

Captain Thomas Jones Gregory, Guerrilla Hunter

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Conventional historical wisdom long held that guerrilla warfare had little effect on the outcome of America's most lethal conflict. Hence, for years historians expended relatively little ink on combat between these Confederate marauders and their foes—rear-area Union troops, state militia and Home Guards. But a handful of historians, including Daniel Sutherland, now maintain that guerrilla warfare, most brutal and persistent in border state Missouri and Kentucky, was anything but an adjunct to the wider war. “It is impossible to understand the Civil War without appreciating the scope and impact of the guerrilla conflict,” Sutherland argued in *A Savage Conflict: The Decisive Role of Guerrillas in the Civil War* (2009). “That is no easy thing to do,” he conceded, because guerrilla warfare was “intense and sprawling, born in controversy, and defined by all variety of contradictions, contours, and shadings.”¹

Mao Zedong, the founder of the People's Republic of China, is arguably the most famous and most successful guerrilla leader in history. “Many people think it impossible for guerrillas to exist for long in the enemy's rear,” he wrote in 1937 while fighting Japanese invaders. “Such a belief reveals lack of comprehension of the relationship that should exist between the people and the troops. The former may be likened to water the latter to the fish who inhabit it.”²

Guerrilla “fish” plagued occupying Union forces in the Jackson Purchase, Kentucky's westernmost region, for most of the war because the “water” was welcoming. Dubbed “the South Carolina of Kentucky” for its intense Southern sentiment, the Purchase-Ballard, Calloway, Fulton, Graves, Hickman, Marshall and McCracken counties during the war was Kentucky's only

¹ Daniel E. Sutherland, *A Savage Conflict: The Decisive Role of Guerrillas in the Civil War* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2009), ix.

² Mao Tse-tung On Guerrilla Warfare, “6. The Political Problems Of Guerrilla Warfare”
<https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/mao/works/1937/guerrilla-warfare/ch06.htm>.

Confederate-majority region. Many citizens helped sustain the guerrillas, and the occasional Confederate raiders, providing both groups food, shelter, supplies and intelligence on Union troop movements.³

Most locals welcomed rebel troops as liberators in September, 1861, when they seized Hickman and Columbus on the Mississippi River, thereby shattering the fragile neutrality Kentucky proclaimed in May. Most Paducah citizens hoped the Confederates would also occupy their community where the Ohio and Tennessee rivers converge. They happily hoisted rebel flags in anticipation of the Southerners' advent. But Yankee Brigadier General Ulysses S. Grant beat the enemy to Paducah, the largest town in the Purchase. While the Confederates heavily fortified Columbus with large cannons and dragged a heavy chain across the river to block Yankee boats, Union forces bolstered Paducah with outer works and a small earthen bastion, Fort Anderson, by the Ohio. Meanwhile, the Kentucky legislature embraced the Union war effort, ordering only the Confederates to withdraw and providing for the raising of Union volunteers.⁴

In February, 1862, a Grant-led army-navy expedition captured Fort Henry on the Tennessee River, just over the Volunteer State line, and Fort Donelson on the Cumberland River at Dover, Tennessee. Thus outflanked, the rebels had no choice but to abandon Hickman, Columbus and their other positions in Kentucky. Union forces took Columbus without firing a shot and stayed put for the rest of the war. Regular Confederate forces stayed elsewhere until 1864, when Major General Nathan Bedford Forrest's cavalry raided Paducah. But guerrillas arose in significant numbers soon after the rebels departed Columbus and Hickman. The outlaws kept the Purchase anything but peaceful.

As they did in Missouri, guerrilla bands ranged statewide in Kentucky. "Before the end of the war there was not a county in [Kentucky] which had not been infested by these mediaeval fighters, and the trail they left reminded one of the Thirty Years War in Germany," E. Merton Coulter wrote in *The Civil War and Readjustment in Kentucky*. "Innocent or guilty, old and young, the guerrillas slew regardless of sex, creed, or condition." The historian added, "Their hatreds and revenges seemed insatiable. They stole, plundered, and burned as they hurried along their career of destruction."⁵

³ See Berry Craig, *Kentucky Confederates: Secession, Civil War, and the Jackson Purchase* (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 2014). Carlisle County was carved from southern Ballard County in 1886.

