

## 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 Unionists 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.

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.

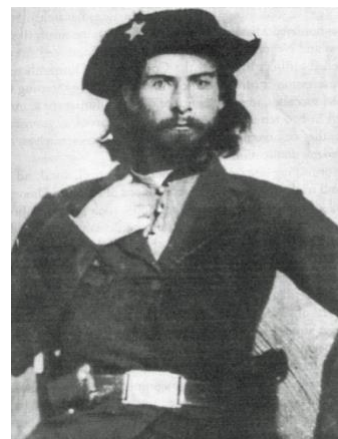
In July of 1863, the Federals arrested nine women accused of spying or otherwise aiding and abetting the bushwhackers. Among the nine were sixteen-year-old Mary Ellen Anderson and fourteen-year-old Josephine Anderson. Ten-year-old Janie had nowhere else to go, so she was allowed to accompany her older 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, 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 (**Photo at right**) 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.



Major Andrew Vern Emen "AVE" Johnston in command of Companies A, G and H of the Thirty-ninth Missouri Infantry had been searching long and hard for the bushwhackers. On September 26, 1874 in the town of Paris, Missouri, he learned that Anderson and about 80 of his men had passed just south of Paris. Now Maj. Johnston and his men were going to track the guerillas down and, under the orders of General Clinton Fisk, exterminate them. The Thirty-ninth was so new that they were actually still being formed. With 160 men, the companies were only at half strength and armed with Enfield single-shot rifles equipped with bayonets. It was an infantry group, all but a few were mounted on mules, brood mares and plow horses.

By dawn of September 27, Anderson and the other groups in his band of bushwhackers had assembled. Their total number was about 400 and they were highly irritable as they had suffered nothing but losses for the last few days, and had 20 men killed or almost dead from wounds. And all of the nearby towns had large garrisons of Union troops protecting them. So they decided to head northeastward for Paris. Before they reached Paris they learned there was a large Union force there as well. They abandoned plans to raid Paris and turned southward and soon were in their camp along Young Creek.

George Todd asked Anderson to visit Centralia to obtain what news he could. Anderson thought it an excellent idea as they needed supplies and the stores would have money and strong drink. Also, Centralia was a stop on the Northern Missouri Railroad and they might just catch a train to rob.

Major Ave Johnston, using field glasses, spotted a group of about 80 men that he determined to be guerillas heading in a southward direction. He gave the orders and his command mounted up. His force could not possibly catch them with their mounts, but

the trail was hot. What he didn't know was that this was not the group he was pursuing and that the bushwhackers were camped just outside Centralia and hidden in the woods.

About 11:00 a dust cloud announced the approach of a stagecoach into Centralia. A few of the men made a mad race to see who could be first to rob the stage. They surrounded the stage and ordered the passengers to dismount and produce their pocket books. One man had a lot more to worry about than his money. James Sidney Rollins was a member of the House of Representatives and a staunch Unionist. If discovered, he knew he would be killed or held for a large ransom. So he lied and told the robbers he was Reverend Mr. Johnson. He was relieved when they accepted that until the guerillas started searching the pockets and the luggage. He was saved by the arrival of the train. There were bigger fish to fry on the train.

At noon on September 27, 1864, the 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 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.

The soldiers were all ordered off the train 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 Sgt. Cave Wyatt of the bushwhackers that had been captured and 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

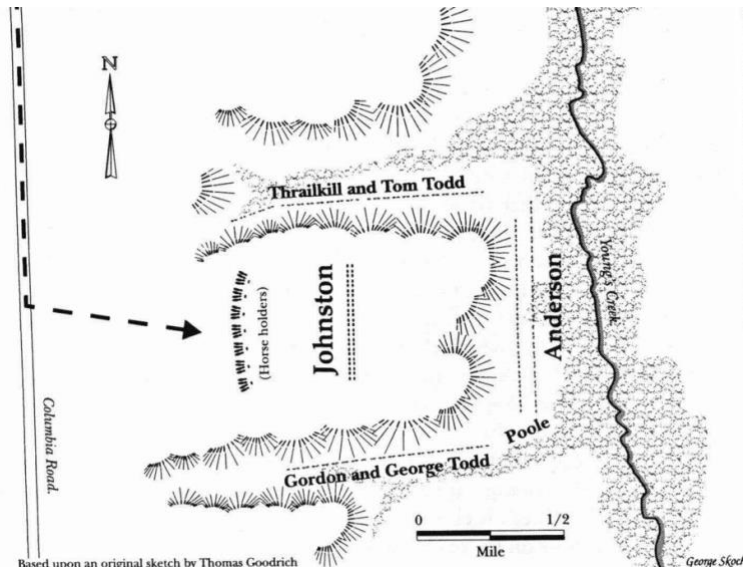
his big hand and clubbed down two of Anderson's men. With bullets raining down and into him he finally teetered and fell like a big oak tree. With twenty bullets in his body he managed to raise himself on one elbow, lifted a huge fist to heaven and cried out, "My Lord ...," and breathed his last as he 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.

