

**AMERICAN CIVIL WAR ROUND TABLE OF AUSTRALIA
(NEW SOUTH WALES CHAPTER)
www.americancivilwar.asn.au**

**JOHN SINGLETON MOSBY
- THE GREY GHOST**

AUGUST 2006

This paper has been prepared by Angus Hordern as the basis for his presentation at the August 2006 meeting of the New South Wales Chapter of the American Civil War Round Table of Australia.

The operations of Colonel John Singleton Mosby throughout the American Civil War have fascinated Civil War scholars and enthusiasts alike and this paper spares nothing in highlighting the exploits of a truly remarkable leader of men. In particular, the intelligence and materiel support Mosby received from the local population within the "Mosby Confederacy" provides an object lesson for those who seek to wage war today.

Angus makes no attempt to hide his admiration for Mosby and in this paper recounts many of mistakes made by Union officers and troops in their futile attempts to take this "thorn in the side" out of the Union cause.

The paper is commended to all, but particularly to those historians and enthusiasts who have an interest in the use of irregular troops in affecting the course of battles and war.

MOSBY'S EARLY LIFE

John Singleton Mosby was born in Edgemont, Virginia on December 6, 1833 the son of a slave owner. When he was 5 or 6 years old, the family moved to a farm outside Charlottesville where his father prospered. One of a family of two sons and seven daughters, one of whom died in infancy, John Mosby went to a school near the family farm and, at the age of ten transferred to a school in Charlottesville some four miles from his father's farm. He was a keen student but unlike most boys of his age, he detested physical activities. In his own words:

"I always had a literary taste"

In October 1850 Mosby became a student at the University of Virginia in Charlottesville where, during he first year, he excelled in English, Latin and Greek, whilst struggling with Mathematics. At this time, he was plagued with chronic illnesses but in his second and third years at the University he continued to excel in languages and literature and began studies in Chemistry and Moral Philosophy. In the spring of 1851 he assaulted a local constable during a brawl in the town for which he was fined ten dollars.

In early 1853 Mosby shot George Turpin, the town bully, who had confronted him over a "please explain" letter Mosby had written to him. Consequently, Mosby was found not guilty of "malicious shooting" but guilty of "unlawful shooting" and was sentenced to one year in the local gaol and payment of a 500 dollar fine. Mosby served seven months of his one-year gaol term with the Governor pardoning him in December 1853 fifteen days after his twentieth birthday. Mosby was said to be so affected by his trial, conviction and imprisonment that he never referred to it again particularly in his later memoirs. It was during his imprisonment, however, that Mosby began his interest and study of the law. On his release from gaol, he continued his law studies with his being admitted to the bar some months later.

Mosby was somewhat frail looking but, as he was to show during the War, he had untiring energy and appeared never to rest. He stood 5 foot 7 inches tall and weighed approximately 128 pounds. He was of fair complexion with sandy coloured hair with his most dominant feature being his piercing blue eyes. His character was such that he could not be indifferent towards people - he was either completely for or against a man!

Mosby opened his law practice in Howardsville, Va, where he met Pauline Clarke, the daughter of a former Congressman and diplomat. They married in December 1857 and relocated to Bristol, Va., where he opened what was to become a very successful practice.

SECESSION AND WAR

Mosby opposed the secession of the states of the Lower South following the election of Lincoln in November 1860 but reluctantly joined the local militia unit, the Washington Mounted Rifles, as a private soldier in the winter of 1861. This company was commanded by Captain William E "Grumble" Jones. With the outbreak of war, Mosby's unit moved to join the Confederate forces and was organised as Company D, 1st Virginia Cavalry. On July 21, 1861 his unit first saw action under the command of JEB Stuart at the Battle of First Manassas.

Mosby had little liking for the routine of military life, preferring scouting and patrolling duties. Nevertheless, Jones saw promise in him with Mosby being selected with five others to receive the six Colt pistols issued to the Company and on February 14, 1862 appointed him as the Regiment's Adjutant. Subsequently, Mosby was promoted to the rank of first lieutenant on April 2, 1862.

When Fitzhugh Lee replaced “Grumble” Jones as Commanding Officer of the 1st Virginia Regiment, Mosby, who detested Fitzhugh Lee personally, resigned as Adjutant and, also, his commission on April 23. JEB Stuart heard of these resignations, however, and assigned him to his personal staff. This appointment began what was to be the most important association of Mosby’s military career. Mosby was to state after the War that Stuart:

“... made me what I was in the war, but for his friendship, I would never have been heard of ... was the best friend I ever had”

By June 1862, the Union Army was within six miles of Richmond. General Robert E Lee had just taken command of the Confederate forces and instructed his cavalry commander JEB Stuart to conduct a scouting mission of the Union lines. Stuart then instructed Mosby to conduct this scouting mission on his behalf. Mosby returned to advise Stuart that McClellan’s right flank was wide open. Two days later on June 12, 1862, 1200 Confederate riders commenced their four-day ride around the Union Army with Mosby riding at the vanguard of this group during the entire raid.

