



The Hughes News Br. General John T. Hughes Camp 614

Historians Corner, Paul R. Petersen



The Hughes News is excited to start featuring a monthly column by Author and Historian Paul R. Petersen. Paul is the Author of *Quantrill of Missouri*, *Quantrill in Texas*, *Quantrill at Lawrence* and *Lost Souls of the Lost Township*. Petersen is a retired U.S. Marine Corps master sergeant and a highly decorated infantry combat veteran of the Vietnam War, Operation Desert Storm, and Operation Iraqi Freedom. He is a member of the William Clarke Quantrill Society, the James-Younger Gang Association, the Sons of the American Revolution, and the Jackson County and Missouri State Historical Societies. He received his A.B.A. from Longview Community College and attends Ottawa University. Petersen lives in Raytown, Missouri.

An Enlisted Man's Response to the Centralia Massacre

William Clarke Quantrill's favorable light is always overshadowed by the Lawrence Raid until one is able to discover the real truth behind the events that transpired before and during the raid. The same is true of William T. "Bloody Bill" Anderson and the Centralia Massacre. A Southern response has never before been written until now and in it one is able to discover the actual truth behind the event that took place before and during the so called massacre.

Following the summer of 1864 in Jackson County there were so many Union patrols scouring the Sni and Blue Hills looking for guerrillas that an effective campaign could not be launched against the Federal forces. With Confederate General Sterling Price heading northward through Missouri on his final expedition with twelve thousand men Quantrill's guerrilla bands were directed to meet him in Boonville, along the Missouri River for orders.

Arriving in Howard County by early Fall Quantrill's company was soon joined by George Todd and Bill Anderson's company. In order to nullify the Union presence in the area an attack on the Federal garrison in Fayette just north of Boonville was agreed upon. When the guerrillas lost the element of surprise the soldiers found safety behind the brick walls of the courthouse and a log embrasure used as a fort. The guerrillas fared badly losing a great number of their best men. Quantrill pulled his company back to his hideout among the rugged thickets of Boonsboro midway between Boonville and Glasgow. Todd led his company back west being chased by Federal units until he was able to counterattack. Anderson led his men eastward.

The Union garrison in Paris, Missouri, soon learned the direction the guerrillas took after the battle of Fayette on September 20. They believed the guerrillas were vulnerable and, furthermore, that a concerted effort to track them down would finally destroy them. Maj. A. V. E. Johnson, in command of the Thirty-ninth Missouri Militia, mounted around 155 men and gave pursuit. Johnson's advance scouts ran into Anderson's company around noon on September 26, 1864. Anderson, not wanting to bring on an attack, slipped into the darkness just outside Centralia. He rejoined George Todd's command along with John Thraikill's company and other small guerrilla units camped on the Singleton farm four miles south of Centralia. Here they gathered with a combined strength of more than 225 men.

The next day, September 27, Todd's men remained in camp. At first light, Anderson took Arch Clement and thirty men on a foray into Centralia to verify the information about Price's movements and to get a St. Louis newspaper. At the time Centralia was a small village with about a dozen houses, only two with more than one story. The town was on a wide-open prairie. From the roof of any of the houses a person could see for miles in every direction. There were two hotels in town; the other buildings were a saloon and commercial stores. Centralia was also a stop on the rail line with a depot and a water tower. On the morning of Anderson's mission, he and his men rudely awakened the people with shouts and pistol shots, demanding breakfast at Sneed's Hotel. Others searched for Unionists to rob. Anderson allegedly rescued a number of civilians who were being

Continued



The Hughes News

Br. General John T. Hughes Camp 614

roughly handled by his men. The railroad depot was set on fire, which were the orders given them by higher command.

When Anderson assembled his men after three hours of brazenly riding about the town, the east-bound stage from Columbia arrived. The passengers were robbed. Any conscription-aged men not in Southern service were considered suspect. After taking their time while going through the belongings of the passengers, the guerrillas heard a distant whistle announce the westbound North Missouri train from St. Charles. Anderson ordered his men to quickly pile ties on the track to halt the passing train. When the train pulled into the burning station the guerrillas immediately surrounded the cars firing their pistols into the air to discourage any resistance. There were twenty-five Union soldiers on board under the command of Lieutenant Peters of the First Iowa Cavalry including sixteen soldiers from Mexico, Missouri being escorted to St. Joseph for court-martial. They had been caught plundering the citizens living in the area of their garrison. The remainder were reporting for duty up the line and the rest were recently returning on furlough from General Sherman's army where they had been conducting "total war" on their way through the Southern states. The Federals on board with rifles crowded the windows and the platforms and fired briskly at the guerrillas. An Iowa soldier was credited in one Union account of having fired out of the soldier's car, setting the stage for the retaliation that followed.

