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Jim Jackson's Raid

Sylvester Hubbartt was returning from Mt. Sterling, where he had gone on business the day before. Thoughts of his recent transactions, local gossip, news of the war, and consciousness of the familiar view of the countryside filled his mind as he rode along that fresh October morning in 1864. Unfenced fields and prairie stretched away on either side of the roadway. Some of the corn had already been cut and shocked, revealing a wealth of yellow pumpkins and exposing the rendezvous of quail and prairie chickens. Farm houses in pleasant groves dotted the southern Iowa landscape.

Just beyond Upton, he observed an unusual group of a dozen or fifteen horsemen galloping westward. From a distance they appeared to be clad in blue uniforms, although some peculiarities of their costumes were evident. Thinking that they were Union cavalymen home on a furlough, Mr. Hub-

bartt spurred forward to overtake them and learn the latest news from the front. Suddenly three or four of the men drew up at a farm lot, caught a horse, saddled it, turned one of their own horses loose, and galloped away to overtake the main band.

Suspicious of such actions, Mr. Hubbartt kept well in the rear and decided to restrain his curiosity about the progress of the war. He was further surprised when the whole band stopped at the home of his friend, John Brumley, in Davis County. A few of the men went into the house, but reappeared in a few minutes and all rode away.

When Mr. Hubbartt arrived he found that the house had been ransacked. Mr. Brumley, who was laid up at the time with a broken leg, could offer no resistance. After breaking a gun, the bandits had ordered Mrs. Brumley to open a trunk belonging to her sister. She had protested that she could not open it, but when they threatened to break it open she unlocked it. The trunk was full of clothing which was thrown out on the bed. A pocket book containing eighty dollars that was concealed among the clothes had escaped the notice of the robbers.

Who were these heavily-armed and well-mounted marauders? When some one asked, the leader gave the laconic answer, "Price's Hell Hounds". Bent upon raiding the homes of loyal Iowans, their principal purpose seemed to be to rob and kill men who had served in the Union army. Apparently they were Confederate soldiers or southern sympathizers

in disguise, and not ordinary highwaymen. "James Jackson", the leader, bold, impertinent, unscrupulous, and pitiless, held absolute sway over his band and proceeded in the execution of his well-planned raid with amazing precision.

From Brumley's house the raiders went to the home of Mr. Gustin. A part of their number entered the house, robbed him of a gun, which they broke, a favorite watch, and about one hundred and sixty dollars in money. Meanwhile another portion of the gang proceeded to William Downing's place where they broke his gun, robbed him of what money he had, and took him prisoner.

Thence the cavalcade rode on northwest to the residence of John Heckathier, but obtained no money as Mr. Heckathier was not at home. The leader asked Mrs. Heckathier if those people (pointing to Thomas Miller's residence a few rods south) had any money and she said she did not know. "We'll find out", was his only comment as he started away with one of his men.

It was between nine and ten o'clock in the morning. Mr. Miller had gone to the field and his wife was ironing when Jim Jackson pushed open the kitchen door and stepped into the room. Tall and straight he was, with a handsome face, fair complexion, light brown hair, and blue eyes. He was dressed in the uniform of a Union soldier and an officer's sword hung at his side. But he must have been an eccentric fellow for he wore a lady's hat

with a broad brim adorned with blue ribbons that streamed down his back. Astonished by the sudden appearance and peculiar aspect of the stranger, Mrs. Miller regarded him critically as he glanced about the room.

“Where is the gun?” he asked, nodding toward the empty brackets on the wall.

“By what authority are you here making such a demand”, challenged Mrs. Miller.

“Lincoln’s”, he replied.

“Pooh”, she said, contemptuously.

But again the man asked about the gun in such a manner that Mrs. Miller realized she must give an answer.

“We have no gun. We didn’t need it and traded it for a sleigh.”

“Then where is your money?” he demanded.

“It’s gone with the gun”, she responded.

But the guerrilla was not to be so easily satisfied. Threatening to burn the house if he found any money, he began to search the place. Mrs. Miller told him if he got any money he would have to hunt it. Thoroughly frightened by this conduct, the oldest daughter rushed to the cradle to save the year-old baby, but Mrs. Miller told her to put the baby back as the man was not going to burn the house. In a bureau drawer he found a hundred and ten dollars. Mrs. Miller tried to seize it, but the raider was too quick for her and put the money in his pocket.

