Spencer Kellogg Brown, the Battle of Osawatomie

This account of the battle and its aftermath, written by Spencer Kellogg Brown, was compiled from his shorthand diary. It describes the battle and his experiences as a young teenager taken prisoner by pro-slavery forces. He traveled with the Missouri troops and their other prisoners, and then for several weeks he lived under house arrest with Dr. James Keith from Lexington, Missouri. This particular account is unique because it gives very detailed descriptions of how ordinary citizens became entangled in the fighting.

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Spencer Kellogg Brown account of the Battle of Osawatomie. from his Diary

Then came the war in Kansas so well known to every one. In May the Potowatomie massacre took place. The attack of Lawrence, and on the 6th of June Osawatomie was sacked.

Our house was on a high hill commanding the west entrance to the town and was occupied by a number of young men armed for its defense. Only my brother and I were at home, ~~the~~ father being in Lawrence after supplies for the defenders of the place. About Sunrise we descried the enemy, first from our house, the morning of August 30th. A shot was heard when some one of our little garrison, cried out that the Missourians were comming; whereupon I immediately ran to the door and gave the alarm. They were in full view and pretty close.

The young men were buckling on their arms, and I seizing my hat started for town. My first plan was to go down and look at the safe in Father's office, and then go over the river. I ran as fast as I could and ~~met, or rather~~ overtook Holmes at the foot of the hill. My desire was to inform the people. The first house I came to was Lakes. They were eating breakfast and hearing the news his wife began to cry. I then met Mr. Merrit who said the enemy were forming on the hill and numbered about 200, but I afterwards learned they were nearly 400. Finding the office locked got into the window and saw the safe was all right. Got a rifle that was there and hid it in a cornfield. Just then the battle commenced and I jumped upon a pile of logs to see the fight.

I did not look long; but soon went to the Block House, and asked if they wanted a gun. They told me to bring it along, which I did, running as fast as possible as I had to go very close to the Missourians. When I got back to the Block House all the men left it, and went down to the woods and I with them. I separated from them, and went to the house of Mr. Sears, who was in the fight. Finding a horse tied near the house, I brought it and helped his wife to go over the river out of the dangers of the battle. After getting her trunk out into the bushes, I then went back to where they were fighting. I mixed freely among the Missourians talking until a man named Taggart who knew me took me prisoner.

I will acknowledge my blood grew cold when he told me to follow him. I did not say anything however. He took me to a house where they had fourteen other prisoners. They afterwards took four others, Dutch Charley, Fuller, Reynolds and Thomas. Soon they began to question me. Wanted to know how many free state men there were, and if I were Old John Brown's Son. I told them I did not know how many free state men were there, thought about 50, at the most but doubted if there were so many. They told me that I lied; that there were two hundred and fifty. I said that I was not Capt. Brown's son. Then I heard the word given to burn the town which made a very hot fire. After that they loaded the wagons with the goods

plundered from the houses. One of them ordered me to put the chairs on the wagon which I did not do, wherewith he came running at me with his bayonet, cursing and threatening to "stick" me if I did not do it.

I remember that two of the prisoners had "chills." So they asked and got permission to stand upon the sunny side of the house. Several of the Missourians were very badly wounded. When on their retreat from the town, they stopped at our house while they plundered and then burned it. They attempted to get out the piano, but in the excitement and heat of the rapidly spreading flames they were compelled to drop it in the doorway, two partly burnt legs and the iron frame only remained to tell the story of its final end. Here I noticed one

of the wounded enemy had been shot in the mouth and another through the lungs. The few free state men under cover of the timber led by Capt. Brown had an excellent chance to use their Sharpe's rifles upon the enemy who came down the hill in half moon shape and closed in upon the boys in their hidden positions.

All this time ~~I~~ was in but half toilet and so was allowed to get some things from the house before the burning. I met a man with my violin which I got from him but not without some trouble. I found two or three suits of clothes and some underwear as they had just come from the laundry and I got a pair of moccasins. One man gave me my fish hook and line, another, my saddle which I could not take.

I walked out to the road when I saw a man take our horse and made me ride her a little ways. There was a fire raging in one of the chambers when I first reacked home and soon it was all in a blaze. After I had ridden a little ways they put me into a wagon but soon gave it up to a sick man for the horse which I continued to ride the rest of the way nearly 40 miles. I had nothing to eat that day until late in the afternoon when we stopped and got a little dinner. At this time I had been in charge of a man named John Hancock from Howard Co. Mo.

