

ON THIS DAY IN WEST VIRGINIA HISTORY OCTOBER 18



Storming of the armory engine-house at Harpers Ferry

On the morning of October 18, 1859, United States Marines commanded by Lieutenant Colonel Robert E. Lee stormed the armory engine-house at Harpers Ferry, capturing John Brown and members of his raiding party who had barricaded themselves in the building.

CSO: SS.8.22, ELA.8.1

Investigate the Document: (Boyd Blynn Stutler Collection Ms78-1)

1. What charges does John Brown explain he has been found guilty of in the letter to his wife?
2. Does John Brown feel guilty for his actions at Harper's Ferry?
3. In John Brown's postscript, he states that he has learned of his sentence; how was his sentence to be carried out? On what day?

Think Critically: How did John Brown's Raid at Harpers Ferry further intensify sectional tensions prior the Civil War? What was the goal of the raid?

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Jefferson Co,

Charlestown, Va, 31st Oct, 1859.

My Dear Wife, & Children every one

I suppose you have learned before this by the newspapers that two weeks ago today we were fighting for our lives ~~at Harpers ferry~~ at Harpers ferry; that during the fight Watson was mortally wounded; Oliver killed, Wm Thompson killed, & Dauphin slightly wounded.

That on the following day I was taken prisoner immediately after which I received several Sabre cuts in my head; & Bayonet stabs in my body. As nearly as I can learn Watson died of his wound on Wednesday the 2nd or on Thursday the 3rd day after I was taken.

Dauphin was killed when I was taken, & Anderson I suppose also. I have since been tried, & found guilty of Treason, &c; and of murder in the first degree. I have not yet received my sentence. No others of the company with whom you were acquainted were so far as I can learn either killed or taken. Under all these terrible calamities; I feel quite cheerful in the assurance that God reigns; & will overrule all for his glory; & the best possible good. I feel no consciousness of guilt in the matter; nor even mortification on account of my imprisonment; & irons; & I feel perfectly assured that very soon no member of my family will feel any possible disposition to blush on my account. Already dear friends at a distance with kindest sympathies are cheering me with the assurance that posterity at least will do me justice. I shall commend you all together with my beloved, but bereaved daughters in law to their sympathies which I have no doubt will soon reach you.

I also commend you all to him "whose mercy endureth for ever"; to the God of my father "whose I am; & whom I serve" "He will never leave you nor forsake you" unless you forsake him. Finally my dearly beloved be of good comfort. Be sure

to remember & to follow my advice & my example too.
 it has been consistent with the holy religion of Jesus Christ in
 which I remain a most firm, & humble believer. Never forget
 the poor nor think any thing you bestow on them to be lost, to you even
 though they may be as black as bedsmelt the Ethiopian, evn who
coned for Jeremiah in the pit of the dungeon; or as black as the one to
 whom Phillip preached Christ. Be sure to entertain strangers for
 they some have — "Remember them them that are in bonds as
 bound with them". I am in the charge of a jailor like the one who
 took charge of Paul & Silas; & you may rest assured that both kind hearts
 & kind faces are more or less about me; whilst thousands are thirsting for
 my blood. "These light afflictions which are but for a moment shall
 work out for us a far more exceeding & eternal weight of glory."
 I hope to be able to write you again. My wounds are doing well.
 Copy this & send it to your sorrow stricken brother, Ruth; to comfort
 him. Write me a few words in regard to the welfare of all.
 God Almighty bless you all; & make you joyful in the midst of all
 your tribulations. Write to John Brown ^{Charleston} Jefferson Co, Va, care
 of Capt John Aris Your Affectionate Husband, & Father.
 John Brown

Dec. 3rd 1859

P.S. Yesterday Nov 2nd I was sentenced to be hanged on 2nd Decem next
 Do not grieve on my account. I am still quite cheerful.
 So kiss you all your ever
 J Brown