⁴ The fort was named for Kentucky-born Robert Anderson, commander of Fort Anderson, whose bombardment by Confederates started the Civil War. After he surrendered the brick bastion in the harbor of Charleston, S.C., the rebels released him and his garrison. Promoted to brigadier general, he took charge of Union troops in Kentucky in September, 1861, but failing health soon forced him to retire.

⁵ E. Merton Coulter, *The Civil War and Readjustment in Kentucky* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1926), 228-229. Fought between 1618 and 1648, mostly in Germany, the Thirty Years War was the bloodiest religious conflict in European history. It began as a war between Protestant and Catholic German states but drew in several European powers. As many as eight million soldiers and civilians were killed.

While secessionism prevailed in the Purchase, Unionism was the rule in the rest of the state except for a few Confederate counties here and there. Between 90,000 and 100,000 Kentuckians donned Union blue; 25,000 to 40,000 opted for Confederate gray. The legislature made it a crime to join the Confederate army or help the enemy. Yet after the war, Kentucky became intensely pro-Southern. Traitors under the law during the war, the old Johnnies became heroes afterwards. Confederate monuments far outnumbered Union memorials.”⁶

The fate of Thomas Jones Gregory, captain and commander of the Graves County Home Guard, was typical, though he and his men were hated during the war. Though he did not survive, his reputation worsened afterwards. Gregory went down in local Confederate history as the county’s meanest miscreant. In his book, *History of the 3d, 7th, 8th and 12th Kentucky C.S.A.*, Seventh Kentucky veteran Henry George demonized Gregory and his men as “robbers and murderers” who “were guilty of as brutal conduct as any gang of cut-throats” who roamed the region during the war. They were “a terror to the whole community,” he claimed, adding, “if a Confederate fell into their hands he was murdered.”⁷

By “the whole community,” George meant Confederate sympathizers. He ignored the fact that the county’s hard-pressed Unionist minority blessed Gregory and his company as their saviors. Coulter, a Georgian who barely concealed his Confederate sympathies, played the blame-the-victim game. He said guerrillas “owed their rise,” at least in part, to Home Guard excesses. Because these Unionists were unpaid volunteers “the temptation was, thus, for unworthy men to foregather for unworthy purposes,” the historian asserted.⁸

In any event, Gregory—he went by “Jones Gregory”—doggedly pursued his country’s enemies, guerrillas, regular rebel troops or Southern sympathizers who aided and abetted the marauders and the soldiers in gray. At least some of his foes were probably pre-war friends. Others were certainly neighbors and perhaps even relatives.

Gregory’s disdain for anything or anyone connected to the Confederacy might have been as personal as it was political. Early in the war, a group of vigilantes attacked his house, aiming to lynch him. He and his and his kid brother, John Franklin “Frank” Gregory, drove the enemy off and escaped, but the unwelcome visitors burned down the dwelling.

Jones briefly joined the army before resigning and organizing an independent Home Guard company. Late in the war, he commanded a company in the state militia, presumably comprised of his Home Guards. Frank volunteered for the Union cavalry. Jones died in a wild

⁶ Lowell H. Harrison and James C. Klotter, *A New History of Kentucky* (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 1997), 195; Coulter, *Civil War and Readjustment*, 140; See Anne E. Marshall, *Creating a Confederate Kentucky: The Lost Cause and Civil War Memory in a Border State* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2013).

⁷ Henry George, *History of the 3d, 7th, 8th and 12th Kentucky C.S.A.* (Louisville: Dearing Press, 1911), 78-79.

