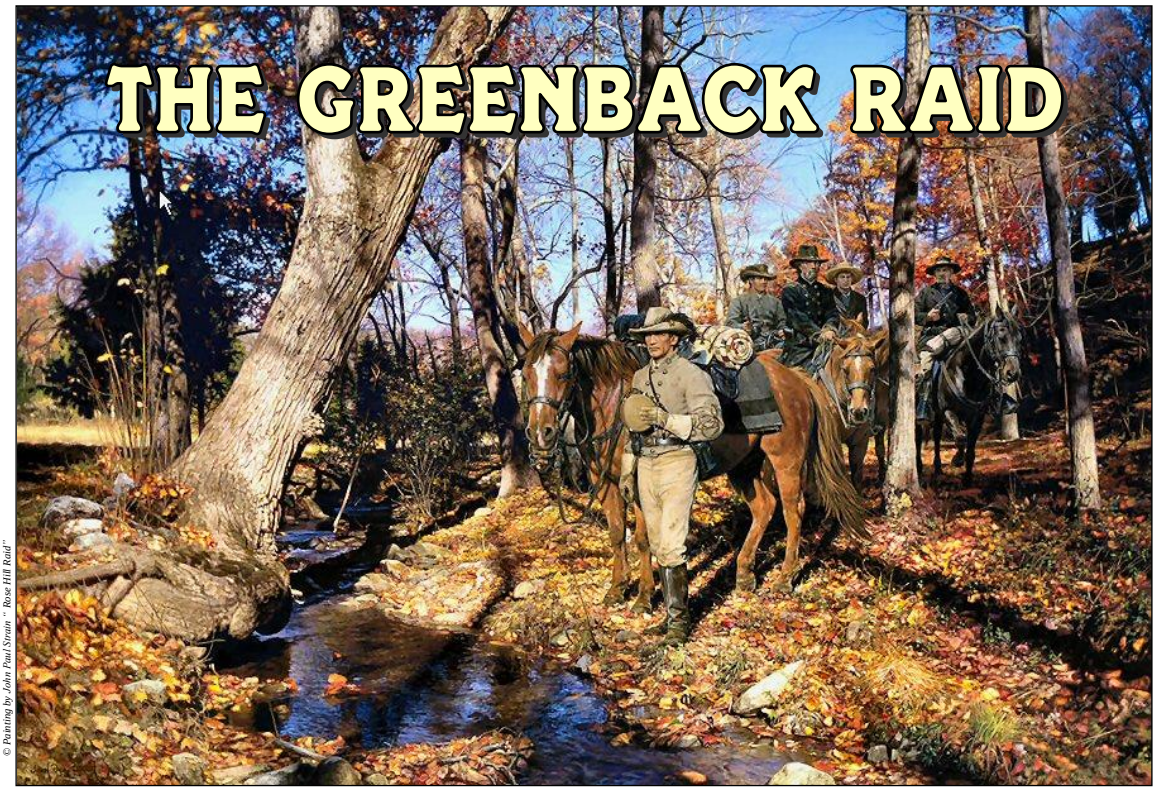


© Painting by John Paul Strain " Rose Hill Raid"

From

The Memoirs of Colonel John S. Mosby

Throughout the fall and winter of 1864, I kept up an incessant warfare on Sheridan and his communications. On October 12, I wrote to my wife:

Near Middleburg.

My dearest Pauline,

I have been engaged in a perpetual strife with the Yankees ever since my arrival. They are now engaged in repairing the railroad (Manassas). I attacked a camp of 800 …

As we operated in Sheridan's rear, the railroad that brought his supplies was his weak point and consequently our favorite object of attack. For security it had to be closely guarded by detachments of troops, which materially reduced his offensive strength. We kept watch for unguarded points, and the opportunity they offered was never lost.

Early in October one of my best men, Jim Wiltshire, afterwards a prominent physician in Baltimore, discovered and reported to me a gap through which we might penetrate between the guards and reach that railroad without exciting an alarm. It was a hazardous enterprise, as there were camps along the line and frequent communication between them, but I knew it would injure Sheridan to destroy a train and compel him to place stronger guards on the road. So I resolved to take the risk. Jim Wiltshire had a time-table and we knew the minute when the train was due and so timed our arrival that we would not have to wait long.

