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THE DAHLGREN RAID AGAINST RICHMOND

MARCH 28, - APRIL 2, 1864.

by

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THE DAHLGREN RAID AGAINST RICHMOND
MARCH 28 - APRIL 2, 1864.

I
Origin and Purpose of the Raid.

The military situation at the beginning of the year 1864 showed that the Confederate States had sustained considerable reverses. In the West, the Mississippi valley in its entirety was held by the Union forces and the States of Tennessee and Arkansas, as well as parts of Mississippi and Louisiana had been overrun. The situation in the East was different; although Lee had suffered irreparable losses at Gettysburg, nevertheless he held a solid line against the Federal forces along the Rapidan River. From the beginning of the year until General Grant took over the command of the Army of the Potomac in the latter part of March, there was practically no conflict more than skirmishes between the two armies.

General Benjamin F. Butler who was in command of the Federal forces in Eastern Virginia could never make his way much past New Kent Court House; and the James River was impassable to gunboats because of the tortuous bends in the stream rather than the defending forts.

President Lincoln had, for some time, wished to circulate within the Confederate lines amnesty proclamations, and (as is reported by General Meade) he sent for Brigadier-General Judson Kilpatrick in the middle of February in order to confer with him as to the possibilities of accomplishing this with the help of the cavalry. (1)

There was, however a more potent factor behind the raid. At this
time there were in Richmond about 8,000 Federal prisoners, in-
carcerated in Castles Thunder and Lightning, the factories of
Crew and Pemberton, Belle Isle, (an open encampment for common
soldiers),(2) and Libby Prison, which held 'Abolition officers.
(3) The release of these prisoners would add tremendously to the
Union forces by a conjunction with Butler on the peninsula,(4)
or, as was probably considered, in the minds of the Federal Offic-
ials, Richmond might be seized and the Confederacy in consequence
would collapse, thus bringing to a close two years of apparently
resultless conflict. General Meade, the commander at that time
of the Army of the Potomac favored as he said a coup de main,
releasing the captive soldiers in the Confederate capital and
then a retreat down the Peninsula.(5)

On February 16th, General Kilpatrick submitted to Captain
E. B. Parsons (6) a carefully worked out set of plans for an
expedition. The introduction is significant:

'Captain: In compliance with orders from headquarters,
Cavalry Corps, I have the honor to report that on the
morning of the 12th instant I proceeded to Washington
City and reported to the President of the United States,
as directed in an order dated headquarters Cavalry Corps,
February 12, 1864.

By direction of the President I afterwards reported
to the honorable Secretary of War and submitted, at his
request, the following plan as, in my opinion, the most
practicable to accomplish the double purpose of distrib-
uting the President's amnesty proclamation to the rebel

(2) The Daily Richmond Enquirer, January 23, 1864.
(3) Ibid, February 6, 1864.
(5) Ibid,
(6) The Acting Assistant Adjutant-General, Cavalry Corps.
command in our front, and to the inhabitants of Virginia in the various counties around Richmond; as also to destroy, as far as practicable, the enemy's communications, and attempt the release of our prisoners at Richmond.' (7)

The set of plans which follow are those which were used in the raid against Richmond.

II
Story of the Raid.

On February 27, General Kilpatrick received a confidential order from Major-General A.A. Humphreys, the Chief of Staff, that his command had been re-enforced with 4,000 officers and men and a battery of light artillery and that he should proceed at once to Richmond, 'to effect an entrance into that city and liberate our prisoners now held there and in the immediate vicinity.' (8)

By this time the idea of circulating the amnesty proclamations of Lincoln had been abandoned, for no future reference is made of them.

The day before, however, Kilpatrick had received from A. Pleasanton, Major-General Commanding, another confidential order which includes for the first time, mention of Colonel Ulric Dahlgren. 'Col. Ulric Dahlgren is authorized to accompany you, and will render valuable assistance from his knowledge of the country and his well-known gallantry and energy.' (9)

This young man, not quite twenty-two years of age, (10) was the son of the distinguished Rear-Admiral John Adolf Dahlgren, well-known as an inventor and naval commander. Ulric Dahlgren had been educated in private academies and was entering a lay office as a student when the War Between the States broke. He at once

(10) John A. Dahlgren, Memoir of Ulric Dahlgren, p. 11.
volunteered and after serving in several capacities the young man entered the cavalry in which division of service he was destined to remain. (11) He served in this division regularly until he was wounded in the foot in the engagement at Hagerstown which took place on July 6th, 1863. (12) Captain Dahlgren was taken back to Washington and the whole leg was amputated because of infection; (13) he recovered from this and at once began to think of plans to liberate the prisoners in Richmond. Though Admiral Dahlgren never intimates in his book, it is highly probable that the father secured the commission for his none too physically fit son. Nevertheless, on horse, with wooden leg and crutch Colonel Ulric Dahlgren joined Kilpatrick at the Cavalry camp at Stevensburg, Virginia. (14)

On February 28 at six fifteen P.M., Kilpatrick was sent the following confidential dispatch: 'The Major-general commanding directs you to move to-night.' (15) The raid had started.

