

Ritchie, John¹
Topeka, Sept. 30th, AD 1881
Hon. F. G. Adams
Secretary Kansas Historical Society

Your letter of Aug. 30th is received, requesting me to furnish anything I might know about Col. H. T. Titus² and the fight at his Block Haus on the 16th of August 1856. I was, the day before, at camp on Washing[ton] Creek, where about 150 Free State men had collected under command of Capt. Sam Walker of Lawrence and Col. James A. Harvey of Chicago. Titus' command had shot and buried Capt. Star Hoyt³ on the prairie on the old Santa Fe Road south of the Walkarusa, a little south east of Lawrence. I went with the company to look for Hoyt. We were fired on in passing. We found him doubled up with his boots on. We took him up; and was fired on as we passed to camp. After getting to camp a council of war was held; and it was decided to attack Fort Titus the next morning; and in order to do so we broke camp and marched to Coon Point on the Lawrence & Topeka Road.

We were on the march by day light, in regular order; and when we got in sight of the Fort the command was divided, throwing myself in front under Capt. Henry J. Shombre of Richmond and who was placed in command, with orders to march to the west of the Fort, which was done and upon our nearing the camp all the Ruffians, who were outside, took to the woods or into the Fort, Titus with the rest. There was a window in the North gable end of the Fort and a fire was opened upon us from that and the Captain, Shombre, fell mortally wounded. Died the next day at Lawrence, his physician Dr. Avery of Richmond asked if he had a word for his friends. Yes he said to Dr. Avery, "Tell my friends I offer up my life freely for freedom in Kansas."

The Fort was proof against sharp rifle balls on the west and on the north only through the window and gable and a load of straw had been ordered to fire the building. But the cannon from the east soon made it unnecessary. A white rag was soon thrown out and Titus surrendered. One man⁴ was killed in the fort and I was afterwards a prisoner charged with his murder, under the judicial administration; the now Republican judge Lecompte⁵ of the Lecompton Constitution. Me thinks I hear in shrill clear voice coming up from his tomb at Lawrence "Great God I was guarded by Col. Titus for two months. He was a what we called then a Northern man with Southern principles dressed like a Yankie. He was cruial to the prisners a brave

¹ John Ritchie (July 17, 1817–Aug. 31, 1887) born in Uniontown, Ohio, was an ultra abolitionist and teetotaler who moved from Franklin, Indiana to Topeka, Kansas Territory, in early spring of 1855. During the Civil War he commanded both the Fifth Kansas Cavalry and the Indian Home Guard. He died in Topeka on August 31, 1887.

² Henry Theodore Titus.

³ David Starr Hoyt (Feb. 17, 1821-Aug. 12, 1856) born in Deerfield, Massachusetts, was a officer in Gen. Scott's campaign from Veracruz to Mexico City during the Mexican War.

⁴ F. Becker, born in Germany.

⁵ Samuel Dexter Lecompte (Dec. 13, 1814- April 24, 1888) born in Dorchester County, Maryland, was Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of the Kansas Territory from 1854 to 1859. He served in the Kansas Legislature from 1867-1868 and died in Kansas City, Missouri on.