After that we left the road and cut across the prairies. Between there and camp Martin White and his brother overtook us. I heard the old man tell how he murdered poor Fred Brown

whose dead body I saw lying along side of the road. Poor Fred! His grave is only marked by a plain board with the following inscriptions made by a pencil "Wm Garrison, Fred Brown and Wm Powers, murdered by the Rev. Martin White and Genl Reid's men, August 30th 1856" Mr. Garrison was murdered at the same time. When we got within 4 or 5 miles of camp, a man came to hurry us up as Genl Lane had drawn up his men to fight near the camp. So after that we rode at full speed.

Once when very tired and out of breath, by riding so hard. I poked my hat, that it sat lightly on my head, and the wind blew it off. So my guard had to stop and get it, and I got a chance to breathe. When

we got close to camp, he said I could get off and stop there if I would promise not to run away, but I preferred to go on. When we got to camp he went out to fight, and I got a piece of bread, which was very tough.

That night I slept or tried to sleep in a tent with 10 or 12 men. I said before, Lane had drawn up his men to fight. So when I got to camp all was commotion, The Missourians had formed their men in number 1200 under the command of General McLean with six cannon, to resist 250 free state men. There was no fighting, however, on account probably of each waiting for the other to commence. The Missouri picket guards were troubled very much by the free

. state men shooting at them in the night.

The next morning which was Sunday, Aug. 31st I was arrested by daylight and taken to the tent where the rest of the prisoners were and put under the charge of 12 armed men, with the observation, "look out for him, he is as sharp as a thorn." So much of a reputation had I acquired.

Seated in a tent on the ground, and trying to keep warm, I had my first opportunity for reflection. No room to stand up, nor lay down, nothing but sitting room, and hardly that. My feet were sopping wet. After the sun had risen a little, the guard marched the prisoners in single file to headquarters. While in the tent, we were continually teased by the Missouri-

ans with such expressions as "d—d abolitionists" and the like. When we were before the officers tent Col. Anderson, of Lexington, came to us and spoke to me. He said I was very young to be in such a place, and then asked my name. I told him, and he said, Spencer, if you will be a good boy, and obey your father and mother, and obey the laws, I will let you go home. I said nothing. He again repeated it, still I said nothing. He then took me to the officers tent, and told Gen. McLean to make me out a passport. While he was writing it, Somebody came and spoke to Col. Anderson, who then spoke to Genl. McLean, and then came and spoke to me, and said there were men, who did not like my being set free, and were waiting to shoot me when I left camp, and that I had better wait, and go with him to Westport

when Anderson had told me I could go home I turned to the prisoners and asked if they had any word to send home. Those were the last words I had a chance to speak to them, and I was obliged to bear the disappointment as best I could Then came breakfast, I eating with the officers in their tent, while the rest of the prisoners, ate after the negroes, who were slaves.

I had to carry a man's wounded ~~leg~~ fifteen miles. I should not like to do it again. On the way we were followed by Lane who burned a house near to where the camp was before which was at the head of Bull creek on the Santa Fe road The Missourians camped that night on cedar creek, which they said was 15 miles from Bull creek. The butchered some of John Brown's

cattle, and part of them at the other camp Early the next morning. Dutch Charley was murdered by Coleman the murderer of Dow. From the first after being taking a prisoner at the battle of Osawatomie he felt a conviction that they would kill him. He told one of his fellow prisoness that he knew Coleman was determined to take his life. It was a cold blooded and premeditated murder.

The officers, especially Genl McClean exculpated the savages from any blame in the matter. That morning while sitting in the Surgeon's tent. (I had been placed in their care) Doctor Keith asked me if I would go down with him to his farm, and stay with him twelve months; and study either law or medicine. I passed it

that off, and I joked and made no answer. Some of the surgeons afterwards advised me to go, and said the doctor was rich and had some pretty daughters. A little while after, he again made the same offer, and I remembering the fate of Dutch Charley, and seeing that he was serious, accepted it, with the condition that any time Father wrote for me to come home, I should be allowed to go.

I was permitted to write and send home the following letter:

"Dear Father:

I write this to ease your mind of any apprehensions you might have on my account. I was taken in town. As I passed by our house, I saw it burned, and the piano

in it. I was allowed to take what I wanted in the shape of clothing. I am as well treated as I would be under your own care. There is nothing to fear on my account. Brennan, Whitney and Brother are safe; So is Uncle Charles and family. No more until I write again

Your Affectionate Son Spencer."