Kilpatrick left his camp at seven o'clock and marched to Ely's Ford on the Rapidan with 3,582 men, where he crossed without interference of the Confederates, Dahlgren having been previously sent ahead to see that there would be no chance of alarm. The latter had with him 450 men and in reconnoitering captured a Confederate picket of two officers and 14 men. (16) The two parties upon conjunction proceeded to Spotsylvania Court House where the final separation took place, the former in the direction of Hanover Court House and the latter toward

(11) Dahlgren, Memoir of Ulric Dahlgren, p.65.
(12) Ibid., p.169.
(13) Ibid., p.177.
(15) Ibid., I, xxxiii, p.175. Humphreys to Kilpatrick. Feb. 28.
Frederick's Hall Station. Colonel Dahlgren and his party pressed on and after travelling all night and a part of the following morning reached Frederick's Hall Station at eleven A.M.(17)

Here was situated a supply base as the Federals well knew, so keeping at a good distance from the Confederate camp, they started to destroy the railroad.(18) By accident they came upon a court martial in session and captured those who were participating, one colonel, one major and eight or nine captains.(19) Among these were Captain Dement and Lieutenant Henry E. Blair, both of whom were to give accounts in later life, for they were forced to ride with Dahlgren throughout the entire raid.(20)

Having captured these officers, the raiding party moved on one mile south of the station and proceeded to tear up the track, bending the rails so that they could not be used again and cutting the telegraph wires to prevent communication.(21) Having done as much damage as was possible without attracting notice the party moved on to the South Anna River which was crossed about ten P.M. (22) By this time the rain and sleet had started to fall and was to continue on for the remainder of the raid.

Colonel pushed on in the direction of Goochland Court House and in spite of the bad weather and the near loss of one part

(19) Ibid., I, xxxiii, p. 194. Mitchell Report. Brigadier-General Armistead Long in his report to the Confederate War Office says that one lieutenant-colonel, three captains and two lieutenants were captured. The War of the Rebellion: I, xxxiii, p. 211.
(20) Southern Historical Society Papers, xiii, p. 538. 'Statement of Judge Henry E. Blair.
of his troops, he was able to reach the James River, 'about 21 miles from Richmond,' on the morning of March 1st. (23)

Here Captain Mitchell received orders from Dahlgren to take a detachment of 100 men and to proceed to the canal where they were to destroy locks, burn mills, canal-boats and all grain that might be found. Captain Mitchell was also placed in charge of the ambulances, prisoners and led horses and was to send them upon arrival at Westham Creek to Hungary Station where they would be taken care of by General Kilpatrick. '.....he, [Colonel Dahlgren], with the main portion of his command, was to cross the James River at a ford which his guide was to show him, release the prisoners, and enter Richmond, I believe by the Mayo Bridge,.....He then divided the torpedoes, giving me one box, some turpentine and oakum.'(24)

Captain Mitchell carried out his orders by destroying,

'...six flourishing grist-mills, filled with grain and flour, one saw mill, six canal-boats, loaded with grain, the barn (also well filled ) on Secretary Seddon's plantation, coal works at Manakin's Ferry and Morgan's Lock just above.'(25) He was unable to bring the ambulances on the tow path, so he went back to the River Road and started to Richmond. As he and his company went along, to their surprise they came upon Dahlgren's tracks and farther on the dead body of a negro hanging from a tree on the roadside. It seems that Colonel Dahlgren intended to cross the James River by a ford, to which his guide (this negro ) promised to guide him. There was neither a ford nor a bridge; the guide

had known it, and in his indignation the Colonel hung him.’ (26) Obviously Mitchell in his story attempted to defend Dahlgren's action, nevertheless there was a ford in that locality but because of the rains and thawing the river was flooded and impassable. (27) This action of Dahlgren proves, if nothing more that he was headstrong and impulsive; the Colonel's passions had time to cool before the execution, for the negro was hanged not by the river side but up on the main road.

