

Manasseth Gap – Guerrilla Ambush Site

Urbanization has destroyed much of the recognizable Civil War sites in Missouri where once gallant Confederates battled the Federal invaders. Only the most devout researcher or historian can point to these places and recall the battles and bloodshed that marked these spots. A little known or written about historical site is located eight miles south of Independence, Missouri in southern Jackson County. During the Civil War this area was known as Manasseth Gap and was a terror to any Federal troops that ventured near. The guerrillas of Colonel William Clarke Quantrill's partisan ranger company conducted numerous ambushes at this location. The Independence-to-Harrisonville Road where the stage and telegraph line connected the city to towns further south was located just one mile to the east. The telegraph line served to bring the local news as far away as St. Louis. The thickly wooded area inundated with rock outcroppings offered two prime ambush sites. The first, six miles south of Independence located directly on the Independence-to-Harrisonville Road was known as the Blue Cut. The second, Manasseth Gap, was situated two miles further south slightly to the southeast at the present day intersection of Little Blue Road and Woods Chapel Road. At the top of the hill from Manasseth Gap sat 180 acres of farmland owned by Henry Washington Younger which he later donated to the county for the Jackson County Poor Farm. The area was guerrilla infested country and any Union patrol had to be company size or larger in order to have any kind of advantage against Quantrill and his men.

The Little Blue River ran parallel to the road on the west coursing its way through the idillic fertile Valley of the Little Blue. The surrounding terrain was wild, but some cultivation had begun in the bottomland, and here and there were some gristmills. Situated a half mile to the north was the

picturesque hamlet of Little Blue which contained a small hotel and post office. Here, just a few hundred yards to the west a Federal ambush against guerrillas George Todd, Ed Koger and John Little resulted in Koger and Little's deaths on July 31, 1862, as they were crossing a ford over the Little Blue. It wasn't until a over a week later on August 11, 1862, that the guerrillas got their revenge when Independence was attacked by a large Confederate force under the command of Brigadier General John T. Hughes. During the initial stages of the battle the leaders of the ambush were sought out and killed.

A few months earlier Quantrill struck a Federal patrol that recklessly ventured into Manasseth Gap. The ambush was set up along the long hill on the south of the Little Blue, where the road led up from the bottomland to higher land on the south. The ambush site followed up a branch between hills on either side and was covered with brush. The site was about fifty yards wide and thirty feet high with both sides lined with heavy woods. It offered both good observation and a good field of fire. The enemy would be helpless in the killing zone, but the guerrillas would be protected behind the terrain features. Quantrill had Todd station pickets at either end of the ambush site to give the alarm when the Federals approached. The ridge on either side was high enough that the attacking party could fire down on the road, and the sides were so steep it was almost impossible for a man on horseback to climb up. One of the guerrillas stated, "Most of our men were in the edge of the brush on the east side of the road. South of the cut, on the opposite side, was an open field that looked as though it had been in wheat for the last crop that had been raised on it." During the ambush

several Yankees were wounded, and the rest surrendered. After their weapons and ammunition were taken away they were paroled. This was before Union General Henry Halleck issued his order on January 1, 1862, raising the Black Flag condemning all of Quantrill's men to instant death if caught or captured. Thereafter the guerrillas responded in kind and in all of Quantrill's subsequent battle reports it was simply stated, "so many killed, none wounded."

On July 6, 1864, a Federal company under the command of Captain Seymour Wagner, a German officer, was patrolling through the Valley of the Little Blue looking for guerrillas. Unfortunately he came upon an equal number of Quantrill's men led by Captain George Todd. Todd had instructed his men to cut the telegraph wires and wait in ambush for any Federal patrol that would come out from Independence to repair it. After sitting in ambush for several hours Todd and fellow guerrilla Lee McMurtry rode to the nearby William Moore cabin to await developments. Across the road to the west of the Moore farm was an open field in the half-mile-wide valley of the Little Blue. It was here the guerrillas planned to pounce on the anticipated Federal patrol.

When the attack was sprung Todd ran back to rejoin his men. The element of surprise was lost when Wagner's pickets discovered the guerrillas waiting for them. In response both sides ordered their men into line to await the final order to charge. In the resulting skirmish thirty-seven of Wagner's men were killed including Wagner himself. Southern casualties resulted in five horses killed and three guerrillas wounded: Ike Flanery, Henry Potter and Warren Welch. Never again did a Federal patrol dare ride into Quantrill country especially in the area of Manasseth Gap.

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

Photograph in collection of the author