▨ | Confederate |
| == | River | ■ | Federal |
| ▨ | Contour | | |

After dark, Guerrant and his aide Mosgrove met with Gen. Felix Robertson. Mosgrove noted that Robertson; "was the youngest looking General in the army, apparently not more than twenty-four years of age, and wearing good cloths, en negligé, gallant and handsome."⁵² Guerrant had never met Robertson before and was impressed that Robertson had recognized him in the dark. During the meeting, the "gallant and handsome" Robertson proudly informed Guerrant that "he had killed nearly all the negroes."⁵³

The Federals built many large fires in order to deceive the Confederates into thinking that they would remain on the field. In reality, Burbridge was quietly heading back to Kentucky.⁵⁴

The black troops knew what was coming. Some of the men captured by the Confederates during the battle had already been murdered. That night, as Burbridge began his retreat, many seriously wounded black soldiers were seen attempting to escape. The commander of the 5th, James Brisbin, looked on in horror as he "saw one man riding with his arm off, another shot through the lungs, and another shot through both hips," all attempting to escape the Confederates. Later Brisbin reported that at least 118 of the 400 men who took part in the fight were killed, wounded or missing.⁵⁵

The saltworks were secure. The Confederates had put up a stout defence with men emptying their cartridge boxes

as many as three times. Some had fired over 100 rounds each. With the timely arrival of reinforcements and the unexpected fortitude of the reserves, the Confederates had won the battle of Saltville.

Notes

1. Lee Smith, "Experiences of a Kentucky Boy Soldier," Confederate Veteran, XX (1912), 440. Smith was a member of the 4th Kentucky Cavalry.

2. Guerrant diary, Oct. 2, 1864.

3. Ibid.

4. Ibid.

5. Ibid; R. A. Brock, Hardesty's Historical and Geographical Encyclopedia...Special Virginia Addition (Richmond, 1884), 95.

6. Guerrant diary, Oct. 2, 1864.

7. Ibid.

8. Wise, End of an era, 381.

9. Mosgrove, Kentucky Cavaliers, 200.

10. Ibid., 68.

11. Ibid., 200.

12. Ibid., 200; Guerrant diary Oct. 2, 1864; Brock, Hardesty's, 95; Wise, End of an Era, 381; Lindsley (ed.), The Military Annals of Tennessee, 671.

13. Ibid.

14. Brock, Hardesty's, 95; Richmond Enquirer, Oct. 8, 1864.

15. Mosgrove, Kentucky Cavaliers, 200.

16. Wise noted that while the Confederate artillery had opened with 6-pound shell at a distance of one mile, the Federal howitzers were unable to elevate enough to respond. Wise, End of an Era, 381.

17. Guerrant diary, Oct. 2, 1864.

18. William B. Kent, A History of Saltville, Virginia (Radford, Va., 1955), 31.

19. Mosgrove, Kentucky Cavaliers, 200.

20. Guerrant diary, Oct. 2, 1864; Richmond Enquirer, Oct. 8, 1864; Mosgrove, Kentucky Cavaliers, 202.

21. Guerrant noted that the 400 "old men & little boys" lost some 20 to 30 killed and as many captured. The Richmond Dispatch reported on Oct. 12, 1864, that Smith's reserves lost 21 prisoners before they evacuated Sanders' farm. Mosgrove added that the 400 reserves at Sanders were overwhelmed by 2,000 Federals with at least 30 of Smith's men being killed. The Richmond Enquirer on Oct. 8, 1864 reported the casualties of the reserves in detail: Col. Robert H. Smith's battalion, 13 killed; 51 wounded; 21 captured. The Federals also held James Sanders until the end of the war.

Mosgrove, Kentucky Cavaliers, 200; Lee A. Wallace, Jr., Guide to Virginia Military Organizations 1861-1865 (Lynchburg, Va., 1986) 223; Richmond Enquirer Oct. 8, 1864; Richmond Dispatch Oct. 12, 1864; Guerrant diary, Oct. 2, 1864; Kent History of Saltville, 30.

22. William C. Davis in "Massacre at Saltville," felt that the attacking Federals had 5,200 men in the fight, and that Gen. Burbridge had deflated his numbers when he reported only 2,500 men in the battle. Yet even the most optimistic Confederate report did not give Burbridge that much credit. Since the Federal force consisted of mounted infantry and cavalry, one man out of each set of four had to stay in the rear to handle horses. With accounting for horse handlers, reserves and stragglers, Burbridge's numbers become more believable. Even the Confederates collaborated with Burbridge's story. The Richmond Enquire (Oct. 8, 1864) stated that Burbridge had 4,000 men with him but only 2,500 were in the fight. In his official report, Dibrell concurred. He stated that he fought 2,500 Federals. Also, Federal Adjutant General Lorenzo Thomas in his official report agreed that while there were 4,000 U.S. troops on the field, only 2,500 were engaged in the fight. (O.R. 1:39, pt. 3. 200). General McLean reported that the command numbered in total 4,200 men (O.R. 1:39, 555-56.). Burbridge's official report also stated that he had only 2,500 men in the fight, (O.R. 1:39, pt. 3. 157-58).

23. Robert Selph Henry, "First With the Most" Forrest, (New York, 1944), 105, 201. George G. Dibrell's brigade consisted of the 4th Tennessee Cav., 8th Tennessee Cav., and the 9th Tennessee Cav. It should be noted that they had

been detached from Forrest prior to the Fort Pillow massacre.