On July 20, 1862, Mosby was captured and then, rather surprisingly, paroled within ten days in exchange for a Union Lieutenant, C A Bayward – a decision that was to prove very costly for the North. Mosby returned to Stuart and served at the Battles of Second Manassas, Antietam and Fredericksburg, each largely without public distinction.

FORMATION OF MOSBY’S RANGERS

On December 30, 1862 Mosby and Stuart met and Mosby discussed conducting guerrilla forays into Loudon County, Virginia during winter with nine men from his Regiment. The region Mosby selected was on the outskirts of Washington across the Blue Ridge Mountains and into the Shenandoah Valley and beyond the Potomac River into Maryland. Mosby argued that Union advances on Richmond now greatly exposed the North’s supply and communication lines.

“...A small force moving with the celerity and threatening many Points on a line can neutralise 100 times its own number,”¹.

This territory represented 100 square miles of forested mountains, wood lots, and hills, all amongst fertile farmland. County lanes with stone walls helped conceal movement. Small towns provided a network of informants. Mosby’s mission was to weaken the Northern armies invading Virginia by harassing their rear and thus disproportionately waste Union resources. Mosby handpicked nine men who were from his old unit the 1st Virginia Cavalry Regiment. On January 10, 1863 he attacked the Yankees at Herndon Street, Alexandria on the Loudon and Hampshire railroad line.

Mosby then met with Stuart to request another 15 men for his command. Stuart and Lee always gave written instructions to Mosby due to the nature of his independent command. These 15 men now formed the nucleus of what was to become Mosby’s Ranger’s.

¹ Wert Jeffrey D., *Mosby’s Rangers*: New York, A Touchstone Book published by Simon and Schuster, 1990. p 34.

STOUGHTON RAID

Mosby's fame at the national level came from his capturing of Union Brigadier General Stoughton from his headquarters in the centre of a garrisoned village on the outskirts of Washington. Following this raid Lee issued Special Order # 82 in which Mosby was officially commissioned with the rank of Captain. In these orders Lee stated:

*"the Genl Commdg (sic) is confident that this manifestation of the appropriation of his superiors, will but serve to incite Captain Mosby to still greater efforts to advance the good of the cause in which we are engaged"*²

Lincoln's reaction to news of the Stoughton Raid displayed the President's wry sense of humour when he remarked that he:

*"... didn't mind the loss of the brigadier as much as the horses I can make much better Generals in five minutes, but the horses cost \$125 a piece"*³

March 1862 saw the expansion of Mosby's Ranger's from the original 15 members. The new men were sourced from the 1st Virginia Regiment commanded by FitzHugh Lee. Mosby's battalion gradually evolved during this month. On March 31, the Federals had gained information that Mosby was staying the night at Miskel's farmhouse in Loudoun County with 150 of his troopers and should have succeeded in surrounding the homestead. This attempt was foiled, however, when Mosby was forewarned⁴ and the Union commander, Captain Henry C Flint adopted the wrong tactics⁵ and was mortally wounded after ordering a sabre and pistol charge on Mosby's troops in the early light of April 1. Never again would the Union forces have such an opportunity to kill or capture Mosby and his command.

Again, at Aldie Mill the Federals were foiled in their attempt to capture Mosby. The Federals had taken prisoners, however, and were to teach the civilian population of the cost that they would pay for supporting the Confederate guerrillas. Mosby himself barely avoided capture twice. At one time Mosby was isolated and was charged by seven Union Cavalrymen. He personally killed three of the enemy but the other four closed in on him with sabres. Using his pistols Mosby succeeded in fending off their sabre thrusts until a fellow Ranger came to his rescue, killing two of the assailants thus causing the other two to flee.

Mosby then succeeded in acquiring from JEB Stuart a mountain howitzer, which he then used against Federal trains along the Orange and Alexandria Railroad. Mosby succeeded in destroying one train and sacking a 14-car supply train, although this alerted the Federals who caught up with the Rebels, and subsequently captured the howitzer.

² *ibid.*, p 46-7

³ *ibid.*, p 48.

⁴ In this regard, the Union forces comprising five companies of the of the 1st Vermont Cavalry, comprising around 150 troopers, stopped at a farm on the way to the Miskel's farmhouse. One of Mosby's trooper was visiting this farm at the time and was able to ride across the fields to warn Mosby of the impending attack.

⁵ If Flint had ordered his men to dismount and use their carbines, Mosby's men would have had to ride through gauntlet of rifle fire to escape. The Confederates had no weapons to match the Union carbines and their capture or killing would have been probable.

PAROLING CONFEDERATE GUERRILLAS

During the first week in May 1862, the Federals started questioning the status of paroling guerrillas. Union officials informed Confederate Agent Robert Auld that the exchange of a dozen of Mosby's men, confined in the old Capital Prison would not be exchanged for Federal prisoners because these men were now regarded as bushwhackers and guerrillas and not subject to the normal laws according parole. Auld was able to later persuade the Federals that Mosby's command was, in fact, a regular unit in the Confederate service and the prisoners were paroled. As the War progressed and Mosby's successes increased, however, Grant gave orders for Federal authorities to retain without release, any man captured from Mosby's command in order to weaken his battalion.

