

## **Greenback Raid Builds Mosby's Legend**

Many years after the famed Green-back Raid, Col. John S. Mosby remembered the inspiration for his great adventure. "As we operated in Sheridan's rear, the railroad that brought his supplies was his weak point; and consequently our favorite object of attack." Therefore, when scout Jim Wiltshire told the colonel of a way to reach an isolated spot along the B&O in Jefferson County, W.Va., perfect for a derailment, Mosby quickly formulated a plan to rob and burn the westbound Express.

He wrote, "It was a hazardous enterprise ... but I knew it would injure Sheridan to destroy a train and compel him to place stronger guards on the road." On the evening of Oct. 12, 1864, Mosby and 84 partisans rode out from the vicinity of Middleburg in Loudoun County, later forded the Shenandoah River, and then headed west toward the Martinsburg-Winchester Turnpike. The next day, the Rangers busied themselves capturing Union horsemen traveling along the road. In one instance, Ranger John Alexander recalled that the men killed one young Union soldier and a Jessie Scout - a Unionist dressed in Confederate garb - who had tried to escape.

Alexander especially regretted the death of the boy, whom the Confederate spoke to just before he died. "Of all the 'passings' to which I was a party of during the war," he wrote, "this is the only one that really left a haunt in my head."

After sundown, the Rangers rode toward the Baltimore & Ohio Railroad track. Sometime before midnight, they reached a patch of woods near their destination, left their horses with a few men, and walked 200 or 300 yards to the tracks. The spot picked out for the holdup was a deep cut about 300 yards west of Quincey Siding and a half-mile west of Brown's Crossing.

As most of the weary men found themselves a resting place high along the north side of the cut, others removed rail from both sides of the track and elevated them so a train would not crash but roughly slide along the cut to a stop.

The Express west left Camden Station, Baltimore, for Wheeling, W.Va., at 9:15 p.m. That night, Locomotive 127 was pulling an Adams Express car, one baggage car, five passenger coaches, and a sleeper. The passenger list included a coach full of German immigrants eagerly on their way to the Great Plains and two Union paymasters carrying cash for Gen. Philip H. Sheridan's troops.

Usually, nothing happened on the trip, but the threat of danger was ever present after the train passed Harpers Ferry. Just eight months earlier, at about 2 a.m. Feb. 12, the Express had been derailed at Brown's Crossing and boarded by a gang of partisans led by Maj. Harry Gilmor. According to published reports, about \$30,000 in cash and valuables was taken from the surprised riders.

Many of the partisans were asleep when the locomotive rumbled heavily into the side of the cut. Mosby, dozing with his head in the lap of Ranger Cug Hutchinson, remembered being suddenly awakened from his slumber by the crash. He wrote, "I was aroused and astounded by an explosion and a crash. ... The engine had run off the track, the boiler burst, and the air was filled with red-hot cinders and escaping steam. "Alexander, one of the few who were wide awake, recalled his excitement as the train approached.

"Directly the headlight of the engine shot around a curve not far off, and as the engine rushed almost under me, it seemed my heart well-nigh choked me." To Mosby's shout of "Board her boys," the graybacks, ignoring the dazed conductor who was already on the ground surrendering the train, dashed down the bank and barged into the cars. The hard-bitten men and boys were looking for a big payday. As partisans, they were entitled to any spoils of war they captured, and, for a few, the riders' wallets, watches, and purses, although not exactly military goods, presented tempting targets they could not resist.

Some of the terrified women passengers were still screaming when Ranger Charlie Dear boarded one of the cars. Toward the back of the coach, a Federal officer tried to pull his revolver, but Dear's Colt barked first and his aim proved true. When he and West Aldridge walked back to

examine his deadly marksmanship, they also got the drop on some other officers. These men, stunned by the suddenness of the event, offered no resistance.

While all this was going on, Mosby was standing on the north bank of the cut shouting instructions for the burning of the train. Nursing a foot injury he had received in a skirmish a short time before, the colonel probably was a curious sight to the travelers with just one boot on, steadying himself with a cane.