There was great danger of our being discovered by the patrols on the road and our presence reported to the camps that were near. The situation was critical, but we were so buoyant with hope that we did not realize it. The western-bound passenger train was selected from the schedule as I knew it would create a greater sensation to burn it than any other; it was due about two o'clock in the morning. Wiltshire conducted us to a long, deep cut on the railroad. No patrol or picket was in sight. I preferred derailing the train in a cut to running it off an embankment, because there would be less danger of the passengers being hurt. People who travel on a railroad in a country where military operations are going on take the risk of all these accidents of war. I was not conducting an insurance business on life or property.

It was a lovely night, bright and clear, with a big Jack Frost on the ground. I believe that I was the only member of my command who went through the war without a watch, but all of my men had watches, and we knew it would not be long before the train would be due. Videttes were sent out, and the men were ordered to lie down on the bank of the railroad and keep quiet. We had ridden all day and were tired and sleepy, so we were soon peacefully dreaming. I laid my head in the lap of one of my men, Curg Hutchinson, and fell asleep. For some reason - I suppose it was because we were sleeping so soundly - we did not hear the train coming until it got up in the cut, and I was aroused and astounded by an explosion and a crash. As we had displaced a rail, the engine had run off the track, the boiler burst, and the air was filled with red-hot cinders and escaping steam. A. good description of the scene can be found in Dante's "Inferno". Above all could be heard the screams of the passengers - especially women. The catastrophe came so suddenly that my men at first seemed to be stunned and bewildered. Knowing that the railroad guards would soon hear of it and that no time was to be lost, I ran along the line and pushed my men down the bank, ordering them to go to work pulling out the passengers and setting fire to the cars.

By this time Curg Hutchinson had recovered from the shock and had jumped on the train. When the train came up, he was snoring and dreaming that he was in Hell; and when he was awakened by the crash, he found himself breathing steam and in a sparkling shower. He had no doubt then that his dream was not all a dream. But he recovered his senses when I gave him a push, and he slid down a bank.

It did not take long to pull out the passengers. While all of this was going on, I stood on the bank giving directions to the men. One of them reported to me that a car was filled with Germans, and that they would not get out. I told him, *"Set fire to the car and burn the Dutch, if they won't come out."* They were immigrants going west to locate homesteads and did not understand a word of English, or what all this meant. They had through tickets and thought they had a right to keep their seats. There was a lot of *New York Heralds* on the train for Sheridan's army. So my men circulated the papers through the train and applied matches. Suddenly there was a grand illumination. The Germans now took in the situation and came tumbling, all in a pile, out of the flames. I hope they all lived to be naturalized and get homes. They ought not to blame me, but Sheridan; it was his business, not mine, to protect them.

While we were helping the passengers to climb the steep bank, one of my men, Cab Maddux, who had been sent off as a vidette to watch the road, came dashing up and cried out that the Yankees were coming. I immediately gave orders to mount quickly and form, and one was sent to find out if the report was true. He soon came back and said it was not. The men then dismounted and went to work again. I was very mad with Cab for almost creating a stampede and told him that I had a good mind to have him

shot. Cab was quick-witted, but, seeing how angry I was, said nothing then. But he often related the circumstance after the war. His well-varnished account of it was that I ordered him to be shot at sunrise that he said he hoped it would be a foggy morning, and that I was so much amused by his reply that I relented and pardoned him. Years afterwards Cab confessed why he gave the false alarm. He said he heard the noise the train made when it ran off the track and knew the men were gathering the spoils and did not think it was fair for him to be away picketing for their benefit. He also said that after he got to the burning cars he made up for lost time.

A great many ludicrous incidents occurred. One lady ran up to me and exclaimed, *"Oh, my father is a Mason!"* I had no time to say anything but, *"I can't help it."* One passenger claimed immunity for himself on the ground that he was a member of an aristocratic church in Baltimore.

Just as Cab dashed up, two of my men, Charlie Dear and West Aldridge, came to me and reported that they had two U. S. Paymasters with their satchels of greenbacks. Knowing it would be safer to send them out by a small party, which could easily elude the enemy, one of my lieutenants, Charlie Grogan, was detailed with two or three men to take them over the ridge to our rendezvous.

