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CHAMP FERGUSON

By B. L. Ridley, Murfreesboro, Tenn.

A typical mountaineer—such was Champ Ferguson. The times in which he lived called forth physical energy, egged on by passion. The acts of his adversaries prompted his motives, and raging war made his career in the strife of 1861-65 an epitome of blood.

Champ was at his home, a citizen, when the tocsin was sounded, and stayed there until his own precincts were invaded. A rabid fire eater—passed his house with a troop of Blues. Champ Ferguson's little three-year old child came into the porch waving a Confederate flag. One of the men in blue leveled his gun and killed the child. O anguish! how that father's heart bled. His spirit welled up like the indomitable will of the primitive Norseman. In a moment of frenzy he said that the death of his baby would cost the "bluecoats" a hundred lives. And it did. One hundred and twenty is believed to be the number he put to death.

He took to the woods, and for four years his war upon them was unrelenting and vengeance was never appeased. It increased with the raging torrent as his family and friends were much vilified and abused. In the Cumberland Mountains clans formed and terrorized the section by petty warfare until the caldron of fear and apprehension invaded every home. It grew with the years, and Champ became the terror of the Northern side, while Huddleston and Tinker Dave Beatty were that to the Southerners. The acts of the latter, because they belonged to the victorious side, are buried in the tomb, and the government perhaps honors their memory; but the acts of Champ Ferguson, because of the misfortunes of war, are bruited as the most terrible in history.

If the sea could give up its dead, and the secrets of men be made known, Champ Ferguson's actions as bushwhacker, in comparison, would excite only a passive and not an active interest. Champ was a mountaineer; rude and untrained in the refinements of moral life, he had entertained that strict idea of right that belongs to the mountain character. His nature had instilled into him the strongest incentive of wreaking vengeance for a wrong. His method was indiscreet, his warfare contemptible; but, in palliation, how was it compared to the open murder of starving out our women and children, burning our houses, and pillaging our homes? Champ Ferguson was well to do in this world's goods when the war began. Had he been let alone, a career of good citizenship would have been his portion. Had he lived in the days of the Scottish chiefs, the clans would no doubt have crowned his efforts; but now, since his flag has fallen, history marks his career as more awful than that of John A. Murrell, and caps it with a hangman's noose. The times in which he acted must be considered! the provocation, the surroundings, and then let history record Champ's actions.

In his zeal for the South to win he became hardened; and the more steeped in blood the more his recklessness increased until irritability occasioned by treatment of his home folk drove him to maniacal desperation.

In encountering these mountain bushwhackers it became the armies of both sides to help them when called upon to wage the war of extermination. A comrade has given me an account of the killing of Huddleston, the Federal hushwhacker, whose company was afterwards commanded by Tinker Dave Beatty. I mention it to show the madness



" I was a Southern Man at the start. I am yet, and will die a Rebel. I believe I was right in all I did. I don't think I have done anything wrong at anytime. I committed my deeds in a cool and deliberate manner. I have killed a good many men, of course; I don't deny that, but I never killed a man whom I did not know was seeking my life. It is false that I never took prisoners. I took a great many and after keeping them awhile paroled them.... I had always heard that the Federals would not take me prisoner, but would shoot me down, wherever found. That is what made me kill more than I would otherwise have done. They never got a man that belonged to my company or Bledsoe's company but that they killed him, and of course they might expect that I would not miss doing the same thing with their men. I repeat that I die a Rebel out and out, and my last request is that my body be removed to White County, Tennessee, and be buried in good Rebel soil...."



