



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.

Unheralded Rebel Victory The Battle of Walnut Creek

In the military career of Confederate Colonel William Clarke Quantrill there are many instances in recorded history concerning his battlefield victories. Known to all those who follow his illustrious campaigns through six states are battlefield accounts in the Official Records as well as published accounts of those who rode with him throughout the war. What is not commonly known are those few accounts of his victories recalled only by his men who survived the war and recorded their accounts in lesser known writings unavailable to a general readership. One such account records one of Quantrill's earliest victories over Federal forces along the border where he fought a stand up battle uncommon to his guerrilla company though being vastly outnumbered.

Only six months after having organized a small group of Southern patriots to protect their homes and neighborhoods from Kansas Jayhawker attacks in Jackson County, Quantrill's command had increased to seventy-five men, in addition to twelve men having joined from a lesser known guerrilla leader, Captain John Winiard Rider. Rider had initially served under General Sterling Price in the Missouri State Guard before returning to Jackson County. Rider's name as well as his father, George appears on Quantrill's July 6, 1862 company muster roll.

In the month preceding the three Confederate victories at the 1st Battle of Independence, the Battle of Lone Jack and the Battle of White Oak Creek, Quantrill was continuously able to confuse and baffle the Federal forces along the border. In the latter part of July, 1862, his designs were to attack Harrisonville in Cass County to the south where a large amount of provisions were stored but large parties of Federal patrols thwarted his plans. In the face of overpowering odds Quantrill made a forced march for several days before pitching his camp on Walnut Creek in Johnson County, Missouri, on the eastern border of Jackson. Using the same defensive arrangements he would make the following month at White Oak Creek Quantrill prepared a defensive position with a body of water to his front and large bluffs to his rear making an enemy attack from behind

impractical.

After establishing his position Quantrill ordered Lieutenant Coleman Younger to take twelve men and attack any Federal advance parties he could find in order to lead their main body back onto their camp where they could be well received. On the 13th of July, Younger found a Federal advance party of fifteen cavalymen from the 200 strong Johnson County militia. His ambush killed fourteen. The main body of militia was soon joined by an additional 200 Federal militiamen from Butler County who followed up Younger's retreat back to Quantrill's position.

Quantrill had well prepared his defenses, felling trees, and making his withdrawal if needed inaccessible to cavalry except at passes left for his own troops. The four hundred Federal cavalymen made a strong impetuous charge, but they were driven back by the well entrenched guerrillas. A second charge followed making the little creek run red with the blood of brave soldiers. The Federals fell back in broken ranks and formed again on a hill two hundred yards distance and held a council of war. The Federals decided to split their forces, one detachment being deployed down the creek and another detachment was sent to attack in the rear but the bluffs prevented them from reaching a point where they could be effective. A combined attack was finally agreed upon but when the charge from the front was made again it was unsupported by the troops sent to attack the flank and a terrible repulse was the consequence.

The several disastrous charges made by the Federals convinced them that cavalry was useless against such a strongly fortified position. The Federal troops were dismounted and with their combined forces moved on Quantrill's position in infantry columns reserving their fire until the last moment. The guerrillas lay behind their barricades with double-barreled shotguns loaded with slugs and buck-shot and their usual double brace of Colt Navy revolvers. Not a shot was fired until the Federals had reached the barricades and were preparing to

Continued on page 6...

Paul R. Petersen continued...

scale them when suddenly a rattling peal of fire rent their lines to shreds. The guerrillas fired through the crevices of fallen trees and despite their exposed position the Federals fought with a valor never surpassed until their ranks simply melted away under the guerrilla's withering fire.

Though protected by a barricade of fallen trees and stumps the guerrillas suffered numerous casualties. Quantrill was shot through the leg. George Shepherd was hit in the arm and more than a dozen of Quantrill's men were mortally wounded never to fight again.

Later that night with his ammunition almost exhausted Quantrill knew the Federal attack would be renewed on the morrow. Quantrill sent two men to reconnoiter the area for a way to escape. It was midnight when Quantrill's men returned. A heavy rain was falling forcing the Federal pickets to seek shelter. A passage was found up a dreadfully steep hillside. Quantrill succored his wounded men tying them in the saddle while the loss of horses compelled the remaining men to ride double while proceeding up the slippery slope. The darkness and rain helped protect the fleeing Confederates.

Quantrill ordered his company to separate in order to make it more difficult to follow. In the days following the guerrillas reached their old sanctuary in the Sni-a-Bar hills of eastern Jackson County. Wounded men were left in the houses of friends to be treated by kindly Southern heroines. After a few days Quantrill recovered sufficiently from his wounds to resume active operations. At this time Southern recruiting officers were converging on Jackson County. Their forces would soon combine on August 11, to overwhelm the Federal forces garrisoned in Independence. Quantrill's company would spearhead the assault resulting in a

Southern victory. Four days later with the help of Quantrill's company the tide of battle was turned into another Southern victory at the Battle of Lone Jack. And two days following, Quantrill's company repelled two Federal regiments under Colonels Charles Jennison and William Penick at the Battle of White Oak Creek.

What made these large scale victories successful was the daily effects of small skirmishes of Quantrill's command, constantly keeping the Federal forces off balance, ambushing Federal patrols and foraging parties, tearing down telegraph lines, stopping the mails, attacking steamers up and down the Missouri River and keeping the Federals guessing where Quantrill might strike next, and then reeling from the enormous amount of casualties whenever they came into contact with the guerrillas.

Article by: Paul R. Petersen, Author of *Quantrill of Missouri*, *Quantrill in Texas* and *Quantrill at Lawrence*.

Reference: J. W. Buel, *The Border Outlaws*, Historical Pub. Co., St. Louis, Mo: 1881.