

BUSHWACKERS, TERRORISTS OF THE PAST

BUSHWACKER: To live or hide out in the woods; to fight in or attack from the bush; to ambush. Bushwacker *n* – Bushwacking – *n*.

Webster's Dictionary

During the Civil War it is doubtful that any word struck more fear in the hearts of the civilian population, north or south, than “Bushwackers.” True to the definition, these men lived in the bush, off the people they terrorized, and for the most part, made their own rules of war. The life styles and cold blooded plots created by terrorists of today are, in some ways, reminiscent of bushwackers 150 years ago. Because of the lack of consistent military or legal presence west of the Mississippi at that time, civilians in Indian country, western Missouri and southern Kansas, were particularly vulnerable to criminal acts. And as the Civil War was about to begin, extremists for either maintaining the union or for secession were fanning the flames.

When war finally broke out in 1861, among other strategic differences between the adversaries was that the north had a standing army and the south didn't. Consequently, during August of 1862, in an attempt to mobilize as many forces as possible, the Confederate Government approved the Partisan Ranger Act. This act permitted the organization of civilian bands and designated their leaders as confederate officers. Although, the most well known of these partisans were confederate sympathizers, northern bands did exist. Stragglers from Lee's retreating army, after the battle of Gettysburg in July of 1863, could attest to that. But for the most part, names of southern guerilla bands lead by John Mosby, William Quantrill, John Morgan and William Anderson dominate the history books.

While these men were supposed to comply with military regulations, in reality the commanding officer determined the extent. For example, Mosby and Morgan, who fought in the east, generally conducted their activities in accord with accepted regulations. Conversely, in our region Quantrill and Anderson followed their own rules, and their conduct resulted in the term “bushwacker” to be feared by western civilians.

William Clarke Quantrill, born in 1837, grew up in Ohio and taught school there for several years. In 1857 he and his brother set out for California, but soon after leaving Weston, Missouri, a group of Kansas outlaws ambushed them killing his brother and leaving him for dead. Quantrill managed to survive and from that moment on vowed to avenge his brother's death by “killing everything Kansas.” Upon recovering, he continued west as far as Utah where he spent the next three years, but in 1860, he moved back to Kansas and was briefly employed as a school teacher in Lawrence. However, when war broke out the next year, he formed a small force of southern sympathizers called Quantrill's Raiders. Soon his band was recognized by the Confederate Government and he was assigned the rank of captain. For the next 1 ½ years, Quantrill's Raiders fought numerous skirmishes with Union troops, killing and otherwise harassing northern sympathizers. The most notable of Quantrill's acts was his vengeful attack on Lawrence, August 21, 1863, when his Raiders killed 183 men and boys and burned most of the town. This led to swift reaction by the Union Army over the next few months, forcing Quantrill to flee to Indian Territory, down the military road and into Texas. Although Indian Territory was

declared to be pro-south, Quantrill's troops "lived off the land" and harassed terrified citizens until they crossed into Texas.

Riding with Quantrill on that escape to Texas was a sociopath who lived for spilling blood and would earn the name "Bloody Bill" Anderson. Born in Missouri in 1839, Anderson grew up in a family of horse thieves and joined Quantrill before the Lawrence massacre. After the Raiders broke up in Texas, Anderson formed his own band late in 1863, returning through Indian Territory to southern Missouri. The atrocities committed by Anderson's followers during 1864 were without precedent. At least, gang members would cut off the noses and ears of their captives, and quite frequently, their heads. Many of the raiders attached scalps of their victims to their horses' bridles. Bloody Bill's reign of terror reached a climax during September when the guerrillas raided a train in Centralia, Missouri. On board were 22 Union soldiers traveling home on leave who Anderson ordered stripped, systematically slaughtered and their bodies mutilated. When a contingent of union soldiers were sent in pursuit, Anderson's gang ambushed them, killing 150 then scalping and disemboweling their victims. It was said that "none of their victims ended up with the head he had begun the day." Enraged, Union officials pursued and finally caught Anderson, killing him a month later.

Although the war ended in 1865, the reign of terror didn't. Familiar names like Jesse and Frank James, both of whom rode with Anderson, continued to operate outside the law. In fact, the bushwacker era set the stage for an unprecedented wave of terror in Indian Territory that would last for the next forty years.