"We need that money and it will do you no good", pleaded Mrs. Miller. But Jackson only looked at her and said nothing. In a moment he left the house. Mrs. Miller followed, walking at his side and insisting that he would suffer for what he did. Her protests were ignored and in a moment the raiders were gone.

At Chris Wagler's house they got no money, but they broke his shotgun, a fine one that he had brought from the old country. Passing on north to the place where the Pleasant Knoll schoolhouse now stands, they turned directly west toward the residence of Henry Blough where they obtained only twenty-five copper pennies and some silver coins belonging to a little boy. When the boy objected to the robbery the guerrilla leader drew his revolver and made the little fellow give him his pocket knife also.

As Martin Kays drove north on his way to Pulaske with a wagon-load of eggs he had bought from farmers he noticed the group of horsemen riding up behind him. Just after he had passed Blough's house, the raiders turned in and from their actions he suspected that they were outlaws. In preparation for possible emergencies he took a roll of money from his pocket and pushed it down in a box of oats which he used for packing eggs. It was well he did so for his apprehensions were soon fulfilled. Two or three of the raiders overtook him and ordered him to stop. After looking over his team the spokes-

man ordered that one of the horses be unhitched. While one of the men threw the harness off on the ground and transferred the saddle from his own horse to the new acquisition, the leader demanded Mr. Kays's pocket book which was handed over without apparent hesitation. The purse contained only a small amount of change. "You've spent most of your money?" questioned the bandit, and Mr. Kays assented. Whereupon the three men returned to Blough's to join the rest of the gang.

Having harnessed the jaded horse that was left by the guerrillas, Mr. Kays hitched it to his wagon. He had gone only a short distance, however, when he found that he had been cheated in the trade, but reconciled himself with the thought that such was always the case in a one-sided deal. Never for a moment did he entertain the idea of trying to make the fellow trade back. Even so he fared much better than many of the others who came in contact with the outlaws, because he had concealed most of his money in the oats and the stolen horse later returned to him.

Mr. Kays drove on to Pulaski as fast as his team could travel and reported his experience with the guerrillas. Immediately the citizens began to prepare for defense. Every man, woman, and child that could handle a gun prepared for battle. The excitement was intense, for the destination of the raiders seemed apparent to everybody. The men loaded guns for the boys and women. All were de-

terminated to defend their village to the last ditch. John F. Scarborough, an attorney in Bloomfield, then a boy about nine years old, remembers that he proudly wore his brother's military cap on the eve of the impending battle. But the guerrillas never came to Pulaski.

About half a mile south of Blough's place was the home of William Power. Two sons, Albert and Wallace, had enlisted in the Union army, but the fall of 1864 found Wallace at home on leave of absence because of sickness. While Mr. Power and Wallace were working near the road on the forenoon of October 12th they saw three men ride up to the front gate.

"Wallace, there are some of your soldier friends coming to see you", remarked Mr. Power, whereupon Wallace went out to the gate to meet them. As he approached they drew their revolvers, dismounted, climbed over the fence, and the leader ordered Wallace to take off his uniform.

It was apparent that they were not his friends, but being unarmed and powerless he took off his uniform and handed it over. Mr. Power, seeing what had happened, turned away. One of the men ordered him to halt, but finding no convenient place to stop he kept on going. Upon reaching the protection of a large corn shock he threw his pocket book into it and started hastily down over the hill. The guerrilla fired at him but missed.

Mrs. Power, alarmed at the shot, came to see what

the trouble was. When she inquired who they were and by what authority they came there, they claimed to be Union soldiers, but she assured them that Union soldiers did not act that way. They then told her they were "Jim Jackson's Dare Devils" and asked her if she had ever seen them before.

Marching Wallace to the barn, they announced that they would kill him unless his father came back. In order to terrify him the more they told him they would kill him in the presence of his mother, to which he replied that they had the power to kill him and if they intended to do so he would rather die in the presence of his mother than any other person. When a younger son informed Mr. Power of Wallace's plight he came back. Having broken Mr. Power's gun, they ordered him and Wallace to mount a barebacked horse, and thus awkwardly situated, riding double and Wallace clad only in his underclothes, they started rapidly in pursuit of the other guerrillas, one desperado on each side of the prisoners and another behind. The bandits got no money from Power, because his running off consumed so much time that they did not search the house.