24. O.R. 1:39, pt. 1, 557.

25. Ibid.

26. Some mystery still surrounds Ratliff's placement of his brigade. Guerrant wrote in his diary that "The negro regts brought here placed, it is said in the front rank, & were almost annihilated." (Guerrant diary, Oct. 2, 1864). In a very accurate account of the battle originally printed in the Abingdon Virginian, and reprinted in the Richmond Enquirer, on Oct. 8 1864, repeated the claim. In addition, the rumor that the Federals intentionally placed the 5th USCC in the greatest place of danger has continued to this day. Yet none of the Federal accounts of the battle mention it. The Union accounts simply state that the 5th USCC held a parallel line with the 11th Michigan Cavalry and 12th Ohio Cavalry. If anything, nearly the opposite is true. Gen. Burbrige bragged that he sent in the 5th USCC after the white troops had failed in two assaults to take the Confederate works. The 5th USCC succeeded in taking and holding the position. Mason, 12th Ohio Cavalry, 64; O.R. 1:39, 3. 200; Robertson, Michigan in the War, 373.

27. Lindsley, Military Annals of Tenn., 671. While there is no Federal account describing Burbrige's headquarters during the battle, one Confederate newspaper account placed him at Sanders' house. Dibrell's men thought they saw him there prior to Ratliff's attack. With two separate Southern accounts placing Burbrige at the same place at the same time lead one to believe that Burbrige established his headquarters at Sanders'.

28. Mason, 12th Ohio Cavalry, 64.

29. Ibid.

30. Lindsley, Military Annals of Tenn, 671.

31. Ibid.

32. Mason, 12th Ohio Cavalry, 65; Robertson, Michigan in the War, 573.

33. Glatthaar, Forged in Battle, 165.

34. O.R. 1:39, pt. 1, 557.

35. Wise, End of an Era, 382.

36. Ibid. Some historians have doubted Wise's story as to when and where Preston's reserves were used. Davis and Marvel both stated that Preston's men never fought the blacks; rather they were used to repel a separate attack by Hobson's brigade. In fact, Preston was used on the right fighting Ratliff and the blacks. Wise was correct in stating that his unit was called from the Confederate left to the right and up Chestnut Ridge in order to fight the blacks.

Also, Davis and Marvel based their opinion on Mosgrove's book and Guerrant's diary. Both accounts state that Giltner brought up two companies of reserves from the church to fight Hobson. While Mosgrove and Guerrant did not mention the name of the units called, historians have since assumed it was Bob Preston's reserves. In fact, the unit that was actually called up by Giltner was Kent's reserves not Preston's reserves. A report by Capt. Peter Gallagher, in command of Companies H and G of Kent's Battalion stated that he had 14 men killed and wounded when he was ordered to the support of Col. Trimble and the 10th Kentucky Cavalry near the log church. This account fits with Guerrant's and Mosgrove's accounts and clears up much of the mystery surrounding the reserves in the battle. Brock, Hardesty's, 95.

37. Guerrant diary, Oct. 2, 1864.

38. Mosgrove, Kentucky Cavaliers, 204; and Kent, History of Saltville, 32, also support Mosgrove's account of the Confederate artillery hitting individual Federal officers.

39. Richmond Enquirer, copied from Lynchburg Virginian, Oct. 8, 1864; Brock, Hardesty's, 95.

40. Ibid.

41. Guerrant diary, Oct. 2, 1864. Robert U. Johnson and Clarence C. Buel, (eds.), Battles and Leaders of the Civil War, (New York, 1884-1887), IV, 479.

42. Guerrant diary, Oct. 3-4, 1864; Mason, 12th Ohio Cavalry, 66; Mosgrove, Kentucky Cavaliers, 203.

43. O.R. 1:39, pt. 1. 557.

44. Brock, Hardesty's, 95.

45. Mosgrove, Kentucky Cavaliers, 203.

46. Ibid., 200.

47. Mason, 12th Ohio Cavalry, 66.
48. Guerrant diary, Oct. 2, 1864.
49. Mason, 12th Ohio Cavalry, 67.
50. Mosgrove, Kentucky Cavaliers, 205.
51. Ibid., 203.
52. Ibid., 200.

53. There are two accounts of this meeting. Edward O. Guerrant recorded meeting Robertson in his diary the night after the battle. Mosgrove, in writing his memoirs, also added that he overheard the conversation. Marvel, in his article stated that Mosgrove lied about being present during the conversation because Guerrant never mentioned whether or not Mosgrove was there. The fact that Gurrant did not directly state that Mosgrove was present does not mean he did not hear the conversation. While Mosgrove freely admitted that he consulted Gurrant's work in writing his memoirs, there is no reason to believe that Mosgrove's account is fictional. Mosgrove, Kentucky Cavaliers, 205; Guerrant diary, Oct. 2, 1864.

54. Mosgrove, Kentucky Cavaliers, 203, 205.
55. Ibid.

Chapter IV

"Our men took no Negro prisoners."

The next morning groups of Confederates began wandering the battlefield. As several hours passed, Southern officers slowly organized their men for the pursuit of the Federal army. In the meantime, the stragglng bands went beyond the normal activities of post-battle looting, they continued the work of killing black prisoners.

As the Federal army escaped back to Kentucky, the hunting and killing of the black prisoners proceeded for several days after the battle. This premeditated and deliberate execution of unarmed and wounded prisoners deserves to be recorded as the most brutal massacre of the American Civil War.

In the early morning fog on October 3, Confederate George D. Mosgrove heard firing along the line. Thinking the sound of battle meant a new Federal attack, Mosgrove noted: "Presently I heard a shot, then another and another until the firing swelled to the volume of a skirmish line." He then mounted his horse and rode forward to ascertain the source of the shooting. Arriving in front of Dibrell's

and Robertson's brigades on Chestnut Ridge, he "found the Tennesseans were killing negroes . . . Hearing more firing at the front, I cautiously rode forward and came upon a squad of Tennesseans, mad and excited to the highest degree. They were shooting every wounded negro they could find. Hearing firing on other parts of the field, I knew the same awful work was going on all about me".¹

Mosgrove was appalled at the scene, yet he admitted that it would have been futile (if not dangerous) to attempt to stop it. He added: "Some were so slightly wounded that they could run, but when they ran from the muzzle of one pistol it was only to be confronted by another."²

Confederate Edwin O. Guerrant also heard the firing and noted it in his diary that "scouts were sent [and] went all over the field and the continual sing of the rifle, sung the death knell of many a poor negro who was unfortunate enough not to be killed yesterday. Our men took no negro prisoners. Great numbers of them were killed yesterday and today."³

Harry Shocker, a wounded prisoner from the 12th Ohio Cavalry also witnessed the carnage. He watched in horror as a Confederate guerrilla, the notorious Champ Ferguson, calmly walked about the battlefield killing black and white prisoners. Shocker looked on as he "saw him pointing his pistol down at prisoners lying on the ground, and heard

the reports of the pistol and the screams of the men." Shocker crawled off and hid as Ferguson approached a wounded friend, Crawford Hazlewood, and asked him "why he came up there to fight with the damn niggers." Ferguson then asked Hazlewood: "Where will you have it, in the back or the face?"