of these mountaineers toward each other. This soldier friend says: "My recollection is that we traveled around Lebanon, Ky., on the night of December 25, 1862, and the next day we went to Columbia, Ky., and it was then that Capt. Ferguson went to Gen. Morgan and asked for two companies to scout with him that night, having heard that they were going to bushwhack Morgan's rear the next day. I did not know that Capt. Ferguson was with us until we had traveled several hours and we went into a house where they were having a Christmas dance. This was a short distance from Capt. Huddleston's house. When he reached it he was upstairs shooting at us. The house was a new log one and not completed. It had no floor upstairs, but a few plank on the joists. I thought that it was an outhouse where no one was living, and that he had gone there for protection. One of-my companions got Capt. Huddleston's horse after they had run him to the house from a thicket near by. The animal was a splendid bay mare and could run very fast. While Huddleston was shooting out of the window upstairs, and we were responding, some one ordered the house burned; but I was close behind a small meat house, and told him to come down-that we would give him quarter. He replied that he was true blue himself and would not come down. Then the house was set on fire, and some one in it put it out with water. About this time Capt. Huddleston was shot, and fell between the joists downstairs. He was brought out of the house, and Capt. Ferguson shot him afterwards. At the time Huddleston was shot some one in the house said: 'You killed him.' There was but one other man in the house, and he claimed to be sick. Ferguson killed him. We then went about three or four miles farther to a house, where two bitter enemies of Ferguson were in bed in a room by themselves. Capt. Ferguson went in advance to this house and into the room, pulled his dirk out of his boot leg and felt in bed with them and commenced cutting them. He killed one in bed and shot one as he went out the door, and our company captured the third man after he came out of the house. One of my companions was guarding the prisoner, when some one told him that he would guard him, and took him off. In a few minutes Capt Ferguson came up and asked where the prisoner was, and said that he would have the man shot who turned him loose. This seemed to frighten the guard, and he asked me what to do and said that he thought Capt. Ferguson was the man who took the prisoner from him. I told him I had no doubt of it, and that I thought he had killed him and was then talking for effect. We then went to Creelsboro, on the Cumberland River, reaching there about daylight after the hardest, coldest night of our lives, and joined the command near Burkesville."

In the "History of Morgan's Cavalry" Gen. Duke says: "The great opponent of Champ Ferguson in the bushwhacking business was Tinker Dave Beatty. The patriarchal old man lived in a cove surrounded by high hills. at the back of which was a narrow path leading to the mountains. Surrounded by his clan, he led a pastoral life which must have been fascinating, for many who entered into the cove never came away again. The relentless ferocity of all that section made that of Bluebeard and the Welch giants in comparison sink into insignificance. Sometimes Champ Ferguson, with his band, would enter the cove, carry off old Dave's stock, and drive him to his retreat in the mountains, to which no man ever followed him. Then, when he was strong enough, he would lead his henchmen against Champ and slay all who did not escape. He did not confine his hostility to Capt. Ferguson. There were not related of Beatty so many stories illustrative of his personal courage as of Ferguson. I heard of the latter, on one occasion, having gone into a room where two of his bitter enemies lay before the fire, both strong men and armed, and throwing himself upon them he killed both, after a hard struggle, with a knife. Beatty possessed a cunning and subtlety which Ferguson, in a great manner, lacked. Both of the men were known to have spared life on some rare occasions. Champ caused a Union man to be released, saying that he did not believe him to be a bushwhacker. Subsequently, after a fit of silence, Ferguson said: 'I have a good notion to go back and hunt that man. I am afraid I have done wrong, for he is the very best shot in this part of the country; and if he does turn bushwhacker, he will kill a man at every shot.'"

Such is the story, in part, of the feats of Champ Ferguson, a

A muster roll of Champ Ferguson's company was "captured" near Ferguson's White County home in August of 1864 by a Union force commanded by Captain Rufus Dowdy. After the war, at Ferguson's trial, Dowdy testified, "I got hold of some blanks in form of a muster roll and payroll with some names written on it. I got it out there in the woods near Ferguson's house... It was in a box packed up in the hollow of a chestnut tree. The box was held up by some poles punched up the hollow of the tree, and when the boys pulled the poles out the box fell down... I found three sheets or I and some others did." Dowdy did not know who got the other two sheets, but now having made his own peace with Ferguson, Dowdy gave his sheet to Ferguson's lawyers. This muster roll, labeled, "Document 'P'", is attached to the trial case file at the National Archives. According to the roll, all members of the company were enlisted on Nov. 19th '62 in Overton Co. for a period of 3 years; Ferguson was enlisted by John H. Morgan and all others by Ferguson. The handwriting, which is not Ferguson's, is difficult to decipher, and some of the names have been obliterated by folding and deterioration:

Name	Rank	Remarks
Champ Ferguson	Capt.	
H. W. Sublet	1st Lieut.	
A. H. Foster	2nd Lieut.	
W. R. Latham	3rd Lieut.	
G. W. Twiford	O.S.	
R. H. Philpott	2nd Serg.	
- F--t---	3rd Serg.	
F. Burchet	4th Serg.	
E. Crabtree	1st Corp.	
W. W. Parker	2nd Corp.	
J. Holsopple	3rd Corp.	
A. Heldreth	4th Corp.	
Ard, R. S.	Private	
Aberson, John	"	
Braswell, H. D.	"	
Burchett, R. A.	"	Killed in Wayne Co., Ky. Jan. 21, 1863
Barnes, W.	"	
Barnes, J. M.	"	Killed in Wayne Co., Ky. Jan. 21, 1863
Barnes, Francis	"	
Barton, B. P.	"	
Berry, B. W.	"	
Boston, G. W.	"	Killed in Wayne Co., Ky. Jan. 21, 1863
Barnes, James M.	"	
Brooks, John	"	
Bellen[w?], A.	"	
Burk, John	"	
Bradley, S. I.	"	
Cogher, W. H.	"	Killed in Jackson Co., Tenn. Decmb. 1st, 1862
Cowain, J. T.	"	
Denton, John	"	
Elder, John	"	
Franklin, Jeff	"	
Frost, F.	"	
Franklin, I. M.	"	
Franklin, Sheby	"	
Gregry, John	"	
Grayham, Durham	"	
Grisham, O. H.	"	
Guinn, S. T.	"	

bushwhacker of the mountains of Kentucky and Tennessee. He was hanged by the Federals at Nashville after the war.

Tinker Dave Beatty and Champ Ferguson's men were the terror of either side throughout Eastern Kentucky and Tennessee until the close of the war.

The Republican Banner, published at Nashville, edited by Henry Watterson and Albert Roberts, dated October 21, 1865, contains the charges against Ferguson read at the gallows. The war had ceased, and Ferguson had been promised his life to surrender; but passions were up, and bad faith led him to his doom.

"Col. Shafter read aloud the charges, specifications and findings of the court. Ferguson listened intently, his head askance and his eyes fixed musingly on his boots. The list was long and bloody! embracing twenty-three separate cases-how the prisoner about to be executed had cut the throats of the wounded soldiers. Again, how he had murdered an old father whilst the arms of his daughter were Hung about his neck; how he had pursued a victim and killed him, saying, 'That's ninety-seven of the Yankees gone and I'll go and kill three more to make it an even hundred;' how he had mangled wounded men with knives; how he had murdered citizens as well as soldiers, running through four years of desperate cruelty and wrong-were clearly read by Col. Shafter, embracing over one hundred and twenty human beings. Champ nodded approval to ten of the charges. To one he said: 'I could tell it better than that.' Col. Shafter replied 'No doubt you could, for you saw it.'

"When he had finished reading the charges Col. Shafter said: 'Well, Champ, you hear what these say, and I am about to carry them out and execute you. I hope you bear me no malice for the discharge of my duty.' Champ replied: 'Not the least-none in the world.' The Colonel then said: 'Do you want to say anything?' 'No,' replied the prisoner, 'That is, I can't say what I want to say here, and maybe it's no matter anyway.' 'Have you no last request to make?'

'Well, I don't want to be cut up by anybody; and when you've done with me I want you to put my body in that coffin and give it to my wife. She'll take me home to White County, on the Calf Killer. There I wish to be buried-not on such soil as this. There is a little graveyard near my house (she knows it), and I want to lie there. If I had my own way, I'd be there now, and not here. I wish you would wipe my face before I go.'