From Power's the raiders increased their speed, moving westward as fast as their horses could travel in a body. While the main group remained intact, details made short sorties on either side, visiting farm houses, robbing men, and breaking every firearm they found. As their ranks were swelled

by several prisoners, people who saw them dashing across the unfenced fields and prairie assumed that all were guerrillas. Estimates of the number varied in exaggeration. Plundering the loyal Iowans and capturing every Union soldier they encountered, the raiders hastened on their way. The homes of David Baughman, Perry Brown, Reese, Daniel Swartzendrover, Jacob King, and Jeremiah Miller were visited in rapid succession. For some reason William Millsap was not molested. Overtaking James Brown, formerly of Company B, Thirtieth Iowa Infantry, they ordered him to "fall in", a term which he understood and obeyed with alacrity if not with cheerfulness. The sound of drums, beaten by some boys and old men of Roscoe Township, convinced the marauders that a posse was being raised to pursue them. As a matter of fact most of the citizens of the community had gone to the county fair at Bloomfield fifteen or sixteen miles away. The suddenness of the unexpected raid, the Union garb of the raiders, and the destruction of all the guns they found rendered their victims practically helpless. Before the neighbors could be called they were gone.

David Gibson, who was making molasses near Miller's, observed the strange horsemen and, determining that they were bushwhackers, mounted a horse and hastened to Bloomfield to give the alarm. Other couriers followed and excitement grew apace. According to one rumor the invaders numbered a

hundred and fifty. The fair broke up, while every one rushed to the defense of the town. "All was hurry, bustle, and confusion." In anticipation of an attack upon Bloomfield men were posted on house tops as lookouts.

In the midst of the turmoil a voice was heard calling for Colonel James B. Weaver, late of the Second Iowa Infantry, to take command of the militia. As the shout of approval went up, Colonel Weaver undertook the organization of a company to pursue and punish the ruffians. Horses were taken from carriages and wagons without reference to the owners. It was late in the afternoon when preparations were completed. Leaving the defense of Bloomfield in charge of Colonel S. A. Moore and several other seasoned veterans, Colonel Weaver and his volunteers set out on the trail of the raiders who were fully twenty miles away and riding fast.

Meanwhile, the guerrillas had proceeded with their nefarious business. The prisoners were formed in line and each was invited to join the band. All declined except one whom they had captured in Missouri, whereupon he was given Wallace Power's uniform, boots, and socks. Jackson then delivered a short speech and ended by asking if every one was satisfied. All answered promptly in the affirmative except William Power who hesitated. Wallace, schooled in the cruelties of war and well aware of the consequences, prompted his father to assent. Having extorted a pledge from each never to join

the Union army, Jackson dismissed all of the prisoners except Wallace Power, James Brown, and the new recruit.

Relieved of most of their prisoners, the raiders continued their pillaging. From James Paris they stole a horse, a revolver, and a watch, but they scorned the sixty cents they found at William Sterritt's house. Finding that L. D. Hotchkiss had no money they helped themselves to what they wanted in the kitchen, broke his gun, and hurried on to plunder the home of Frank French, where they obtained some military clothing. Morris McCracken and his son, a member of Company G, Forty-fifth Iowa Infantry, had a narrow escape. The guerrillas noticed the son's uniform and asked if he had been in the army. He replied that the uniform belonged to his brother who was at the fair, so the robbers contented themselves with stealing eighty dollars and breaking his gun. Though Mr. Haney's house was thoroughly searched and considerable damage done no money was found and the marauders hastened on to enrich themselves at the expense of Thomas Hardy, reputed to be the principal money-lender in the southern part of Davis County.

A diligent search, however, failed to reveal any money, although eight hundred dollars lay in the folds of an old day book which they had thrown on the floor. Failure to get money there seemed to vex the guerrilla leader more than any other event that occurred on the raid. Perhaps the robbery of

Thomas Hardy was one of the chief motives of the expedition. At any rate his house seemed to be their most distant objective in Iowa, for thereafter the raiders turned southward again. Indeed, it is probable that this point was the farthest north that any Confederate forces reached during the war. Certainly it is several miles farther north than John H. Morgan went on his famous raid into Ohio.