Admiral Dahlgren never once alludes to this incident in his book; but the Colonel's signal officer Lieutenant R. Bartley, who later wrote an article which appeared in the Detroit Free Press in 1882, goes out of his way to defend Dahlgren. There was no ford at the place at all, but a steam ferry, with a boat at the opposite side of the river, and no ford short of twenty miles up the river. This man came down from Washington City, sent by Stanton, who was a personal friend of the Colonel. He made a bargain with Kilpatrick and Dahlgren to take them to a ford at Dover Mills and take them over, when his services would cease, and in case of any mistake or treachery on his part he was to be hanged, and if it came out all right he was to receive a large sum of money. He took charge on those terms, took us safe through and had plenty of chances to make his escape, but still kept on with us. When asked why he had misled us, he did not, or could not give a satisfactory answer. The Colonel then told him he would have to carry out his part of the contract, to which the guide assented, and admitted that was the agreement and made no objection to his execution. He went along to the tree without any force and submitted to his fate without a murmur.’ (28)

This story is quite untrue not only in reference to the ford but the negro, who was not brought from Washington but was

(27) There is a ford at both Manakin and Dover.
(28) Southern Historical Society Papers. xiii, 518.
a freed slave by the name of Martin, (29) who worked as a brick-layer, he had formerly been the property of a Mr. Mimms who lived in that vicinity. (30)

There is a story published, claiming that the wife of Secretary of War Seddon saved Richmond from the raiders. According to the account Mrs. Seddon had been to school with the mother of Colonel Dahlgren and had invited him into the house when he came up, thus giving her husband time enough to escape to Richmond to give the warning. (31) Captain Mitchell gives no account of this but only says that Colonel Dahlgren after abandoning the idea of crossing the James River took a cross road about eight miles from Richmond and proceeded '...I think near Short Pump. There I joined him about 3:30 P.M.' (32) If when Mitchell was burning the barns at Sabot Hill, Secretary Seddon's home, Colonel Dahlgren had been present there would have been no delay in the joining of the two forces.

There was pillaging at both Dover and Sabot Hill, not an uncommon occurrence on a raid, but nevertheless a fact which has special interest later on. Silver was carried away from these homes and was not returned until the raiders were captured. (33)

Richmond was prepared for an attempt of this kind for since the attack of General Stoneman in April of 1863, the Home Guard had been established by orders of the Confederate Congress. This guard was composed of departmental clerks and skilled.

(30) Richmond Daily Dispatch, March 2, 1864. Richmond Examiner, March 2, 1864. Spells the name of the owner 'Mimms' not Mimms.
(31) Southern Historical Society Papers, xxxiv, pp. 357-358
workmen of the Tredegar Iron Works, not old men and young boys as is disparagingly claimed sometimes by Northern authors and heroically acclaimed by Southern sentimentalists.\(^{(34)}\)

The appearance of the raiding party before Richmond caused the usual stir. On March 1st early in the afternoon the great bell in the Capitol Square was rung and the local defence group organized in front of the War Department building, which was situated on Ninth Street opposite the lower end of the Square. \(^{(35)}\)

After organizing the company marched up Franklin Street where, 'Women flanked the street to cheer and encourage us.'\(^{(36)}\) Outside the city Colonel McAnerney, the commander, met another part of the Home Guard who had previously arrived on the scene. He took command of the entire company and proceeded to the farm of Benjamin Green. Here the Colonel decided to make a stand against the Federals. A battalion under the command of an English officer in Confederate service, Major Ford was surrounded and captured some distance away.\(^{(37)}\)

Colonel McAnerney in order to delay the Federals sent ahead Captain Babcrek with about fifty men '...to the rail fence.... with instructions to fire one round as Dahlgren approached him, then fall back to our main line; this order was executed in a most creditable manner...'\(^{(38)}\) Colonel Dahlgren took this as the last stand of the Defence Guard and proceeded; he then encountered the main force which was waiting under the command

\(^{(34)}\) Southern Historical Society Papers, xxxvii, p. 200
\(^{(36)}\) Ibid.
\(^{(37)}\) Ibid.
\(^{(38)}\) Ibid.
of Colonel McAnerney, who had ordered that not a gun be fired until he gave the word. 'When Dahlgren reached the center of the field he seemed suspicious of danger, he halted his command, then moved slowly forward and halted again - He was now within easy range of us - and evidently discovered our line of battle, gave the order to charge, and I gave the order to fire. On they came like maddened fiends, but our splendid volley was too much for them - many of the troopers turned and fled, others charged our lines with drawn sabres and wounded several of our men - According to Captain Dement, Dahlgren was surprised and dismayed by our first and well directed volley - he believed he had encountered a large body of fresh troops, sounded the "retreat" and followed his fleeing troopers, leaving his dead and wounded on the field together with several prisoners and horses.' (39)