The man pleaded for his life. Shocker watched helplessly as Ferguson executed Hazlewood. Shocker later observed Ferguson killing four more black men at a cabin on Sanders' land.⁴

Sanders' house had been the center of Ratliff's Union line. Many of the men who had been wounded in the charge were brought to the farm and left during the retreat. Mosgrove found seven or eight slightly wounded blacks in a cabin. The men were lined up with their backs against the walls. As Mosgrove stepped in, "a pistol-shot from the door caused me to turn and observe a boy, not more than sixteen years old, with a pistol in each hand." Mosgrove told the boy to hold his fire while he jumped out of the way. He then added "In less time than I can write it, the boy had shot every negro in the room."⁵

Orange Sells of the 12th Ohio Cavalry also witnessed the murders at the cabin, he watched "a good many negroes killed there. All of them were soldiers and all were wounded but one. I heard firing there all over the place; it was like a skirmish."⁶

George Carter of the 11th Michigan Cavalry looked on as eight or nine blacks were killed. "I couldn't tell whether or not citizens or soldiers did the killing of the prisoners, as all seemed to be dressed alike."⁷ While many Confederates were local civilians called up as reserves, the veteran Confederate regiments were also known for their non-military appearance.

Later in the morning, Mosgrove watched as Gen. Breckinridge, Gen. Duke, and other officers rode to the front. The scene infuriated Breckinridge. "With blazing eyes and thunderous tones, [he] ordered that the massacre should be stopped. He rode away and--the shooting went on. The men could not be restrained." Mosgrove asserted that he did not see any Kentuckians of his unit involved in the murders, although he admitted that they could have been. He blamed the work on the Tennessee brigades of Felix H. Robertson and George D. Dibrell of Forrest's Old Brigade.⁸

Later, Mosgrove found a black boy "who seemed to think he was in no danger." A young Confederate approached him and drew his pistol, "and then the little mulatto jumped behind a sapling not larger than a man's arm, and cried out that General Duke had ordered him to remain there until he should return. It was no use. In another moment the little mulatto was a corpse."⁹

After attempting to stop the bloodshed, Breckinridge

began organizing the pursuit of the Federals. Guerrant sent Capt. Dick Gathright's company to act as a scout and "hunt up the lost Yankees." Breckinridge then ordered the rest of Giltner's brigade to prepare to follow. He directed Williams to take his brigade and those of Duke, Cosby, Vaughn, Dibrell, and Robertson along a parallel route to Hayter's Gap in order to intercept off the Federal retreat. The plan called for Williams to cut off Burbrige at Richlands. The pursuit finally got underway around 8 A.M. with Duke in the lead.¹⁰

Giltner's brigade slowly followed the Saltville Road to Laurel Gap along the route of the Federal retreat. As Giltner's men crossed the battlefield, everywhere they looked they found the refuse of a defeated army: Guns, ammunition, hats, coats, horses, and camp equipment were strewn along the road. The dead lay where they fell, while the wounded men occupied every house along the path. After bypassing the bridge they had burnt on Saturday night, Giltner's men found the wounded Col. Charles Hanson in a cabin.

Hanson had been shot during his abortive attack on the Confederate left at Saltville then left to die by his men during the retreat. Giltner and his staff stopped at the cabin to check on Hanson. They found him "lying on a rude bed and swearing horribly." One of Burbrige's surgeons, Doctor Hunt, attended Hanson. When asked about

the battle, Hunt had little positive to say about Burbrige. Mosgrove noted: "He had expressed his opinion of Burbrige in language more forceful than polite, and said that Burbrige had kept well to the rear, 'too d---d cowardly to go where he had sent his men.'"¹¹

Hanson was a large, well-built and attractive man, the picture of leadership and an acting brigadier when he was wounded. Although his wound appeared fatal, Hanson made no preparations for death. Instead, he became abusively drunk. Hanson had several canteens of brandy hanging from the head of the bed and he swore and drank continuously. As Guerrant left, he noted in his diary that he "Feared it [Hanson's wound] would not prove Fatal." Later the Confederates moved Hanson to Emory and Henry College, then being used as a hospital.¹²

Giltner did not press his pursuit of the Federals. He intentionally followed at a slow pace in order to give Williams a chance to get in front of Burbrige. As Giltner moved up the Saltville Road, Capt. Gathright's scouts, well in the lead, spied the 5th USCC then being used as a rear guard.

Gathright's men could not pass up the opportunity; they attacked the 5th USCC at Laurel Gap and scattered them. The Federals were held up at the gap by more handiwork by Capt. Jenkins and the reserves. During the battle, Jenkins destroyed a portion of the road leading

through the gap, thus slowing Burbrige's escape. While attempting to cross the road, the Federals found that one of the guns could not make it. They tried to burn its carriage and left it as a trophy for Gathright and his scouts.¹³

As the Federals filed through the gap, Mrs. Sexton once again found her home threatened by Yankees. First the Federals took the Sexton's wheat and used it to shore up the road where it had been destroyed. Earlier, Mrs. Sexton had hid a barrel of pickled beef in her dairy. When the Yankees approached, she stood in front of the barrel in order to hide it. Mary Sexton Fellers later remembered that "it seems every fellow for himself, took up her apron, and snatched a few pieces."

