

*From The Alexandria Gazette, October 31, 1859*

Col. Baylor's Report

From the official report of Col. Baylor (Col. Commanding Virginia troops at Harper's Ferry) made to the governor we (*The Alexandria Gazette*) make the following extract: —

"The insurgents occupied all the lower part of the town, had their Sentinels posted on all the different streets, and had shot one of our citizens and a negro man who had charge of the Depot on the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad. I here formed two companies of the citizens and placed them under the command of Captain Lawson Botts and Captain John Avis. Their forces were variously estimated from 300 to 500 strong, armed with Sharpe's rifles and revolvers.

I detached the Jefferson guards under the command of Capt. Rowan, and ordered them to cross the Potomac River, in boats, about two miles above Harper's Ferry, and march down on the Maryland side, and take possession of the Bridge, and permit no one to pass. This order was strictly executed. The command under Capt. Botts was ordered to pass down the hill below Jefferson's rock, and take possession of the Shenandoah Bridge - to leave a strong guard at that point, and march down to the Galt House, and rear of the Arsenal building, in which we supposed their men were lodged. Capt. Avis' command was ordered to take possession of the house directly in front of the Arsenal; both of the above commands were promptly executed. By this movement we prevented any escape. Shortly after this, a report reached me that Geo. W. Turner and Fontaine Beckham, two of our most esteemed citizens, had been shot.

About 4 o'clock we were reinforced by the arrival of Hamtramck Guards under the command of Capt. Butler, the Shepherdstown Troop, under the command of Captain Reinhart, and some 30 citizens of Martinsburg, under the command of Captain Alburtis. I ordered Alburtis to march down Potomac street, through the Armory yard to the arsenal. The Hamtramck Guards and Shepherdstown Troop, (dismounted and armed with muskets,) under my command, proceeded down High Street to the centre of the town in front of the Arsenal. During this march, the Insurgents having secreted themselves and the Engine House in the Armory yard, opened a brisk fire on Capt. Alburtis' company. The fire was quickly returned by Capt. Alburtis' company, who behaved very bravely. The different companies near at hand, rallied to Capt. Alburtis' rescue.

The firing at this time was heavy, and the insurgents could not have retained their position many minutes, when they presented at the door a white flag. The firing thereupon ceased, and I ordered the troops to draw up in line in front of the Arsenal. During this engagement and the previous skirmishes, we had ten men wounded, two I fear mortally. - The insurgents had eleven killed, one mortally wounded, and two taken prisoners; leaving only five in the engine house, and one of them seriously wounded.

In this engagement we rescued about thirty of our citizens whom they held as prisoners in the guard-house - they still held on the engine house, ten citizens and five slaves.

Immediately after the troops were withdrawn, Capt. Brown sent to me, through Isaac Russell, one of their prisoners, a verbal communication, stating, if I would permit him to cross the bridge with his prisoners to some point beyond, he would set them at liberty, I sent him the following reply in writing."

HEADQUARTERS, HARPER'S FERRY

CAPT. JOHN BROWN: –

SIR - Upon consultation with Mr. Isaac Russell, one of your prisoners, who has come to me on terms of capitulation, I say to you, if you will not set at liberty our citizens, we will leave the government to deal with you concerning their property as it may think most advisable

ROBERT W. BAYLOR, Col. Commandant

In reply, I received the following answer in writing: -

CAPT. JOHN BROWN, answers: –

In consideration of all my men whether living or dead, or wounded being soon safely in, and delivered up to me at this point, with all their arms and ammunition, we will then take our prisoners and cross the Potomac bridge, a little beyond which we will set them at liberty; after which we can negotiate about the government property as may be best. Also, we require the delivery of our horse and harness at the hotel.

JOHN BROWN

To the above, I returned the following answer: –

HEADQUARTERS

CAPT. JOHN BROWN: –

SIR -- The terms you proposed I cannot accept. under no consideration will I consent to a removal of our citizens across the river. The only negotiations upon which I will consent to treat are those which have been previously proposed to you.

ROBERT W. BAYLOR, Col. Commandant

"These terms he declined. Night by this time had set in, and the weather being very inclement, I thought it best for the safety of our citizens, whom they held as prisoners, to cease operations for the night. Should I have ordered an attack at that hour, and in total darkness, our troops would have been as likely to have murdered our own citizens, as the insurgents, all being in the same apartment. Having concluded to postpone another attack until morning, guards were posted around the Armory, and every precaution taken to prevent escape. Our troops by this time required some refreshment, having been on active duty and exposed to a heavy fall of rain all day. A little after night we were reinforced by Col. L.T. Moore of the 31st Regiment, having

under his command the "Continental Guards," commanded by Capt. Washington, and the "Rifles," commanded by Capt. Clarke; also three companies from Frederick, Maryland under the command of Col. Shiver, About 12 o'clock Col. Lee arrived, having under his command eighty-five Marines from Washington. The Government troops took possession of the Government property, and formed inside the Armory yard, in close proximity to the engine house. In this position, Col. Lee thought it best to remain until morning. -- The night passed without serious alarm, but not without intense excitement.

It was agreed between Col. Lee and myself that the volunteer forces should form around outside of the Government property, and clear the streets of all citizens and spectators, to prevent their firing random shots to the great danger of our soldiers, and to remain in that position whilst he would attack the engine house with his Marines. As soon as day dawned the troops were drawn up in accordance with the above arrangement. After which, Col. Lee demanded of the insurgents a surrender upon the terms I had proposed before to them, which they still declined. The Marines were then ordered to force the doors. The attempt was made with heavy sledges, but approved ineffectual. They were then ordered to attack the doors with a heavy ladder which was lying a short distance off. After two powerful efforts, the door was shattered sufficiently to obtain an entrance. Immediately, a heavy volley was fired in by the Marines, and an entrance effected, which soon terminated the conflict. In this engagement the Marine had one killed and one slightly wounded. The insurgents had two killed, and three taken prisoners. After the firing ceased, the imprisoned citizens walked out unhurt."