This idea that the main line of the Confederates had been reinforced was also held by Captain Mitchell. '....finally, from the increased fire it appeared that the enemy had received reinforcements, and the Colonel gave orders to retire.' (40)

The rain and sleet continued to fall heavily, as it had done during most of the raid. Due to this and the darkness of the night Captain Mitchell and his company became separated from the main column; he attempted to find the Colonel but could not, so at once, obeying former instructions, set out for Hungary Station. After some blundering and skirmishing he formed a junction with General Kilpatrick near White House and from there the two proceeded down the peninsula and joined General Butler. (41)

(39) John McAnerney, "Dahlgren Raid."
On March 2, the Richmond newspapers jubilantly announced the repulse of the enemy and in relief told somewhat whimsically of a dashing Yankee Cavalry officer, who in the engagement of the night before fallen into a deserted ice-house where his horse had been killed and he had broken his arm. He was pulled out and promptly taken to Libby Prison. (42)

General Kilpatrick had the same day, (March 1) come before Richmond and shelled the outer fortifications on the Brooke Road, but being unsuccessful in reducing these, due to the coming night and the bad weather, he had decided to camp near Atlee until the next morning. (43) General Wade Hampton of the Confederate Army had meantime received a message that the Federal force was before Richmond and came at once to the scene of action. He arrived the night of the first and after learning of the whereabouts of Kilpatrick, set out to attack the camp, in spite of the late hour and the pouring rain and sleet. He and his brigade struck the camp and in a short time drove off the Federals. (44)

There was now nothing left for Kilpatrick to do but retreat, he therefore made his way down the Peninsula to New Kent Court House and joined General Butler. (45)

Dahlgren was now the only one who had not been able to make a safe retreat. He was now isolated with about one hundred men surrounded by the enemy and in an almost strange country. (46)

(42) Richmond Daily Dispatch, March 2, 1864.
(46) There is no official report covering the remainder of Dahlgren's raid. Probably the most nearly accurate account of the last day's happenings, is a report made by Lieutenant Bartley, Dahlgren's signal officer, which was published in 1882. Admiral Dahlgren's memoir of his son is all too obviously a passionate plea in defence of the son. In his earnestness the Admiral indulges in — let us be lenient — historical innaccuracy.
After the engagement before Richmond and the separation of Captain Mitchell, Colonel Dahlgren also determined to go to Hungary Station and there form a junction with General Kilpatrick. On the Brooke Turnpike, however he learned from an individual that Kilpatrick had retreated down the Peninsula. Now for some unaccountable reason, Dahlgren changed his mind and determined to cross both the Pamunkey and Mattaponi Rivers and proceed down the York Peninsula to Gloucester Point where he expected to get aboard the Union war vessels which were anchored there. (47)

The retreat was laborious for the rain and sleet still fell heavily. Dahlgren reached the Pamunkey and despite the swollen condition of the river crossed at Hanover town Ferry without difficulty, sometime in the mid-morning. (48) The company evidently journeyed with difficulty but reached the Mattaponi during the early afternoon. (49)

Meantime the local Home Guard, none too well organized, began to make ready. Lieutenant James Pollard received early on the morning of March 2 a dispatch warning him that part of the Federal force which had attacked Richmond on the day before was retreating in the direction of King William and King and Queen Counties. (50) He at once collected about 25 men who were home on furlough and started out after Dahlgren. Pollard and his men crossed the Mattaponi and waited for the Federals at Dunkirk, there being a ferry at that point. (51) However the enemy crossed

(48) Dahlgren, Memoir of Ulric Dahlgren, p. 218.
(49) Southern Historical Society Papers, xiii, p. 530. Pollard reports that he struck the rear of the enemy after they had crossed the Mattaponi about 4 P.M.
several miles lower near Aylett's, in spite of a small resistance and down the York Peninsula.