About 3:00 on the same afternoon, Major Johnston, having spotted the smoke from the burning town, 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. With at least 115 men and the advantage of long range rifles against the guerillas pistols the odds seemed pretty good to him. Johnston climbed into the attic of one of the hotels and through his field glasses spotted a band of guerillas coming toward Centralia. He raced back down the stairs to get his men in motion. The townsmen tried to tell Johnston that though there were only about 80 in the raid, there were about 400 total in the camp and that they all had revolvers. They also told him that Anderson's men were far better mounted than his men and the guerillas were well trained fighters. It all fell on deaf ears. What he could not know was that the group coming toward him were bait for a trap. As soon as the guerillas spotted the Union soldiers they wheeled their horses around and headed back to camp with Johnston in pursuit.

Upon leaving Centralia, Anderson and his men had returned to their nearby camp where the bands of John Thraikill, Tom Todd, George Todd, (neither known to be related to this author, but possible.), Dave Poole and Si Gordon were also hiding out. Their numbers now would total around 450. Then they set the trap for Johnston. Their camp was around a horseshoe shaped clearing. The top of the horseshoe was a wooded area. The two sides were covered with brush and a ravine. Hiding in the woods was Anderson and his group. On the left hand, or northern side, the men of John Thraikill and Tom Todd were hidden from view. On the right, or southern side, were the men of Si Gordon and George Todd. Dave Poole had his men to the right of Gordon and George Todd covering the area between George and Anderson. (**See the map below.**)



**Site of Centralia Massacre Battlefield**

Major Johnston led his men straight into the trap and didn't realize his error until he saw hundreds of men come out of hiding on three sides and that his men were almost completely surrounded. He had sent his mounts to the rear with 24 soldiers to handle them. The guerillas began their charge and the massacre was on. Some of the soldiers returned fire, but many just stood paralyzed with fear. Many threw down their weapons and dropped to their knees pleading for mercy. There was no mercy that day. Johnston stood beside his dead horse and fired his pistol until a bullet struck him down. A guerilla then rode up to him and shot him in the head. Frank James reported that his younger brother, sixteen-year-old Jesse, fired the shot that killed Major Johnston (I don't think that has been confirmed.)

At least two guerillas had been shot from their horses and two suffered bayonet wounds. The exact number of guerilla casualties are not known, but it was very few. The soldiers were left where they fell. Anderson had a local carpenter build two coffins and he buried his men in the local cemetery. However, there are three Confederate markers in the Pleasant Grove Cemetery dated September 27, 1864 and all were Anderson men. One each for Henry "Hank" Williams; Pvt. John Peyton; and Pvt. Frank Shepherd. Of the 155 soldiers in Major Johnston's command, 22 managed to survive.

Those soldiers who were able fled back toward Centralia and 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.

Congressman James Rollins, from the stagecoach robbery, was looking for a good place to hide. The proprietor of one of the hotels provided him with one in the second floor maid's room. From the window in the room he could look down on all the death and mayhem that the guerillas were perpetrating. He was terrified and could only hope that no one in Centralia had recognized him and informed the bushwhackers of his presence. Someone had informed Anderson and he knew that a congressman would be far better trade bait than a sergeant. All of a sudden Anderson changed his mind and pursued other matters. Rollins was able to flee the city and head for Mexico, Missouri.

As for the fate of Sgt. Goodman, you will have to read about him later in this volume.

Bloody Bill Anderson was most pleased with his success at Centralia in contrast to the US Army which was extremely irate over the whole affair. They were determined to eliminate Anderson for good. Fortunately, or unfortunately, depending on your point of view, he only had one more month to enjoy his victory and create what more havoc he could.

Acting Lieutenant Colonel Samuel P. "Cob" Cox had been given the assignment to find and whip Anderson by Brigadier General James Craig, commanding officer at St. Joseph. 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 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 the ring finger of his left hand to remove the ring. Otherwise his remains were left un mutilated, unlike his victims.



His body was buried in the Mormon cemetery on the edge of town in Richmond. His grave is located along the southern fence line, near the street.

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