man cannot at so, it is contrary to all the rules by which true bravery is measured. At rool call of the prisners Capt. Mitchell⁶ said to Titus damn you when you were our prisner you cryed like a baby and you were fed on the best the good women could get, you feed on us on fly blown beef necks your own men would not eat and moldy side meat and bramd for flapjacks. For this he was tyed with a small cord so his wrists bealed and broke into sores gaging with a stick in his mouth. He allowed his guard to stone us for looking out of the broken glass. Hit a man in the face and the blood flood freely. He and I got allong finely I talked good humoredly I know you will hardly believe me. As being as wise as the owl and as harmless as the dove. Well if you are ever in a penitentiary and Old Lecompte the judge and Col. Titus loaded cannon pointing over you if that would not bring you to your senses you have less than me. What Titus might have been in a good course I cannot tell I told him I could knock the sand from under any man that wore the size boot he wore, and for this little liberty I am informed since my escape by a minister that he would not allow Jesus Christ to see that fellow. Titus had a fine chestnut horse I had planned to go out on, and had raised or loosened some board and layed my being upon to cover and there being only a loose stone wall or a dry wall as the masons call it, I intended to make my way through to the horse. This was Ritchies plan. But God as I believe had a better way. He caused the guard to each sit down by there camp or post fires, and I got down on my belly and crawled out between there fires and have been out ever since and have no desire to return. If Titus did fight desperately when captured is it not said the coward makes the hardest and most desperate fight when you get him in a tight place: may God direct us to so govern ourselves in making and executing the laws so we may not need anymore Col. Titus'. Let us never have to offer up any more sacrifices like Brown⁷ of Leavenworth and with Phillips,⁸ Barbre⁹ of Douglas[,] Hoit, and the two Browns and Col. Whipple¹⁰ that was hung with Old John Brown.

John Ritchie

⁶ Capt. William Mitchell of the Prairie Guards militia of Wabaunsee.

⁷ Maj. Reese P. Brown was a wool dealer and native of Springfield, Massachusetts, had moved to Logan County, Ohio, and then migrated with his wife Martha and their daughter to Salt Creek, Kansas, in October 1855. He had been elected to the freestate legislature and the following month received from James H. "Jim" Lane a military commission as an officer of the First Regiment, First Brigade, Kansas Volunteers. He was taken prisoner after a gunfight with proslavery men and mortally wounded with a hatchet blow that severed his left temporal artery on Jan. 19, 1857. He was hailed by abolitionists as "one of the first martyrs to freedom in Kansas."

⁸ William Phillips killed by a party led by Frederick Emory on Sept. 1, 1856, when resisting Emory's attempt to drive him out of Leavenworth.

⁹ Thomas Barber, shot and killed on December 6, 1855 during the Wakarusa War.

¹⁰ Col. Charles Whipple, hung at Charlestown, Va., as Aaron D. Stevens, March 16, 1860, for participating in the Harper's Ferry raid.

To the prisoners a brave man cannot do so, it is contrary to all the rules by which true bravery is measured. At Rock call of the the Prisoner Co. St. White. He said to Titus can you when you were in prison you cried like a baby and you were fed on the best the good women could get, you, feed us on fly blown beef make your own men would not eat moldy side meat and bread for ^{a flap gacks} bread. For this he was tied with a small cord so his wrists healed and broke into sores gaging with a stick in his mouth. He allowed his guard to stone us for looking out of the broken glass. It hit a man in the face and the blood flowed freely. We and I got along finely I talked good humerely I know you will hardly believe me, as being as wise as the scap and as harmless as the dove. Well if you are ever in a penitentiary and Old Leconte the judge. If that would not bring you to your senses. you have less than me and Col Titus Loaded Cannon pointing over you. What Titus might have been in a good cause I cannot tell. I told him I could knock the sand from under any man that wore the six boot he wore, and for this little liberty. I am informed since my escape by a minister that he would not allow your Christ to see that fellow. Titus had a fine Chesnut Horse I had planned to go out on, and had raised or loosened some board and layed my body upon to cover. and a there being only a loose stone wall or a dry wall as the masons call it, I intended to make my way through to the horse. This was Ritchie's plan. But God as I believe had a better way. He caused the guard to each to sit down by their camp or post fires, and I got down on my belly and crawled out between these fires. And have been out ever since and have no desire to return. At Titus die fight separately when captured I shot said the coward make the bravest and most desperate fight when you get them in a tight place: may God direct us to so govern our doers in making and executing the laws so we may not need any more Col Titus. Let ^{us} never have to offer up any more sacrifices like Brown of Leavenworth and Phillip, Barber of Douglas Hoit, and the two Browns and Col Whipple that was hung with Old John Brown.

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