Lieutenant Pollard found this out from a picket and started after Dahlgren, harassing the rear of the force for several miles. He then turned off and was joined by a Captain Magruder of the local Home Guard with about 30 men and together the two groups raced ahead of Dahlgren and hid themselves near Walkerton by the road along which the Federals must come. Meanwhile Captain Edward C. Fox, also of the Home Guard of the county joined Pollard after gathering up about fifteen men. (51)

Dahlgren and his men being thoroughly tired stopped to rest shortly before dark near Stevensville and waited there until about eleven o'clock, at which time the company resumed march. (52) The Confederate force now consisting of about 150 men waited. (53) About 11:30 the Federals came along the road with Colonel Dahlgren riding in front. (54) He saw some of the Confederates and drawing his pistol demanded their surrender; the reply was a challenge. Dahlgren attempted to shoot, the revolver missed fire and almost instantly the Confederates poured a volley into the

(52) Ibid. xiii, p. 539. Statement of Judge Henry E. Blair.
(54) Ibid. xiii, p. 520. R. Bartley Report. Bartley says that one of the officers of the company, Lieutenant Merrit was in the advance of Dahlgren. After traveling a short distance from Stevensville, he came back and reported that a force of Confederates were holding the road along which they had to pass. Dahlgren drew his pistol and went in advance. Upon meeting the enemy he demanded that they surrender. 'This was answered by a defiant demand for us to surrender. At this Dahlgren attempted to shoot the officer in charge of the Confederates, but the weapon hung fire. Almost instantly a volley was fired into our left flank.....'

Admiral Dahlgren says that his son was as well as assassinated and attempts to prove his point by saying that the Confederates lurking in ambush fired upon the back of the Colonel as he passed along. Dahlgren, Memoir of Ulric Dahlgren, p. 222.
line. Colonel Dahlgren fell dead pierced by five bullets. (55) The Federals seeing that their leader had fallen, broke ranks and fled into the woods that bordered the road. Some surrendered to Captain Dement, (56) while others attempted to escape only to be captured the next morning. (57)

III

The Finding of Dahlgren's Orders and the Ensuing Controversy.

The Finding of the orders upon the body of Dahlgren is a point of considerable dispute. However strong the Northern claims may be about the messages being forged, there remains one fact certain; that Dahlgren had orders on his person, giving directions to his men. General Kilpatrick, his superior officer admits, though he fervently denies the existence of certain phrases. (58)

According to most accounts, just after the Federals had dispersed and the Confederates were in hot pursuit, there came along the road a Captain Edward W. Halbach who had been previously exempted from service because of the fact that he was a schoolmaster with the required number of pupils. With him was one of his charges, a thirteen year old boy named William Littlepage. The two had heard the excitement and wished to participate but having no horses they had to go on foot. As they were going on their way, they came upon the body of Dahlgren lying in the middle of the road. The boy stopped and searched the pockets of the "dead Yankee" in hopes of finding a

(56) Supra. p. 5. (57) Southern Historical Society Papers, xiii, p. 540. Blair Account
watch. His master paid little attention to him but later, after they had joined the Confederates and the child offered some cigars to the group, they were surprised and began to ask questions. That anyone during such hard times should be able to offer cigars was strange. On being questioned Littlepage replied that he had also some papers and a memorandum book. Captain Halbach asked for the papers, which were promptly given him; the boy then added that the "dead Yankee" had a wooden leg. At once those present recognized that the man was none other than Colonel Ulric Dahlgren. (59)

The papers were not examined until morning for no light could be made without running the risk of attracting the attention of the Federals who were still abroad in the neighborhood. (60)

Halbach kept the papers in his possession until about two o'clock the following day, (March 3d.) when Captain Pollard came by and was shown the papers. (61) These were taken to General Beale, the local commander, who sent them at once by courier to Major-General Fitz. Lee. (62)

(60) This is quite obvious; but had the papers been examined there is hardly a shade of doubt that there was no ink or other means with which to change or rewrite the orders.
(62) General Beale in his History of the Ninth Virginia Cavalry, does not actually say that he read the orders of Dahlgren or that he ever received them. 'The papers were forwarded by Pollard's courier to Richmond. The order-book was retained.' p. 111.
Pollard in his account, in the same book, (page 182) and General Fitz. Lee in his report to Adjutant and Inspector-General Cooper, (The War of the Rebellion: I, xxxiii, p. 217. March 4.) say that the papers came from General Beale.