Whether my men got anything in the shape of pocketbooks, watches, or other valuable articles, I never inquired, and I was too busy attending to the destroying of the train to see whether they did. We left all the civilians, including the ladies, to keep warm by the burning cars, and the soldiers were taken with us as prisoners. Among the latter was a young German lieutenant who had just received a commission and was on his way to join his regiment in Sheridan's army. I was attracted by his personal appearance, struck up a conversation with him, and rode by him for several miles. He was dressed in a fine beaver cloth overcoat, high boots, and a new hat with gilt cord and tassel. After we were pretty well acquainted, I said to him, *"We have done you no harm. Why did you come over here to fight us?" "Oh,"* he said, *"I only come to learn de art of war."* I then left him and rode to the head of the column, as the enemy was about, and there was a prospect of a fight. It was not long before the German came trotting up to join me. There had been such a metamorphosis that I scarcely recognized him. One of my men had exchanged his old clothes with him for his new ones, and he complained about it. I asked him if he had not told me that he came to Virginia to learn the art of war.

"Yes," he replied.

"Very well," I said, *"this is your first lesson."*

Now it must not be thought that the habit of appropriating the enemy's goods was peculiar to my men - through all ages it has been to custom of war. Not long after this incident I had to suffer from the same operation - was shot at night and stripped of my clothes. Forty years afterwards a lady returned to me the hat which I was wearing. She said that her uncle, Lieutenant-Colonel Coles of the regiment that captured it, had given it to her as a relic of the war. That is war. I am willing to admit, however, that in a statement of mutual accounts at that time my men were largely in debt to Sheridan's men.

Before we reached the Shenandoah River, a citizen told us that a Captain Blazer was roving around the neighborhood looking for us. He commanded a picked corps, armed with Spencer carbines - seven-shooters - that had been assigned by Sheridan to the special duty of looking for me. My men had had an easy time capturing the train, and, although they were not indifferent to greenbacks, their mettle was up when they heard

that "Old Blaze", as they called him, was about. They were eager for a fight in which they could win more laurels. It was not long before we struck Blazer's trail and saw his camp fires where he had spent the night. I could no longer restrain the men - they rushed into the camp *"as reapers descend to the harvests of death."* But Blazer was gone! He was a bold but cautious commander and had left before daybreak. But this only postponed his fate for a few weeks, when Captain Dolly Richards met him near the same spot and wiped him out forever.

We crossed the Shenandoah and Blue Ridge before noon and found Grogan's party with the greenbacks waiting for us at the appointed place in Loudoun County. The men were ordered to dismount and fall in line, and three were appointed - Charlie Hall, Mountjoy, and Fount Beattie - to open the satchels and count the money in their presence. I ordered it to be divided equally among them and no distinction to be made between officers and men. My command was organized under an act of the Confederate Congress to raise partisan corps; it applied the principle of maritime prize law to land war. Of course, the motive of the act was to stimulate enterprise.

The burning of this train in the midst of Sheridan's troops and the capture of his paymasters created a great sensation. Of course, the railroad people thought that Sheridan had not given adequate protection to their road. The following dispatch shows what General Lee thought of the importance of the blow I struck.

Chaffin's Bluff, October 16th, 1864.

On the 14th instant Colonel Mosby struck the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad at Duffield's, destroyed U. S. military train consisting of locomotive and ten cars, securing twenty prisoners and fifteen horses. Amongst the prisoners are two paymasters with $168,000 in Government funds.
(Signed) R. E. Lee, General. Hon. James A. Seddon, Secretary of War.

The paymasters and other prisoners were sent south to prison, and one of them, Major Ruggles, died there. They were unjustly charged with being in collusion with me, but their capture was simply an ordinary incident of war. As the Government held them responsible for the loss of the funds, they had to apply to Congress for relief. After the war, Major Moore came to see me to get a certificate of the fact that I had captured the money. The certificate stated that my report to General Lee of $168,000 captured was based upon erroneous information and was sent off before I had received the report of the commissioners appointed to count and distribute the money. The sum captured was $173,000.

The attack was made on the train on the night of October 13 between Martinsburg and Harper's Ferry. During the day, as the following dispatch shows, we had operated on the Valley Pike and moved at night to the railroad.

[Seward, at Martinsburg, to Stevenson, at Harper's Ferry]

Four scouts have just arrived and reported that they were attacked about eight miles this side of Winchester by a party of fifty guerrillas this afternoon. They all seem to be positive that they were attacked by Mosby's men and that Mosby with one foot bound up was with them.

It is true that I was there and with one foot bound up. In fact I had on only one boot. I suppose the scouts heard this from some citizen who saw me. A few days before my

horse had been shot in a fight, and a Yankee cavalryman rode over me. His horse trod on my foot and bruised it so that for some time I could wear only a sock and had to use a cane when I walked. I was in this condition when we captured the train.

