

Sergeant Thomas Morton Goodman

The only noise in the coach car, as the train traveled through Central Kentucky on the night of September 25, 1864, was the usual train noise; the sound of the locomotive; the clacking between the wheels and the railroad track and the snoring of the men asleep on the uncomfortable wooden seats. Half of the passengers were Union soldiers and in the long tradition of fighting forces, they would sleep anywhere and whenever they could. The soldiers had just left Atlanta, Georgia where they were members of General William Tecumseh Sheridan's army. When they had captured and destroyed Atlanta after about four months of bitter struggle, many of the men were allowed a 30-day furlough. Some of them had served out their enlistment and were heading home for good.

Uppermost in their minds was the fact that despite a bitter loss of casualties, they were survivors of Resaca, Kennesaw Mountain, Peachtree Creek, Bald Hill, Ezra Church and Jonesboro. They also survived cold nights and hot sunny days, mud, dust, endless marching and digging trenches and as always, more men were lost to disease than in battle. Some of the men had received medical discharges and some were suffering from wounds.

One of the men on furlough was stocky, six-foot-tall Sergeant Thomas "Tom" Morton Goodman who definitely looked like a sergeant. Before the war, and enlisting in 1862, he had been a blacksmith which gave him powerful shoulders and strong arms. He was also older than the others at thirty-five. He had served in the Mexican War and had earned the three gold chevrons on the sleeve of his blue coat. Sgt. Goodman's chance of survival was greatly enhanced by the fact that he was a member of the First Missouri Engineers. During the Atlanta campaign all the battles were in Georgia and his regiment had been back in Tennessee repairing railroad lines and blockhouses in order to keep Sherman's supply trains delivering the war materials and sustenance. He had a reasonable chance of surviving until his enlistment expired or the war was over, whichever came first.

His journey back to his Hawleyville, Iowa home, wife and family had begun on September 23 in Atlanta on a train bound for Nashville, through Chattanooga. In a little wide spot in the road known as Big Shanty, now known as Kennesaw, an hour north of Atlanta, the rebels had blown up about a quarter of a mile of railroad track. Sherman kept a lot of rails stored near the tracks, so it only took the experienced engineer about five hours to get underway again.

After a long layover in Nashville, the train was underway again with all the soldiers miraculously aboard. There had been a lot of wild drinking and prowling Spring and Front Streets where the saloons and bawdy houses were lined up. As the train rumbled through the night the soldiers all fell asleep. That is all but Sgt. Goodman.

For some reason that Goodman did not understand, he was in a dark mood. There was worry on his face, and that was unusual. He knew not what it meant or why his feelings were in such turmoil. He only knew that he had never had this feeling before. He got up from his seat and moved to a window which he opened and took deep breaths of the night's cool air. He was now in far northern Kentucky, perhaps even in Hardin County where he was born. But that was not home, home was where his wife, family and friends were. He decided that if he concentrated his thoughts on his sweet Mary and the three

boys, Willie, Jim and Daniel his black mood would be forced out of his body. It worked. He returned to his seat and was soon asleep.

In the afternoon of October 26, 1874, the soldiers had arrived in St. Louis, Missouri. Most of the Iowa men either went to a hotel or out to enjoy the pleasures and sights of a big city. The Missouri soldiers decided not to waste the rest of the day and night and crossed the Missouri River on a ferry in an attempt to catch the evening train out of St. Charles, Missouri. Now it was 4:15 in the morning of the 27th and the Iowa soldiers were boarding a train for St. Charles.

At the depot a man informed the soldiers that he had just come in from the direction they were heading and that at every stop people were talking about a bunch of guerillas lurking around Centralia and other villages along the route. Goodman believed they had made the right decision. If guerillas were going to attack a train, it would probably be at night and not in broad daylight.

To the Iowans surprise, they were delighted to find all the Missouri soldiers at the depot in St. Charles. They had heard the same rumors about guerillas and decided they would wait for the greater safety of daylight and the increased numbers. The two groups were quite glad to be back together and Goodman thought that they felt braver and better. When they pulled out of the depot Goodman thought they had not been in higher spirits the entire trip.

