



### Historians Corner, Paul R Petersen

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### William Reynolds - Guerrilla fighter

#### Though he survived the shells he became a casualty of the war

Even before the Civil War began Yankees were swarming through the Missouri countryside looting, burning homes, murdering old men and young boys and sexually abusing Southern women and their slaves. Boys too young to join the service were forced to join the closest military unit they came in contact with. These military units came together to not only fight against the Northern invader but for self-preservation and to seek revenge. One young boy, William Reynolds, was only sixteen when the Yankees murdered his father and burned down his home in Lone Jack, Missouri. The Yankees often returned demanding that his mother furnish them whatever they desired, telling her it was due them. Yankees had already pillaged other farms in Lone Jack stealing silverware, money and horses. The Yankees turned Reynolds's neighborhood and those around him into utter ashes. Yankees burned all forty-seven houses in nearby Dayton, in Cass County. A week later Yankees sacked and burned Columbus in Johnson County, Missouri then rode back into Cass County and plundered Pleasant Hill burning twelve homes. Reynolds's neighbors in Kingsville reported to him that over 160 houses were set on fire in their neighborhood. They also murdered eight helpless prisoners who were mowed down in cold blood. A month later Yankees struck again in Cass County burning 150 homes in Chapel Hill. In nearby Morristown near Freeman in Cass County, Yankees sacked the town and murdered several citizens. Soon afterwards Yankees again returned to Morristown and burned it entirely to the ground and murdered three citizens. Reynolds's friends from Holden, Missouri reported that the Yankees burned 40-50 homes and stole what they did not burn.

from the center of government that the Yankees could easily disregard administration policy and War Department orders with impunity. As a result, the Yankees attacked anyone regardless of sympathy. One loyal citizen recalled that the Yankees came to their home and stripped them of nearly everything and would have burned them out, but for proving that they were Union and had never done anything against the government. They also recalled seeing Yankees driving helpless women and children from their homes and made to stand in the snow while they were forced to witness their homes go up in flames. One of the Yankees described the devastation in a letter home to his family. "A wilderness of solitude reigns supreme. It is my first view of war's terrors, and even my worst pictures of imagination are more than realized. Those who have never seen such desolation need never wish to."

Most of the men who rode with guerrilla leader Colonel William Clarke Quantrill were mere boys and were there by necessity because most had no homes to go home to. Towns like Dayton, Morristown, Butler, Papinsville, Pleasant Hill, West Point, Chapel Hill, Columbus, Kingsville and Holden were burned off the map and many ceased to exist. The war was very personal for William Reynolds. He had fought in most of the major engagements in Western Missouri and had vivid memories of Yankee atrocities. He stayed behind in Jackson County when Quantrill took his company into Texas during the winter of 1862-63. When Quantrill's second in command, Captain George Todd, returned early in the spring of 1863 Reynolds joined up with him before later joining Captain William "Bloody Bill" Anderson's company and was with him when Anderson was killed on October 27,

The war in western Missouri was so far removed

1864. Following the Lawrence Raid as the Yankees were carrying out Order #11 depopulating five Missouri counties a group of Reynolds's neighbors from Lone Jack were attempting to move their belongings into Johnson County when they were stopped and murdered in cold blood. The youngest victim was only seventeen while the oldest was seventy-five-year-old Benjamin Potter. Potter's son Marion immediately rode off to join Quantrill. In the spring of 1865 Marion was mortally wounded while staying with friends when he was captured by the Yankees. They carried him to the cemetery, still unconscious, leaned him against his casket and shot him.

Back in early August 1862, Federal Lt. Levi Copeland had gone to Reynolds's home and demanded of his father that he turn over his two sons who were riding with Quantrill. After being told that he knew nothing of their whereabouts, Copeland and his men took the old man and tied him to a tree a few feet from his front porch and bayoneted him to death in the presence of his wife and daughters. Copeland remarked as he rode off, "This is what I do to all damned Rebel sympathizers." During the Battle of Lone Jack on August 15, 1862, Confederate Major Harry J. Vivian had his horse shot out from under him and was taken prisoner with three other Confederates. Lt. Copeland had the prisoners lined up and shot. Vivian only managed to escape death when his executioner's pistol failed to fire. Vivian angrily remarked that such actions would exact a terrible revenge. Copeland was ironically captured himself the next day and held as a prisoner by Colonel Upton Hayes. Hayes surrendered his prisoner to Quantrill when told that he wanted Copeland for an exchange of prisoners for one of his men in Federal custody: Perry Hoy. When Hoy was later hanged prior to August 28, Quantrill turned Copeland over to William Reynolds who executed him in the same manner that Copeland had killed his father a few weeks before.

The men who had ridden with Quantrill were especially harassed after the war. Union newspapers throughout the State urged the establishment of vigilance committees to seek out and destroy any Southerners who did not keep their place. During the summer of 1866, the governor of Kansas submitted to the governor of Missouri a list of three hundred men who had taken part in the 1863 Lawrence Raid. These men were especially hunted down and harassed. Governor Fletcher of Missouri called on the State Militia, to serve as unofficial posses to hunt down these former Confederates. Vigilance committees were formed to arrest Quantrill's men for their wartime actions. William Reynolds remarked that he would never be taken alive. A warrant was subsequently issued for Reynolds. On January 22, 1866, 25-year-old Sheriff James Holmes of Harrisonville, and his 23-year-old deputy, James Copeland, brother of Lt. Levi Copeland who had murdered Reynolds father during the war tried to serve a warrant for the arrest of Reynolds in Pleasant Hill, Cass County, Missouri, for actions taken during the war. The sheriff and his deputy found Reynolds with two other guerrillas, George T. Maddox and N. P. Hayes. As soon as Holmes finished reading the warrant Reynolds drew his revolver shooting and instantly killing the sheriff. In return Deputy Copeland shot and killed Hayes then managed to fire again seriously shooting Reynolds in the leg who then fired back striking Copeland in the chest killing him. Reynolds fled to his mother's house, where he was followed and captured the next day. He was brought back to town, a distance of seven miles, in the back of a wagon, his head pillowed on his mother's lap. When the wagon arrived in Pleasant Hill, Allen Copeland, the younger brother of the slain deputy, walked up to the wagon and put two bullets in Reynolds's head saying, "Here my brother died, here you die."

There is a memorial plaque displayed for fallen deputies of the Cass County, Missouri Sheriff's Department honoring Sheriff Holmes and Deputy Copeland. Few know the true story.

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

Photo of William Reynolds courtesy of Emory Cantey and the Cantey Myers Collection of Civil War guerrilla photos at [CnnteyMyersCollection.com](http://CnnteyMyersCollection.com).

References: Bruce Nichols, *The Civil War in Johnson County, Missouri*, Two Trails Publishing Press, 2002; *Civil War Letters of Webster Moses*, Kansas State Historical Society, Topeka.