

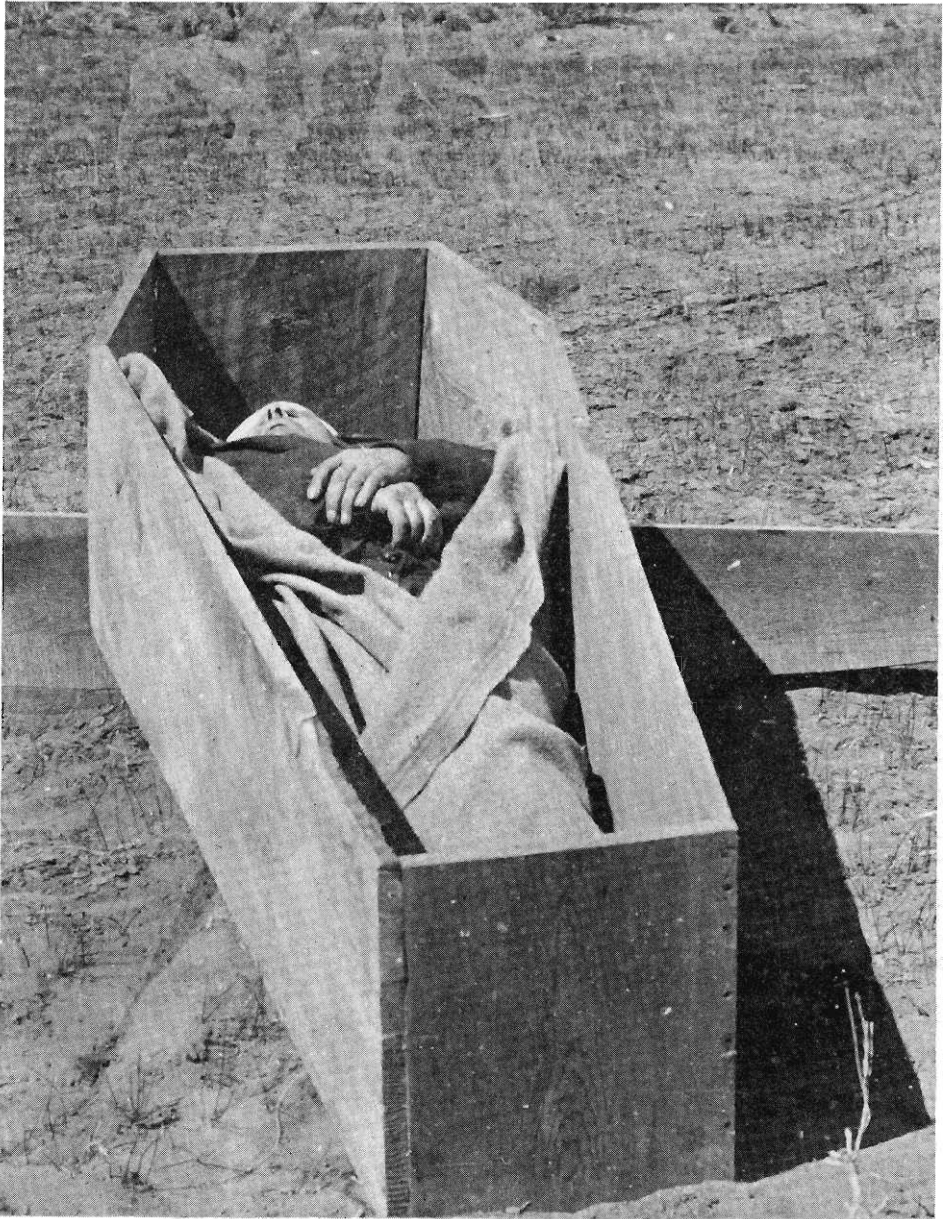
John D. Lee

at his execution,
Mountain Meadows, Utah, March 23, 1877

I want to say I used what strength I had
to save those people. It went on. I could not
stop it. They brought it on themselves — waving
a gun they said they used on Joseph Smith,
calling an ox 'Brigham,' our wives 'whores,'
poisoning springs — until some Indians died.
And when I met Moquetas and Big Bill
on the road between Cedar City and New Harmony,
painted for battle, they said they'd kill me —
kill everyone in the settlements —
if we didn't help them get that wagon train.
They took my small son hostage and rode off.
The rest is tangled threads, drawn to a knot
that blood has hardened. We got out here — the camp
was twice as large as anyone had supposed —
children, women at their work, men posted.
Somewhere along the trail two parties had joined.
I looked down from that hill and did not see
myself standing where I stand today.
Where were the murderers? I wept, pleaded —
the chiefs would not move. Under a flag of truce,
I offered a Militia escort back to Cedar.



Last scene in the life of John D. Lee taking leave of the officers while sitting upon his coffin just before being shot. Mountain Meadows. J. Fennemore & Co., Photographers



Remains of John D. Lee, five minutes after execution, on the ground where he was shot. Mountain Meadows. J. Fennemore & Co., Photographers

The Indians, I gave out, would be drawn off
by supplies, cattle — but they had to leave
their weapons behind, and any murderers
among them must stand trial. I saw suspicion
in eyes that had been open for a week,
but most of them were just too starved to argue
with their deliverers. We drove two wagons up,
loaded them with the wounded, and young children,
and women and children walking, we set out
in a blinding dusk. Behind, a quarter mile,
the men came, one by one, each with a guard.
The horses, moving fast, got far ahead,
and just as the wagons passed behind a knoll
the women entered a draw where scrub oak grew
on all sides, shadowy and shoulder high.
At the command, 'Halt! Do your duty!' the guards
knelt down and shot their prisoners, while the Indians,
leaping the brush from both sides of the trail,
hatcheted children, women, and stray men
whose guards, afraid of murder, shot the air.
I was assigned to kill the sick and the wounded —
McMurdy and Knight, who helped me, say I did it,
but actually the shots I fired went wild
in the confusion and almost killed McMurdy.
Next morning, we rode back and quickly buried
six score — right where they fell — the braves
had scalped and stripped the bodies during the night.
That landscape took a general's sanity.
Now for the last victim — here I am
beside this casket twenty years to the day.
Death holds no terror, and I have not asked
the courts or the world to spare my life.
Where I am going is no worse than this.

Center my heart, boys, don't mangle my body.