FOUNDING THE 43rd BATTALION

On March 23, 1863, Robert E. Lee and JEB Stuart provided separate orders to Mosby to permit the formation of the 43rd Battalion of Virginia Cavalry. This unit was subject to the orders of Lee and Stuart. In contrast to the practice in other units, Mosby appointed his own officers, allowing the men a vote to endorse his choices rather than allowing them the practice of selecting by vote their officers. His absolute control over the elections is reported to have caused some grumbling amongst the ranks but no one ever directly challenged Mosby directly on this issue.

Approximately 1,900 men saw service in Mosby's command from January 1863 until April 1865. At the War's conclusion, Mosby had well over 700 men still under his command, as 779 Ranger's were paroled between April and May 1865. Mosby rarely gathered more than 300 men for an operation, however, because it is unlikely that such large bodies of horsemen could travel without detection and 80 – 90% of his command was from Virginia. Mosby also had a handful of recruits from Canada, England, Ireland, Scotland and a few Northerners. Whilst a few dozen Rangers' were aged in there 30's and even 40's most of Mosby's Ranger's were teenagers or men in there early 20's. Significantly, only 10% of the Rangers had previously served in Confederate forces. Many stayed at their parent's homes and many others resided with family friends or distant relatives. Mosby would arrange to assemble his command for a raid and then send messages to his Rangers to assemble at a specific spot in a specified time. He often gave up to three days notice for Rangers to assemble. Typically, the assembly point was near a blacksmith so as to care for the horses. If Mosby had surplus Rangers for his mission he would send them on a scouting mission elsewhere but he always retained a final detail of men to care for any captured supplies that would later be distributed. The two items, which were indispensable for the Rangers, were their horses and pistols.

The Rangers kept some of the best horses in the old Dominion and cared for them as their lives depended on it. The Rangers used a single shot, single action. 44-calibre army colt revolver and, after the War Mosby was to claim:

"I think we did more than any other body of men to give the colt pistol it's great reputation"⁶

Mosby's Rangers acquired these weapons from captive Yankee cavalrymen:

"During the War the Union Government purchased 127,156 army colts at \$13.75 per gun making it the standard side arm for its forces. The Ranger's in turn like their compatriots in the Confederate Army relied on their enemy to meet their supply needs"⁷

⁶ *ibid*, p 81.

⁷ *ibid*, p 81

It is interesting to draw a parallel between Mosby and Jackson at this time. Both Commanders were accused by their soldiers of not sharing orders and keeping their plans to themselves. To this Mosby replied,

“Only three men in the Confederate Army knew what I was doing or intended to do! They were Lee, Stuart and myself!”⁸

Mosby maintained the success with his operations was attributed mainly to surprise and charging with pistols firing. He often said that if he were going to fight, it was best to be the attacker. Mosby divided the spoils amongst the members of the raiding party never taking any for himself, not even horses of which he had six. This system rewarded the individual spirit by encouraging a healthy rivalry amongst the men and at the same time removed the problem of men leaving to obtain their plunder in the middle of combat. Mosby continued to exert constant pressure on the Federal camps and lines of communication and gather valuable reconnaissance for Stuart and Lee.

“I wanted to use and consume the Northern Cavalry in hard work”⁹

Mosby succeeded in avoiding capture on numerous occasions, however, none were perhaps as more dramatic than when a detachment of the 1st New York Cavalry were “tipped off” on Mosby’s visit to Salem where he was spending the night with his wife, Pauline. Upon the Yankees breaking into the house where Mosby was visiting his wife, he succeeded in quickly dressing, climbing out the bedroom window and staying perched on a branch of a large walnut tree several stories above the ground. He left his spurs on the floor of the room where his wife was interrogated by the Federals. Not finding Mosby, they searched the grounds, failing to look above their heads in the walnut tree adjacent to the house where Mosby remained perched for several hours in the freezing cold. Upon the Federals leaving the house and taking Mosby’s horse with them, he climbed from the tree back into the bedroom. The tree still stands today except the bough next to the window has been cut off!

THE GETTYSBURG CAMPAIGN

On June 9, 1863 at the largest cavalry engagement of the War was fought at Brandy Station. Despite the Confederates holding the field at the end of the battle, the Federals had fought with tenacity not shown in previous battles. No longer did the Confederate cavalry hold superiority over the Federals as it had in the first two years of the War. At this time, Pleasonton, who commanded the Federal cavalry force, sought and obtained Hooker’s permission to bribe Mosby to obtain his services. The plot apparently evaporated and there was no further evidence of a formal proposition ever being made to Mosby.