Northern writers have never admitted that the soldiers opened fire on the guerrillas but the truthful account has been verified by several eyewitnesses. Guerrilla George T. Scholl, one of Anderson's men described what happened as the train pulled into the station. "We rode into town with no intention of taking a trip around town. Sometime later a train came in filled with Federal soldiers. The company lined up outside the coach and began a fusillade. We answered and started to clean them." Fifteen-year-old Frank Dalton riding with Anderson explained his version of the scene. "Fighting under Captain Bill Anderson, he had captured a passenger train and got a lot of money, most of which was being sent South to pay the Union troops. On the train were thirty-four Union

soldiers who were being sent South to join the Union army. As the soldiers showed fight when we ordered them to leave the train, we had to dispose of them. The Yankee troops saw us and lined up to give battle." Before the firing stopped, Anderson's men overran the train. One of the guerrillas discovered a man who had once testified against him in court. They dragged him from the crowd and shot him beside the platform. The rest of the soldiers were taken from the train and lined up alongside the tracks and questioned by Anderson.

As he looked over these Union soldiers Anderson recalled the Federal's recent actions. Union Maj. Austin King from Fayette reported that his men on September 12, killed five of Anderson's men. One was seventeen-year-old Al Carter, who had moved his family to Howard County from Kansas City because of Gen. Ewing's General Order No. 11. The other was seventeen-year-old Buck Collins, who was foraging for food with Carter when they were cut off and surrounded at a farmhouse by twenty-five Federals looking for Anderson. They shot the two men from their saddles. After killing Carter, the Federals shot out his eyes then scalped him. Carter had long black curly hair, and the Federals believed they had killed Anderson. The atrocity only showed the deep hatred of the Union troops toward the guerrillas and the brutal deeds of which they were capable. Shortly after this engagement, a Federal scouting party of two hundred men found guerrilla James Bissett and four others of Anderson's men in eastern Howard County. It was nine o'clock in the morning, and a strong rain began falling when the five guerrillas turned their horses from the road to seek shelter in a nearby barn. The guerrillas had removed their saddle blankets to dry and were busy oiling their pistols when a Federal patrol discovered their tracks and followed them to the barn.

With no picket on watch, James Bissett, James Wilson, Harvey Brown, Thomas Fulton, and Patrick McMacane were taken by surprise. Firing their pistols with both hands while trying to get to their horses, Bissett and Brown were shot down at the first charge. The rest although wounded pulled themselves against a tree trunk. Each man had a pistol in his hand, ready to take a few Federals with them. Fulton tried to rally the men. A round to



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the head killed Wilson. Fulton, wounded numerous times, hollered out a last good-bye to his comrades before he fell. McMacane was the last to fall. The Federals rushed at them still firing, riddling their bodies until they were unrecognizable. One of the attacking officers recalled, "They fought desperately before we succeeded in their killing." The five guerrillas managed to kill thirteen Federals and wound twenty-one before being overpowered. Official reports failed to mention that the Federals scalped the dead guerrillas.

When Anderson was notified of the deaths of his men, he was visibly affected. Guerrilla Hampton Watts was present and recalled that "great tears coursed down his cheeks, his breast heaved and his body shook with vehement agitation." Watts noted that Anderson was morose for several days afterward, planning an equitable revenge for the men he lost.

Still grieving over the recent news that some of his best loved men had been shot then scalped by Federals in Howard County Anderson told the frightened captive soldiers at Centralia. "You Federals have just killed six of my men, scalped them, and left them on the prairie. I will show you that I can kill men with as much skill and rapidity as anybody. From this time on I ask no quarter and give none." When the soldiers protested Anderson replied, "You are Federals, and Federals scalped my men, and carry their scalps at their saddle bows. I have never allowed my men to do such things." He then ordered Lt. Archie Clement to "muster out" the remaining soldiers. One sergeant was singled out and spared for an exchange of prisoners for one of Anderson's men recently captured. The sixteen Federal thieves from Mexico, being sent to St. Joseph for court martial were shot along with the others. Their bodies were shipped back to Mexico for burial, one of them buried in the wedding suit of Alex Bomar, which he had earlier stolen.

After the soldiers were shot down, Anderson gathered up his men and rode back to rejoin the rest of the guerrilla band. Later that day Major A. V. E. Johnson arrived in Centralia and was told which

direction the guerrillas headed. Johnson left thirty-two men behind to guard the town. He decided he would attack Anderson with the men he had left. His bravery bordered on recklessness akin to foolishness. Johnson led his men toward the guerrilla camp and an ambush. Not one of the 123 Federals who took part in the battle escaped alive.

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Bloody Bill Anderson

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