

History 225

Re: Notes from Jack Hurst, Nathan Bedford Forrest(1993)

Subject: Fort Pillow Massacre

Ft. Pillow was a top a bluff overlooking the Mississippi river. It was manned by 580 black troops and white Federals. Pillow was built in 1862 by Confederates in Tennessee. Ft. Pillow hampered Forrest's control of this section of the state and his orders to protect the agricultural assets in western Tennessee and in Mississippi.

In April 1864 it was attacked and overrun by 1,500 of Forrest's troops.

Forrest demanded that the fort surrender and he would treat the Feds as POWs No harm would come to them--black and white. When the acting commander refused these terms Forrest ordered a full attack on the fort.

Some testimony that Forrest ordered his men to kill every good one of them. Whether factual or not the Union force was shot down while it tried to escape or to surrender. Confederates who were in the engagement do write about the slaughter. Black and white Federals who tried to surrender were shot down. Of the 580-man garrison, 66 % of the blacks were killed and 35% of the whites. Those escaping into the Mississippi river were picked off w/ head shots by Rebs. The Mississippi River ran red with blood.

Wm. Ferguson Union master of the steamer Silver Cloud was allowed to come ashore the next day to retrieve Union dead. He noted the complete destruction of the fort and found about 150 bodies inside the fort. "Bodies with gaping wounds, some bayoneted through the eyes, some with beaten through, others with hideous wounds as if their bowles had been ripped open with bowie-knives. . . ."

Was Forrest making an example out of Union policy of arming black troops. Was he playing at warning off blacks from military service with the Federals by countenancing this atrocity? Hurst, not an unsympathetic biographer, notes that in a battle report filed three days later by Forrest the general wrote he "hoped . . . [the battle] would demonstrate to the Northern people that negro soldiers cannot cope with Southerners."

Some indication that the Rebs even buried some of the Feds while they were still alive.

Note* More on Confederate atrocities toward black troops see Glathaar's Forged in Liberty