Mosby delivered critical intelligence to Stuart on June 18, concerning Pleasonton’s cavalry. Mosby had penetrated Pleasonton’s lines around Aldie and captured papers revealing that Pleasonton’s entire command of nearly 7,000 troopers was concentrating near Aldie. Mosby presented this information personally to Stuart. He then reported to Stuart on June 23 that Stuart’s cavalry could ride through Hooker’s dispersed Infantry Corps and ford the Potomac between the Federal Army and Washington. Mosby suggested that Stuart could cross the river at Senecaport. It was at this critical time prior to the Battle of Gettysburg that matters unravelled influencing Stuart’s decision in splitting his cavalry force. The exact details will never be exactly known however Lee on June 23 issued orders to Stuart directing him to “... move on and field the right of Ewell’s 2nd Corps”, which was the vanguard of the Confederate invasion. These orders were, at best, discretionary and certainly imprecise. Mosby again reported back to Stuart on June 24, reiterating his belief that Stuart could move between the Federal infantry now marching north. At 0100hrs on June 25, Stuart with three brigades moved out of Salem towards the Bull Run Mountains, however, instead of finding a clear passage, they found a road clogged with Union infantrymen. Stuart was forced to swing around this

⁸ *ibid*, p 82

⁹ *ibid*, p 84

John Singleton Mosby - The Grey Ghost

column in a wider arc thus losing valuable time. It was not until June 27/28, that Stuart actually was able to ford the Potomac. Further delays resulted in Stuart completing his ride around Hooker without providing the necessary reconnaissance reports that Lee's Army now required before stumbling into a major engagement at Gettysburg on July 1. Mosby's intelligence reports contributed to Stuart's decision to interpret Lee's orders in the broadest sense, but Mosby had not seen the large Union corps on the march and by the time Stuart reached Haymarket, Mosby's information was outdated.

It should be noted that after the War, Mosby wrote numerous articles including a book trying to absolve Stuart of his share of the blame for Gettysburg, a controversy that endures to this day. This crusade Mosby took to his grave. During this campaign, Mosby's men were dispersed except for those on scouting duties and, significantly, saw no action.

SUTLER TRAINS

After Gettysburg, Mosby organised his Rangers to attack Sutler trains which were civilian wagon trains containing war goods sold by a private businesses to the Army. Lee is reported to have criticised Mosby for his repeated attacks on these Sutler trains. Lee preferred that Mosby concentrate his efforts on attacking railroads, which were the main supply source for the Federals. Mosby did not have the means by which to damage the railways and the Sutler trains continued to provide valuable resources for his Rangers keeping them supplied and recruiting new members and supplies. It was during this period Stuart twice recommended Mosby for promotion to Lee.

GOODLING'S TAVERN

Mosby's war was a series of localised skirmishes as evidenced by the Goodling Tavern raid. With around 30 Rangers he attacked the California Battalion who prided themselves on their toughness. In the battle that ensued Mosby succeeded in securing a large herd of horses, but was shot in the ankle and groin. Despite this he was able to secure the horses and extract his Rangers before the Federals could counterattack. On hearing of Mosby's wounding Stuart praised him for his "boldness and skill", but Mosby's wounds disabled him for well over a month.

Mosby to prove to the Northern press that he was still alive and well when, with four other Rangers, he rode deep into Federal territory into Fairfax County, and sought to capture the Governor of West Virginia – Francis H Piermont. Piermont was not at home on the night of Mosby's attempted kidnapping as he was spending the night in Washington. In residence was Colonel D H Dulany, however, who was Piermont's military aide. Mosby captured Dulany and brought him back into his Confederacy. This not only proved to the Northern press that he was still alive but still very capable of penetrating up to the doorsteps of the capital and capturing Union leaders.

MOSBY'S CONFEDERACY

In the summer of 1864, Mosby officially defined his "Confederacy". It was contained in a large triangle which began in the North West at Snickersville at the start of the Snickers Gap and the Blue Ridge, ran southwards along the mountains to Lindon at the mouth of Manassas Gap and then turned eastward through upper Fauquier Plains to the Plains along the Bull Run Mountains to Aldie. It was an area comprising of approximately 125 square miles of land and embracing the counties of Fauquier, Loudoun, Fairfax and Prince William. Mosby's success was reliant upon the trust that he obtained from the local population. In this regard, a young local woman wrote

*"we all had brothers, cousins and lovers with Mosby
and each one thought of her own loved one"¹⁰*

The partisans had an "open-door" policy in the majority of homesteads throughout the Mosby Confederacy. "Safe houses" dotted Mosby's Confederacy with each safe house having a hiding place for the Rangers. Mosby's men called these "secret closets" and they included underground passageways leading to an outside exit or a false wall/panel in a room. The local population who supported Mosby's Rangers knew that if the Confederates were discovered in their residences, they faced incarceration and great reprisal from the Federal authorities. Consequently, the local population were always on alert and served as a vast warning intelligence network for the Rangers with nearly every house in the region holding a spy or a messenger for the guerrilla commands functioning at all times, day and night.