The papers consisted of an address to the officers, an address to the pioneers and a memorandum book. This last item must have remained in the possession of General Beale, for on March 31, General Fitz. Lee forwarded this book to General Cooper. 'I have the honor to inclose to you Colonel Dahlgren's note-book, just sent me by Colonel General Beale, ... '"The War of the Rebellion: I, xxxiii, p. 224. Fitz. Lee to Cooper.
General Lee sent them straight to Adjutant and Inspector-General Samuel Cooper, (63) who must have forwarded them to the War Department at once, for they passed through the hands of the dyspeptic General Braxton Bragg. The latter wrote on the same day a flaming letter to Secretary of War James A. Seddon, in which he put forth his idea for drastic action. 'My conviction,' he wrote 'is for an execution of the prisoners and a publication as justification;' (64). Secretary Seddon took up the cry and sent the next day to General Robert E. Lee, a clipping from the Richmond Examinier, which was a quotation of the orders of Dahlgren and an account of the end of the raid. (65) With the clipping was a letter which expressed the same feelings as expressed by General Bragg. 'My own inclinations are towards the execution of at least a portion of those captured at the time Colonel Dahlgren was killed, and a publication of these papers as its justification;' (66)

General Lee's reply to this is characteristic of his reserve and proper command of a situation.

'I concur with you in thinking that a formal publication of these papers should be made under official authority, that our people and the world may know the character of the war our enemies wage against us, and the unchristian and atrocious acts they plot and perpetrate. But I cannot recommend the execution of the prisoners that have fallen into our hands. Assuming that the address and special orders of Colonel Dahlgren correctly state his designs and intentions, they were not executed, and I believe, even in a legal point of view, acts in addition to intentions are necessary to constitute crime. These papers can only be considered as evidence of his intention.' (67)

This curbed the strong feeling which had by this time had been expressed in the newspapers of Richmond. (68) The Confederate authorities took more reasonable steps, and prepared to confront the Union leaders.

The papers were accordingly photographed; from the testimony of the topographer, about 50 copies were made. (69)

This work evidently took some time, for it was not until March 30 that General Robert E. Lee was sent photographic copies of the address and special orders, by General Samuel Cooper. (70) Lee was directed by President Davis to open 'a correspondance with the General commanding the Army of the Potomac to ascertain if the orders and instructions of Colonel Dahlgren, as contained in these papers, were in conformity to instructions from his Government or superior officers, and whether the Government of the United States sanctions the sentiments and purposes therein set forth.' (71)

General Lee wrote to General George G. Meade, the then commander of the Army of the Potomac, a letter dated April 1st, in which he inquired whether the plans as set forth in the papers were sanctioned by superior officers of the Government of the United States. (72) Meade wrote Kilpatrick and sent him the photographic copies which he had received putting the question up to him. (73) General Kilpatrick's reply is intensely interesting and significant.

(68) Richmond Daily Dispatch, March 8, 1864.
Richmond Examiner, March 11, 1864.


(73) There is in the above collection no letter from General Meade to General Kilpatrick; but the latter upon receiving the copies of Dahlgren's orders and the letter wrote back at once.
Headquarters Third Division Cavalry Corps
April 16, 1864

Brig. Gen. S. Williams, A.A.G. Army of the Potomac:

General: In accordance with instructions from headquarters

Army of the Potomac I have carefully examined officers and men

who accompanied Colonel Dahlgren of his late expedition.

All testify that he published no address whatever to his

command, nor did he give any instructions, much less of the

character as set forth in the photographic copies of two papers

alleged to have been found upon the person of Colonel Dahlgren

and forwarded by General Robert E. Lee, commanding the Army of
Northern Virginia. Colonel Dahlgren, one hour before we separated

at my headquarters, he handed me an address that he intended to

read to his command. That paper was indorsed in red ink, "Approved",

over my official signature. The photographic papers referred to

are true copies of the papers approved by me, save as far as

they speak of " exhorting the prisoners to destroy and burn the

hateful city and kill the traitor Davis and his cabinet," and in

this, that they do not contain the indorsement referred to as

having been placed by me on Colonel Dahlgren's papers. Colonel

Dahlgren received no such orders from me to pillage, burn, or

kill, nor were any such instructions given me by my superiors.

Very respectfully, your obedient servant,

J. Kilpatrick

Brigadier-General Volunteers.

Kilpatrick to Williams. (The latter forwarded it to General
Meade.)

Strange to say, General Kilpatrick wrote on March 16, to
the Acting Asst. Adjutant-General, Cavalry Corps, Captain
General Meade received this letter of General Kilpatrick's and forwarded it to General Robert E. Lee, with one of his own, denying that the United States Government had sanctioned Dahlgren's orders. (75)

Officially the affair died after this. Those men who had been captured during the raid were confined to prisons where some remained until the end of the war. (76)

The Confederate authorities, in order to remove the danger of future raids, enlarged the Home Guard and placed General Braxton Bragg in command. (77)

(74, cont.)