Yet all was not lost however. The Federals remembered that Mrs. Sexton was still caring for a soldier who had been wounded during the advance. As the Yankees left, an officer gave Mrs. Sexton a few pounds of "genuine coffee, and she felt that she was amply compensated for her trouble." A few hours later, the wounded soldier died. Neighbors buried him nearby.¹⁴

What little discipline the Federal troops had when they entered Virginia quickly disappeared as they retreated. Guerrant found that the "Yankees had robbed the houses along the route of everything they could carry: Pillaged every nook and corner." Later in the day he found

a young girl standing at the door of her cabin. He asked her if the Federals had robbed her house. She answered: "They tuck a skillet a tin bucket & a hammer!" Apparently the people were so poor that the skillet, bucket and hammer may have comprised the majority of their possessions.¹⁵

As Burbrige continued his retreat, a courier met the column. The message, from Gens. Schofield and Sherman, directed Burbrige to cancel the raid and proceed with his full force to Knoxville. Confederate Gen. Nathen Bedford Forrest had launched a new raid into Middle Tennessee, and Sherman needed Burbrige's army to protect his supply line. Burbrige's support, the commands of Gillem and Ammen, had already received the order to retreat and could no longer give him any aid. Rather than seeing his command safely back to Union lines, Burbrige and Gen. McLean left the column and headed back to Lexington. As he left, Burbrige gave Col. Hobson the honor of saving the force from destruction.¹⁶

At 4 P.M. as Giltner's brigade passed its old position on Clinch Mountain, the men could see Burbrige's column once again on the Bowen's land. Burbrige rested part of the day and had made his headquarters at Colonel Henry Bowen's house as his men continued their pillaging. The Bowens had their slaves, cattle, horses, and food taken as well as much of their property destroyed.

Later, when Giltner's men arrived, local citizens reported seeing Governor Sanders with the Yankees. The Federals forced the old man "whos' hair is white with the frost of 60 years, & whose steps totter to the grave," to walk during the retreat. While many of the pursuing Confederates were outraged with Burbrige's treatment of the old prisoner, few of them seemed to have been bothered at the time with their own treatment earlier in the day of the 5th USCC.

The next morning the Confederates resumed their pursuit. Ratliff's Federal brigade continued to act as a rear guard as the command headed down Big Sandy Mountain. The 11th Michigan Cavalry lagged behind the Federal column and the Southerners seized the opportunity to cut them off. Dismounted and totally surrounded, Col. James B. Mason mounted his troopers and led them in a desperate charge to cut their way free.¹⁷

The sortie succeeded in freeing the regiment. One trooper noted that "those Spencer carbines were our salvation." Yet the cost had been high. As Col. Mason led his men away from the gates of prison and to the safety of the Federal lines, he fell mortally wounded. The escape of the 11th proved to be the last fight of the Saltville raid.¹⁸

By noon it became clear to Giltner that Williams would not be able to flank the Federals as planned. Dibrell

failed to cut off Burbrige after he had crossed Clinch Mountain by way of an old Indian trail. The other brigades missed as well. Many were disappointed and felt that if Breckinridge's orders for a quick pursuit had been followed, they would have captured Burbrige. One Southerner noted that "our mortification and disappointment were great. It was useless to follow further." The Confederates then turned their commands back toward Saltville as the Federals continued their journey back to Kentucky unmolested.¹⁹

On October 3, word reached Richmond of the Confederate victory. General Echols wrote the commander of the reserve forces in Virginia, Gen. James L. Kemper, and commended him on the fine performance of his militia. He also added that "there were two or three regiments of negro troops, which were badly cut up."²⁰

On Oct. 4, Gen. Robert E. Lee issued an official report of the battle to Confederate Secretary of War James A. Seddon. Lee informed Seddon that the "enemy attacked Saltville on the 2nd instant and received a bloody repulse. They retired during the night in confusion . . . leaving most of their dead and wounded on our hands. . . . All our troops behaved well."²¹ Yet as several days passed, the truth about the battle began to emerge in Richmond as the murders continued around Saltville.

The Confederates gathered many of the remaining

wounded and moved them to nearby Emory and Henry College. The school had been converted into a Confederate general hospital. After the battle it served both the Federal and Confederate wounded.

Federal Surgeon William H. Gardner continued to work with the wounded at Emory and Henry. On October 7, at 10 P.M., Gardner watched as several men forced their way past the Confederate staff at the hospital and murdered two blacks in their beds.²²

Possibly in order to protect the prisoners, the Southerners began sending large numbers of wounded prisoners from the hospital to Lynchburg. On October 8, the hospital sent sixty-one prisoners east. However many were too severely wounded to travel, and each day the Confederates brought in more captives.²³

At 4 P.M. on October 8, several men in Confederate uniform forced their way past the Southern guards. This time many people recognized the guerrilla Champ Ferguson as the leader of the band. Wounded Union trooper Harry Shocker once again found his life threatened by the guerrilla chief. Ferguson approached Shocker and asked him if he knew Lt. Elza C. Smith of the 13th Kentucky Cavalry. Ferguson added: "I have a begrudge against Smith: we'll find him." Smith and Ferguson had known each other prior to the conflict, and with the Civil War, their earlier relationship developed into a no-quarter guerrilla fight

around Burkesville, Kentucky.²⁴

Leaving Shocker, Ferguson eventually found Smith's bed. Looking up, Smith asked: "Champ is that you?"

Ferguson lowered his gun and replied: "Smith, do you see this?"

