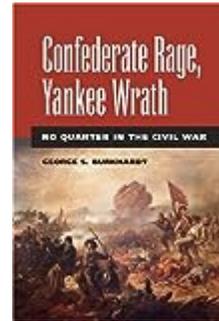




George S. Burkhardt. *Confederate Rage, Yankee Wrath: No Quarter in the Civil War.* Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2007. xiii +338 pp. \$37.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8093-2743-0.



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Reactions to the United States Colored Troops during the Civil War

Many historians of the United States are at least familiar with the massacre at Fort Pillow which was carried out by men who served in General Nathan Bedford Forrest's command during the Civil War. However, most have little understanding of the extent of such events or whether the issue was addressed by either government. While historians generally agree on what occurred (with the exception of Forrest's personal involvement), the Confederate mindset during Fort Pillow and other similar events during the war have been without a thorough exploration until recently. George S. Burkhardt has filled this gap with *Confederate Rage, Yankee Wrath: No Quarter in the Civil War*.

Burkhardt's work covers the evolution of limited no-quarter combat during the war. For most of the book, Burkhardt conducts a thorough and unbiased examination of the Confederate practice of executing African American soldiers. According to Burkhardt, "discrepancies or questions about a particular event diminish in importance if the incident fits solidly into a pattern" (p. 7). Although not expressly stated by the author, Burkhardt seems to be addressing the debate regarding whether

Forrest ordered the executions at Fort Pillow. A pattern of executing African American soldiers is clearly established in the subsequent chapters. In a wonderful narrative, Burkhardt soundly supports the theory of the existence of a de facto policy of executing captured African American soldiers. Burkhardt argues that the significance of these relatively widespread incidents of executing African American soldiers greatly overshadows the issue of whether Forrest had personally ordered the atrocity at Fort Pillow. Regardless of whether Forrest gave the order, his men understood that they would not be punished for their actions.

While Burkhardt wisely circumvents the debate over Forrest's involvement, he does address the conflict over the ferocity on the part of the Confederates at Fort Pillow by comparing contemporary newspaper accounts to letters and diaries written by Confederate soldiers involved in the event. In many cases, feeling righteous in their actions, the soldiers did not censor themselves. Rather than finding that newspaper reports embellished the accounts of Fort Pillow, Burkhardt's research reveals that the sources largely corroborate each other. The same is

true for the rest of the work with Confederates openly revealing the graphic nature of their actions.

According to Burkhardt, the most significant debate over the practice of executing African Americans was within the Confederate government itself. The author charges that the Confederate national government was unable and unwilling to stop the executions of African American soldiers. In fact, the Confederate government could never fully decide what to do with captured African American soldiers. The case regarding those captured at Fort Wagner is particularly interesting. According to Burkhardt, Jefferson Davis originally stated that the African American combatants were insurrectionists and should be killed. Davis, however, later changed his opinion and ordered that captured African Americans be “returned” to slavery. After an attempt to try the group as insurrectionists evaporated, the Confederates eventually sent the Fort Wagner prisoners to a prisoner-of-war camp. With a very telling quotation from Confederate Secretary of War James Seddon, Burkhardt captures the dilemma and ambiguity of what was to be done with African American soldiers: “free negroes should be either promptly executed or the determination arrived at and announced not to execute them during the war” (quoted, p. 76).

Ultimately, however, Burkhardt argues that neither the Confederate nor the United States government had the power to stop the murder of African American soldiers. Not only did Davis lack the power to stop this, Burkhardt believes that Abraham Lincoln’s only option of reprisal executions might have spun out of control and made the Civil War look very similar to the combat seen in the Pacific Theater during World War II.

The practice of giving no quarter to African Americans and their white officers extended to other whites in somewhat isolated incidents during the war. While the African American uniformed soldiers were executed, actions against whites usually only included guerillas or “perceived” irregular troops acting outside of the rules of warfare. Among others, Burkhardt offers the example of the Shenandoah Valley during the middle stage of the war. In an effort to deny Confederates the Valley as a breadbasket and a staging area, patrols of Federals set out to destroy any foodstuffs and most of the structures in the Valley. Initially, John S. Mosby and other Confederates retaliated by killing those soldiers who engaged in arson. Later, partisan raiders extended no-quarter tactics to any Union soldiers found with stolen property in the area. Eventually, General Ulysses S. Grant ordered Union forces to capture family members of Mosby and his men as a means of ensuring acceptable behavior. Once the Union soldiers had completely decimated the Valley the reprisals in the area ceased as the conflicting forces moved out. Burkhardt argues that, while very isolated instances of no-quarter combat existed between whites, their shared heritage and common religious convictions prevented a national strategy of no-quarter warfare from gaining acceptance during the war.

The number of events that Burkhardt documents leaves little room to dispute his argument that an unwritten policy existed, which allowed Confederates to execute captured African American soldiers. Burkhardt has contributed a significant piece of scholarship to the field of Civil War history as well as multicultural studies. His highly objective and thorough examination of the subject will present quite a challenge to anyone seeking to debunk the claims made in this work.

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