A shrill whistle and grinding brakes announced their arrival in the small, but pretty, town of Mexico, Missouri. The ride from St. Charles had been without any incidents and the little towns they had passed through were all peaceful and quiet. Sitting in the coach and looking out the window they noticed a commotion on the depot platform. Men were pacing nervously back and forth on the platform. They would cast quick, nervous glances up the line ahead. Some men were standing around in silent groups. The 125 people in the four coaches, one-fifth of them soldiers, had no idea what was going on, but obviously something was happening up ahead.

The train's conductor, Richard Overall, left the depot and headed back to the train. Several excited men were after him, urging him to remain in Mexico. They told him to leave would be madness without a military escort. He pondered the information that he was given and decided he had a schedule to keep, particularly with the superintendent of the line on board. Overall climbed up on the lead coach, glanced up and down the train at all cars, checked his pocket watch and, at 11:05 gave the signal and the train lurched out of the station

James Clark, the train engineer, had made the trip to Centralia hundreds of time and knew every inch of the track and terrain around the rails. He knew that the best place for an attack was the watering tank at Young's Creek just outside Centralia. Not only would the train be sitting still, but it was also the only place on the route that had brush to conceal a gang of guerillas. Clark gave the firemen the instructions to pile on the wood. He also ensured there was plenty of water in the boiler. They were going to blow on through the tanks and not stop until they were in Centralia.

Back in the coaches Goodman and other passengers were becoming concerned with the speed which was steadily increasing and was racing along at a frightening speed. With the increase in train speed the concerns of the passengers were also increasing. It

was obvious the engineer suspected something up ahead. Goodman thought that maybe the guerilla rumor was a real threat.

Nine miles out of Mexico the train rounded a bend and Centralia came into view. The train thundered across the short bridge over Young's Creek, through the brush, past the water tank and headed into Centralia. Clark was heavily relieved that there would be no trouble that day.

Passengers noticed horsemen in the edge of the woods and called Overall over for a look. He declared they were just farmers and nothing to worry about. The train was now just a straight mile of track out of Centralia. Clark spotted a large group of mounted men wearing blue. He hoped they were Union soldiers, but he also knew guerillas wore captured Union uniforms. When he spotted men piling ties on the track all doubt was removed, they were bushwhackers. He contemplated putting the train in reverse, but realized by the time he could bring the train to a stop and reverse the engines, the guerillas would be all over the train. He considering going to full throttle and take a chance of smashing through the barricade without derailing. In the end the brakeman set the brakes and the coaches were filled with the sound of the shrill whistle and the grinding brakes. The sound of women and children screaming and sobbing overrode the other sounds.

Goodman came to understand why he had felt the uneasiness through much of the trip. He had been having a premonition of what was about to happen: death. He would not be going home to his beloved wife and children and they would not meet again in this life.

Waiting for the train's arrival was William T. "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.

The soldiers were all ordered off the train on the opposite side of the tracks. 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 Sgt. Cave Wyatt, one of the bushwhackers that had been captured and was being held captive.

Anderson wanted to keep a sergeant and called for a volunteer, but none of the soldiers would own up to being of such rank. Sergeant Thomas Morton Goodman was absolutely sure that the one selected would be suffering some horrible consequences and there were several sergeants within the ranks. Then he saw the bushwhacker who had stripped him of his uniform and knew he would be the chosen one. So he stepped forward, hoping that by doing so he would save the other troops from death. Not realizing it was

his lucky day, he 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 Valentine Peters rushed at the soldiers with his naked body streaming blood and managed to knock a few of them down with his fists. Then he rolled under the train and fled into the depot. The bushwhackers fired the depot and waited for him to be forced to come out. Soon he did so with a piece of firewood in his big hand and clubbed down two of Anderson's men. With bullets raining down and into him he finally teetered and fell like a big oak tree. With twenty bullets in his body he managed to raise himself on one elbow, lifted a huge fist to heaven and cried out, "My Lord ...," and breathed his last as he dropped back to earth.