He then leveled the weapon at Smith's head and attempted to fire. The cap failed to ignite the charge. Ferguson had to cock and pull the trigger two more times before it went off. A witness noted the ball "hit Smith about the side of the forehead, going diagonally through the head and coming out just behind the ear."²⁵

To everyone's surprise, the testy and profane Col. Charles Hanson of the 13th Kentucky Cavalry had survived his wound. After killing Smith, Ferguson turned his attention to executing Hanson and Capt. Degenfield of the 12th Ohio Cavalry. Before he could accomplish this, the Confederate staff from the hospital--at the risk of their own lives--intervened and talked Ferguson out of the plan.²⁶ The next day, the Confederates defused the situation by moving the rest of the wounded prisoners to Lynchburg. Meanwhile, Ferguson quietly left the department.²⁷

By the end of the week, the Richmond papers were proclaiming a great victory in southwest Virginia over Burbridge and his army. The Richmond Enquirer proudly ran a segregated casualty column:

Killed, (Yankee Whites)	106
Negroes,	150
Wounded, (Whites)	80
Negroes,	6 28

Evidently the Enquirer did not feel the need to explain the disparity in numbers between the eighty wounded whites and six wounded blacks.

The Richmond Dispatch joined in with an editorial: "They routed Burbridge and all his 'niggers,' horse, foot and dragoon. Abundant as the article was in that region, they could not put a grain of salt on the tails of the flying black birds. The coat-tails, we mean, which stuck so straight that little boys might have played marbles on them." The racist tone of the article reached a peak as the editor concluded with: "The country had since been infested with birds of the same color, but greater respectability. They are turkey-buzzards this time, and they come in quest of Yankee carcasses." 29

Following his parole and return to Federal lines, Surgeon Gardner of the 30th Kentucky Infantry filed with his superiors a full report of the massacre. The document traveled up the chain of command with many endorsements and then went on to the Secretary of War in Washington. General McLean endorsed the report with a demand that the murderers be delivered for punishment to Union authorities. "In case of refusal [he urged] that

immediate retaliation be enforced upon such Confederate prisoners as we may have in our possession, man for man." On October 18, Federals delivered Gardner's report to Lee's headquarters by a truce boat.³⁰

Breckinridge had already informed Lee of the murders, and he added that one of the generals at Saltville had taken part in the killing. On October 21, Lee's aide-de-camp reported to Breckinridge that the General was "much pained to hear of the treatment the negro prisoners are reported to have received, and agrees with you in entirely condemning it. That a general officer should have been guilty of the crime you mention meets with his unqualified reprobation. He directs that if the officer is still in your department you should prefer charges against him and bring him to trial."³¹

After a great deal of detective work, historian William C. Davis determined that Gen. Felix H. Robertson may have directed killings. Yet Robertson slipped away from Breckinridge's court of inquiry and left the department to join Gen. Joseph Wheeler's cavalry in Georgia.³² While leaving the department, Robertson and his brigade became completely insubordinate. They refused to follow orders and terrorized all communities they passed. Events of the war may have overshadowed further efforts to apprehend Robertson.³³

As the Federal force made their disorganized retreat

back to Kentucky, the 5th USCC reported losing 118 of its 400 men. Yet as time progressed, many who were lost on the campaign drifted back into camp. The monthly reports for October, 1864, state that the regiment had not even been organized prior to the battle. With the poor leadership and organization of the regiment at the time, it is difficult to make an exact judgement as to how many men were murdered at Saltville. Few officers and non-commissioned officers were at their posts and one black sergeant later stated that he did not even know the names of his men during the time of the battle.³⁴

As the Federals reorganized in Kentucky, many of the men originally listed as missing in action from the 5th began to drift into camp. Jerry Thompson of Company C, had been listed as being killed in action at Saltville. Actually he had been captured, and he eventually returned to the regiment. The Confederates also captured Ralph Cook, and on April 15, 1865 Cook escaped from the Southerners and reentered Union lines at Knoxville.³⁵

A few of the men did desert at Saltville, Samuel Harrison of Company G had been listed as missing in action after the battle. On February 6, 1865, Harrison returned to the unit and was courtmartialed for desertion. The court sentenced Harrison to forfeit all pay due him prior to his desertion and during the period of his absence. Alex Young of Company L returned to the regiment in April,

1865; a courtmartial sentenced him to one year hard labor for deserting at Saltville.³⁶

Still it is not likely that the majority of the men who were listed as missing in action at Saltville had deserted. At the end of the war the regiment still listed 46 men as being missing in action at Saltville. After eighteen months of service, the 5th also listed 65 men as being deserters for the entire period. It is difficult to believe that the 46 men listed as missing at Saltville would have deserted from a regiment that only recorded 65 desertions for the entire war.³⁷

The men of the 5th USCC had no doubt as to the fate of their missing comrades. Colonel Wade noted on the October 1864 muster roll that his men "participated in a very severe engagement losing a large number of killed and wounded and missing; those who fell into the hands of the enemy were supposed to have been murdered."³⁸

Many of the company returns also listed troops as being left wounded on the field and later murdered by their Confederate captures. Lieutenant Augustus Flint of Company E reported that the twelve men missing from his company were killed by the Confederates.³⁹ The commander of Company C noted that he left eight wounded men on the field at Saltville and was unsure of their fate.⁴⁰ White troops also attempted to make sense of the events after the battle. The historian of the 12th Ohio Cavalry recorded

that Jacob. C. Pence had been listed as missing at Saltville and that he was "supposed to have been killed by Champ Ferguson." ⁴¹

In Kentucky, Gen. Burbrige continued in his efforts to apprehend Ferguson. Under a flag of truce, Burbrige informed Confederate Gen. Duke that he considered the murder of Lt. Smith as "one of the most diabolical acts of the war." He also added that if the Federals captured Ferguson and his band, "they would not be treated as prisoners."⁴² Although the Confederates had no desire to turn Ferguson over to the U. S. Government, but Breckinridge had no intention either of letting Ferguson get away with murder.

Upon hearing of the killings, Breckinridge ordered Ferguson's arrest. While Ferguson had slipped out of the department, by February 5, 1865 the Confederates had captured and imprisoned the guerrilla in Wytheville, Va. Ferguson later bragged that no one could prove his guilt. By the end of the month the Confederates released him "on parole." It is unclear the exact reason for Ferguson's release.⁴³ However, it is likely that the Confederates could not find any witnesses willing to testify against him.

