

## William T. "Bloody Bill" Anderson

Even today, 148 years after his death, flowers occasionally appear at the gravesite of William T. "Bloody Bill" Anderson. To many of Missouri's southern sympathizers he was a hero. The feelings of the Unionist toward Anderson are probably best described by the editor of the *St. Joseph Herald* who, in the August 10, 1864 edition, described William T. Anderson as:

...the most heartless, cold blooded, bushwhacking scoundrel that has operated in Missouri since the break out of the war. ... His acts are characterized by a fiendishness and diabolism of the devil incarnate. Quantrell [sic], Todd ... and others we might name have written their names, high upon the pages of infamy, but Bill Anderson overtops them all in crime. His appearance in North Missouri is of a recent date, but in the few weeks since he commenced operation he has been guilty of more outrages than all others. Indiscriminate plunder and murder seem to be his mission, and as we trace his career it is impossible to find where he has exhibited the least trait of humanity.

Anderson was born in 1839 in Hopkins County, Kentucky, to William C. and Martha Anderson. He and his two brothers, Jim and Ellis, and three sisters, Mary Ellen, Josephine and Janie joined the family as they left Kentucky and wandered into Missouri and then into Iowa and back to Missouri. The father was struck with gold fever and headed for California and failing to find gold returned to his family in Missouri. In 1855, Kansas was opened up to settlement and the elder William filed a claim on Bluff Creek beside the Santa Fe Trail, near Council Grove, Kansas. The rest of the family joined him in early 1857 and for the first time the family was fairly successful. Brother Charlie would join the family in Kansas and was only one year old when his mother was struck by lightning and killed in late 1860. This came just after Ellis had shot a drunken Indian through the head and had to flee to Iowa.

Where, when, and why did Bill Anderson go so wrong? As a youth and a young man, he had a good, solid reputation and held a steady job as a ranch hand for a couple of years. At the age of twenty-one he acquired his own claim and seem to be making it. He began to accompany wagon trains on the Santa Fe Trail. After a few trips he became "second boss" on one of the trains. A few days later, Anderson and the top boss returned to say they had lost the train because the livestock had strayed. Most likely the animals were sold for the money. He began taking ponies into Missouri and returning with horses that he then sold around Council Grove. As the Civil War began, the horse stealing was expanded into all kinds of banditry, or as it was called in Kansas, jayhawking. In 1860 and 1861, Kansas suffered the granddaddy of all droughts. Weeks and months passed with no rain and not a snowflake fell during the winter. These conditions made jayhawking and bushwhacking even more attractive.

Arthur Ingram Baker of nearby Agnes City, Kansas had been a large land owner and a man of much influence and wealth. But he also suffered severely through the drought. In late 1861, he formed a band of young men to go raiding into southwest Missouri. Bill Anderson was one of the young men. The raid turned into a disaster when a troop of Union soldiers on patrol stumbled upon their camp and thinking them to be bushwhackers, attacked. All escaped except one man who was killed and Baker who was captured and placed in a military prison. After a political ally gained his release and he returned to Agnes City, he badly wanted a wife and began courting Anderson's 15-year-old sister Mary Ellen Anderson. Just when the affair was getting real serious and the Andersons were expecting a wedding announcement, Baker announced his engagement to Annis Segur, a 17-year-old. The senior Anderson, Bill and Jim all exploded with rage over their perceived dishonor to Mary Ellen and the family. Then to pour salt in their wound, Baker formed a posse to arrest Lee Griffin who was Bill's cousin and a member of his gang. The Andersons threatened to kill Baker if he did not withdraw the charges against Griffin. He didn't and in a drunken rage the senior Anderson rode to the Baker home whereupon Baker killed him with a shotgun.

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On the night of July 3, 1862, Bill and Jim went to Baker's store with the intention of making him wish he had never been born. They were accompanied by Griffin and two other men, one was a stranger. The stranger went to Griffin's home and told him he was a teamster passing through and he needed whiskey for his men to celebrate the Fourth of July. Baker was a cautious man and strapped on a brace of pistols as he headed for the store with George Segur, Annis' sixteen-year-old brother and the stranger following him. At the store, Baker had to go to the cellar to fill a whiskey bottle. When the bottle was filled he turned to find Bill and Jim Anderson. When he told Bill he did not expect to see him there, Bill told him, "I am the last man you will ever see. God damn your soul." Baker whipped out a pistol and fired, striking Jim a painful but only a minor flesh wound. As Baker was firing his pistol, Bill's revolver put Baker on the floor. Bill and Jim went up the stairs, shot and wounded George, dumped him down the stairs, covered the trap door with barrels and boxes and set them on fire. They watched the flames for a while then road away.

The next day the folks digging through the ashes found Baker's cremated body and determined that he had shot himself in the head rather than suffer the pain of the burns. George had managed to crawl out through a small window and lived only long enough to tell how the Anderson's had claimed the first of their many victims.

