



### Historians Corner, Paul R Petersen

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## Quantrill's First Skirmish as a Guerrilla

When the Civil War started in April of 1861, Quantrill found himself escorting a wealthy Missouri farmer and his family to safety in Texas. Quickly heading north he readily enlisted as a private in the First Cherokee Mounted Regiment of Colonel Joel Bryan Mayes before transferring to Captain Stewart's Company B, in Colonel Jeremiah Vardeman Cockrell's Independent Home Guard of the 1st Brigade, 8th Division, Missouri State Guard, commanded by Brigadier Gen James Spencer Rains. He was soon promoted sergeant in Company I, of the Third Mo Cavalry. General Sterling Price finding himself unable to arm or supply his newly formed army ordered his mostly independent units to return to their home counties to wage partisan warfare.

Winter was not far off, and Price realized that he would not be able to feed and supply his men in winter quarters. The situation was also affected by the short enlistment terms of most of Price's soldiers. Many three-month enlistments had already expired. An alternative, which the general endorsed as a military necessity, was to establish groups of partisan rangers. Partisans protected their own land and provided for themselves. Organized independent ranger companies would keep Union forces in the state occupied and off balance. A fast, well-armed, mobile force existing off the land and supported by friends and family could do more damage to a Federal army of occupation than Price could by trying to maneuver a numerically superior adversary into set-piece battles. Price knew that his army required an intelligence network, and the guerrillas could set themselves up in every county and locale. At the same time, partisans could disrupt the enemy's supply lines and communication. Quantrill returned to Jackson County where the civilian population eagerly welcomed him due to his support in warning them of an earlier Jayhawker attack in December 1860, on the farm of Morgan Walker in Blue Springs. At this point in time

Missouri was still a sovereign state in the Union but that did not prevent Jayhawkers from Kansas attacking farms and plantations all along the Missouri border. In October Jayhawkers raided the Brooking Township eight miles south of Independence. They burned the home of Martin Flanery, who then joined Quantrill. Flanery reported that the Jayhawkers had burned a church and twenty-seven other homes in the neighborhood and had pillaged the home of Reuben Harris in the middle of the night.

Before Missouri seceded from the Union on October 31, 1861, the State had won several victories against their Northern aggressors. Missouri had fought and won battles at Carthage, Wilson's Creek and Lexington but this did not stop Union troops from devastating the countryside. Colonel Charles Jennison had earlier formed the Seventh Kansas Jayhawker Regiment and soon made it the most notorious of all the Kansas regiments. John Brown Jr. led one company within the command into Missouri.

At the end of September 1861, the Kansas Jayhawkers received orders from Union General Charles Frémont to march to Kansas City, Missouri. As the Jayhawkers camped on the outskirts of Kansas City they began a wild orgy of plunder and rape. Despite the success of their earlier victory at Osceola, Missouri, the regiment lacked uniforms, shoes, blankets, and weapons. They were also untrained and undisciplined. A camp visitor described the Jayhawkers as a "ragged, half-armed, diseased, mutinous rabble, taking votes whether any troublesome or distasteful order should be obeyed or defied." The men boasted about their plundering. All Indians seemed hard up for cash and eagerly offered to sell Rebel souvenirs at ten cents each. Blacks mingled with the rowdies.

They stationed themselves in Kansas City but soon raided toward Independence. Along the eight miles between the two towns the Jayhawkers burned twenty-six homes. Their especial hatred was toward the Morgan Walker farm where the Jayhawkers were rebuffed in their earlier attempt at plunder the year before. On Tuesday morning, October 1, 1861, a squad of Jayhawkers struck Walker's farm. They rode from farmhouse to farmhouse and pillaged the farmers of money, silverware, and jewelry. One of the local residents rushed word of the raid to Quantrill, and he quickly rode to Walker's farm. After surveying the damage he gathered Morgan Walker's son, Andrew, Morgan T. Mattox, John Little, William Haller, John Hampton, and six other youths, and they raced after the Jayhawkers. All of them were expert horsemen and marksmen, and they all knew the territory well.

Quantrill rushed to cut them off before they could make it back to their headquarters in Independence. He formed his men into an ambush on the Independence and Blue Springs Road and waited for the Jayhawkers. Somehow the raiders detoured to another road with people to rob and farms to plunder. Two miles west of the Walker farm, the Jayhawkers attacked the farm of Daniel DeWitt, which had been the last hiding place of Kansas Charlie Ball and his raiders prior to the ambush at the Walker farm the previous December. The Jayhawkers then moved north toward the Strother Stone farm. Here they insulted Stone's wife, and one of them struck her on the head with his

revolver when she protested their actions. After looting the house, they rode off to the farm of William Thompson.

As Quantrill and his men came riding up they saw Stone's wife standing in her yard, her face covered with blood, pointing out which way the Jayhawkers had headed. For a brief moment Quantrill and his men were stunned at the sight of the shaken, bleeding woman. Southerners were noted for maintaining and living by the "Southern Code of Honor." Women were held sacrosanct and highly respected. Guerrilla James Campbell recalled that Quantrill had told his companions earlier, "Any member of his troop who insulted a woman would be shot." After they resumed the race toward the Thompson farm, their shock turned to anger. The Jayhawkers had already set fire to the Thompson home by the time the guerrillas arrived, but they had not as yet ridden away. Many were just mounting their horses when Quantrill and his men boldly charged into the midst of them. Quantrill was leading the way with his gun blazing. Already known as an unerring shot, he killed the soldier who had struck Mrs. Stone. His men wounded two others. The rest of the Jayhawkers fled on the Independence and Blue Springs road toward the safety of Independence, five miles away.

The fight became a wild horse race as Quantrill's men were in hot pursuit.

When word of the Jayhawker's death reached Independence, Unionist citizens clamored for an arrest; this was the first instance of a Federal soldier being killed in Jackson County. The town marshal arrested both Stone and Thompson the next day for the soldier's death. Not wanting innocent men to be charged for something that he had done, but knowing that he might be putting his life in danger, Quantrill went to Independence and had a Justice of the Peace assist him in swearing out an affidavit stating that the killing was his responsibility. To Andrew Walker, Quantrill replied, "They can't catch me, and I'll save 'em if I can." This affidavit satisfied the authorities, and Stone and Thompson were released. After learning the circumstances of the Jayhawker's death, the authorities brought no charges against Quantrill.

This incident, however, led the Unionist militia in Independence to target Quantrill, and for a short time he was forced into hiding. At first he camped in the woods where he and his men could find cover and concealment and water for their horses. Areas like this were abundant in and around Jackson County as Quantrill's small band brought relief from Jayhawker injustices. Guerrilla Jack Liddil recounted, "Naturally we gained many recruits until we became several hundred strong. We were all Southern men, in spirit and sympathy, and naturally our band became a fighting machine with a purpose." Another guerrilla, Harrison Trow stinctly stated, "The border warfare had found a chief."

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A Kansas soldier fell wounded from his saddle in front of the home of Southerner John B. Saunders during Quantrill's first guerrilla skirmish. The Saunders's tended his wounds and nursed him back to health. Two years later he commanded a company and was given a list of homes to be burned under General Orders No. 11. The Saunders house was on the list, but because the family had shown this man kindness, the house was spared from the jayhawker's torch. After the war the family returned to find their home still standing but stripped of its doors and windows and all furnishings except the top of a sewing machine and a broken rocking chair. This house is still standing east of Independence at 17601 R. D. Mize Road.