Many of the troops who had seen the massacre were out of the department; others obviously condoned his actions by their own participation in the killings. The witnesses

were also aware that Ferguson led a gang of killers. With Confederate government no longer able to enforce law and order, it is doubtful that they could have safely testified against Ferguson. Finally, the Confederate government collapsed rapidly in the early days of 1865. As with Robertson, the approaching events of the war may have overshadowed Southern efforts to convict Ferguson.

Although the Confederates faced accusations of murder, they had accomplished their main goal,--driving off the Federal raiders. While they had failed to capture Burbrige, they at least bought some precious time for the department. The saltworks, lead mines, and railroad were temporarily secure. Breckinridge could devote his time to other important matters. Confederate deserters and Unionists still roamed southwest Virginia, civil government had collapsed, and the Federals certainly would return.

Notes

1. Mosgrove, Kentucky Cavaliers, 206-07; Guerrant diary, Oct. 2-3, 1864. Marvel felt that Mosgrove contrived most of his account of the massacre. He added that what Mosgrove did not lift from the Gurrant diary, he lifted from newspaper accounts of Champ Ferguson's trial. The interesting point is that Mosgrove lived in Kentucky after the war and the Federals tried Ferguson in Tennessee. It is doubtful that Mosgrove even knew of the trial, much less followed the Tennessee papers that covered it. Finally, Marvel is certain that Mosgrove's account of the killings at the cabin were directly taken from testimony from the Ferguson trial, yet Mosgrove never mentions Ferguson in connection with the killings at the cabin. If Mosgrove fabricated his entire account, one would think he would mention the name of the most notorious killer at Saltville to add credence to his story.

2. Mosgrove, Kentucky Cavaliers, 206-7.

3. Gurrant diary, Oct. 3, 1864.

4. Thurman Sensing, Champ Ferguson, Confederate Guerrilla, (Nashville, 1942). 185.

5. Mosgrove, Kentucky Cavaliers, 207.

6. Sensing, Champ Ferguson, 182.

7. Ibid., 181.

8. Mosgrove, Kentucky Cavaliers, 208. In his account of the battle, William Marvel stated that George Dallas Mosgrove "pointedly denied that any Kentucky soldiers took part in the killing, insisting it was only Tennessee troops." Mosgrove's actual account is much different. In Kentucky Cavaliers in Dixie, he wrote: "I did not see any of the Kentuckians shoot a negro. A few of them, however, may have done so. Not having met the negroes in battle they had not the same provocation as the Tennesseans." Rather than being a pointed denial, Mosgrove admitted that Kentucky troops may have taken part in the massacre.

9. Ibid., 207.

10. Ibid., 208; Guerrant diary, Oct. 3, 1864.

11. Mosgrove, Kentucky Cavaliers, 209.

12. Guerrant diary, Oct. 3, 1864; Mosgrove, Kentucky Cavaliers, 209.

13. Guerrant diary, Oct. 3, 1864; Mosgrove, Kentucky Cavaliers, 210.

14. Guerrant diary, Oct. 3, 1864; Fellers, "Burbrige Raid."

15. Guerrant diary, Oct. 3, 1864.

16. Mason, 12th Ohio Cavalry, 69; O.R. 1:39 pt. 1, 157-58, 552, 564.

17. Robertson, Michigan in the Civil War, 572-73; Mason, 12th Ohio Cavalry, 69.

18. Ibid.

19. Lindsley, Military Annals of Tennessee, 671; Southern Historical Society Papers, VII (1879), 385; Mosgrove, Kentucky Cavaliers, 210.

20. O.R. 1:39, pt. 1. 560.

21. Ibid., pt. 3, 786.

22. Ibid., pt. 1, 554.

23. Ibid., 561.

24. Sensing, Champ Ferguson, 182, 184-85; Mason, 12th Ohio, 70.

25. Sensing, Champ Ferguson, 182; O.R. 1:39, pt. 1, 554.

26. Ibid., 557.

27. Ibid., 554, 556; Mason, 12th Ohio Cavalry, 70.

28. Richmond Enquirer, Oct. 8, 1864.

29. Richmond Dispatch, Oct. 6, 1864.

30. O.R. 1:39, pt. 1, 554.

31. O.R. 2:7, 1020.

32. William C. Davis, Breckinridge Statesman Soldier Symbol (Baton Rouge, 1974), 460.

33. O.R. 1:39, pt. 1, 565.

34. Glatthaar, Forged in Battle, 317.
35. N.A. R.G. 64, Box 10.
36. Ibid.
37. N.A. R.G. 94, box 10. Glatthaar, Forged in Battle, 316. Also see Ella Lonn, Desertion During the Civil War, 1966. At full strength the 5th USCC should have had 1,200 men in the ranks. The average desertion rate for black units during the war was 67 men per 1,000. For white regiments an average of 63 men per 1,000 deserted. The 5th USCC had 65 deserters for the war.
38. Muster Roll of the Field and Staff of the 5th USCC (N.A. R.G. 94, Box 5317).
39. Monthly return for Co E. 5th USCC for Oct. 1864. (N.A. R.G. 94, Box 5317). Five of Flint's missing men in Co. E. eventually were accounted for.
40. Return for Co. C. 5th USCC, (N.A. R.G. 94. Box 5317).
41. Mason, 12th Ohio Cavalry, 29, 70.
42. O.R. 1:49, pt. 1. 765.
43. Sensing, Champ Ferguson, 14.

Conclusion

Of course the Federals did return to southwest Virginia. The area had too many vital resources that Union authorities could not afford to ignore. In December, 1864, Gen. George Stoneman, the new commander of the Department of the Ohio, launched his own raid into Virginia.

