

Johnson, William Henry, Collection

William Henry Johnson Collection

1861-1862



Title Statement

Johnson, William Henry, Collection William Henry Johnson Collection, 1861-1862 Ms.2023.017

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Profile Description

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Descriptive Summary

Unit ID

Ms.2023.017

Unit Date

1861-1862

Language

The materials in the collection are in English.

Abstract

This collection contains American Civil War materials relating to the execution of William Henry Johnson, including four newspapers covering the event, three letters written by witnesses to the execution, and the signature of Major General William B. Franklin.

Extent

0.2 Cubic Feet 1 oversize folder

Repository

Special Collections and University Archives, Virginia Tech

Administrative Information

Conditions Governing Access

The collection is open for research.

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Source of Acquisition

The William Henry Johnson Collection was purchased by Special Collections and University Archives in September 2016.

Processing Information

The processing, arrangement, and description of the William Henry Johnson Collection was completed in May 2023.

Preferred Citation

Researchers wishing to cite this collection should include the following information: [identification of item], [box], [folder], William Henry Johnson Collection, 1861-1862, Ms2023-017, Special Collections and University Archives, Virginia Tech, Blacksburg, Va.

Biographical Note

William Henry Johnson was a Private in Company B of the 1st New York Cavalry Regiment during the American Civil War. On December 4, 1861, Johnson deserted the Union Army and attempted to make his way south to the Confederate front-lines. While making his way to the Confederate lines he encountered a Union reconnaissance unit returning from patrol, whom he mistook as Confederates. After identifying himself as a Union deserter and offering to provide the location of Union pickets, he was placed under arrest and taken to the Provost Marshal. Johnson was subsequently court-martialed and sentenced to death. Johnson's execution took place on December 13, 1861, and marked the first time that a deserter was executed by the Union Army.

External Source:

"The 13 December 1861 Execution of Pvt. William Henry Johnson at Fairfax Seminary" (Dec. 12, 2011), Civil War Washington, D.C. blog, <http://civilwarwashingtondc1861-1865.blogspot.com/2011/12/13-december-1861-execution-of-pvt.html>, accessed May 2023.

Scope and Content

This collection contains materials relating to the execution of William Henry Johnson. This collection includes a copy of *The Philadelphia Enquirer* from December 21, 1861; a copy of *Harper's Weekly: A Journal of Civilization* from December 28, 1861; a copy of *The Illustrated London News* from January 11, 1862; and a copy of *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper* from April 4, 1862. These newspapers provide details about William Henry Johnson's desertion, trial, and execution. Also included in the collection are several letters written by people who witnessed the execution. This collection also includes a cut-signature of Major General William B. Franklin, who was the court-martial convening authority.

Keywords

Civil War

United States -- History -- Civil War, 1861-1865

United States -- History -- Civil War, 1861-1865 -- Desertions

Johnson, William Henry, d. 13 December 1861

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Description of Subordinate Components

Letter from W. S. Milmime to Alfred Milmime

Unit Date 1861-12-15

oversize 1 (folder)

Letter from Dewitt Trump to John Edwards

Unit Date 1861-12-23

oversize 1 (folder)

Letter from Eli Hitchcock to Father and Mother

Unit Date 1862-01-13

oversize 1 (folder)

William Buel Franklin Signature

Unit Date n. d.

oversize 1 (folder)

The Philadelphia Inquirer

Unit Date 1861-12-14

oversize 1 (folder)

Harper's Weekly: A Journal of Civilization

Unit Date 1861-12-28

oversize 1 (folder)

The Illustrated London News

Unit Date 1862-01-11

oversize 1 (folder)

Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper

Unit Date 1862-04-04

oversize 1 (folder)