F. C. Newhall a letter explaining the account, '...in the rebel journals.' This letter is almost identical to the one sent General. He concludes with a sentence which may throw light upon the general attitude in the North. 'All this is false and published only as an excuse for the barbarous treatment of the remains of a brave soldier.' The War of the Rebellion: I, xxxiii, p. 176. March 16, 1864. Kilpatrick to Newhall.

The reference to the barbarous treatment of Dahlgren's body is based upon information given by the Colonel's servant who escaped capture and found his way to Yorktown. 'Colonel Dahlgren's servant has also come in. He reports seeing the Colonel's body on the roadside stripped of his clothing and horribly mutilated.' The War of the Rebellion: I, xxxiii, p. 183. March 8, 1864. Kilpatrick to Pleasanton.

Colonel Dahlgren's body was buried in the neighborhood and was allowed to remain there until the orders reached General Fitz. Lee. It was then that the body was exhumed and brought to Richmond for identification. Here the remains were buried in a deserted part of Oakwood Cemetery, but were not destined to remain long in this spot for they were taken up by Northern sympathists and carried out to Hungary Station and again committed to the soil. After the war Admiral Dahlgren had his son's body brought home and there an elaborate funeral was held while a lavish apotheosis was presented. John A. Dahlgren, Memoir of Ulric Dahlgren, pp. 226-240.


(76) Southern Historical Society Papers, xiii, p. 520. "Statement of Lieutenant Bartley." He was exchanged after about six month's confinement.

(77) This was done mainly through President Davis' influence, for he had unlimited faith in the general's ability.
Here following are copies of the address and orders of Colonel Ulric Dahlgren.(78)

Headquarters Third Division
Cavalry Corps

1864

Officers and Men

You have been selected from Brigades & Regiments as a picked command to attempt a desperate undertaking — an undertaking which if successful will write your names on the hearts of your countrymen in letters that can never be erased, and which will cause the prayers of our fellow soldiers now confined in loathsome prisons to follow you & yours wherever you may go.

We hope to release the prisoners from Belle Island first, & having seen them fairly started we will cross the James River into Richmond destroying the bridges after us & exhorting the released prisoners to destroy & burn the hateful City & do not allow the Rebel Leader Davis and his traiterous crew to escape. The prisoners must render great assistance as you cannot leave your ranks too far or become

(End of page)

78) Photographic copies of the address of Colonel Dahlgren in the Confederate Museum. It is copied with the same number of words to the line as the original.
too much scattered or you will be lost. Do not allow any personal gain to lead you off which would only bring you to an ignominious death at the hands of citizens. Keep well together and obey orders strictly and all will be well, but on no account scatter too far for in Union there is strength.

With strict obedience to orders and fearlessness in the execution you will be sure to succeed. If these We will join the main force on the other side of the city or perhaps meet them inside.

Many of you may fall, but if there is any man here not willing to sacrifice his life in such a great & glorious undertaking or who does not feel capable of meeting the enemy in such a desperate fight as will follow, let him step out and he may go hence to the arms of his sweetheart & read of the braves who swept through the City of Richmond.

We want no man who cannot
feel sure of success in such a Holy cause.

We will have a desperate fight but stand up to it when it does come and all will be well.

Ask the Blessing of the Almighty and do not fear the enemy

U. Dahlgren
Col com'd.

(79) There is in the Confederate Museum one good copy of the address and one badly faded. These are some of the original photographs that were made by the Confederate Government.

The sheets of the address were folded twice so that the paper is slightly blotted. On the top side of the last sheet is blotted the first. For some reason the stationery heading also blotted.

It is this blotting which took place across the signature, that caused Admiral Dahlgren to claim that the Confederates in forging the orders misplaced the letters l and h.
Guides --- Pioneers (with Oakum, Turpentine & Torpedoes)
signal offr -- Qr Mr -- Com

Scouts & pickets men in Rebel Uniform.

Men will remain on the N. bank and move
down with the force or the S. bank, not getting ahead
of them, and if the communication can be kept
up without giving an alarm, it must be done, but
everything depends upon a surprise and no one
must be allowed to pass ahead of the column
Information must be gathered in regard to the
crossing of the River so that should we be
repulsed on the S. side we would know where to
recross at the nearest point. All Hills must
be burned and the Canal destroyed and also
everything which can be used by the Rebels
must be destroyed, including the Boats in the
River. Should a Ferry Boat be seized and can
be worked have it moved down. Keep
the force on the S. side posted of any important
movement of the enemy, and in case of danger
end of page
some of the scouts must swim the River and bring us information. As we approach the City the party must take great care that they do not get ahead of the other party in the S. side & must conceal themselves & watch our movements. We will try & secure the bridge of the City - (1 mile below Belle Isl) & release the prisoners at the same time. If we do not succeed they must then dash down & will try & carry the bridge from each side. When necessary the men must be filed through the woods & along the river bank.