The presence of the Rangers in the region was a "win-win" situation for the local population. Mosby's men obtained the booty and money from their raids and shared them with the locals and then assisted in ploughing fields, harvesting crops and patrolling against undisciplined guerrillas who infested the mountains. Mosby with his legal background brought justice to a time of disorder so as 1863 gave way to 1864 the people of "Mosby's Confederacy" remained steadfast in their loyalty to "Old Mose". In the winter of 1864, Mosby continued his raids against the Federals. Stuart, being apprised of the situation, wrote to Lee commending Mosby in the following terms:

*"his sleepless vigilance and unceasing activity have done
the enemy great damage" declared Stuart about Mosby"¹¹*

BETRAYED

Mosby continued to succeed in keeping a large force of Federal cavalry continually deployed in the Fairfax region. The Northern press continued to belittle the Federal horsemen who continually failed to contain Mosby's actions. Thomas Rosser who was serving in the Shenandoah Valley wrote to Lee on January 11, 1864, describing irregular commands such as Mosby's as a :

"nuisance and an evil to the service".

On February 16, 1864, Ranger John Cornwall who acted as the battalion's quartermaster was disallowed some expenses when submitted to Mosby. Outraged by the rebuke, Cornwall defected to the Federals and then led a large force of 350 Cavalrymen against Mosby's safe houses. This resulted in the capture of 28 Rangers, which was the largest loss of men Mosby experienced at any time during the entire War. As a consequence, many of the Rangers were forced into the mountains or caves, thus disrupting Mosby's efficiency at this time.

¹⁰ *ibid*, p 116

¹¹ *ibid*, p 138

BATTLE OF THE WILDERNESS

Work for the 43rd Battalion took on a new dimension when Grant launched his attacks on Lee in the Wilderness. Mosby deployed his Company A and D against the rear of Grant's army and Company B and C against Sigel across the Blue Ridge. The men knew their work well with scouts tasked to locate weak points along the Federal lines and then attacking at these points. The mission was to draw troops away from the main invading force. An interesting incident occurred on May 8, when Mosby sent his Rangers to intercept a 20-wagon caravan. The Rangers worked swiftly successfully cutting the train in two by sending the rear half of the wagon train down a side road. Just as the separation had been completed a Union officer in the escort reined up demanding to know who stopped the wagons and ordered them to turn off the road. The reply received was simply "Colonel Mosby" as a revolver was drawn on the unfortunate Union officer. The Rangers rode to the front of the train, stopped it and after unhitching the teams disappeared into the darkness with prisoners, horses and mules.

On May 12, 1864, JEB Stuart died in Richmond as a result of an action at Yellow Tavern. Mosby declared that he was his "best friend in the Army". Significantly, after Stuart's death Mosby reported directly to Lee and was the only commander beneath corps level in the Army of Northern Virginia ever to do so. On May 20, Mosby's Rangers were surrounded by Union infantry. Acting quickly, one of Mosby's commanders, Glascock, waved his men forward at the gallop and in front of the Yankees shouted,

"Mosby is after us! Get out of the way!"

The Federals mistook the Confederates for Union cavalymen and allowed them to escape. Interestingly, at this time Mosby came upon a Federal soldier, thought to be straggler, who was attempting to burn down a house in Newtown. Mosby hanged him instantly and sent a dispatch to Union Major General David Hunter that he would kill every prisoner he took if these burnings continued. It was at this time, also, that Mosby prescribed to his men the limits of his Confederacy and required all men to live within these boundaries. Roll calls were made at each rendezvous and if a member missed two successive meetings without permission or acceptable reason he would be sent to Lee's army. At this time, the effective strength of Mosby's command was 200 Rangers. It was at Mt Zion Church in an exchange between the Union California Battalion that Mosby's men confessed that they respected the Californian's above all their enemies.

On July 7, Mosby sent Rangers Bowie and Nelson to General Early who had been dispatched by Lee to advance into the Shenandoah and defeat Hunter's forces. Mosby's note to Early was:

"I will obey any order you will send me"¹²

In post-war records no secret is made of the fact that Mosby loathed Early. Mosby had accused Early of drunkenness and stated that his Rangers Beattie and Heaton had observed Early drinking in their presence and stated, "He could scarcely stand". Significantly, Early failed to work with Mosby and after Early's attack upon Washington DC on July 11, 1864, he returned to Lee without having any further contact with Mosby. Early was known to have a particular disregard for Confederate cavalry and, furthermore, despised Mosby's independent unit choosing to disregard any valuable assistance that Mosby could have supplied. Mosby met with Early and it should be noted that for four months Early's outnumbered army defended the Shenandoah Valley, Mosby's Ranger's operated without any direction or co-operation from Early's headquarters. A young boy was known to have said this of Mosby's Ranger's -

*"they had for us all the glamour of Robin Hood and his Merry Men,
all the courage and bravery of the ancient crusaders, the
unexpectedness of benevolent pirates and the stealth of Indians"¹³.*

¹² *ibid*, p 178.

¹³ *ibid*, p 193.