[Stanton, Secretary of War, to Stevenson, Harper's Ferry]

Washington, October 14, 1864.

It is reported from Martinsburg that the railroad has been torn up and a paymaster and his funds captured. When and where did this occur and have any measures been taken for recapture? Immediate answer.

[Stevenson to Stanton]

Just heard from captured train. The attacking party was part of Mosby's command. They removed a rail, causing train to be thrown off track, then robbed the passengers and burned train. The point of attack was about two miles east of Kearneysville, about 2.30 A.M. Paymasters Moore and Ruggles with their funds were captured and carried off. . . . General Seward telegraphs that his courier parties were attacked last night twice by Mosby's command between Bunker Hill and Winchester and dispersed.

[Stevenson to Stanton]

The cavalry sent out in pursuit of Mosby's guerrillas, who burned the train, have returned. Report they failed to overtake them. They learned that they moved off in the direction of the Shenandoah and having several hours' start, succeeded in getting away with their prisoners and plunder.

At that time there were a number of paymasters at Martinsburg on their way to pay off Sheridan's soldiers, and they were now in a state of blockade. One of them who was shut up there said in a dispatch:

I have my funds in the parlor of the United States Hotel here, guarded by a regiment. The express train was burned eight miles west of Harper's Ferry between 2 and 3 o'clock this A.M. Major Ruggles' clerk escaped and is now with me … General Seward, who is in command here, says he will use all his efforts to protect us and our money. I shall make no move till I can do so with safety.

The following telegram from Stevenson to Sheridan shows his anxiety about the safety of the trains and that Sheridan had as much cause to give his attention to his rear as to his front:

Mosby has now concentrated his guerrillas in your rear and commenced operations; burning railroad trains, robbing passengers, which without cavalry I am powerless to prevent. He at the same time threatens all your supply trains.

[Stevenson to Halleck]

At least 1000 good cavalry should be attached to this command to protect us against the sudden dashes of the guerrilla organizations infesting this part of the country [My battalion was the only Confederate force in that region]. If I had this cavalry I could safely say Mosby could not reach the railroad.

But our operations that day were not confined to the Shenandoah Valley, but extended east of the Blue Ridge to the vicinity of Washington, where preparations were made to keep us south of the Potomac. Later in the same day we captured the train ten

miles west of Harper's Ferry. Captain William Chapman, with two companies of my battalion, crossed the Potomac a few miles east of it and struck the canal and railroad in Maryland. The alarm caused by the burning of the train in the morning had not subsided before news came of a fresh attack on the road at another point, and troops were hurried from Baltimore and other places to meet it. But, of course, when the troops got there, the damage had been done and my men had gone.

[Stevenson to French]

Move with all your available cavalry at once to Point of Rocks, Md.; unite your force with the forces in that vicinity and attack a body of rebel cavalry near Adamstown.

[Lawrence, A. A. G., to Halleck]

Bal't., Oct. 14th, 1864.

The enemy was at Buckeyestown, four miles from the Monocacy, at 4 P.M. this evening.

Another dispatch said:

All lost. Even citizens were passing through here from Poolsville with horses to get away from the rebels. They report 2,000 rebels between there and Monocacy.

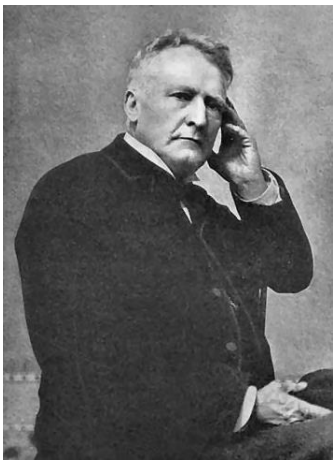
[Prescott Smith to President Garrett of the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad]

October 15.

We have no fresh alarms but the two affairs badly damaged the working of the road and will involve an immense loss to the company in every way.

This meant that the railroad must be more strongly guarded if communication was to be kept up between the Shenandoah Valley, Washington, and Baltimore. Troops were rushed from many points to guard the railroad and the canal. My object had then been accomplished.

The illustration at the beginning of this article is a copy of the oil painting "Rose Hill Raid" by American artist John Paul Strain. The CHAB is indebted to Mr. Strain for granting the association the kind permission to reproduce his artwork.



John S. Mosby, aged 55