⁸ Coulter, *Civil War and Readjustment*, 226-227.

shootout with guerrillas shortly before the war ended in 1865. Frank was the victim of friendly fire, of sorts. His colonel shot him in an 1864 altercation.

Perhaps anonymity is a fate preferable to everlasting condemnation. Reflective of that obscurity, there are no known images of the brothers. But all Yankee veterans got the short-shrift in postwar Graves County. Local Confederate volunteers—perhaps 900 in number—are still honored in a court square monument erected in 1917. In cemeteries, the epitaphs of Union veterans and leading Unionist civilians are silent about the war. Save for a few individual military tombstones, nothing commemorates the 156 white and 89 African American enlistments the state credited to the county.⁹

Nonetheless, deepest western Kentucky's persecuted Unionist minority were grateful to Jones Gregory and his men as their sword and shield against a vengeful foe. "Secesh" sometimes directed guerrillas to their "tory" neighbors. The marauders seemed to delight in shooting, lynching, kidnapping, beating, burning out and running off Union families.

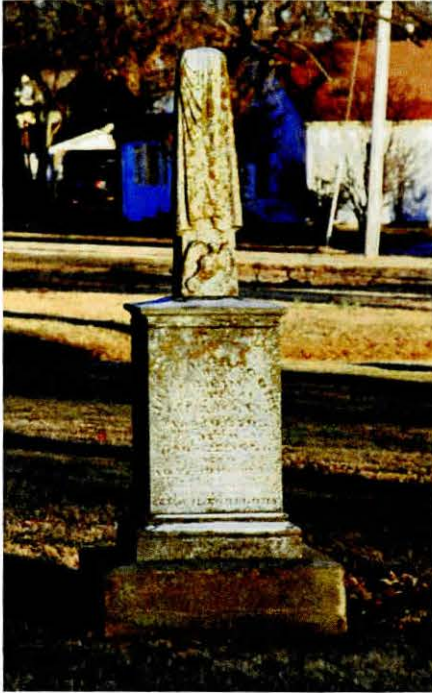
Guerrillas generally steered clear of Paducah and Columbus and their garrisons backed up by artillery and sometimes gunboats. But guerrilla country started just beyond musket range of the Yankee pickets. The bushwhackers scourged the interior of the Purchase. It is impossible to tell how many guerrillas or rebel soldiers Gregory and his mounted men captured or killed in skirmishes and ambushes. His troops sometimes did grisly double-duty as firing squads for condemned guerrillas. George's denunciations suggest that Gregory's band arrested or slew more than a few of the foe.

Gregory just as zealously went after local secessionists who willfully assisted the enemy. He and his men swooped down on their farms and businesses, arresting men and seizing their grain, livestock and wares. Between 1862 and 1864, Gregory's Home Guards evidently operated solo, although they seemed, to some degree, to coordinate their operations with Union army commanders at Paducah. In 1864, they became part of a Jackson Purchase battalion of Union state militia.

The Yankee brass and Kentucky's Unionist press praised Gregory as a brave and resourceful soldier. In Confederate folklore, he comes off as a cold-blooded killer, a Civil War version of Simon Girty, the hated and feared "great renegade" of Revolutionary War-era Kentucky. Girty went down in Bluegrass State history as Kentucky's worst villain, though his purported crimes were almost certainly exaggerated. Similarly, it seems Gregory was far from the bloodthirsty fiend rebel sympathizers—and latter-day "Lost Cause" local historians—have made him out to be.¹⁰

⁹ Craig, *Kentucky Confederates*, 293.

¹⁰ Craig, *Kentucky Confederates*, 248.



Apparently, little is known of Gregory before the war. He, Frank and their mother share a common tombstone in Paducah's Oak Grove Cemetery. Lichens and years of weathering have rendered their epitaphs almost unreadable. But it appears that Thomas Jones' birthday was June 1, 1826; he died on March 22, 1865. John Franklin was born on June 3, 1838; his life ended on February 23, 1864. Jane A. Gregory outlived both of her sons; her life ended in 1876 at age 80, according to the tombstone. The Gregory family hailed from Dublin, a tiny farming community about eleven miles west of Mayfield, the Graves County seat. The unincorporated community, home to perhaps a hundred or so souls today, is almost certainly the smallest of fourteen Dublins in the United States.