John Singleton Mosby - The Grey Ghost

Mosby learnt of the violent destruction of Early's troops at Cedar Creek after the Battle. Mosby was infuriated again with Early that he had not advised him of this offensive as he could have worked against Sheridan's support lines. Mosby learnt years after from one of Early's staff officers that a member of Early's staff had suggested the idea that Mosby be advised of Early's attack at Cedar Creek and to work in conjunction with this operation. Old Jube was reported to have shot back

"by God I was not going to do the fighting and Colonel Mosby do the plundering".¹⁴

After the Berryville wagon train raid disaster, Grant issued his notorious order:

"if any of Mosby's men are caught hang them without trial".

Sheridan was directed to implement this although he did not publish this order as he believed that in a campaign of reprisals Mosby's men could execute more of his men than he could of Mosby's. Significantly though, Sheridan did comply with Grant's request and arranged for all able bodied male citizens under the age of 50 who were suspected of aiding, assisting or belonging to guerrilla bands to be arrested and confined to Fort McHenry. Sheridan found he could not comply fully with Grant's second proposal, which was to destroy all crops and livestock. He assigned this duty to Christopher Augur who was the commander of the Department of Washington. In September, Sheridan realised that his mission was to defeat Early's army in the Shenandoah Valley and to destroy the Valley's ability to act as a granary for Lee's army at Petersburg. He created, therefore, an independent command with the sole mission of operating against Mosby's Rangers. Sheridan appointed General George Cook to set up this unit and he called his 100-man force the "Legion of Honor". He obtained 100 Spencer rifles from Washington which were a 7 shot repeater which used metal cartridges and gave its users a volume and range of fire unsurpassed in the Confederacy. The Confederates single shot rifles and carbines and 7 shot colt pistols could not match the firepower of these Spencer rifles. Cook then organised Captain Richard Blazer to command this unit.

HANGINGS

On September 2, 1864, Atlanta fell to Sherman's troops and delivered Lincoln's presidential campaign the battlefield victory it required. At this time, Grant visited Sheridan at Charleston and advised Sheridan to "go in" against Early. It was at this time, also, that six of Mosby's Ranger's were captured and executed in retaliation for Mosby's on-going raids. Sergeant Sam Willis of the 1st Rhode Island Cavalry later wrote -

"... those men should never have been hung for not betraying their commander. I think the order of General Talbot was unwise, narrow and cruel in the extreme"¹⁵.

When Mosby's men entered Front Royal they cut down the bodies of the six corpses. 35 years after the war on September 23, 1899, approximately 150 of Mosby's Rangers reassembled at Front Royal. Then elderly men, they formed a column and marched to Prospect Hill Cemetery as a crowd of 5,000 watched them commemorate their fellow Rangers that dark day back in 1864. Mosby at this time had been recovering from a wounding and upon hearing the death of six of his comrades wanted to immediately know which Union officer was responsible for their execution. One or several of the participators stated that according to some citizens of the Front Royal, George Armstrong Custer ordered the shooting and hangings. Mosby is reported to have accepted this and continued to believe this for the rest of his life. Whether Custer actually was the responsible officer or not, no Union records definitely confirm who specifically gave the order. Mosby maintained that Custer had been instrumental in the burning of many households and had been largely outspoken in his disgust of the Rangers. On September 23, 1864, the 13th New York Cavalry received information with regard to the whereabouts of a large store of Mosby's ammunition and supplies. At the Blackwell's house they fell upon the occupants, obtained the contents and burnt all the stores. When confronted with

¹⁴ *ibid*, p 238.

¹⁵ *ibid*, p 218

John Singleton Mosby - The Grey Ghost

the loss of these supplies Mosby was outraged. On October 13, 1864, Ranger John Lunceford of Company B surrendered to Augur's troops. He confessed that he no longer wanted to serve under Mosby's Rangers and led the Yankees to the hidden camp of Mosby's four cannon. The 13th New York Cavalry and two companies of infantry arrived at Mosby's artillery camp and captured eight Rangers. This artillery had greatly contributed to Mosby's success in the Valley. Mosby reported to Lee of the loss of the cannon, but advised that he had killed and captured over 300 of the enemy.

An incident occurred not long before the end of the War where Frankland, who was commanding Company F of Mosby's Rangers, disregarded one of Mosby's direct orders and as a result had his company ingloriously routed by the enemy. Unfortunately, Mosby was wounded at the time and was unable to meet with Frankland, but subsequently asked him to resign his command. Frankland put forward a petition from his men in Company F requesting that their commander be retained. Mosby reportedly replied,

*"they can have him but he could never serve as an officer under me again".*¹⁶

This was indicative that no one in the 43rd Battalion disobeyed an order from Mosby particularly involving the loss of his men and would not receive forgiveness for this from Mosby.

In his memoirs written after the War, Mosby argued that his operations against Manassas Railroad were :

"of greater military value than anything I did in the entire war, for it saved Richmond for several months".

Mosby's operations in the Valley and on Manassas road effectively prevented Sheridan's co-operation with Grant and provided Richmond with an additional six months of life.

