

## Civil War Crimes

The Union military kept an official record of its activities during the Civil War. The *Official Records* does not include many of the horrific war crimes committed by Union officers and soldiers, for obvious reasons. But it does contain enough detail to paint a vivid picture of Yankee depravity,

barbaric brutality, savage hostility, psychotic revenge, and criminal conduct. The officers who provided those details had no idea their words would eventually be recorded, published, and read by future generations.

Historian Dr Allan Nevins observed in 1962 that this systematic Yankee devastation had been mostly ignored by other historians. He concluded that there were probably three reasons for that. (1) So much relevant information had been omitted from the official reports. (2) The story of Yankee devastation in the South is so horrific that it is painful to write about, and most unpleasant to read about. (3) Trying to tell the full story soon becomes monotonous.

Maybe that's why no one had bothered (or dared, or even thought of) going through the *Official Records* and isolating the parts of it that present an accurate picture of Yankee conduct during the war. Until, that is, Thomas Bland Keys published his *The Uncivil War: Union Army and Navy Excesses in the Official Records*, 1991.

Mr Keys does not quote Southern sources, even though they could contribute a wealth of relevant information. That's because most people are not going to consider Southerners as credible witnesses or objective observers when it comes to describing events of the Civil War. Besides, bad things happen in all wars, so sad stories from sad Southerners is hardly considered significant. Keys quotes only Union sources, as documented in their own *Official Records*. The devastation revealed in his book is comparable, at least in terms of property, to the worst chapters of the two world wars, according to Dr Nevins. The devastation in terms of human slaughter and suffering at the hands of the American president-turned-dictator is comparable to the most despicable behavior of the most flagitious tyrants in world history.

### Engagement of Rules: What is a War Crime?

The book *The Uncivil War: Union Army and Navy Excesses in the Official Records*, by Thomas Bland Keys, documents a few of the countless examples of Union military war crimes and violations of both international and Union standards of acceptable war conduct. These are official records of Union military officers, so they are considered entirely reliable. The men recording these events had no idea they would be read by anyone other than Union military personnel and high-ranking Republican elected officials, so they had no reason to lie. In fact they had every reason to conceal these truths if they had any suspicion that people like me or you would someday be gazing at their correspondence in disgust and disbelief.

On almost every page there are General Orders and Circulars written by anguished Union officers lamenting the level of depravity displayed by Union soldiers and officers, who either participated in events, or looked the other way, or found themselves unable to control the criminal conduct of the men under their command. It's difficult for me to imagine officers not being able to control their men, because during my brief military career, even low-ranking officers had all the authority they needed to make sure every troop toed the line, with very punitive disincentives at their disposal, and a predisposition toward fully utilizing them.

Yet time after time, Union commanders reminded their troops and junior officers of the importance of following the Union's own military standard of conduct. The Northern military juggernaut could demolish and annihilate the entire Southern region of the nation, but they were simply helpless to keep their own men in line. That is apparently what we are to conclude from this book. But I draw an entirely different conclusion.

Although some Union officers were sincere in their efforts to control behavior, they were tacitly overruled by their superiors -- top-ranking generals, Abraham Lincoln, and his cabinet. Oh, and by Northern newspapers and the Yankees who read them. They were all well aware of widespread Union atrocities, and that's exactly what they wanted. They didn't want to just win the war. They wanted revenge. They wanted to crush the South,

and humiliate them. They wanted cultural genocide. Their goal was to cleanse the South of its culture, so Yankees could replace it with their own. It was a campaign of cultural cleansing. After the Civil War, Yankees turned their wrath on Indians, and destroyed their cultures, also. They were driven by supreme Yankee arrogance and unrestrained aggression.

In order to understand how far Union troops strayed from established military standards of conduct, we need to take a look at exactly what those standards were. We learn that from *The Real Lincoln: A New Look at Abraham Lincoln, His Agenda, and an Unnecessary War*, by Thomas J DiLorenzo.

An international convention met in Geneva, Switzerland in 1863 to establish a written record of generally accepted rules of warfare, which had been in effect for over a century. But the Civil War had already been raging for two years by then. Furthermore, after 1863, the Union army abandoned all pretenses of following any accepted military rules of conduct, and they made up their own rules, just as Lincoln had been doing on the political front from the very beginning of his administration. So, the Geneva Convention had little or no impact on the Civil War.