The guerrillas walked through the bodies, kicking some of them and shooting those that showed any signs of life. One victim had a bullet wound above the eye, one in the face and one in the chest. Yet he was still digging his heels into the ground. The sadistic Clements with his usual dark attempt at humor said, "He's marking time." (A military term for marching in place.) Despite Anderson's orders 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. The engineer advanced the train very slowly and as the body was being broken up, it actually derailed the locomotive. That proved Clark's wisdom of not trying to plow through the barricade.

Goodman was taken to the guerillas camp at Young's Creek where he was left to ponder his future. What were they going to do with him, or to him? He suspected the very worse and no one was talking to him. Anderson assigned two of his men to guard Goodman with orders that the prisoner was to be spared.

That night in the guerillas' camp Goodman was still in his underwear and trying to sleep on the bare ground without a blanket. He was lying between his guards who were asleep, as were all the other guerillas except the pickets that Anderson had posted. Anderson had allowed them three hours to get some sleep before they had to move on. They knew the mayhem they had caused that day would bring thousands of Federal troops looking for them. It was best to get a head start on them.

Visions of all the day's horrors kept running through Goodman's mind. He could see the bushwhackers rush into the passenger coach, his fellow soldiers being murdered, Val Peters making a valiant effort against the guerillas, watching the union soldiers getting mowed down in the ambush and the mutilation of the bodies and murder of the wounded soldiers. And later, when the mob returned to Centralia, he was a witness as the guerillas hunted down and murdered the soldiers that had remained in town. And now as he lay on the cold ground he gave up all attempts to sleep. And then he wept.

Long before daylight Anderson's band, with Goodman in tow began a long day's march to the south. In late September and early October summer was coming to an end and it was time to winter in Texas. In the very early morning hours they came across a clearing that offered a good spot for a brief respite until midmorning when they resumed their march. For a few hours they traveled through brush, back roads and trails whenever possible to avoid being seen. At noontime they camped until the arrival of darkness and when it came they pushed into more open country. They were pushing hard now as a scout had reported during the afternoon that a large number of Union soldiers were seen in the

area. In fact, every available Federal soldier, militiaman, and home guard were out hunting for Anderson to put an end to him and to his killing.

Around midnight they had again entered a wooded area and made camp for the night. The rebels used their saddles as pillows and slept. But not Goodman. He lay on the bare ground freezing and hungry. He had not eaten since leaving St. Louis, more than two days ago. And he was weak from all the stress. Sheer exhaustion finally took over and gave him some relief from the nightmare he was living and he slept until rough hands shook him awake to bright sunlight. The guards took him to Anderson's horse and told him to saddle and curry it. He hated the thought of doing it, but he set forth to do the job with determination.

Anderson was so pleased with the job that a couple of hours later he rode up alongside Goodman and asked, "Well, my old fellow, how do you get along?"

"Very well, sir" was Goodman's answer.

"You, my man," Anderson continued, "are the first being whose life I ever spared who was caught in the federal blue."

"That's so, Colonel!" some nearby guerilla shouted in confirmation. Colonel was a title that heretofore had only been granted to William Clarke Quantrill among the Missouri bushwhackers.

Shortly after this conversation a Confederate officer joined the column. Spotting Goodman, he rode up to the guards and asked who the man was. The guards answered that he was a prisoner taken in Centralia. The officer observed that Anderson did not take prisoners. "This one by orders of Anderson to be reserved, Colonel." Goodman could only guess for what purpose he was being reserved. With a shudder, he thought of the possibilities and vowed to make every effort to escape.

Around noontime the band halted in a grove of trees near a farmer's field. They fed their horses and sent out a party to forage for some food they could eat. Just twenty minutes later the party came racing back, yelling, "The Yankees are coming. The Yankees are coming."