His opponent, Gen. Breckinridge had followed up his victory at Saltville with a campaign to remove the Federals from his department. In November, Breckinridge had forced the Union forces back to the gates of Knoxville, Tenn. Stoneman's plan was to return to southwest Virginia with Burbrige and remove Breckinridge as a threat.¹

Once again the Union raiders picked up the 5th USCC and also added the newly created 6th USCC. The 5th had slowly been regaining its strength since Saltville. On October 30, nearly a month after their first fight, the men of the 5th were officially organized into a regiment. Some of the missing troops had returned to camp as well, and the survivors were more than likely ready to avenge Saltville.²

Facing the new threat of Stoneman, Breckinridge had only a small force of 1,000 men left in his department. On

December 17-18, outnumbered four-to-one, Breckinridge made a stand about a mile outside of Marion. The fight took place along the Holston River. After two days of indecisive action, Breckinridge decided to withdraw his command.³

As Breckinridge retreated, the Federals finally were free to take the resources of southwest Virginia. On October 20, Stoneman captured Saltville and began destroying the works. He also had done considerable damage to the lead mines, the Virginia and Tennessee railroad, and the towns of Abingdon, Wytheville, and Bristol. While the damage to the railroad and saltworks would be repaired, the loss of the government stores in the towns could not be replaced.⁴

The black troops preformed admirably in Marion and continued to add to their hard-won reputation. Even former enemies like the 13th Kentucky Cavalry admired the performance of the 5th. The men had won their spurs and would remain on active duty for almost a year after Appomattox. On March 16, 1865, the 5th United States Colored Cavalry held its Final formation in Helena, Ark. The horsemen had paid the full price for their freedom.⁵

Stephen Gano Burbrige, the 5th's commander at Saltville, soon left the army. On February 18, 1865, Federal authorities removed Burbrige from command. Most likely his demise was caused by his controversial handling

of civilian affairs in Kentucky and his botched raid on Saltville. Despised by Federals as well as Confederates, both sides were relieved to see his rule come to an end.⁶

As for the murders, Champ Ferguson became the only person ever brought to justice for the massacre at Saltville. After Appomattox, Federals captured Ferguson and brought him before a courtmartial. On May 25, at Nashville, Tenn. Union authorities put Ferguson on trial. They charged him with the murder of Lt. Elza Smith as well as "twelve soldiers whose names are unknown at Saltville, Va.," and "two negro soldiers, names unknown, while lying wounded in prison, at Saltville." In total, the court found Ferguson guilty of killing fifty-three people throughout the war and convicted him as a "border rebel guerrilla, robber and murderer."⁷

On October 20, 1865 Ferguson was hanged. Standing silently nearby as witnesses to the execution were the men of the 15th United States Colored Infantry. The presence of the 15th added a bit of poetic justice to the end of Ferguson's brutal life.⁸

Yet the massacre at Saltville was not an isolated incident. Not only does Saltville stand as possibly the worst battlefield atrocity of the Civil War, it also demonstrates one of the factors that cause the "rules of war" to break down. In modern American warfare, as religion, race, and culture conflict on the battlefield,

massacre of prisoners increases.

From Powhatan's War at Jamestown to Wounded Knee in 1890, Native Americans and European decedents often killed their prisoners. The Indian Wars became a struggle for religious and racial survival, and the victors repeatedly felt justified in slaughtering their prisoners. The goal of this type of fighting went beyond that of a victory; it included racial survival.

At Saltville, men on both sides were aware of the fate of the blacks at Fort Pillow. To the Confederates, the sight of armed black men was their worst nightmare. Raised on stories of Nat Turner and the recent memory of John Brown, Southerners felt that the presence of blacks on the battlefield raised the stakes from that of a civil war of independence to that of a total war over race. Neither side could expect quarter.

Notes

1. Davis, Breckinridge, 465-77.
2. Return of the Fifth Regiment of the United States Colored Cavalry, Colonel James S. Brisbin, October 1864. (N.A. R.G. 94, Box 5316), also Descriptive Roll for the 5th United States Colored Cavalry. (N.A. R.G. 94).
3. Mosgrove, Kentucky Cavaliers, 234-42.
4. Ibid.
5. Return of the Fifth Regiment of the United States Colored Cavalry, Colonel James S. Brisbin, October 1864. (N.A. R.G. 94, Box 5316). Also Descriptive Roll for the 5th United States Colored Cavalry. (N.A. R.G. 94); O.R. 1:39, pt. 1, 557.
6. Thomas Speed, R. M. Kelley and Alfred Pirtle, The Union Regiments of Kentucky, (Louisville, 1897). 67.
7. Sensing, Ferguson, vii, 247, 251. Ever the partisan, Marvel considered Ferguson's trial "a sham designed to convict him, guilty or not." He accused George W. Carter of the 11th Michigan Cavalry of being an "imposter" because he failed to find Carter's name in the unit's regimental history. Marvel failed to take into account that accurate Civil War rosters are almost non-existent. It is far more likely that Carter's name had been lost in the records rather than Marvel's thesis that he was a planted "imposter."
He also discounted Henry Shocker's testimony. Marvel used Shocker's record to demonstrate that he was "not the best of soldiers" because he had been reduced in ranks from corporal to private for an unknown infraction. He then suggested that Shocker was a "skulker" who manufactured his story of the murders in order to cover his desertion at Saltville. Evidently, Marvel considered Shocker's wounding and capture a certain way for the scamp to shirk duty.
8. Davis, "Massacre," 48.

Appendix A

Order of Battle

Confederate forces: Brig. Gen. John S. Williams aided by Brig. Gen. Alfred E. Jackson. (Arriving late in the day were Maj. Gen. John C. Breckinridge and Gen. Brig. Gen. John Echols.)