In July of 1863, the Federals arrested nine women accused of spying or otherwise aiding and abetting the bushwhackers. Among the nine were sixteen-year-old Mary Ellen Anderson and fourteen-year-old Josephine Anderson. Ten-year-old Janie had nowhere else to go, so she was allowed to accompany her older sisters. The Federals confined the females on the second floor of a three floor building in Kansas City. An adjoining building was used as a guardhouse and the soldiers removed supporting posts and partitions to make more room. The building began to sag against the prison building. On August 13<sup>TH</sup>, the building collapsed and buried the female prisoners in the rubble. Josephine Anderson was killed and both her sisters were crippled and disfigured for life.

Prior to this event, Anderson had killed ruthlessly, but only as revenge against Baker, or during a raid against Union troops. Now, killing would almost become his only purpose in life, especially Union soldiers. And it would be savage killings involving wanton mutilation. "Bloody Bill" Anderson rose out of the rubble of that prison and he is reported to have said just before he died, "I have killed Union soldiers until I have got sick of killing them.

On August 21, 1863, Anderson was still riding with William Quantrill, though they would come to a parting of the ways, when they participated in one of the most infamous raids in history. Lawrence, Kansas, was Quantrill's hometown and it would offer no resistance as three hundred and fifty bushwhackers and one hundred Confederate recruits Quantrill had invited to accompany them rode into town to rob, loot, burn and kill. Women and children were to be spared, but teenaged boys and men were shot down where ever they could be found. Anderson was responsible for fourteen killings, more than any of Quantrill's other chieftains. They departed Lawrence at 9:00 a. m., four hours after they arrived. They left behind more than 180 dead men and boys and hundreds of devastated females. As he departed, Anderson supposedly told a lady, "I came here for revenge and I have got it." Unfortunately he was not nearly through with his extraction of revenge.

Shortly after the Lawrence raid the bushwhackers would head off to Texas for the winter. They would return to western and northern Missouri in May of 1864 and bushwhacking was good. Anderson now had his own band though quite often they would be joined by other bands. One June 12<sup>th</sup>, Anderson's and Dick Yager's band, about eighty strong and all dressed in Yankee uniforms were able to ride up to point blank range with a Union patrol. Thirteen were shot dead and another so badly shot up he couldn't possibly live very long. They stripped the bodies of their uniforms and scalped one of them. Up until now scalping was really rare. But now it was to become a trademark of Anderson's group.

At noon on September 27, 1864, a train pulled into the station in Centralia, Missouri. On the train were twenty-four Union soldiers that had just been with Sherman as he completed his barbaric destruction of Atlanta. Some of these men were discharged and some were headed home on furlough and all were unarmed. Also on the train were about

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125 civilians. Waiting for the train's arrival was "Bloody Bill" Anderson and about 80 of his bushwhackers. They had arrived in town a couple of hours ahead of the train and had been robbing and plundering the town. Anderson had given orders to leave the women alone, but a few were molested. Before the day was over it would become the most horrible day in all of Missouri's history of the Civil War. The bushwhackers had all the civilians off-loaded on the platform side of the train. Naturally they were all robbed of any money or valuables. One well-dressed gentleman handed over a few dollars. Anderson told him he would be searched. The man quickly pulled off a boot and removed \$100. The man was shot and tumbled on the tracks. One guerrilla killed a man he recognized as once having testified against him in court. Anderson then ordered the depot, a warehouse and some boxcars to be set afire.



**William T. "Bloody Bill" Anderson**

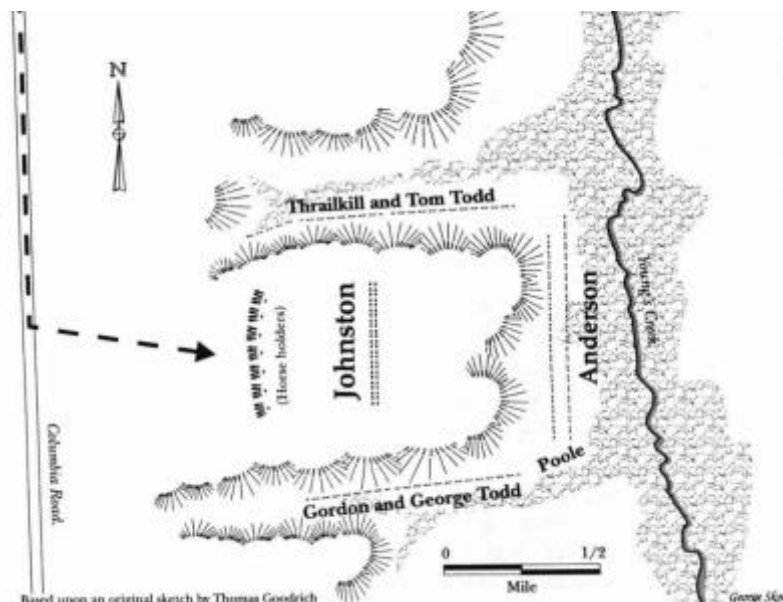
The soldiers were all ordered off on the opposite side of the train. They were not only robbed of any valuables, they were also stripped of their uniforms leaving them in their underwear or naked. They were all ordered to line up across the street, in front of a store. One of the more vicious bushwhackers, Little Archie Clements, asked Anderson what he intended to do with the soldiers. Anderson's reply was, "Parole them, of course." This delighted Clements because that meant kill them. It was decided that one soldier would be kept in an effort to swap him for one of the bushwhackers that had been captured. Anderson wanted to keep a sergeant, but none of the soldiers would own up to being of such rank. One of the bushwhackers remembered that a fellow by the name of Tom Goodman had been seen wearing sergeant stripes and brought him forward. Goodman, not realizing it was his lucky day was in mortal fear that something terrible was about to come his way. And something did, he watched as the bushwhackers mercilessly shot all the other soldiers. One giant of a soldier named Val Peters rushed at the soldiers with his naked body streaming blood and managed to knock a few of them down. It wasn't until his body had twenty bullets that he finally fell like a big oak tree. The guerrillas walked through the bodies shooting those that showed any signs of life. Two of the soldiers were scalped.

