

The Execution of the Negro Soldiers at Hilton Head.

TWO THOUSAND PEOPLE PRESENT.

[From the New South, of November 25th.]

About the 20th of August last, privates James Grippen, Co. F., 104 U. S. C. T., and Ben Redding of the same regiment, (colored,) together with a gang of colored soldiers, forcibly entered and ransacked the house of Mr. Mew, near McPhersonville, ravishing the persons of Mrs. E. Mew, Miss Florence Mew, Mrs. Mary E. McTier and Miss Heape, with the assistance of several of the gang of soldiers who were with them, and stealing everything that was of value.

Ben Redding struck Mrs. Mew with his gun, and threatened to take her life. He then attacked, struck and bound Dr. W. G. Hazle and Mr. H. C. Morgan, and attempted to kill Dr. H. by thrusting at him with his bayonet. Redding was also present and assisted the gang of desperadoes in burning Mrs. Heape's house. As to Grippen, the cross-breed, he seems to have been intent on his hellish outrages and burglary. These two fiends were soon after arrested and finally brought before a General Court Martial, held at Headquarters, Department South Carolina, Hilton Head, October 26th, on charges of rape, burglary and arson—Major E. C. Culp, President. On trial, the Court found them guilty, and sentenced them to the scaffold. They were then remanded back to jail to wait the execution of their sentence. Grippen was a small individual, well put together, and a mulatto—Redding was a full-blooded African—very black.

Before noon, on Monday, quite a number of little companies of people were seen coming into town and hanging about the different corners, patiently waiting the hour of execution. When the time arrived there were some two thousand spectators gathered together, a large majority of whom were colored people. Everything remained orderly and quiet throughout the entire time occupied in carrying into effect the execution of these unfortunate men. All the military were present.

At twenty minutes before three o'clock, the condemned men, with their arms securely bound, emerged from the prison, the clergyman on one side, and the jailor on the other; two soldiers in front and two in the rear, with the officer in advance. At this moment the band of the 6th infantry struck up the "Dead March," and the party moved slowly and solemnly toward the scaffold. Grippen, the youngest of the two, and quite an intelligent looking youth, stepped forward firmly; the other, Redding, was so weak, from nervous excitement, that two soldiers were obliged to support him. Ejaculations for mercy fell from the lips of both as they neared the scaffold. At the foot of the stairs the cortege halted, and Lieut. Richards, ascending the scaffold first, motioned the others to follow. Grippen moved up the steps without hesitation, followed by Redding and his assistants. The man's nerves seemed completely prostrated—entirely useless. The clergyman then proceeded to offer up a prayer, which was attentively listened to by both men. He then left the scaffold, and Lieut. Richards, drawing forth a paper, read in a clear, slow and distinct voice the finding of the Court, the sentence, the approval of the General commanding, and the orders.

Lieutenant H. M. Jones, Acting Assistant Provost Marshal, who had been charged with the conduct of the execution, having positively refused to perform the duties assigned him, was placed under arrest, and Lieut. Charles F. Richards substituted in his place.

During the ten minutes which was occupied in reading the above orders, the feet of the condemned men had been bound securely together. The officer now asked Grippen if he had anything to say; if he had, he would repeat it for him to the assembly. He replied that he confessed his guilt, and warned all those present, more particularly the colored troops, and his own company, which were present, "not to be led away by strange men; but to do right, and they would not be where he now was." He also wished them all good-bye. Redding, although nearly exhausted, desired the officer to warn all "to be good," and bid them all "good-bye."

The officer then drew the black caps over their heads, and, with coolness, adjusted the noose about their necks. At this moment Grippen, who had borne up manfully thus far, gave signs of nervous trepidation. Shaking hands with each, the officer descends from the scaffold, he gives the signal by dropping his glove; the trap falls, and the two criminals die without a struggle.

In half an hour the surgeons pronounced life extinct. The bodies were then placed in their coffins, and the burial party taking charge of them, they were conveyed to their narrow homes in a secluded spot outside the intrenchments.