In addition, distraught passengers running up to him for protection somewhat distracted the "Gray Ghost" from the job at hand. In particular, a frightened lady found Mosby and shouted out, "My father is a Mason." The colonel quickly retorted, "I can't help it." Although by now, with some of the cars on fire, most of the passengers, captured soldiers, and B&O employees were out of the train standing atop the cut in the cold night air, the coach load of Germans refused to move. When one of his men reported this to Mosby, the tough partisan shouted out, "Set fire to the car and burn the Dutch, if they won't come out." Immediately, Ranger John Puryear threw some burning bundles of the New York Herald into the coach, and the Germans quickly piled out and ran up the bank.

Suddenly, into all this commotion, lookout Cab Maddux galloped in with news that the Yankees were on the way. Mosby promptly called for the men to get to their horses and sent a scout out to verify the report. When the rider came back and said it was a false alarm, the colonel realized that Maddux had made up the story so he could leave his post and get in on some of the spoils. The irate colonel dressed down Maddux on the spot "and told him that I had a good mind to have him shot." About this time, Aldridge and Dear ran up to Mosby and excitedly showed him a big satchel and a tin box, both full of greenbacks. The men had found the money in the possession of two Union paymasters, Maj. Edwin Moore and Maj. David Ruggles.

According to Alexander, Moore had surrendered his satchel to Dear upon getting off the train. Ruggles, however, was hiding in a coach under a gum blanket when Aldridge found him. When he got up, he calmly dropped his poncho to the floor thereby covering his money box. Confident that he had done his duty and kept the money from falling into robbers' hands, the major, while later watching the inferno roar through the train, sarcastically taunted the graybacks, saying "that he had contributed over two hundred thousand dollars to the fire." Just then, Aldridge surprised Ruggles by showing him the box and tapping it with his hand.

Before the partisans left, Mosby, knowing that a small party would have a better chance making it back to Loudoun County safely, sent Lt. Charlie Grogan, Aldridge, Dear, and Wiltshire off with the money to Bloomfield, where they were to wait for the command. Not long afterward, the Rebels put their Yankee prisoners on the horses they had captured that day, mounted up, and rode off into the night.

Meanwhile, the passengers watched as the fire consumed the rest of the train and its contents, which, according to the Oct. 19 issue of the Frederick Examiner in Maryland, included two corpses, one male and one female, that were in coffins aboard the baggage car.

The raid lasted around 45 minutes. Now the partisans were in a race to get back across the Shenandoah to their hideouts in Loudoun before enemy cavalry from nearby Charlestown or Harpers Ferry could block their escape. Just before dawn, however, Mosby found out from a local that Capt. Richard Blazer and his band of capable mountain scouts were bivouacked not far from Kabletown, W.Va. Although Mosby probably could have skirted the Yankees and still reached the nearby ford, the colonel decided this was the time to surprise his nemesis and pay him back for some recent trouble the Ohioan had caused him.

Mosby recalled the reaction of his men: "Their mettle was up when they heard that 'Old Blaze,' as they called him, was about." Not long afterward, the graybacks sighted the Federals' campfires. They charged pell-mell into the camp, but the wily Yankees had already left.

The next afternoon, the command reached Bloomfield. There, Mosby picked a few men to count and distribute the money equally. According to the colonel, the haul of greenbacks totaled \$173,000, giving his men just a little over \$2,000 apiece.

Wishing to preserve his warrior reputation, Mosby refused his share. Later on, though, the grateful partisans presented him with a fine thoroughbred, which he accepted.

The captives included a lieutenant not long off the boat from Germany who, when questioned by Mosby as to why he was fighting the South replied, "I only come to learn de art of war." He later was forced to hand over his fine clothes and boots to Mosby's men.

The Union soldiers were sent south to Confederate prisons. While imprisoned, the unlucky Maj. Ruggles died.

Sometime after the war, Maj. Moore was in hot water with Federal authorities. According to R.E. Lee's report of the incident, Mosby claimed that the raiders had stolen \$168,000. Of course, this left \$5,000 unaccounted for, and the government wanted its money back. The major visited the Gray Ghost and had him help clear up the matter by signing a certificate stating that he sent the wrong figures to Lee and that the true amount was \$173,000. No doubt, the two veterans reminisced about their roles in the Greenback Raid.

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