When Mosby had learnt of the execution of his men and concluded that George Custer was responsible, he instructed his men that whenever a member of Custer's command was captured the prisoner should be separated from all other captives and not forwarded to Richmond. Mosby had told Robert E. Lee in a letter of 29 October 1864:

"it is my purpose to hang an equal number of Custer's men whenever I capture them".

Lee gave approval to Mosby for this through William H. Mosby who had carried his brother's letter to the Confederate commander. When Lee transmitted Mosby's letter to the War Department Secretary James Seddon concurred. On October 13, 1864 Ranger Willis was captured by Union Cavalry and hung. Consequently, on November 6, Mosby rode to Rectortown and ordered 27 Yankees confined in the store building to be brought outside and taken away from the village. A hat containing 27 slips of paper was passed along the line of these men and each man would draw one slip. Seven of the pieces had a mark on them and if a man pulled out one of these he would be hanged. Most of these men belonged to Custer's command. On November 26, 1864, Sheridan sought to seek retribution on Mosby's support base since Mosby had continued to elude him. Sheridan reportedly said:

*"if the Federals can made the residence of Loudoun and Faquier poor by destroying their property and comforts the residence of that region will cry for peace."*¹⁷

Sheridan was now able to execute Grant's orders to destroy Mosby since he had been able to eradicate Jubal Early from the Shenandoah Valley. Grant's instructions to Sheridan were.

*"there is no doubt about the necessity of clearing out the country so that it would not support Mosby's gang. So long as the war lasts they must be prevented from raising another crop"*¹⁸.

¹⁶ *ibid*, p 238

¹⁷ *ibid*, p 260.

¹⁸ *ibid*, p 260.

Sheridan assigned this duty to Brevet Major General Wesley of Merritt's First Cavalry Division. Apparently no commander in the Army of the Shenandoah had suffered more under the Ranger's than Merritt's three brigades. Interestingly, a lot of the victims in Loudoun were Quakers who were not Union sympathisers and as this became known it reduced uncounted numbers of families to poverty as Sheridan had planned. At this stage Mosby sought retribution upon the Yankees, however, this was largely denied him due to the overwhelming force that Sheridan was now concentrating against him. On October 8, 1864 Mosby and his officers prepared three lists of membership for Rangers. The first list was for those men who enlisted before October 8 1864, a second for those new recruits who joined after that date and a third which contained a master roll of all the companies. The purpose of the inspection and scrutiny of the rolls was to identify deserters from regular service who were avoiding conscription. Desertion and avoidance from the draft plagued the Confederacy.

On January 19, 1865, Mosby was promoted to Colonel and he reorganised his command. During this time Mosby was again grievously wounded. Whilst Mosby was convalescing, Dolly Richards who was in command of one of Mosby's Companies attacked a Union column with 40 men and succeeded in killing, wounding or capturing approximately 90 Federals for the loss of only one man and freeing many captured Rangers.

On 27 March 1865 Lee commenced directing orders to Mosby to guard the Piedmont region. Lee could spare no one from the Petersburg trenches. On Palm Sunday, April 9 1865 at Appomattox Courthouse Virginia, Robert E. Lee surrendered to Ulysses S. Grant. For a week after the fall of Petersburg and Richmond, Lee's army had tried to resist the Army of the Potomac, but Lee was forced to submit to the inevitable. Mosby learnt of Lee's surrender by reading an account from a Baltimore newspaper. On April 10, Major General Godfrey Weitzel, commander of the occupation troops in Richard, telegraphed Grant that Mosby's men should be included in Lee's surrender terms. Grant replied that Mosby's men should be handled by Major General Windfield S. Hancock. Grant at this stage said that all detachments and stragglers from Lee's army will be paroled and permitted to return to their homes, however, the guerrilla chief Mosby is not to be paroled. Initially, Mosby is reported not to have cared concerning Lee's surrender and was known to have boasted that he would fight as long as he had a man left under his command. At this time, the Union's Chief of Staff Halleck wired from the capital that Grant had authorised Hancock to accept the surrender of Mosby's command.

LINCOLN'S ASSASSINATION

On April 15, 1865, Lincoln was assassinated by John Wilkes Booth at Ford's Theatre in Washington. One of the conspirators in Lincoln's assassination was a former Ranger and some historians allege that Mosby had recruited and then sent Lewis Powell, this former Ranger, to assassinate Lincoln. Furthermore other historian's have argued that when the 8th Illinois Cavalry captured Thomas Harney, another former Ranger, who previously had worked with the Torpedo Bureau, he had plans to blow up the White House. Again, it is proposed that Harney had been sent via Mosby for safe passage through Union lines to achieve this mission. Both these cases are unproven and subject to mere rumour-mongering and speculation.

SURRENDER

Mosby had declined Hancock's offer to accept the same terms that he offered to Lee. Mosby advised that he would seek Lee's instructions on this matter. Mosby respected Lee above all others and if Lee advised surrender then this is what Mosby would do. Rather than accept the Yankee surrender, Mosby formed his command once more and addressing his men advised that:

"he disband his force as opposed to surrendering to the Yankees as he would no longer be their commander".

