THE BORDER WAR. WHEN? WHERE?

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A soldier's first duty is obedience to orders from his superior officer. Little did I think when I first heard of the firing on Fort Sumpter nearly three months after the dastardly act was committed, that I should ever volunteer, or that my services would be needed. I thought all traitors would be promptly arrested and hanged. I was in far-off Colorado. There were no railroads or telegraph lines west of the Missouri. Coming to Denver about July 7, 1861, I learned that war had been declared and 75,000 volunteers were wanted. Colorado had not been asked for help. I met two young men unemployed, Crawford and Goodrich, and proposed that if they would go with me to the states and enlist I would "pay the freight." They accepted and on July 9, 1861, we left Denver in a light wagon drawn by two mules driven by a Missourian homeward bound. We made a remarkably quick trip, only eighteen days from Denver to Leavenworth, Kansas.

We tried to enlist at Fort Kearney, Neb., where there were two companies of regular troops, but were refused and advised that our nearest enlistment station was at Leavenworth.

At Marysville, Kan., Crawford and myself (being in splendid physical condition, having averaged about eight miles a day on foot, and feeling sure that the war would be over before we could reach Fort Leavenworth) left the wagon at 4 p. m., just after our Missouri teamster had camped for the night and pushed on on foot, walking and trotting until 3 a. m., then laid down on the prairie for sleep and rest; having no overcoats or blankets two hours exposure was all we could stand, then we "double quicked" about eight miles to the first ranch where we received a good breakfast and two hours rest and sleep; then until 3 p. m. we tried to outwalk and outrun each other; a good dinner and three hours rest at an Indian agency gave us strength for an all-night rapid march to Atchison, Kansas, 127 miles in forty consecutive hours, feet blistered and tired beyond description.

A short steamboat ride brought us to Leavenworth on the evening of July 30. By 10 a. m. on the 31st day of July, 1861, my twentieth birthday, I enlisted, and was mustered out November 2,1865. If I had dreamed that my four years, three months and three days' service was to be all the time west of the Mississippi, on the border, on the extreme right wing of our great army, that obedience to orders and soldierly duty would deprive me of the glory of the "Army of the Tennessee," the "Atlanta Campaign," the "Army of the Potomac" the march in the "Grand Review," that the twenty-four general engagements and hundreds of bushwhacking fights in which I participated were to be comparatively insignificant, that they were to be barely mentioned in the history to be written of the great struggle; if I had but dreamed of the possibility of such a fate, I would have walked to Washington before enlisting. Within ten days I participated in the fight at Independence, Mo., and only a few days later, in a fierce little battle at Morristown, Mo., where I learned my first lesson of the horrors of what was then called the "Border War." In a charge upon the rebels commanded by General Rains, Colonel Johnson, a gallant officer of the Fifth Kansas Cavalry, was killed. We won the fight and captured several confederates, seven of whom were called before a drum-head court martial and sentenced to death. Their graves were dug, were compelled to kneel down by the edge of the grave, blindfolded, and shot by a regularly detailed file of soldiers, the graves filled up and we marched away. It was a sickening reminder that we were fighting under the black flag. This execution was in retaliation for the murder only a few days previous of seven men of our command.

This story of the cowardly murder that caused this revenging retaliatory act is best told by the brilliant editor, author, and rebel soldier, John Edwards, who used his masterly pen to paint Quantrill a hero in his book entitled "Noted Guerrillas or the Warfare of the Border," page 111.

"A military execution is where one man kills another; it is horrible. In battle one does not see death. He is there surely—he is in that battery's smoke, on the crest of that hill fringed with the fringe of pallid faces, under the hoofs of the horses, yonder where the blue or the gray line creeps onward, trailing ominous guns—but his cold, calm eyes look at no single victim. He kills there—yes, but he does not discriminate. Harold, the dauntless, or Robin, the hunchback—what matters a crown or a crutch to the immortal reaper?

"The seven prisoners rode into Missouri from Shawneetown puzzled; when the heavy timber along the Big Blue was reached and a halt was had, they were praying. Quantrill sat upon his horse looking at the Kansans. His voice was unmoved, his countenance perfectly indifferent as he ordered: 'Bring ropes; four on one tree, three on another.' All of a sudden death stood in the midst of them and was recognized. One poor fellow gave a cry as piercing as the neigh of a frightened horse. Two trembled, and trembling is the first step towards kneeling. They had not talked any save among themselves up to this time, but when they saw Blunt busy with some ropes, one spoke up to Quantrill: 'Captain, just a word; the pistol before the rope; a soldier's before a dog's death. As for me, I'm ready.' Of all the seven this was the youngest. How brave he was!

"The prisoners were arranged in a line, the Guerrillas opposite them. They had confessed to belonging to Jennison, but denied the charge of killing and burning. Quantrill hesitated a moment. His blue eyes searched each face from left to right and back again, and then he ordered: 'Take six men, Blunt, and do the work. Shoot the young man and hang the balance.'

"Hurry away! The oldest man there, some white hairs were in his beard, prayed audibly. Some embraced. Silence and twilight, as twin ghosts, crept up the river bank together. Blunt made haste and before Quantrill had ridden far he heard a pistol shot. He did not even look up; it affected him no more than the tapping of a woodpecker. At daylight the next morning a woodchopper, going early to his work, saw six stark figures swaying in the early breeze. At the foot of another tree was a dead man and in his forehead a bullet hole, the old mark."

I was a member of the original First Kansas battery, then equipped with one 12-pound brass cannon and a mountain howitzer. We were attached to the Fourth Kansas Infantry commanded by Colonel William Weer; the Third Kansas, then part infantry and part cavalry, was with us, and was commanded by Colonel James Montgomery, a border warrior since 1856, and a copartner in the John Brown conspiracy. We had also part of the Fifth and Sixth Kansas cavalry with us, all commanded by United States Senator "General" James H. Lane. This army was called Lane's Brigade.

The battle of Drywood, Mo., east of Fort Scott, Kan., September 2, 1861,was a dash by Col. Montgomery with about 1,200 men and our mountain howitzer, then known as "moonlights battery" against over 5,000 rebels with six Parrot guns, the famous "Bledsoe battery" the confederate force commanded by Gen. Rains, a late regular army officer. So bold and determined was our assault that Rains was content, after he had shaken us off, to move on south without trying to capture Fort Scott, as he intended to do.

At Balds Mill, September 26, we charged upon Col. Rosser's confederate regiment, about 600 men and whipped them badly. Here I saw a man escaping through a cornfield. Being on horseback I gave chase and soon came up with him. He threw himself on his knees and prayed for life. While he was a full-grown man, nearly six feet high, yet he was only a sixteen year old boy, son of Col. Rosser, whose home was at Westport, Mo., and had just reached his father's command with letters and clothing sent by his mother. I took him