

TWO

Missouri and Kansas had been warring into each other's territories long before the attack on Fort Sumter that triggered the American civil war. The Jayhawkers from mainly, anti-slavery Kansas, made regular raids into Missouri, causing many farmers and landowners near the border to set up their own raiding parties into Kansas, they were known as Bushwhackers.

In September 1861 a bunch of Jayhawkers attacked and captured the City of Independence Missouri. They murdered many of its citizens, some, so I heard, were women and children. This news, though distressing to some, didn't perturb me maybe as much as it should, but my pa had been outraged at such wanton and unnecessary killing and plundering. He had previously, always been neutral in the cross-border war, his allegiances lay with neither the North nor the South. I believe though, that my mother had always had anti-slavery views. Now though, pa vowed to support the confederacy in any way he could in the escalating war. This was all the excuse I needed to get away. I announced that I was going to join the confederate army and seek to avenge the people of Independence. Pa was furious at my insensitive decision to leave the farm during such troubled times. But after a blazing row with him and much hand wringing and crying from my ma, I set off on foot for Springfield, Missouri, where I hoped they were recruiting. Before I left, Lise came running to me and jumped up into my arms where I held her tight, hugging her tiny, frail body for many minutes.

'You will write to me won't you Andy?' she begged. 'I want to know all about soldiering and the war and all the places you visit.'

Lise, just like me, only saw the glory in being a soldier. None of us could have foreseen the four years of horror that came with war. The maiming and bloodshed, limbs blown off, men blinded, and families left fatherless and homeless in a hopeless war that was far less than glorious.

'Sure, I will Lizzy,' I replied using the name I had always used to address her. She wrapped her arms tighter around me and buried her face in my neck.

'I don't want you to go Andy,' she whispered. 'I might never see you again.'

'Sure, you'll see me again silly, in a few months' time when the south has won the war, I'll be back just to see you and you know what?'

'What?' she giggled.

‘We are going to get on a boat and sail down the great river all the way to St Louis, just you and me.’

‘Aww you joshing me Andy, how could we afford to do that?’

‘When I come home from the war, I will be rich you’ll see and I’m gonna give you all the things you deserve for all the hard work you do around here.’

That was when my pa came striding up to us.

‘Put that child down boy and get offa my land,’ he yelled. He’d never completely lost his Danish accent. ‘You’re trespassing and if you don’t leave, I will take a switch to you and beat the hell outa your sorry ass.’

I kissed Lise on her cheek and lowered her to the ground. She looked up and smiled sadly. When she did that, I felt as though I was looking into the face of an angel, unbeknown to me at the time, it was to be the last time I would ever see her angel face looking that way.

‘Ok pa,’ I said mildly. ‘I’m going, but there is no need for it to be this way.’

‘Don’t you call me pa; I no longer have a son. You are a stranger, and you are trespassing on my land.’

He had stopped just a couple of feet away and I became aware, I was taller than him, something I had never noticed before. However, he was bulkier and broader than me. I was little more than a boy, who at seventeen, was still growing and had not, yet, bulked out. I looked past him and saw my ma standing in the doorway to the homestead where I had been raised from an early age. Although quite a way from my position, I could see she had been crying, but strangely, I felt no remorse and wondered briefly, if I actually had a heart. Until I looked down at Lise’s angelic face and recognised, I had a heart because it began to melt. I knew then, that if I didn’t leave quickly, I would be compelled, because of her, to stay. Only now do I realise the enormity of my decision to leave that lovely child. For if I had stayed, Lise would not have suffered at the hands of James Wesley Singer and his friends. Because he and I never would have met, and I wouldn’t have killed his brother. But the death of his brother Henry at my hands, was the sole reason James Singer, did what he did to my family.

...

I slung a gunny sack containing all my meagre, possessions over my shoulder and headed for Springfield where I’d heard, a company of Confederate soldiers were bivouacked. There would be no problem in finding the way there, I had driven to Springfield many times with our big wagon pulled by the only horse we owned, to get supplies. It would take me a day and a half to walk to Springfield,

so I needed to be sparing with the canteen of water and the few biscuits and cheese that Lise had secretly slipped me.

I had travelled around eight or nine miles when I saw horsemen approaching in the distance. There looked to be around a dozen or so of them and my first thought was, "Jayhawkers." I was on the road to Springfield and in open prairie land. Apart from the odd bush and small tree, there was nowhere I could hide. So, I decided to hold my ground and try to talk myself out of any danger or malice they might hold towards me. I carried on walking until, when they were almost upon me, I stood to one side to allow the horsemen to pass. I hoped they would see, I clearly, posed no threat and would carry on by to go about their business with no interference from me. They were 13 in number and all were heavily armed, with pistols, muskets and knives. They were accompanied by several spare horses and heavily burdened, pack mules. The company of men stopped a few feet from me and each one of them studied me with interest. I noticed that more than a couple of them wore articles of confederate clothing, pants here, a tunic there or a hat. These men were not Jayhawkers that was plain to see. However, I decided that I needed to use caution in my actions.

One of them urged his horse forward until it was standing close and the man was looking down into my upturned face. He was obviously the leader of the band; he commanded respect simply by his bearing and superior demeanour. The other horsemen looked formidable and dangerous. But this man, though normal in appearance, had a way about him that demanded that people recognize his superiority over them. He was a leader and seemed to be so confident in his abilities, that I was sure the men with him would gladly follow him into hell if he asked them.

'Where are you headed boy?' he asked in a mild and almost, gentle voice.