The bushwhackers leaped into their saddles and raced out of the woods and back to the road, Anderson leading and Goodman and his guards not far behind. Two cannon balls passed over their heads without doing more than frightening them. Being fired upon by cannon was not something they were used to in the type of war they were engaged. They went back into the woods and swung in a half circle ending up on the other side. They were pleased to find a broad, open prairie with no blue coats. They were relieved at having avoided a trap and galloped toward a lone high hill. At the crest of the hill they found that there were blue-jacketed cavalry men stretching for miles in every direction. They had not avoided a trap; they had ridden directly into it.

Anderson wheeled his horse around and gave a weird cry and the guerillas broke into groups of five to eight men and raced down the hill in every direction. Anderson and eight of his men did not flee. Instead he rode over to Goodman and the two guards. For what seemed like an eternity, Anderson gazed at his prisoner with eyes that revealed nothing. Goodman knew this was the end and all he wanted was to be shot and not cut with a knife. Finally, Anderson spoke words that Goodman never expected to hear, "Prisoner, you must now ride for your life! Boys, we all must!"

Goodman now felt he was in a world turned upside down. To win was to lose; to lose was to win. His saviors were his destroyers; his destroyers, his saviors. He had no choice. To turn and run toward the soldiers meant bullets in his front was a sure thing. To run with the Anderson group was a possibility of a bullet in the back. It seemed the whole world was wanting his blood. He raced down the hill with his captors like a madman praying that he and his future murderers would escape.

Anderson, way out in front, led his men through an opening between two oncoming columns. Having superior mounts and Anderson's nerves and instincts allowed them to elude several ambushes. Rifle and pistol fire in the distance told them that some of the other groups were not so fortunate.

Hour after hour the deadly game of hide seek played out from woodland to woodland, over prairies, through thickets and brushy ravines. Anderson rode off on his own after instructing his band to continue south. An hour later the band was entering a thicket when Anderson appeared out of nowhere. He informed them that a Union outpost was just beyond the trees. The band did a 180° turn and headed north.

Late in the afternoon, they entered the Perche Hills where they were safe. Federals rarely entered these hills and when they did the only guerillas they found were those that wanted to find them. After riding about twenty minutes into the woods they came upon Todd's camp of about twenty men. Two of them badly wounded.

During the night, more and more raiders came into the camp in groups and singles. Goodman was surprised that many of them were drunk, especially George Todd who was in a foul mood. The whiskey was flowing freely and all of the bushwhackers were soon so drunk they were all acting like mad men. Goodman had never seen such a scene or heard that much profanity. He felt as if he were in Hell and his life in the hands of the chief devil.

Eventually all the guerillas were passed out and unmindful of the rain that was steadily falling. What a perfect time to escape, except his guards never drank. They were asleep, but any movement of Goodman was likely to arouse them. Besides the fact that they had saved his life on several occasions when other members had made an attempt to kill him.

With the dawning of the new day, the rain had ceased and the guerillas were sorting equipment, drying their blankets and caring for their horses. Anderson, Todd, Thraikill and Poole were discussing the future. Obviously they had to split up. They would range through the brush for a week and then meet at the river where they would cross together. The wounded would remain behind until they were ready to travel.

For the next week Goodman, in a party with Anderson, Todd and 20 raiders, all dressed in blue, traipsed through the thickets and brush without encountering any Union forces and all the people in the area were stout secesh and Anderson was a hero to them.

On October 6, the entire band of Bushwhackers reassembled at a place called Harker's with the intention of crossing the river that night. A severe thunderstorm caused a cancellation of that plan. The following day they spent the morning and afternoon at Harker's. In the evening Anderson and a majority of the bushwhackers, along with Goodman were heading for the Missouri River.

Upon arrival at the river the men immediately began unsaddling their horses and attaching lead halters. Goodman dismounted in anticipation of his first and last

opportunity to escape. Thirteen skiffs were assembled to get the men and equipment across the River, which at this point was only about 25 yards wide. The horses could swim. Goodman calculated that it would take three trips to complete the operation. He prayed he would not be on the first trip. As it turned out, he would be among the last.