Decades later Mosby, thinking of that day, described it as "... the saddest most sorrowful and pathetic scene". The next day William Chapman, one of Mosby's officers, rode with 200 officers and men to Union forces at Winchester where they signed surrender papers allowing them to keep their horses. At least 779 members of the 43rd battalion were paroled by the end of June 1865. This did not include Mosby who headed south to learn the fate of Joseph Johnston's army with some half a dozen of his former Rangers. Hancock offered a reward of up to \$5,000 for his capture. When Mosby approached Richmond he learnt of Johnston's surrender. At that time Mosby, acknowledged that the War was over and ordered the final disbanding of his last soldiers and arms. He and his brother spent the next several weeks hiding near their father's home outside Linchburg. Mosby became a hunted man but continued, as always, to elude Yankee patrols. Finally, on the direct intervention of Ulysses S. Grant, Mosby had his parole by the month's end and by September he was back in Faquier practising law where his wife Pauline joined him and with their children who he had rarely seen in the last two years.

SUMMARY

Mosby and his Ranger's emerged from the Civil War as the most famous Colonel and battalion the war produced on either side. The truth is that Mosby conceived a plan of warfare, sought and found a favourable theatre, attracted and made the most of suitable men and with them worked out his conception with glorious results. No other unit of its size received such remembrance by former members. Four years separated the publication of Scott's book on Mosby in 1867 and Alexander's in 1907. Mosby's memoirs were released in 1917, one year after his death. The Yankees had referred to Mosby as the "scarlet cloak". Philip Sheridan in the Shenandoah Valley had argued that a more harassing enemy could not well be imagined, referring to Mosby. Another Union officer said "they were a most dangerous element and caused perhaps more loss than any single body of men in the enemy service". Finally Ulysses S. Grant in his memoirs wrote of Mosby:

" there were probably but few men in the South who could have commanded successfully a separate detachment in the rear of an opposing army and so knew the board of hostilities as long as he did without losing his entire command".

Mosby's men had appeared in the depths of darkness as knights dressed in their plumed hats and red lined capes. They captured a Union General in his bed, captured thousands of enemy soldiers, horses and arms and derailed trains and road away barely scathed by these encounters. In the end, they accepted defeat but not surrender. The Ranger's had secured victories – the capture of Edward Stoughton, Miskel's Farm, second Dranesville, Mt Zion Church, the Calico raids, the Berryville wagon raid, the Greenback raid, Gold's Farm, Cabletown and Mt Carmel Church.

The Ranger's casualties amounted to between 35-40% of their command and although precise figures are unknown, 85 members were identified killed, wounded or executed with an additional 16 Ranger's died in prison from disease. Well over 100 fell in combat with wounds. Federals also captured at least 477 Ranger's during the command's existence. Many of these were exchanged and later returned to the battalion and 25 members deserted. Mosby and the 43rd battalion had no equal as guerrillas during the Civil War. The primary credit for this belongs to Mosby.

Mosby had a keen intellect, uncompromising discipline and a sure grasp of the potential of guerrilla warfare. Mosby supplied JEB Stuart and Robert E. Lee with invaluable intelligence and severed Union lines of communication and supplies frequently. The information he supplied to his superiors and the troops he drained from the enemy were invaluable and important accomplishments in themselves.

The Northerner's never really found an effective answer to Mosby not even with the ruthless operators like Grant and Sheridan on the scene. Mosby and his Rangers prevailed in a war of wits against the Union Cavalry despite being better mounted, more numerous and certainly better equipped however with ingenuity, the valour the Ranger's eluded their Federal counterparts. Mosby's Ranger's were farmers and carpenters, livestock breeders, teachers, merchants, businessman and lawyers, like their commander.

AFTER THE WAR

After the War, Mosby returned to his law practice and watched his family grow to four sons and four daughters. He eventually reconciled himself to the outcome of the war and somewhat surprisingly became friends with President Ulysses S. Grant. Like Longstreet he switched to the radical side of politics by joining the Republican Party. To Southerners, this was an act of treason but unlike Longstreet, Mosby simply ignored the condemnation. Grant and future Republican Presidents rewarded Mosby with a Consulship in Hong Kong, a posting to the General Land Office and Assistant Attorney in the Department of Justice.

On May 30, 1916, at the age of 82, Mosby died in Washington DC, the capital of his former enemies. A train carried his remains to Warrenton where he was buried beside Pauline and some of his deceased children.

In the decades after the War, the ranks of the surviving Rangers dwindled. Somewhat surprisingly, Mosby had avoided most if his battalion's reunions making various excuses, but in 1895 he came to one and during the course of his address to his veterans he said:

"... life cannot afford any higher reward of ambition that I have received as commander of the forty-third Virginia Battalion of Cavalry".

REFERENCES

Jones, Virgil Carrington, ***Ranger Mosby***: Chapel Hill, The University of North Carolina Press, 1944.

Wert Jeffrey D., ***Mosby's Rangers***: New York, A Touchstone Book published by Simon and Schuster, 1990.