"The Colonel did as requested. The wife and daughter remained near by. Almost unconsciously, the daughter said after the execution: "I hope they are satisfied, and that now we will be let alone."

The article thus winds up: "That Champ Ferguson's career was an epitome of blood seems evident, but he possessed the nerve, if he did not the magnanimity, of manhood; and the same courage, fortitude, and purpose, directed by education and good intent, might have crowned a noble life instead of a death upon the gallows tree."

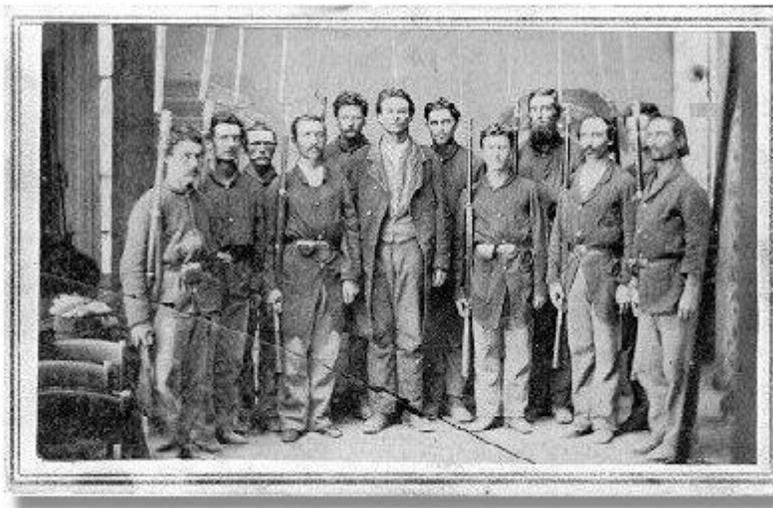
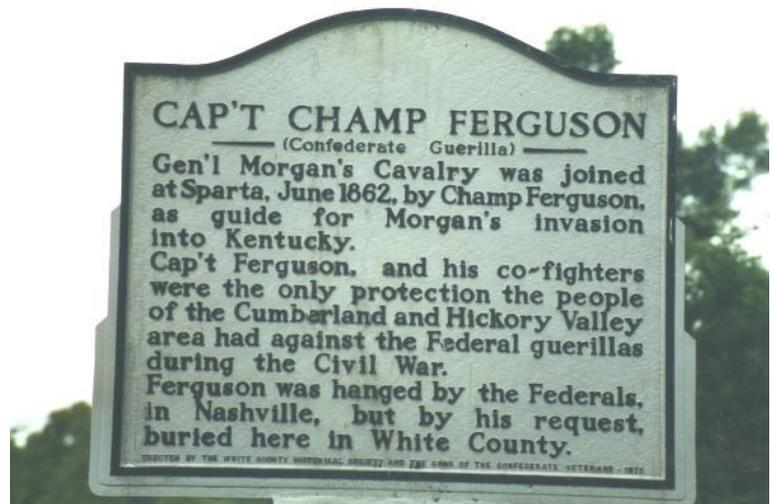
Capt. S. J. Johnson, of the Confederate army, in sending me the picture of Ferguson, says: "This picture was taken in Nashville just before Ferguson was hanged. My farm and home were once owned by Champ Ferguson. He is buried near my home, in White County, Tenn., on the Calf Killer. I can stand on my front piazza and see the tall gray tombstone, that was cut from rock in the mountain not over a mile from his grave."