The first group of men boarded the skiffs holding the lead halters. The men on shore were pushing the horses into the water. Some were resisting and balking. More men, cussing and shouting, ran down the embankment to help. One of the guards shouted, "You watch the prisoner, I want to go and see the start."

Suddenly there was another big commotion down by the river. The remaining guard walked off a few paces to get a better view. Goodman thought that it was all a trick to allow him to walk away and someone would shoot him. Trick or not, he had to take the chance. With wobbly legs he turned and walked through a group of men and horses expecting to be shot at any second. He reached some bushes and without hesitating he entered the thicket. For two hundred yards he walked quickly and silently and then stopped. Every nerve in his body was on edge as he listened for any sound of pursuit.

Hearing none he stepped out of the brush into the narrow trail. Immediately he heard a sound and dived back into the bushes. Looking through the branches he saw four horsemen pass by. After that close call he stuck to the woods where travel was a bit more difficult but considerably safer.

After walking for hours for hours he spotted a road sign and was disappointed to discover he had walked in circles and was only eight miles from where he started. He spotted a dilapidated tobacco barn. Inside was a haystack and Goodman burrowed into it and was immediately asleep. He slept through the morning and well into the afternoon. When night time came he continued his journey, but now it was very slow because of his mental and physical exhaustion. Around dawn he spotted a figure on the nearby road and figured it was a man he could trust since it was a black man.

The black man informed him that Fayette, Missouri, where there was a garrison of Union soldiers was only a mile away. But better than that, there was an outpost only four hundred yards away. His goal was nearly won: Liberty! Friends! Home!

Because of his dress, he approached the outpost with great caution. After all he had been through, being killed by enemy fire would be the worst thing that could happen to him.

As he turned a bend in the road he heard a shout: "Halt, there!" Twenty paces away was a soldier with a cocked rifle ready to fire. He immediately obeyed and after answering a few questions the guard was satisfied and summoned a corporal. His presence was then reported to headquarters in Fayette. Within half an hour the big man, now practically a shell of himself, was seated in headquarters telling his story to the garrison commander.

He had survived. He had escaped. He was safe. He had returned to life.

During the night of October 13, 1864, Mary Goodman, who had refused to believe the Army telegram telling her that Tom had been killed in Centralia was having a restless night of sleeping. During the early morning hours of the 14th she had a startling dream that woke her up. She dismissed the dream and went back to sleep. She dreamed the same dream. This time it was just too real to be dismissed.

She dressed and walked to the place that had appeared in her dream and waited. And waited and waited. The man in her vision did not come walking down the road. Her eyes began to tear up and hope faded away.

Suddenly she saw him and he saw her and they ran toward each other, embraced, cried with joy and laughed at their tears. Tom Goodman's long journey home by way of Hell was over.

He did not make it back to his unit until the war was over and he met them in Louisville, Kentucky only to be discharged and six days later to receive his pay in full. To get from his home to Louisville by train he almost certainly passed through Centralia, but his memoirs made no mention of it.

In Hawleyville, he returned to his occupation of a blacksmith. He also wrote, in conjunction with Captain Harry A. Houston, *A Thrilling Record*, his story of the ten days spent with Bloody Bill Anderson (still available on Amazon). The economy and the town of Hawleyville were both dwindling away. In 1875 he acted on the advice of two of his brothers and moved the family to California and settled in Sonoma County near Santa Rosa

He again worked as a blacksmith with his oldest son, James. He made a very comfortable living and he and James became respected members of the community.

The years of hard work, military service and his ten days of captivity took its toll. On February 5, 1886, three weeks short of his 57th birthday, Thomas Morton Goodman passed away from "disease of heart" according to his death certificate. He was buried in the Santa Rosa Rural Cemetery. Mary joined him in 1899.



Sources: *Bloody Bill Anderson: The Short, Savage Life of a Civil War Guerilla* by Albert Castel & Tom Goodrich

***A Thrilling Record* by Tom Goodman and Captain Harry A. Houston**