



## 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

### Civil War Terrorism

Sometimes it takes years for the truth to make its way into print. Most of the time truth has an uphill struggle just trying to overcome the obstacles of entrenched political propaganda. Recently the answer to a minor episode along the Missouri-Kansas border during the Civil War has been recently researched in order to discover an unexplained episode centering around one of the more prominent members of the Civil War. The question was, why was General Thomas Ewing at one time the commander of the District of the Border relegated to a small insignificant post in Southern Missouri at the end of the war. The answer might surprise you.

Ewing was promoted to brigadier general on March 13, 1863, for his leadership at the Battle of Prairie Grove. He was given command of the District of the Border, which comprised Kansas and western Missouri. Before becoming Commander of the District of the Border Ewing was responsible for recruiting the 11th Kansas Jayhawker Regiment which he became the colonel of in late April 1863. The 11th Kansas remained under his command with the new colonel Preston B. Plumb occupying the position of Ewing's Chief of Staff.

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Kansas Jayhawkers had already gained an unsavory reputation around Independence, Missouri. Captain Henry Palmer, Company A of the 11th Kansas Regiment described one of his Jayhawker raids. "They marched through Kansas City, nearly all dressed in women's clothes; old bonnets and outlandish hats on their heads, spinning wheels and even grave stones lashed to their saddles. Through the country strewn with worthless household goods, their road lighted by burning homes, this regiment was little less than an armed mob"

Stories of Jayhawkers terrorizing the Missouri border were numerous. One story told by Captain Henry Palmer of the 11th Kansas Regiment is a sample of what transpired along the border on a daily basis. Redleg Joseph B. Swain and seven of his followers made a nighttime raid on the home of a Missouri farmer named Lawrence. The party demanded the man turn over to them all his money and silverware. Lawrence said he could not comply with their demand as he had sent all of his money to a bank in Canada for safety. Dragged to a nearby tree with a rope around his neck, Lawrence was repeatedly hauled into the air and strangled as Swain tried to extract the location of his wealth. When Lawrence failed to produce the goods the men ransacked his home, smashing open locked drawers, emptying trucks, and ripping open mattresses. In the parlor they found the coffin of Mrs. Lawrence, who had died that day, resting across two chairs. In the words of Jayhawker Henry E. Palmer: "One fellow suggested that maybe money was hid in the coffin, and with that he knocked off the lid of the casket and searched for gold. A ring on the finger of the dead woman attracted his attention, and whipping out his bowie knife he cut off the finger to release the ring. Before leaving, this gallant party of Union defenders said to the terror stricken daughters: "If you want to plant the old lady, drag her out, for we are going to fire the ranch." Unaided they dragged the coffin from the burning home.

Sometime late in 1863 or early 1864 the 11th Kansas was occupying the Missouri town of Independence. It was a wealthy freighting town and its wealth attracted the greed and lusts of the Kansas Jayhawkers. When the Jayhawkers had plundered the Southern sympathizers of all their movable

wealth they ultimately turned on loyal Union men to satisfy their greed. One resident of Independence said that the houses in town were used for stables. "A number of good business houses on the square are now occupied as horse-stables by the Kansas Eleventh." One citizen of Independence, Richard Leach was arrested as a Southern sympathizer. He was given permission to leave the state. "I was

glad to get away," he said, "and leave a people who had now become thieves and robbers, which constituted the loyalty of Union men."

Lt Col. Preston Plumb of the 11<sup>th</sup> Kansas Jayhawking Regiment was General Thomas Ewing's chief of staff. While stationed in Independence Plumb acted as the provost marshal and practiced another wily method of robbery on Missouri's peaceful citizens. As provost marshal Plumb had enormous discretionary power over civilians around Independence. He could force labor from the citizens and seize any property he deemed needed for the military or for his own personal use. Captain John G. Lindsay of Company F of the 11th Kansas arrested a local citizen, A. L. N. Crenshaw with Rebel mail on his person. The package contained letters to be forwarded to soldiers in the Confederate army. Such a minor infraction could carry a death penalty but this mistake was used by the Jayhawkers for a more sinister purpose.

Lt Col. Plumb had four Redlegs seize Crenshaw who was a noted and wealthy Unionist and livestock dealer. Plumb had his regimental quartermaster seize all of Crenshaw's corn and hay then burned down his house. Then Plumb's Redlegs drew their pistols and roughed Crenshaw up making him believe he was going to be hanged. They offered to buy Crenshaw's stock for \$1.00 a head. Fearing for his life Crenshaw signed a bill of sale for \$650 for 100 cattle and 30 hogs. The Redlegs said they would give him \$150. Again they offered Crenshaw \$1,200 for thirty-one mules and horses. This was followed by another so-called sale that took fifty-eight mules the last of his stock. Crenshaw was kept in jail for over a year where he was mistreated becoming ill and going blind and never receiving a dime for his property from Major Plumb. Ewing finally released Crenshaw after

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forcing him to promise to keep his treatment a secret.

By 1864 a board of Federal officers met acknowledging that General Ewing and his subordinate officers were all guilty of a conspiracy to rob and murder Crenshaw. Ewing was eventually reassigned to a small insignificant post in Southeast Missouri. Where once he commanded over 6,000 soldiers he now commanded only a small force of 800 white and black soldiers at Fort Davidson at Pilot Knob, Missouri. This would have been the end of Ewing's career but for the fact that Fort Davidson lay directly in the path of Sterling Price's campaign through Missouri in October 1864. Ewing played a major part in confronting Price and delaying his raid buying additional time for the Union army to strengthen the defenses around St. Louis. Instead of surrendering, Ewing and his men successfully eluded Price's force during the night and fought a fighting withdrawal to Rolla, Missouri.

Photos of Thomas Ewing, Preston Plumb and John G. Lindsay courtesy of the Greg Walter Collection. Photo of Henry E. Palmer courtesy of the Kansas State Historical Society.

(Ref: *Kansas City Times*, November 24, 1908)

(Ref: Henry E. Palmer, *The Black Flag Character of War on the Border*, Kansas Historical Collections, vol 9, 1906, pg 455-

(Ref: *Independence Examiner*, December 28, 1914)

(Ref: Report of the Headquarters Board of Officers, Kansas City, September 6, 1864, Thomas Ewing Family Papers, Library of Congress)

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Captain Henry Palmer, Company A of the 11th Kansas Regiment. He wrote about how they burned, stole and vandalized everything in their path as they marched thru Missouri.



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