Jones and Frank's pre-war political leanings also are evidently unknown. As ardent as their Unionism was, they did not vote for the winner in the presidential election of 1860. Kentucky-born Illinois Republican Abraham Lincoln did not collect a single ballot in Graves County, which Southern Democrat John C. Breckinridge of Kentucky easily carried. Nonetheless, when the war began, Jones and Frank were outspoken Union men. Evidently almost everybody else who lived around them sided with the South.¹¹

"Being high-spirited men, [the Gregorys]...could not hear treason uttered without rebuking it, and this obtained for them the ill will of their neighbors, who threatened their lives," *The Cairo, Ill., News* reported in August, 1864. The threats were anything but idle. In the autumn of 1861, when the Confederates were at Columbus and at Camp Beauregard, an outpost in southern Graves County, "it was determined to 'root out' the brothers, and to make examples of them." Almost one-hundred armed swarmed on Jones' house. It is not clear if Frank lived with him, but they were together when their unbidden guests arrived.¹²

Anticipating the attack, the siblings barricaded themselves inside the home and "calmly awaited the coming of their chivalric neighbors," the paper said. The host opened fire, bullets rattling "like hail around the house." The brothers shot back, killing three of the enemy and wounding others. "Finding the game somewhat hazardous," the assailants withdrew, "leaving the

¹¹ Jasper B. Shannon and Ruth McQuown, *Presidential Politics in Kentucky 1824-1948: A Compilation of Election Statistics and an Analysis of Political Behavior* (Lexington: Bureau of Government Research, College of Arts and Sciences, University of Kentucky, 1950), 35-36. Breckinridge received 1,225 votes in Graves Count to 66 for Constitutional Unionist John Bell of Tennessee and 140 for Northern Democrat Stephen A. Douglas of Illinois. Bell carried Kentucky with 66,051 votes to 53,143 for Breckinridge, 25,638 for Douglas and 1,364 for Lincoln.

¹² *Cairo News*, n.d., quoted in the *Evansville (Ind.) Journal*, Aug. 12, 1864.

Gregorys master of the situation.” Even so, the brothers knew their days were likely numbered if they stayed in Dublin. Hence, they made good their escape from the house, which the vigilantes put to the torch, according to the *News*.¹³

The *News* may have erred on the date of the assault and the nature of the assaulters. It is possible that the mob was a posse or bounty hunters who came for them in the summer of 1861 when Jones and Frank were wanted men. Court records are confusing. On August 8, 1861, the Graves County grand jury issued two indictments. One had Jones Gregory and James Bowren [Bolin?] shooting, “with the intent to kill,” W.C. Womack and T.J. Schofield on August 5. The duo purportedly wounded their two targets “with guns loaded with Powder & leaden Shot or bullets [sic] or other hard substances.” Evidently, on the same day word reached the grand jury that one of their victims had died. The second indictment identified him as “John Womac” and named “James Bowrin” as Jones Gregory’s accomplice. At any rate, Jones and “Bowrin” were accused of conspiring “feloniously and with malice aforethought” with Frank Gregory, talking him into murdering “Womac.” In both indictments, bond was fixed at \$500 for each of the accused.¹⁴

The fate of “Bowren” or “Bowrin” is evidently unknown. The Gregory siblings ran away to the big Union army base at Cairo. Two men, evidently relatives of the slain “Womac” and the wounded Schofield—or perhaps Schofield himself—promised a reward to anybody who caught and brought back Jones and Frank. On September 2, W.W. Robertson told Andrew R. Boone about the fugitives. A Mayfield attorney and recently county judge, Boone was the newly-elected secessionist State Representative. Included with the missive was a note from George W. Reardon of Cairo “who proposes for the reward offered by Schofield & Wommock to apprehend & bring the Gregory boys over & deliver them to the proper authorities.”¹⁵

