

The Nation

~February 9, 1927~

A "Hun" of the Civil War

"HARDLY a man is now alive who remembers that famous day and year" when a thrill of horror went through the North as the news came that a Confederate cavalry general, one John McCausland, had led his troops into Chambersburg, Pennsylvania, on the thirtieth of July, 1864, and burned the greater part of that town to the ground. In an hour this inconspicuous brigadier-general who, with "Stonewall" Jackson, had been a professor at the Virginia Military Institute prior to the war, became one of the most execrated of men. He was declared an outlaw, a brigand, a violator of all the decencies of war and the laws thereof; a beast who warred on women and children. Had the word "Hun" been in use then it would instantly have been applied to this destroyer of private property. It was openly declared that no quarter would be granted him if he were caught—and he was so nearly caught by General W. W. Averell just a week later that he lost his artillery, three flags, nearly all his wagons, 420 prisoners, including thirty-eight officers, besides about a hundred killed and wounded. No matter what might happen to General Robert E. Lee or to "Jeff" Davis, General McCausland was slated, in the united opinion of the North, for a drumhead court martial when the Confederacy fell.

On January 23, 1927, he died in his sleep at the age of ninety in the West Virginia town that bears his name—the survivor of almost all those who once thirsted for his blood and, with one exception, the last of the Confederate generals. More than that, General McCausland was of the Old Guard who die but never surrender. Lee might give up his sword and Early and Johnston and Pickett and all the rest, but not the destroyer of Chambersburg. There was no Appomattox for him. With numerous others he went into Mexico and began that hegira through Europe which for some of these irreconcilables led to Egypt, service in the Egyptian army, and almost two decades of wanderings. McCausland's exile was cut to two years because Ulysses S. Grant came to his rescue, declaring that Chambersburg belonged in the category of things to be forgotten and forgiven, which resulted in the quashing of indictments—for arson—brought against McCausland and General Bradley T. Johnson in Franklin County, Pennsylvania. General McCausland came back, but never yielded to the "Yanks." To

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his dying day he boasted that he had never surrendered, nor taken the oath of allegiance. If ever a man deserved to have the "Stars and Bars" on his coffin it was surely the "Hun" of Chambersburg.

What influenced General Grant? Primarily, doubtless, the fact that McCausland acted under the orders of his superior officer, General Jubal A. Early, who had instructed him to demand from the citizens of Chambersburg "\$100,000 in gold, or, in lieu thereof, \$500,000 in greenbacks and national currency." Why? It was, General Early declared, "in retaliation of the depredations committed by General Hunter . . . during the recent raid." So the Germans in Belgium had good American precedent for any fining—or firing—of Belgian towns. The citizens of Chambersburg, who the year before had watched the march up to Gettysburg of the Confederate legions, could not produce the necessary funds. They could only stand by and see the best part of their town and their personal property, too, go up in flames and smoke. Something of this may have been in General Sherman's mind when he apparently said that it would not hurt him deeply if Columbia, South Carolina, should burn down. It did. The war in the Shenandoah was full of bitterness about this time. General Sheridan, it will be remembered, undertook to lay the valley waste so that if a crow were to fly over it "he would have to carry his rations on his back." Sheridan's men executed some Confederate officers there out of hand—without trial—in retaliation for what was said to be the murder of some of his officers and men by Mosby—Hunnish work on both sides! A monument to some of these victims stands by the side of the Shenandoah turnpike today. Such is the nature of war even when conducted by American heroes. The little quarter given at Fort Wagner, the massacre at Fort Pillow—they have their counterparts in every war and so does Chambersburg, which proves anew that the minute one side resorts to what the opponents consider villainous practices, the "purer" and "nobler" side immediately descends to the same practices, cheerfully making them its own. So it was with poison gas, which we are now so proud of and find so humane, and so it will be without end until war is forever abolished and the profession of soldiering is no more.