

Book Review of

Phillip Shaw Paludan, *Victims: A True Story of the Civil War*. Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 1981.

In a remote Appalachian town called Shelton Laurel, North Carolina thirteen Unionist mountaineers were murdered by the Confederate Army in January, 1863. The Shelton Laurel Massacre and the associated guerilla warfare in the Appalachians were small and oft ignored events in the American Civil War. Paludan's rationale for studying these conflicts was that they gave him "...the chance to tie the social history of the Civil War era to a concern about the relationship between the grand events that are the focus of most historical investigation and the daily experience of ordinary life." (p xi)

Despite the small scale of the event, much of Paludan's evidence on the people involved comes from varied primary sources such as: memoirs, oral family histories, census data, newspaper articles, court cases, and private and government letters. The emerging history is uniquely human, both engaging and troubling at the same time. Rural mountaineers, despite living in the Confederate state of North Carolina, generally favored the Union because of "...class hostility, rural suspicions of more urban places, and a feeling that the wealthy and influential slave owners were threatening hard-working common people." (p 61) They fought with guerilla style hit-and-run tactics due to the rugged terrain around Shelton Laurel. "Locals had a saying that in these mountains a person could shoot a squirrel fifty feet away and have to walk a mile to fetch it." (p 68) The largest drawback of using guerilla tactics was Unionist mountaineers would not be treated as regular enemy soldiers on the battlefield. When a regular soldier surrendered, rules of engagement required he be captured and treated respectfully as a prisoner of war. Guerillas could be killed when surrendering. If captured they were taken to a local civilian court to stand trial for their crimes. (p 87-88)

On the Confederate side, Paludan introduced readers to Lt. Col. James Keith, Col. Lawrence Allen, and Gen. Henry Heth. Keith and Allen lived in the wealthy town of Marshall, located in Madison County, where Shelton Laurel also was located. Both men already were wealthy and successful when the

Civil War began in 1861. They saw an opportunity for added respect and glory when they volunteered to serve as officers in the Sixty-Fourth North Carolina Regiment. (p 31-34)

Due to the availability of Henry Heth's detailed memoirs, Paludan spends a large portion of the book, at least 25 of 144 pages, detailing his life. Great things were expected of Heth, yet he fell short. At West Point, Heth had poor grades and "...found his status in the class of 1847 by becoming its outstanding prankster and general incorrigible." (p 36) Heth's military career bounced him from Mexico in 1848, to Fort Atkinson, KS, in 1851, and on to Utah in 1858. All the while he became more and more frustrated that he missed out on major action. He was praised for keeping a cool head in tense situations, though, and eventually was promoted to Brigadier General. (p 49) Future defeats in western Virginia in 1862, and later in Kentucky, caused Heth to be passed over for promotion to Major General. He then was unhappily transferred to command the East Tennessee region, overseeing the Sixty-Fourth and other regiments. (p 54-55)

In Chapter 4: The Killing, Paludan realizes one of his stated goals in the Preface to "appeal to informed hearts and minds" (p xv) by writing actively and emotively, causing the reader to concurrently empathize with the victims and the murderers. Fifty mountaineers raided Marshall, NC, for salt, clothing, and money needed for Unionists and Confederate deserters hiding in the Appalachian Mountains. Col. Allen lost two of his three children from scarlet fever during the aftermath of that raid. Shelton Laurel families suffered greatly when Allen and Keith, after receiving orders from General Heth, brought the Sixty-Fourth Regiment to find the Unionist band of raiders. During questioning many women were tied to trees, whipped, beaten, and hung to nearly the point of death. Livestock was slaughtered; homes and barns were burned to the ground.

Allen and Keith were frustrated because they only captured 15 men, and two later escaped and were repeatedly fired upon by Unionist guerillas. They marched their captives to Knoxville for trial. A few miles on their way Keith ordered five of the prisoners to kneel and they were summarily shot by the

Confederate soldiers. The rest were treated the same way until all were dead. David Shelton, the youngest at age thirteen, is attributed with unsuccessfully pleading: "You have killed my old father and my three brothers; you have shot me in both arms - I forgive you all this - I can get well. Let me go home to my mother and sisters." (p 98)

Paludan wraps up the event in a fifth chapter and an epilogue. The war continued and other big events such as the Battle of Gettysburg, the overall demise of the Confederacy, and Reconstruction overshadowed the small and seemingly insignificant Shelton Laurel Massacre. Lt. Col. Keith was the only officer to be indicted and stand trial. He evaded judgment on thirteen individual counts of murder by escaping prison. Col. Allen eventually resigned and wrote a pamphlet detailing his career with the Sixty-Fourth. General Heth eventually was promoted to Major General and served under General Lee, a close friend since West Point. His military career turned for the worse when his poor decision making contributed to defeats at Chancellorsville, Gettysburg, and the Battle of the Wilderness. The surviving people of Shelton Laurel mourned their dead, regrouped, and continued to abide in their isolated Appalachian wilderness homes.

Paludan's history on guerilla warfare in the Appalachian Mountains during the Civil War and the Shelton Laurel Massacre is a well written and engrossing book. It causes the reader to ask questions that can be applied to many wartime atrocities such as the Holocaust of World War II or the My Lai Massacre in 1968. I highly recommend this book to any thoughtful student of history.