The Bridges once secured & the prisoners loose and over the River, the bridges will be secured and the city destroyed. The men must keep together & will in hand & once in the city it must be destroyed & Jeff Davis & Cabinet killed.

Pioneers will go along with combustable material
The Officer must be use his discrimination about the time of assisting us. Horses & Cattle which we do not need immediately must be shot rather than left. Everything on the Canal and elsewhere of service to the rebels must be destroyed.

As General Custer may follow me be careful not to give a false alarm. (80)

(80) In the Confederate Museum there is only one copy of this order. It is rather faded but legible. This order is not signed and shows evidence of haven been written in great haste. This order is folded in the same manner as the address and also blotted, with the first sheet's impression upside down on the second.
IV

Were the Orders of Dahlgren Forged?

This question of whether the address and orders of Colonel Dahlgren were forged has strong arguments on both sides. Admiral John A. Dahlgren in the memoir of his son frantically denies the existence of the papers; (81); Captain Mitchell also denies that Colonel Dahlgren published these orders; (82); and in later years the published statement of Dahlgren's signal officer, Lieutenant Bartley says that all orders were given orally, none were written. (83) Against all of these, however we have the words of General Kilpatrick acknowledging the existence of the papers. (84) That Colonel Dahlgren showed no one the address and orders but intended to read them to the men after crossing the James River just before attacking Richmond, is highly probable.

As to the question of the forging of the papers, there is a question of the possibility but not of the probability. Unfortunately for historians the originals have disappeared and can nowhere be located; one has to rely solely upon the photographed copies. Let us look at the salient points.

First: General Kilpatrick admits the existence of papers, denying only the passage, '...exhorting the prisoners to destroy and burn the hateful city and kill the traitor Davis and his cabinet.' (85)

(81) Dahlgren, Memoir of Ulric Dahlgren, p. 227.
(83) Southern Historical Society Papers, p. 520 Bartley Statement.
(84) supra p. 18
(85) Ibid.
Kilpatrick however fails to designate exactly which passage, of either the address or the orders he did not approve, he misquotes both; to which was he referring? In the address to 'Officers and Men' the passage is: '.... exhorting the released prisoners to destroy & burn the hateful City & do not allow the Rebel Leader Davis and his traiterous crew to escape.' (86)

In the orders to the Guides and Pioneers the passage is: '.... & once in the city it must be destroyed & Jeff Davis & Cabinet killed.' (87)

To which passage did Kilpatrick refer? He had both papers in front of him in photographed form, he was not merely relying on memory.

Second: If the offensive passage in the address to 'Officers and Men' was added by the Confederates the whole paper would have had to be re-written, as the reader can well see. (88) The position in the paragraph would have made any such addition impossible. However in the orders to the Guides and Pioneers the passage in question could have been added for it comes at the end of a paragraph which does not terminate at the end of a line. (89)

Kilpatrick also writes, 'That paper was indorsed in red ink, "Approved", over my official signature.' (90) Nowhere on these photographs is there an indication of this sign of approval and yet Kilpatrick in writing does not use this fact as evidence against the authenticity of the papers.

Third: The circumstances which surround the raid the authenticity of the address and orders.

(86) supra p.20
(87) supra p.24
(88) supra p.20
(89) supra p.21
(90) supra p.18
The whole point of the raid was the destruction of as much of the supplies which might be used by the Confederates, as possible and the release of those Federal prisoners which were incarcerated in Richmond. The destruction of private property in this raid was considerable. As we have seen, Captain Mitchell reported the burning of the barn and outhouses at Sabot Hill, Secretary Seddon's home and silverware was stolen from the residences along the way. (91) An ignorant negro man was hanged for the only reason that he showed the Federals to a ford that was impassable for no other reason than the water being up in the river. Dahlgren could not have thought under any circumstances that if he turned loose some 8,000 liberated prisoners, who had been shut up, many of them for several years, on the City of Richmond that soon there would be a scene of the most fearful description. One has only to look ahead to the burning of Columbia, South Carolina to see what might have happened in Richmond. (92)

(91) supra p. 6
(92) February 17th, 1865.