About two hundred yards south of the house the guerrillas met Mr. Hardy and his hired man riding on a load of wood. Jackson ordered them to halt.

“How old are your horses?” he asked.

“Five years old”, said Mr. Hardy.

“Get out and unhitch them, I want them”, ordered the guerrilla.

In an equally firm tone Mr. Hardy replied, “I want them, too. You don’t intend to take them without paying me for them?”

“Oh yes, I’ll pay you for them”, the bandit growled as he drew his revolver and fired.

The shot took effect near the right eye and the wounded man fell off the wagon. Placing his hands over the wound from which blood gushed between his fingers, he staggered to his feet exclaiming, “God have mercy! God have mercy!” and sank to the ground.

With a fiendish purpose, the ruffian dismounted, drew a small pistol from his belt, and standing over the prostrate form of the dying man, took deliberate aim. But the shot did not have the desired effect.

Muttering a curse between his clenched teeth, the bandit replaced the weapon, drew a heavy Colt's navy revolver and fired again. In Mr. Hardy's pockets he found about four hundred dollars which he took and remounted his horse. He then ordered the hired man to unhitch the horses, but they were not taken. When one of the men asked why he had killed the man, the villain answered: "Because he did not mind me. I will kill any man who refuses to obey me."

Meanwhile, three or four of the raiders went to meet a man coming toward them with a team and wagon. Their errand was eminently successful for they obtained five hundred dollars which they put in a cartridge box and coolly asked the man for cigars. They told him that the captain would soon be there and that he must do whatever he was told, and do it quickly. When Jackson came up and was told that the money had already been taken, he ordered the man to unhitch the horses.

"Do they pace?" he inquired.

"No sir."

"Then I don't want 'em, I have better horses. Take off that halter."

"Which one?"

"The one on the bay."

The man handed the halter to the raider, who then ordered him to hitch up his horses and drive to the house, where he would find a dead man to take care of, and not to leave there until morning.

The guerrillas next stopped at the house of Eleazer Small, a soldier of Company A, Third Iowa Cavalry. Mr. Small was just leaving the farm when he saw the group approaching and, thinking they were Union soldiers, went up to his gate to meet them. The leader rode up and asked him a few questions concerning what part of the army he had served in, dismounted, and without the slightest warning drew his revolver and shot him in the face. Another shot took effect in the breast, and as Mr. Small fell to the ground a third ball pierced his neck. The dead man's pockets were searched and what money he had was taken. The murderer then stooped and pinned to his coat a slip of paper bearing the inscription: "James Jackson, Lieutenant Commanding, October 12th, 1864."

P. H. Bence, captain of the Thirtieth Iowa Infantry, was at home on a furlough in the little town of Springville. As the raiders rode into town, Jackson called Captain Bence to him, asked him what regiment he belonged to, and ordered him to take off his uniform.

"What does this mean," asked Captain Bence, surprised at the command. "Aren't you Union soldiers?"

The guerrilla leader then informed him that they were not, and inasmuch as he was a soldier they intended to kill him.

Captain Bence coolly responded, "I see that I am within your power and request you not to kill me

here in the presence of my family." The guerrilla put his revolver away and demanded the captain's money which amounted to eight hundred dollars. Ordering one of his men to see that Captain Bence changed his clothes, he went into the house and asked Mrs. Bence if she had any money. She hesitated to answer, but Captain Bence, coming into the room at this time, told her to get the fifty dollars he had given her that morning.

"Is that all?" Jackson inquired, and she replied that it was.

He announced that he was going to see for himself and if he found any more money he would burn the house. He went to the bed and turned down the pillow, but found nothing and immediately returned to his horse.

News of the outlaws' depredations had reached Springville a short time before their arrival, and several militiamen were preparing to resist the invaders. Three or four horses were tied to a fence. These were seized and William Hill, Joseph Hill, and Andrew Tannehill were captured. Just as David Sanderson, who was collecting firearms, stepped out of an old wood-house carrying three guns he was confronted by one of the mounted guerrillas who pointed his revolver and ordered him to throw down the guns. Mr. Sanderson obeyed and was taken to join the other prisoners.

