

**Historians Corner, 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.

Fact or Fantasy – The Unbelievable Life of a Quantrill Guerrilla

It has always been assumed that Colonel William Clarke Quantrill's partisan ranger command maintained its highest level of manpower strength during the Lawrence Raid when 450 men rode into Kansas on August 21, 1863. But amazingly records prove that during his career Quantrill commanded over 1,000 men whose names have been shown to have ridden with the guerrilla chieftain, some for the entire length of the Civil War while others for very short periods of time. The level of soldiers in his command fluctuated considerably. Some joined and were killed in action. Others joined for only a short duration then joined the regular Confederate army under General Sterling Price. If any Confederate soldiers returned to their homes on a furlough or to recuperate from battle wounds, out of necessity they joined up with Quantrill for protection. A large majority of Quantrill's men initially joined the regular Confederate army in Missouri at the start of hostilities then later returned home after their initial enlistments to join Quantrill on a permanent basis. But wherever he ventured on military operations throughout his career through six states Confederate soldiers were drawn to his command.

Quantrill spent two winters sojourning in Texas behind Confederate lines since the winter denuded the foliage eliminating the cover and concealment needed for the guerrillas to hide in the wooded hills and valleys along the Missouri-Kansas border. His winter treks south to Texas took him through the sparsely settled area of the Indian Territory of present day Oklahoma. When passing through Indian Territory Quantrill enlisted Confederate Indians as scouts to help guide him through the dangerous region.

One scout in particular, Solomon Bedford Strickland, the red-headed Indian, gained a colorful reputation every bit as fantastic as many others in Quantrill's company during and after the war. He was born on a stormy night on June 5, 1839 in a log cabin on Crystal Creek, in Montgomery County, Texas. He was

raised in the Cherokee nation and given the name "Red Wolf." His mother's name was Princess Wild Flower. His father deserted the family so his mother never told the boy his real name taking him back to her native Tennessee. There he attended a pale-face school for a short time. After his mother's death, an uncle, told him his father's name was William Strickland and his name was Solomon. Upon reaching manhood he became known as "Handsome Johnny" for the imperial Van Dyke mustache which adorned his features. According to his autobiography he was generally known as "Red" following the Civil War and dressed similar to his Wild West hero Buffalo Bill Cody complete with mustache and goatee.

During his adolescence Strickland recounted how he hitchhiked a ride on an ox-drawn wagon to New Orleans and from there took a boat to Texas. By a strange coincidence he said he fell in with a fellow-traveler that revealed that he was the boy's father. Now reunited the two joined the Texas Rangers traveling to Brownsville, Presidio, San Antonio and other such cities. At Fort Brown near Brownsville, Strickland said he learned to play poker and won \$2,000. Strickland said that within sixteen months and as almost as many killings later he left the Texas Rangers and went to New Orleans where said he met up with Nathan Bedford Forrest of later Civil War fame. Strickland said they had a jolly bar-room poker game which broke up in a free-for-all fight and resulted in Forrest hitting one man over the head with his pistol, knocking him cold.

From Brownsville Strickland ventured into Houston, claiming to have helped financier Paul Bremond, president of the Galveston and Red River Railroad to help build the Houston Central Railroad. On one occasion he amazed Bremond and City Marshal Bob Boyce by killing a buzzard on the wing with his pistol. He went on to say he also amazed an Allan Vince by killing him as Vince tried to steal away on

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Petersen Continued... Strickland's horse.

Strickland's first notable appearance on the stage of history was when he joined the regular Confederate army serving as a scout for Confederate General Albert Sidney Johnston. During the Battle of Shiloh on April 6, 1862, Johnston received a mortal wound. Strickland related how he was in Johnston's camp the night before the battle and held the dying general in his arms while his life's blood ebbed away. When Johnston fell, Strickland looked at him, lying on the ground, and said to himself, "I'll make them pay for his death, for he was worth a hundred of them." He said he began to kill Yankees and in the end must have killed ten times a hundred.

After Shiloh, Strickland rode to Missouri, where he reportedly shot a hold-up man in a saloon. Getting in a feud with Kansas Jayhawkers Strickland said he then joined up with Quantrill riding with the guerrillas during the Civil War and becoming bosom friends with Quantrill and Frank James. Strickland said he took part in the fight at Lawrence, Kansas besides many other skirmishes and battles.

He said he parted with Quantrill at the end of the war when Quantrill departed Missouri to head east where he was mortally wounded in Kentucky.

Strickland claimed that after the war when Federal vigilantes went to the James farm to get Frank and Jesse, Jesse shot four of them but was wounded as a result. He said he and Frank took Jesse to Strickland's home in Montgomery County, Texas to recuperate. During the wait he said that he and Frank spent a good deal of time in Houston but ran into trouble with some "Negro police." It was during this time of Reconstruction that the area was under the control of a Federal regiment commanded by future Reconstruction governor E. J. Davis. Davis' regiment was made up of deserters from the Confederate army, Mexicans, negroes, thugs and a generally undesirable element of society. They had not been in charge a week before robberies and knockdowns began to occur. On Preston Avenue, Strickland said he shot three of them and that City Marshal Lord wished them well and even waved goodbye as he and Frank were forced to ride away.

For several years Strickland said he rode with the James boys, robbing banks and railroads and fighting the hated "Pinkerton men." He said he parted

Petersen continued.. with the gang in 1873 after robbing a bank in Springfield, Missouri. He then joined Comanche Chief Quanah Parker in fighting Bat Masterson, Billie Dixon and other lawmen. In 1875 Strickland rejoined the James boys in robbing the Northern Pacific Railroad in Minnesota. For the next decade or so he wandered from Kansas to Texas and points west, gambling, running saloons, ranching, and wheeling and dealing.

Back in Texas, Strickland's health failed, and he was paralyzed for three years. When he was able to walk again he found himself broke, having lost huge sums of money. He was forced to live in an ox-drawn wagon for two years. Back in Tennessee he heard that someone was trying to get money out of oil on his land back in Texas. He registered at the Globe Hotel in Houston in 1927. He and his tribe wound up suing the big oil companies for the oil rights on their ancestral lands. In June 1939, when he was 100 years old, a voice told him to write his life story. What resulted was a 742 page biography that made the average fiction thriller read like a bedtime story. He remarked that, "I believe I can get a very good idea of my life up to this date; what is to come only the Great Spirit knows." Even at his advanced age he looked young enough to be 75. During his lifetime Strickland bragged that he called Sam Houston, Jesse James and Bat Masterson by their first names and even sat down to dinner with President Grover Cleveland in the White House. Afterwards he claimed to have traveled to Europe with "Rosie, the Cowgirl." Strickland spent his lifetime as a soldier, gun-slinger, gambler and adventurer at large. His biographer claimed that "Strickland's life story is the most fantastic narrative he had ever read. He killed more people, won and lost more money, ran more gambling joints, robbed more banks and trains, engaged in more adventurous activities in more places, and dropped more famous names, than any other man in literature, sacred or profane. Yet all his exploits are documented by such detailed associated facts and circumstances as to clothe them with credibility." It is believed that Solomon Bedford Strickland died in Austin, August 14, 1947, dying at the ripe old age of 108.

**Article written by Paul R. Petersen author of the
Quantrill trilogy books.**

Photo of Solomon Bedford Strickland from the CanteyMyersCollection.com

Ref: True Stories of Old Houston and Houstonians by Samuel Oliver Young, Copano Bay Press 2010.

Fortunes or Fantasy – Wilson's Strickland's 1,476 Acre Survey by Inez Strickland Palmer



**Solomon
Strickland**