**"The dead should be sacred-in peace let him rest--
Nor trample in scorn o'er the prayer hallowed sod;
The green turf is holy that covers his breast;
Give his faults to the past, leave his soul with his
God."**

<http://www.champferguson.com/ChampsBio.html>

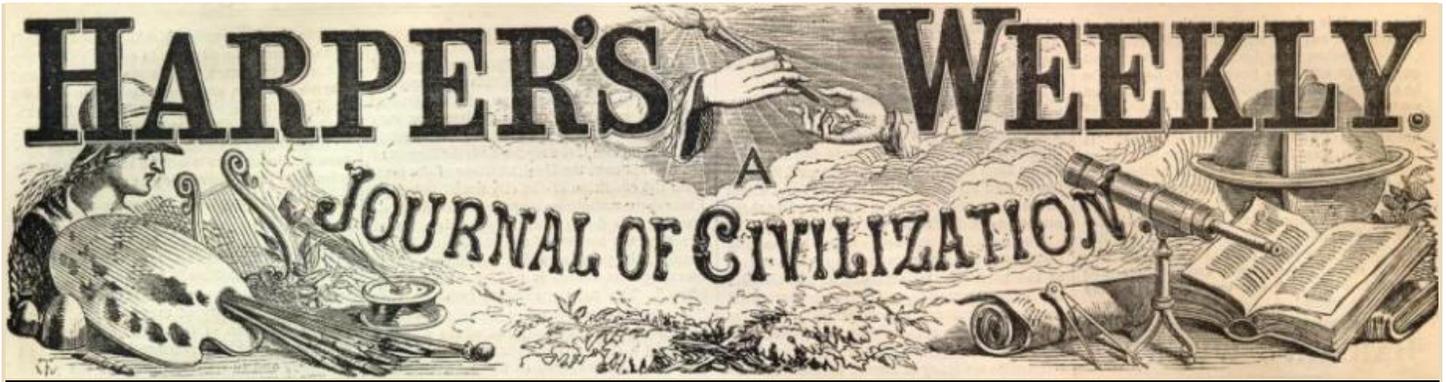
A photograph of Champ Ferguson and his men, perhaps taken while they were in custody in Nashville.

Horsup, John	"	Killed in Overton Co., Tenn. Feb. 1st, 1863
Hickey, B[enson?]	"	
Haynes, John	"	
Holsopple, W.	"	
Johnson, H.	"	Killed in Wayne Co., Ky. Jan. 21, 1863
Jones, John	"	
Jones, T. S.	"	
Kelly, Thomas	"	
McGinas, J. H.	"	
Moles, Hansel	"	
Marchbanks, C.	"	
McGee, J. M.	"	
Orness[?], Silvers	"	
Owens, J. B.	"	
Pruet, Henry	"	
Pagett, S. M.	"	
Potter, M. A.	"	
Petage, W. W.	"	
Ritchinson, R. H.	"	
Rumen[?], I.	"	
Rigney, G. W.	"	
Russel, Fount	"	
Shelton, T. A.	"	
Smith, J. T.	"	Killed in Wayne Co., Ky. Feb. 12th, 1863
Singleton, J. S.	"	
Sharp, D. E.	"	
Talent, I.	"	
Taylor, John	"	
Taylor, C. N.	"	
Taylor, A. J.	"	
Turpin[?], E-----	"	
Troxdale, Granvill	"	
Vaughn, G. B.	"	
Vann, T. C.	"	
Wheeler, Silas	"	
Wade, John	"	