The bandit chief demanded Joseph Hill's money, and when he replied that he had none ordered him

to turn his pockets inside out, which revealed only a pocket knife.

“Throw it away”, commanded the raider. Hill tossed it aside.

“Hadn’t I better shoot him because he didn’t throw it farther?” suggested the leader to one of his men, but receiving no response he turned to the horses and ordered the prisoners to mount. Captain Bence and David Sanderson were placed upon the same horse and all rode away.

They had not gone far when they met Will Losey and inquired of him if he had heard of any rebels being in the country. Losey, who was carrying a rifle, replied that he had and was then on his way to Springville and Savannah to give the alarm.

“We are the rebels”, said Jackson, “and you fall in line.”

Astounded by this announcement, Losey hesitated, but the click of a revolver and the advice from the prisoners settled the matter and he also “fell in”. Having broken his gun and robbed him of sixty-four dollars, the raiders passed on to the house of Lieutenant William Niblick of Company D, Third Iowa Cavalry, whom they robbed of a saber, uniform, and thirty dollars in money.

“Don’t you think you ought to be killed?” inquired the guerrilla chief.

“No, I don’t think I ought to be killed”, replied Mr. Niblick. “I have done my duty to my country.” No one knows why his life was spared.

The sun was sinking behind the western hills as the band of outlaws crossed the border into Missouri. In the timber and hollows shadows deepened rapidly into the darkness of the chilly October night. Wallace Power, still clad only in his underwear and an army blanket which one of the guerrillas had given him to wear about his shoulders, was chilled through. The prisoners were solemn and in deep thought as they galloped along the unfenced road. They were thinking of their loved ones at home and the cruel fate that had befallen their neighbors and friends. Was there any possible way of escape? They were passing down a road that was bordered by a deep ravine, the slope to which was covered with thick brush. David Sanderson whispered to Captain Bence suggesting that they jump from the horse into the brush and make their escape. He was certain that they would be killed if they remained and that they should take what seemed to be their only chance. But Captain Bence, who was better schooled in the cruelties of war, understood the outlaws and knew that they were only waiting for an excuse to kill him. The ruffians were at no time more than a horse's length distant.

The guerrilla leader also seemed to be absorbed in thought. He was apparently meditating on what to do next. Suddenly he reigned his horse and took a place at the rear of the outlaws and prisoners. Riding up quietly until he was beside the horse on

which Captain Bence and David Sanderson were riding, his demeanor suddenly changed and he began to whistle. Then drawing his revolver he placed it near Captain Bence's head and fired. Both men fell from the horse at the crack of the gun. Sanderson lay on the ground as if dead, but Captain Bence, scarcely conscious of what he was doing, rose on his elbow. Again the cold-blooded assassin took deliberate aim and fired another shot into the brain of the dying man.

"Get up", he said to Sanderson scornfully. "You're not shot."

When Mr. Sanderson had scrambled to his feet he was forced to promise that he would never join the Union army or take up arms or attempt to pursue the raiders.

"Now go home, and if you look around I'll shoot you", said the guerrilla as he flourished his revolver. Mr. Sanderson started down the road, walking as fast as he could and expecting every moment to be shot, but his life was spared.

The outlaws then held a council to determine the fate of the remaining prisoners. Finally, the prisoners were ordered to dismount and a pledge was extorted from each that he would never enter the Union army nor say anything about what he had seen or heard before reaching Springville. They were formed in line and one of the guerrillas rode slowly along in front, drawing his revolver on each, and asking the leader in each case what he should

do. When asked this question concerning Wallace Power, the chief replied, "I will let him go home as I told his father I would when I released him."

Thereupon the prisoners were dismissed. They lost no time in starting for home, walking as rapidly as possible. Grateful for their unexpected escape, they could not divert their minds from the terrible deeds they had witnessed. It was about midnight when they arrived in Springville completely exhausted.

The raiders mounted their horses and soon disappeared in the darkness as they rode away into the timbered country toward Lancaster, Missouri. By the side of the road lay the body of Captain Bence where he had fallen. On his coat fluttered a slip of paper bearing the ominous legend, "James Jackson, Lieutenant Commanding, October 12th, 1864."

HERMAN H. TRACHSEL