Prior to the convention, nations worldwide were in general agreement that certain things were just wrong, and they were so obviously wrong that civilized people knew intuitively that they were wrong. For example, it was a war crime to: attack defenseless civilians, cities and towns; to plunder and wantonly destroy civilian property; or to take from civilians more than what was necessary to feed and sustain an occupying army. Violators were subject to imprisonment or death. It was also universally accepted that the only just war was a defensive war.

Clearly, on that last point alone, Abraham Lincoln, his cabinet, top Union elected officials, and top-ranking Union officers were war criminals. Lincoln had absolutely no constitutional, legal, or moral authority to invade the South. The entire war was criminal. The South did not want war, even though Lincoln manipulated them into firing on Ft Sumter. That was a legitimate defensive act on the part of the Confederacy, and it was most certainly not intended as an offensive move. If it had been, it would have been the dumbest military tactic in world history. No one was killed or even injured in the Ft Sumter incident, and the South did not follow it up with further attacks. They just wanted to be left alone, and they knew they could not allow federal cannons at Ft Sumter to remain there, pointed directly at the Confederacy's capital city. That would have been entirely unacceptable to any country.

Another source of information about accepted rules of war was *The Law of Nations*, by Emmerich de Vattel, 1798. It was a collection of wisdom and customs that had been handed down from generation to generation from the classical era. American politicians and military officers relied on it, because its self-evident moral standards were considered worthy of respect by all civilized societies.

For example, women, children, feeble old men, the sick, and anyone offering no resistance are exempted from hostility. Citizens are not part of the battle, and they are to play no part in it, so they should have no fear of harm from military officers or soldiers -- the only legitimate participants in hostilities. Occupying soldiers who engage in pillaging, plundering, assault, or destruction of private civilian property are regarded as savage barbarians.

Gen Henry Halleck wrote *International Law*, and he used it as his textbook when he taught the subject at West Point. Halleck agreed with Vattel on almost every point. Non-combatants should be spared as much as possible. Civilians and their property were to be protected, with these exceptions: property may be confiscated as a penalty for committing some offense; the rule may be suspended if necessary to maintain civil order; and food may be taken if it is necessary to support an occupying or invading army. Otherwise, any property taken should be compensated.

Halleck departed from Vattel on these two principles: taking civilian hostages and burning private homes. Vattel had prohibited those acts, but Halleck's book did not. They were both practiced by Union forces throughout the South. Halleck was appointed general in chief of the Union armies in July 1862.

Lincoln himself weighed in on the subject in his General Order no 100, which became known as the Lieber Code, because Columbia University law professor Francis Lieber is the one who wrote it for Lincoln. It echoed the general principle that civilians were to be exempted from the war as much as possible, and it was widely considered a moral and humane code of conduct.

But that was because nobody bothered to read it closely. It contained, at the end, an escape clause, giving Union officers the option of totally disregarding the Code if they felt it was necessary. As it turns out, military commanders rarely failed to exercise that option, judging almost every situation they faced as "necessary" to ignore Lincoln's General Order no 100. It was a smokescreen, and it was typical Lincoln.

From the very beginning of the war, Vattel's and Halleck's works were completely ignored, and punishment for violating those principles was extremely rare. In fact, the most ruthless, barbaric commanders were often praised and promoted. Some Union generals were genuinely upset with this policy, but their protests accomplished nothing good. Many other generals issued frequent orders to refrain from violating what they considered the binding code of military conduct, and they sent letters of protest up the chain of command, but they did no good. Apparently, they were unaware of Lincoln's escape clause, which essentially gave Yankees carte blanche authority to act as barbaric anarchists with impunity. Or maybe these officers were merely trying to cover their own ass. Just in case.

Lincoln had no use for any military code of conduct, any more than he had any use for the Constitution, civil law, the Supreme Court, public opinion, or anything else, other than his own supremely arrogant and despotic will. His plan from the very beginning was to wage total war against the South, including rampant pillaging, plundering, destruction of property, bombing and burning entire cities, murder, rape, taking civilian hostages, and starving women and children to death.

His goal, he said, was to preserve the Union. Which is like a man telling his wife that he will continue to beat her until she expresses her eternal love and devotion to him.