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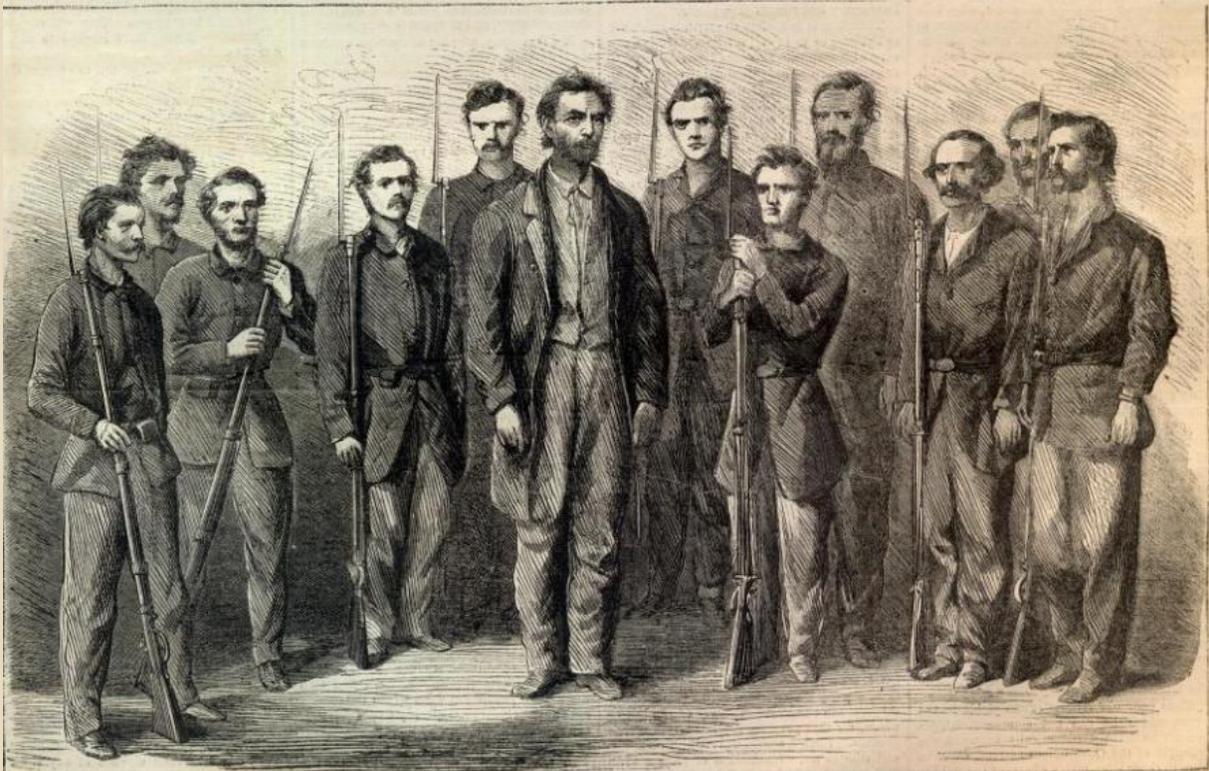
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CHAMP FERGUSON.

AMONG the guerrillas who infested Kentucky during the war CHAMP FERGUSON and his men were the most notorious. Their outrages were chiefly confined to Wayne and Clinton Counties. CHAMP FERGUSON himself is quite a character, though the bloodiest of rascals and murderers. His religious notions are, to say the least, rather queer. Whether he takes a hint from THEODORE PARKER, who used to call God "our Father and Mother," is uncertain, but CHAMP is in the habit of speaking of the Father of All as "the Old Man." He, in a recent interview with the editor of a Western paper, expressed his opinion that "the Old Man" had been on his side thus far in life, and he believed he would stay with him and bring him out of his present trouble all right. He thought the Campbellites were about as good as any of the religious denominations, and a little better.

CHAMP FERGUSON is now being tried at Nashville by a court-martial on the charge of committing murders and other acts in violation of the laws of war. The verdict has not yet been given, but there is no doubt that he will be punished with death for his many atrocities. Before the war he was arrested for the murder of READ, the constable, and confined in jail. At the outbreak of the rebellion he was released on his pledge to join the rebels. He claims that he had been previously a Union man. He then commenced his career of murder and robbery which made his name a terror in Kentucky. He acted under the orders of **JOHN MORGAN** until the latter made his **raid into Ohio**. He was with MORGAN in most of his **raids in Kentucky** and Tennessee. He surrendered at the close of the war, supposing that he would be let off with the oath of allegiance. CHAMP owns a considerable amount of land in Clinton County, Kentucky, estimated by the hundreds of acres. He has good reason for the wish, which he now expresses, "that there had never been any war."



CHAMP FERGUSON AND HIS GUARD.—[PHOTOGRAPHED BY C. C. HUGHES, NASHVILLE, TENNESSEE.]