Col. Henry L. Giltner's Btn:

	<u>KIA</u>	<u>WIA</u>	<u>MIA</u>
4th Kentucky Cavalry;	--	--	--
10th Kentucky Cavalry;	--	--	--
10th Kentucky Mtd. R.;	--	--	--
64th Virginia Mtd. Inf.;	--	--	--
Capt. Barton W. Jenkins			
Co. of Kentucky Cav.;	--	--	--

Brig. Gen. John S. Williams

Cavalry Division:

Col. William C.P. Breckinridge:

1st Kentucky Cav.;

9th Kentucky Cav.;

--	--	--
--	--	--

Col. George G. Dibrell:

4th Tennessee Cav.;

8th Tennessee Cav.;

9th Tennessee Cav.;

--	--	--
--	--	--
--	--	--

Brig. Gen. Felix H. Robertson:

3rd Confederate Cav. (partial);

6th Confederate Cav. (partial);

8th Confederate Cav. (one btn.);

10th Confederate Cav.;

5th Georgia Cav. (partial);

--	--	--
--	--	--
--	--	--
--	--	--
--	--	--

Reserves:

Col. Robert H. Smiths Btn.:

Smyth, Russell, Tazewell, Washington;

Col. Robert T. Preston's Btn.:

Montgomery;

Col. Kents Btn.:

Wythe, Carroll, Grayson;

Col. James Preston's Btn:

Saltville area;

13	51	21
2	5	--
3	18	1
--	--	--

Artillery:

Capt. Hugh L.W. McClung's

Tennessee battery;

Capt. John W. Barr's

Virginia battery;

--	--	--
--	--	--

Confederate total (estimate): 30 100 30

Federal Forces: Maj. Gen. Stephen G. Burbrige

	<u>KIA</u>	<u>WIA</u>	<u>MIA</u>
Brig. Gen. Edward H. Hobson:			
13th Kentucky Cav.;	4	13	1
30th Kentucky Mtd. Inf.;	5	2	-
35th Kentucky Mtd. Inf.;	3	11	21
40th Kentucky Mtd. Inf.;	-	1	-
45th Kentucky Mtd. Inf.;	-	2	-
Col. Charles Hanson:			
11th Kentucky Cav.;	-	10	1
26th Kentucky Mtd. Inf.;	1	3	-
37th Kentucky Mtd. Inf.;	2	9	-
39th Kentucky Mtd. Inf.;	1	10	-
Col. Robert Ratliff:			
5th United States Colored Cav. (with two companies from the 6th USCC);	10	37	46*
11th Michigan Cav.;	11	61	16
12th Ohio Cav.;	5	31	12
Six mountain howitzers, Lt. Wallace of 40th Kentucky Mtd. Inf.;	-	-	-
Federal Totals	42	190	97

* This number represents the number of men massacred after the battle. For more information of the massacre of captured members of the 5th USCC, see Appendix B.

APPENDIX B

Marvel stated that "the butchering of scores of black prisoners is pure exaggeration. No more than an even dozen could have been murdered October 3, and quite possibly only the five witnessed by Surgeon Gardner."

Marvel based his thesis on the carded medical records of the United States Colored Troops at the National Archives. His final count came to 20 men killed in action, 63 wounded, and 31 missing. He then concluded that the 31 missing men "either crawled away to die uncounted or deserted somewhere between Mount Sterling and Saltville, never to return."

Marvel's thesis sounds probable on the surface, yet a detailed investigation of the regiment's history reveals a different story. First, Civil War regiments did not keep track of men who were missing in action in the medical records. The monthly, quarterly and annual muster rolls and returns for the 5th USCC as well as the descriptive roll for the regiment and individual companies at the National Archives--are a far more accurate record.

The men killed in action, (K.I.A.) wounded in action, (W.I.A.) died of wounds (D.O.W.) and missing in action (M.I.A.) from the 5th USCC can be broken down as follows:

Casualty reports of the 5th USCC at Saltville.	KIA	WIA	DOW	MIA
Chief Surgeon James G. Hatchitt's report, October 4, 1864. (O.R. 1:39, pt. 1, 553).	22	37	--	53
Muster Rolls for Individual Companies in the 5th USCC, October 1864. (N.A. R.G. 94, Box 5317).	20	--	5	93
Returns for Individual Companies in the 5th USCC, October 1864. (N.A. R.G. 94, Box 5317).	6	--	--	80
Return for the 5th USCC, October 1864. (N.A. R.G. 94, Box 5316).	6	--	--	102
Quarterly Return of Deceased Soldiers of the 5th USCC (N.A. R.G. 94, Box 10).	7	--	--	--
Annual Return of Altercation and Casualties for the year ending December 31, 1864 in the 5th USCC (N.A. R.G. 94, Box 10).	7	--	--	102
Descriptive Roll for the 5th USCC, (N.A. R.G. 94).	13	--	3	54
Descriptive Roll for Companies in the 5th USCC (N.A. R.G. 94).	10	--	4	46

At a glance the rolls appear to be contradictory and confusing, yet it becomes apparent that many of the original men who were missing in action were eventually accounted for. The descriptive rolls for companies and regiment, maintained during and after the war give the most detailed account of the missing individuals. While a few did desert, and many came in after the battle, a total of at least 46 men remained missing well after the war.

Secondly, Marvel contended that his missing 31 men "either crawled away to die uncounted or deserted somewhere between Mount Sterling and Saltville, never to return." However, of over 4,500 Federal troops in 12 regiments, 104 men were initially reported as missing by Hatchett: 53 men from the 5th USCC, and a total of 51 from the other 11 white regiments. It is unlikely that over half of the missing men from a 4,500-man army would be deserters from one regiment (the 5th USCC).

Finally, over 1,200 men served in the 5th USCC during eighteen months of service. During that time, only 65 men were listed as deserters. To contend that the men listed as missing in action at Saltville were deserters fails to take into account the regiment's record. Of the 46 men missing at Saltville, it seems difficult to believe that they would desert at one time from a regiment that only had 65 deserters for the entire war.

A conservative estimate of the number of blacks

murdered at Saltville is forty-six. These are the men listed and kept on the rolls as M.I.A.'s until well after the war. The bodies of these men, as well as the 10 men killed in action, would verify the many eye witness accounts that describe the burial of a large number of blacks on the field.

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