'Springfield, sir,' I replied. There was no point in lying, the trail I was on led directly to Springfield and anyhow, his very demeanour compelled me to tell the truth.

'What is your business in Springfield?'

I hesitated, if these men were Jayhawkers and I told them I was going to join the Confederacy, I would be in deep trouble. However, they seemed to be returning from Springfield, so it was unlikely that they would be Jayhawkers, especially as some of them were wearing articles of Confederate uniform. It was more than likely they were Bushwhackers; in which case they would be pro confederacy. I decided though, despite the odds, to tough it out.

‘Sir,’ I said, with all the bravado and authority I could muster. ‘My business in Springfield is my business and mine alone.’

A few of the men in the group laughed, others merely smiled. The leader of the group simply looked down at me expressionless.

‘Your business is indeed your business,’ he replied in that same mild voice which carried so well despite the sound of milling hooves, the creaking of leather and snickering of horses. ‘However,’ He continued. ‘These are troubled times with many desperate men abroad. Missouri is a state where allegiances lie in two directions and it behoves me to enquire of you regarding your allegiances.’

I hesitated, before answering.

‘Well sir,’ I replied earnestly. ‘Perhaps allegiances do lie in two directions, so it would be in my own interest to enquire as to your own sympathies.’

The horsemen were all eying me with greater interest now. Some were grinning, whilst others were looking on with apparent fascination, or maybe, expectation. Perhaps, they were expecting the leader to draw his pistol and shoot me between the eyes for my insolence. Many men in Missouri, during the border wars, had been killed for less, women and boys too, truth be known. So it was, that with bated breath, I awaited his response.

He smiled what appeared to be a friendly smile, but I wasn’t fooled. This man was the leader of a bunch of heavily armed and dangerous men and he had their respect. What would they think of him if he allowed a kid barely out of short britches and still wet behind the ears, to get away with disrespect?

‘I asked first,’ was his response to the sound of uproarious laughter from his men.

I grinned, partly with relief that the tension had been taken out of the situation and partly, because of his simple but clever response, as I looked up into his smiling face.

‘In that case sir, I will answer your question. I am going to Springfield with determination to join the Confederate forces in the hope that I may strike a blow against the North.’

‘Right answer son,’ he said with a broad grin spreading across his face. ‘I too intend to strike a blow against the north, so it would appear, we are allies.’

‘Yes sir, it does, and I wish you well in your endeavour. Now, by your leave, I will be on my way as I wish to make Springfield by tomorrow afternoon at the latest.’

I turned and set off the way I had been heading, walking stiff backed as I felt the eyes of every man in the group watching me. I listened keenly for the sound of them riding away, but the sound of hooves never came. Instead, a commanding voice rang out.

‘Wait!’

I stopped and turned to face him. Then I waited nervously, to hear what he had to say.

‘It’s a long walk to Springfield son; I can sell you a horse if you’ve a mind to give your legs some respite.’

I smiled wryly.

‘That would be a preferable option sir, but I have truly little by way of possessions and no money at all.’

‘Then how do you propose to get by when you get to Springfield?’

‘Once I join the army, I will be fed and watered and supplied with weapons and a horse and my army pay will allow me to buy anything else I need.’

There were loud guffaws and general laughter from the assembled group. The leader simply sat his horse and looked at me expressionlessly, whilst I in turn could feel my face reddening, partly with anger and partly with the feeling that I was being ridiculed.

‘You are setting your sights high son,’ he said mildly. ‘It is true the confederacy is recruiting, but volunteers are expected to supply their own horses and weaponry, unless you are recruited into an infantry division, in which case you will be expected to march on foot. Even then, you would be expected to supply your own amenities. Therefore, I think you will be turned away until you can fulfil that obligation.’

I stared at him unsure if he was holding me to ridicule or simply telling it as it was.

‘However,’ he continued. ‘I am raising an army and I am recruiting suitable men. How are you at horsemanship and shooting?’

‘I can ride and shoot as good as any man,’ I lied. I could ride a horse, but apart from shooting a few squirrels and occasional wild turkey, I had no idea about firing a gun, especially at another man.

‘Then you may join us if you’ve a mind.’

There was some muttering and sounds of dissent from his men, but he stared at them one by one and they quickly capitulated.

‘It would be an honour to join you sir,’ I said, though with a feeling of some trepidation.

...

His name was William Clarke Quantrill and for the next two years I rode with him and his army. I learned how to shoot and become an excellent horseman. Above all, I learned how to kill, and during those turbulent years, I killed and maimed many men and boys. Possibly, even women. There were so many chaotic raids where indiscriminate gunfire was normal, I was left with little time for remorse. Many of them were acts of revenge. The raid on Lawrence Kansas, was a direct response to the despicable act by the authorities, of imprisoning female sympathisers and, from what we heard, deliberately causing their makeshift prison to collapse upon them, killing four innocent women.

After Lawrence, most of the four hundred strong army led by Quantrill, many of them farmers, returned home where, in acts of retaliation, many were shot and killed, and their homes burned down leaving their women and children homeless. At that time, I worried about my own family. But felt there would be little I could do the way things were, because we became fugitives and I fled to and remained in Texas for a while with Quantrill’s army. It was during our time in Texas, that Quantrill’s band of guerrillas began to break up and we formed into small groups to go our separate ways. I joined up with Bill Anderson, who was also known as, Bloody Bill Anderson. We returned to Missouri as a small army and made many raids on Union soldiers and Union supporters. It was after the raid on Centralia Missouri, that I had my run in with Jim Singer and his brother.