As Anderson's band left town, with Goodman as a captive, they noticed a construction train approaching Centralia. A group of the guerrillas rushed to rob the crew on that train as well. This group then placed the body of a dead soldier on the track and forced the engineer to advance the train.

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About 3:00 on the same afternoon, Major Andrew Vern Emen "AVE" Johnston who had been in search of the bushwhackers rode into Centralia to find the horrible gore the guerrillas had left behind. Most of the surviving citizens of the town had fled, but enough were left for Johnston to determine who had perpetrated the act and that their number was about 80. With about 115 soldiers Johnston set out to engage the bushwhackers. Through his field glasses he could see the fleeing guerrillas.

Upon leaving Centralia, Anderson and his men returned to their nearby camp where the bands of John Thraikill, Tom Todd, George Todd, (neither known to be related to this author), Dave Poole and Si Gordon were also hiding out. Their numbers now would total around 450. A small band of guerrillas rode out to lure the Union soldiers into a trap. The larger group of combined bushwhackers was hidden in a horseshoe-shaped formation and hidden in the woods and brush invisible to Major Johnston. He rode right into the trap and, before he realized what was happening, bushwhackers were upon him from three sides with bloodcurdling screams and blazing revolvers were decimating his troops. Frank James reported that his younger brother Jesse fired the shot that killed Major Johnston (I don't think that has been confirmed.)



**Site of Centralia Massacre Battlefield**

Those soldiers who were able to flee back toward Centralia were chased down by Anderson and Poole's men. Also, in town were soldiers that Johnston had left to guard the civilians. These soldiers were also hunted down and killed. By around 5:00 in the afternoon 123 of the 155 soldiers under Johnston were dead. Twenty-three of the twenty-four on the train were dead and all the bodies were left where they fell. Almost all of the bodies were stripped naked. A dozen or so were scalped, including Major Johnston. Some were earless, eyeless, or had no nose. Many heads had been removed, stuck on rifle barrels, saddles, fence post, tree stumps, and sometimes on the wrong body. The worst atrocity was a soldier with his genitals removed and stuffed into his mouth and his facial expression suggested he was alive as it happened.

Both of the men that the bushwhackers lost were placed in wooden coffins that Anderson had a local carpenter construct. They were then buried in the local cemetery.

Acting Lieutenant Colonel Samuel P. "Cob" Cox had been given the assignment to find and whip Anderson. He was a veteran of the Mexican War and had been acquainted with Kit Carson and Jim Bridger. He was familiar with guerrilla tactics and knew that was the way to defeat Anderson. He got a real break on October 27, 1864, when a lady rode into his camp outside Richmond, Missouri and informed him that Anderson and a large number of

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his band were camped just outside Albany, Missouri. Cox and about three hundred men of the Thirty-third and Fifty-first Missouri Militia, all of them mounted, began to march toward Albany. This time it was the Union soldiers who set the trap and the guerrillas, expecting another Centralia, chased the bait right into it whooping like Indians. Some of the bushwhackers did manage to escape and though they were chased by the soldiers for miles, they were not caught. Bloody Bill was not so lucky, a bullet had taken a good portion of his skull behind the left ear and one penetrated his left temple. He was lucky in that he died quickly and painlessly and was not subject to the same mutilation that he had rendered others. His body was put on display at the county court house. The soldiers were instructed to place his body in a decent coffin and bury him. As the pictures of his body shows, they did cut off and the ring finger of his left hand to remove the ring.



His body was buried in the Mormon cemetery on the edge of town in Richmond.



**Sources: Bloody Bill Anderson: The Short Savage Life of a Civil War Guerrilla by Albert Castel and Tom Goodrich**