

Harper's Ferry Raid by John Brown in 1859

One of Momentous Events in American History

Spark Provided
To Ignite North
And South in War

Editor's Note: It was just 100 years ago — on Oct. 16, 1859 — that John Brown led his raid on Harper's Ferry. The story of that historic event and its significance is told in the following dispatch by Boyd B. Stutler, a former magazine editor and newspaper publisher who is president of the West Virginia Historical Society and a leading authority on John Brown.

By BOYD B. STUTLER
President, West Virginia
Historical Society
(Written for UPI)

When John Brown struck at Harper's Ferry on the rainy Sunday night of Oct. 16, 1859 — just 100 years ago — in his one-man war to free the Southern slaves, he fired a train that led inevitably to civil war.

The shattering convulsion came less than 18 months later in a delayed explosion from the fuse lit by Brown and his dedicated abolitionist raiders in the mountains of what was then Virginia and later became West Virginia.

Historians are agreed that the Harper's Ferry raid was one of the momentous events in American history. Though insignificant within itself and in its immediate results, it was the one spark needed to explode the charged magazine of hates and differences, political and economic, that had accumulated for years between the industrial North and the agrarian South.

Truly, it was the curtain-raiser — though not the immediate cause of the four-year war that followed. The dedicated crusader struck at slavery, popularly the sorest point at issue between the two sections, which he well knew could not fail to arouse the hot-heads of both North and South to intemperance and frenzied action.

John Brown and his pitiful little "army of liberation" of 21 men swooped down on Harper's Ferry from their hideout in the nearby Maryland hills late in the night of Oct. 16. The U.S. Army and Arsenal, with thousands of stands of arms, was quickly taken; details of the raid were sent into the surrounding country; orders were issued to round up hostages and to gather a few unwilling slaves



BROWN FORCES CAPTURED—This sketch by Alfred Bergman, which appeared in a newspaper in 1859, shows U.S. Marines and Cavalry troops in action against John Brown and his followers after they were routed from the

to serve in the "army."

Hostages Penned Up By daybreak, some 40 hostages had been captured and penned up, and Brown was wearing Gen. George Washington's sword which legend said had been given him by Frederick the Great of Prussia. The sword, together with its owner, had been taken from the home of Col. Lewis Washington, grand-nephew of the first President.

But Brown had not reckoned on the rapid mobilization of the local militia companies. The alarm was spread by horsemen throughout the area and before noon on Monday companies from Charles Town and Shepherdstown were on the scene, followed shortly by others from Martinsburg, Winchester, Frederick, Maryland, and later from Baltimore. After Monday noon the raiders were ringed into the Armory area and escape was impossible.

Late Monday night, a detachment of 90 Marines arrived under the command of Brevet Col. Robert E. Lee, 2nd U.S. Cavalry. At daybreak Tuesday, the Marines battered down the doors of the fire engine house in the Armory enclosure in which Brown and his few surviving men had taken refuge.

All Over Quickly It was all over in a few minutes. But in the fighting, the mayor of Harper's Ferry, a

Marine, one free Negro, two slaves and 10 members of Brown's "army" were killed. Nine Virginia militiamen and one Marine were wounded. Brown and six of his raiders were captured and later hanged. Five escaped.

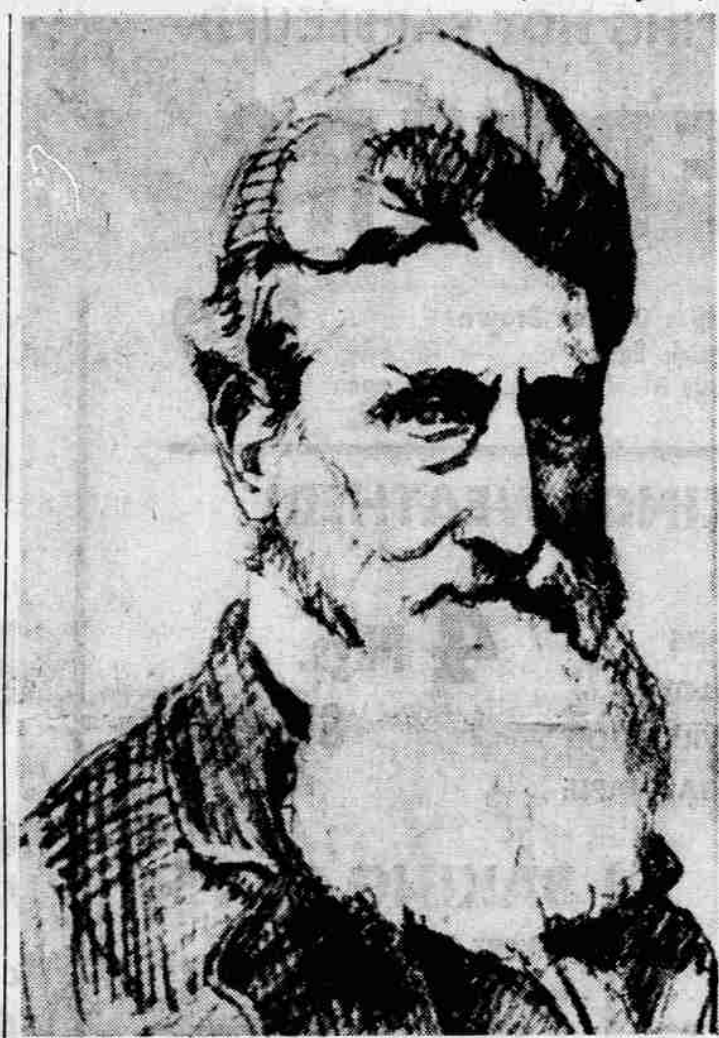
A great militia force was mobilized at Charles Town and Harper's Ferry; an iron curtain was drawn around the area; travel was permitted only under military supervision, and much of Virginia was reduced to a state of fear over Northern invasion and slave insurrection.

