

## Civilian describes pillaging near Gettysburg, 1863

### Introduction

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On July 5, 1863, Dr. William H. Boyle wrote to a fellow member of the local Columbus Lodge of the International Organization of Odd Fellows, Isaac McCauley, describing the devastation the Confederates had caused in Chambersburg, Pennsylvania, twenty-five miles west of Gettysburg. Confederate forces had been in Chambersburg as early as June 16 and had taken food, clothing, and other supplies, some of which was paid for with Confederate money. The pillaging this letter describes was what General Robert E. Lee had hoped to avoid when he issued General Orders No. 73 on June 27:

The commanding general considers that no greater disgrace could befall the army, and through it our whole people, than the perpetration of the barbarous outrages upon the unarmed, and defenceless and the wanton destruction of private property that have marked the course of the enemy in our own country.

Lee's order was ignored, as Boyle reported:

The rebels have stripped this valley of everything. All the Stores – Book, Dry Goods, Groceries, Mills and Warehouses have been emptied. There is not enough left for the people to live on for two weeks. Both railroads are destroyed. All the new depot buildings are down. Many farms are destroyed by roads over them and encampments upon them. The telegraph lines are all destroyed. We are completely cut off from the outside world. . . . The outrages committed on private property and on individuals have been dreadful. Murder, rape, robbery and arson are the names by which you designate a few of their atrocities. Gen. Lee's order to respect private property was laughed at by the villains that compose his army.

The bulk of Lee's army passed through Chambersburg on its way to Gettysburg, where over July 1–3, 1863, they met Union forces under the command of General George Meade.

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### Questions for Discussion

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Read the introduction, view the image, and read the transcript of the letter. Then apply your knowledge of American history to answer the following questions:

1. Locate Chambersburg, Pennsylvania, on a map of the United States, including areas from northern Virginia into southern New England. Find its position relative to Gettysburg.
2. Why did the actions described in this letter strike fear into the hearts and minds of Northerners?
3. Explain the reason the author of this letter felt that his community was isolated and defenseless?
4. War, by its very nature, visits horrors upon combatant and civilians alike. Which of the actions described in this letter do you consider the most devastating to the community of Chambersburg?
5. If the letter is accurate, why do you think that the Confederate troops disobeyed the orders of their commander, General Robert E. Lee?

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Image

Chamberburg. July 5. '63  
 Friend M. Cauley,  
 Having an opportunity to  
 send a letter outside the conf: lines I  
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 for over two weeks. We get our news  
 via Richmond. I bought three Rich-  
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William H. Boyle to Isaac McCauley, July 5, 1863, page 1. (Gilder Lehrman Institute, GLC09180.02)

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names by which you designate a few of their atrocities. Gen. Lee's order to respect private property was laughed at by the villains that compose his army. They have destroyed our Lodge room - all the regalia had been carried off or torn up to get off the lace and bullion. Not an article of regalia is left. The leather fixtures shared the same fate. When they took possession of the Hall I saw the officer in charge and begged of him to respect that room - he promised me it should not be disturbed and placed a guard over it. The guard broke in three times and plundered it. McCallum's and Stambaugh's offices are destroyed. The safes are broken open - yours among the rest - the books were thrown down all the books carried off or scattered about, the papers strewn over the floor and trampled in the mud. Such a picture of ruin as the office presents you cannot imagine try your best. The town is one vast and nasty horse stable. It smells so bad we can scarcely live in it. I am fearful of an epidemic. The country people fear worse than the town. All sorts of outrages were committed on their persons and property. This morning about a dozen of wagons with wounded from Gettysburg passed through here. They were followed and captured. The wagons and horses were run off and the wounded left in the hospital which the rebels have still here. The wounded say the fight was going against them up to Saturday morning when they left. If they retreat through here I fear they will destroy the town. I will write to you soon again if we ever get a mail through. I send this to be mailed at Harrisburg.

Yours  
W. H. Boyle

William H. Boyle to Isaac McCauley, July 5, 1863, page 2. (Gilder Lehrman Institute, GLC09180.02)

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### Transcript

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Chambersburg, July 5, '63

Friend M'Cauley,

Having an opportunity to send a letter outside the Confed: lines I will give you a short account of our situation. The rebs have stripped this valley of everything. All the Stores – Book, Dry Goods, Groceries, Mills and Warehouses have been emptied. There is not enough left for the people to live on for two weeks. Both railroads are destroyed. All the new depot building are down. Many farms are destroyed by roads over them and encampments upon them. The telegraph lines are all destroyed. We are completely cut off from the outside world. We have had no northern papers here for over two week. We get our news via Richmond. I bought three Richmond papers from one of their newsmen on the street for 25 cents – for the three. The outrages committed on private property and on individuals have been dreadful. Murder, rape, robbery and arson are the [2] names by which you designate a few of their atrocities. Gen. Lees order to respect private property was laughed at by the vallains that compose his army. They have destroyed our Lodge room – all the regalia has been carried off or torn up to get off the lace and bullion. Not an article of regalia is left. The lamp fixturs shared the same fate. When they took possession of the Hall I saw the officer in charge and begged of him to respect that room-he promised me it should not be disturbed and placed a guard over it. The guard broke in three times and plundered it. M L [*illegible*] and Stumbaugh's offices are destroyed. The safes are broken open – yours among the rest – the book cases thrown down all the books carried of or scattered about, the papers strewn over the floor and tramped in the mud. Such a picture of ruin as the office presents you cannot imagine try your best. The town is one vast and nasty horse-stable. It smells so bad we can scarcely live in it. I am fearful of an epidemic. The country people fared worse than the town. All sorts of outrages were committed on their persons and property. This morning about a dozen of wagons with wounded from Gettysburg passed through here. They were followed and captured. The wagons and horses were run off and the wounded left in the Hospital which the rebs: have still here. The wounded say the fight was going against them up to Saturday morning when they left. If they retreat through here I fear they will destroy the town. I will write to you soon again if we can get a mail through. I send this to be mailed at Harrisburg.

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W. H. Boyle