John Brown was hurried to trial, and was as hurriedly convicted of treason, murder and of conspiring with slaves to rebel — all capital crimes. Thirty days after sentence was passed, on the morning of Dec. 2, 1859, he marched unflinchingly to the scaffold at Charles Town.

Had John Brown been killed in the fighting it is very likely that his fame and his cause would have died with him. His raid would have been labeled an irresponsible, insane and fanatical foray upon a peaceful community, and deserving of the fate that befell it.

But in quelling the disturbance, Gov. Henry A. Wise over-reached himself by attaching to the raid more importance than it really merited, contributing much toward

engine house at Harper's Ferry. Brown and his 21-man "Army of Liberation" seized the arsenal the night of Oct. 16, 1859. They were captured and later hanged. (UPI Telephoto)



ONE-MAN WAR—When John Brown struck at Harper's Ferry on the night of Oct. 16, 1859, in his one-man war to free Southern slaves, he fired a train that led inevitably to civil war. Brown is shown above in a pencil sketch by William Morris Stutler, from a photo made by J. W. Black in Boston, Mass., in late May, 1859. (UPI Telephoto)

giving Brown the aura of a martyr.

John Brown's jailers had made another mistake between the time he was captured and the day he died. They placed a mighty weapon in his hand by granting him the privilege of writing freely from his cell — and his letters, which went out in a constant stream, found their way into the newspapers almost as soon as received by his Northern supporters.

These letters were a tremendous force in forming public opinion in the North and of winning new converts to the anti-slavery crusade. As the anti-slavery sentiment mounted and crystallized in the North, the South seethed with anger at the imminent

danger to its billion-dollar business in slaves.

Potent Force John Brown, dead, was even a more potent force than John Brown living; he troubled the country more than ever after he had been laid in his grave at North Elba, N.Y., high in the Adirondacks.

He became a symbol of the struggle for freedom; his raid was a live political issue in Congress and in the presidential campaign of 1860. And the theme song of the Union soldiers was "John Brown's Body." As a symbol his name had been covered with legend, and in many lands he became something of a patron saint of minority or oppressed groups struggling

1964 Champagne To Be Excellent

Epervay, France — (UPI) — The year 1964 is really worth waiting for, say the men who make champagne here.

That's when 1959 vintages will become available, and, according to the experts, '59 will go down in history for the champagne it produced.

The vintners have just finished the greatest harvest in the district in at least five decades and are predicting the wine will match that of 1893, the greatest vintage year in champagne history.

Three months of uninterrupted dryness is credited by the grape growers for the extraordinary crop.

gling for political or physical freedom.

One hundred years have done little to give Old John Brown a niche in history on which all can agree. Even today, he is almost as controversial as he was on Dec. 2, 1859, when the hangman sent him plunging into his measure of immortality. His fame or infamy still depends very largely on the personal point of view — and frequently it depends on the side on which grandpa fought in the Civil War.

Historians Disagree Historians disagree even weighing the same evidence, and working from the same unchangeable set of facts. Some find him a selfless martyr to the cause of human freedom, while others call him a firebrand and midnight murderer.

Nathaniel Hawthorne said that he deserved to hang because of his miscalculation of the probabilities, but that with all his failures, "There are few men who ever lived who understood better how to die." A more recent writer said, "Few men have done so little and accomplished so much as did Brown from October 16 to 18, 1859."

Army Posts Give Amateurs OK To Launch Rockets

Fort George G. Meade, Md. — (Science Service) — The U.S. Army has given permission so far for the launching of 20 amateur rockets by six groups at Fort Knox, Ky., and Camp A. P. Hill, Va., in October and November.

Headquarters of the Second Army said here that the two Kentucky groups have been given permission to launch seven rockets Oct. 24 at Fort Knox, and four other groups

to launch 13 rockets Nov. 14 at Camp A. P. Hill, Va.

These, so far, represent amateur rockets that have passed the Army's preliminary technical analysis and evaluation. The Army's program of assisting amateur scientific groups requires amateur rocketeers to make formal application for permission to launch their rockets on Army bases, and to submit technical data for analysis and evaluation.

To Encourage Youth The Army said its program is intended to encourage youth to "pursue scientific study" and to develop a potential source of trained manpower for national defense.

"Such firings," the Army said, "are intended to provide amateurs with opportunities to launch their rockets under qualified supervision

to minimize danger to themselves and to eliminate the hazards involved in unsupervised launching of rockets in civilian communities."

12-Year-Old Girl Bags Big Caribou

Anchorage, Alaska — (UPI) — Twelve-year-old Marilyn Hazen bagged the largest caribou of the season with one shot while on her second hunting trip.

The eighth-grade student made the kill in the Oshenta river area while hunting with her father, M/Sgt. Lynn Hazen of Elmendorf Air Force Base, Anchorage.

The huge caribou is being entered in the North American Big Game Trophy competition. Sgt. Hazen didn't get a shot during the trip.

DOCTORS WARN AGAINST EATING GREASY FOODS

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Now you can enjoy delicious fried foods without fear of distress or weight increase due to using greasy fat, oils or shortening! An amazing new discovery — PAM Dry Fry — lets you fry, bake, grill eggs, meats, fish, potatoes without using a single drop of grease. Cuts calories up to one-half. And — PAM Dry Fry prevents foods from sticking to pans!

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