Reardon, according to Robertson, had a plan “to make the arrest legal.” The details were in Reardon’s note, which he wrote on August 21. Reardon claimed that “a Mr. Dowdy at Columbus,” told him that Jones, Frank and “James Bosen” murdered a man in Dublin. He added that W.C. Wommock and Thomas Leopold were offering \$500 for the arrest of the three men, who were in Cairo “acting as spies for the Federal troops.” Reardon said he could “bring them over” with Kentucky Governor Beriah Magoffin’s help, evidently meaning an extradition request. He also asked that Ray Mauer be appointed the governor’s agent and warned that “this must be done on the Sly for if the troops find out it here I will hardly get them.”¹⁶

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ “Graves Equity & Criminal Court, The Commonwealth of Kentucky Against Jones Gregory & James Bowrin,” Kentucky Department of Library and Archives, Frankfort. Boone was expelled from the legislature as a traitor after he helped organize Kentucky’s bogus Confederate state government at Russellville in the fall of 1861. He was elected to Congress after the war.

¹⁵ W.W. Robertson to A.R. Boon[e], September 2, 1861, KDLA.

¹⁶ George W. Reardon to Gentlemen, August 21, 1861, KDLA.

Reardon also cautioned that the alleged killers “have friends in your Neighborhood, and if they find out what we are doing we may give up the chase.” In addition, he suggested that Magoffin give him a reward of \$300 or \$400 apiece on the fugitives “so that I can possibly make a little Money out of the scoundrels.” Robertson forwarded the letter so Boone would “fully understand the matter and” would be able “to take the necessary steps in the transaction and attend to it as speedily as possible.” Robertson advised that he had no more news except that “there were two more murders committed in Doublin [sic] a short time since.” The victims were Bill Sherfield and Buck Smith; “two Baileys” slew the duo. Several more men were wounded in the shootout, according to the *Daily Wabash Express*, a Terre Haute, Indiana, paper.¹⁷

Jones Gregory ended up in Smithland, where, on January 6, 1862, he became a first lieutenant in the Twentieth Kentucky Infantry Regiment’s Company G. Most of the company came from Marshall County, which adjoins Graves on the east. Gregory signed up for three years but resigned on February 5, 1862. Military records do not say why Gregory left the regular army. He may have decided he could better serve the cause by going home and recruiting a Home Guard outfit to protect pro-Union families.¹⁸

In any event, on September 12, 1862, Gregory and fourteen of his company foiled “a robbing guerrilla band” that was ransacking Unionist J. T. Bolinger’s store in Mayfield, according to the *Louisville Daily Journal*. Gregory’s group surprised the marauders, who were led by “Dr. Hart, of Boydsville,” a south Graves County community and guerrilla haven on the Tennessee state line. They slew one of Hart’s men and wounded another bandit. Hart got away.¹⁹

Almost two years later, Gregory figured he had the drop on a local rebel bigwig: Confederate Colonel Edward Crossland of Clinton, one of Forrest’s most trusted officers. Crossland commanded the Seventh Kentucky Mounted Infantry Regiment during Forrest’s March 25, 1864, attack on Paducah, and he was wounded in the rebels’ unsuccessful assault on Fort Anderson. After Forrest departed from Paducah, the shot-up colonel and a small group of officers and men paused to spend the night at Southern sympathizer William Pryor’s house about four miles south of Mayfield. In the wee hours, Gregory’s company surprised the unsuspecting Crossland and his contingent. The Home Guards killed at least two of the colonel’s entourage and wounded others. They put another bullet in Crossland, who played dead and ultimately eluded the Home Guards on foot with help from one of his men, according to George’s book. The next day, Gregory was seen in Paducah astride Crossland’s horse. The

¹⁷ Ibid; *Daily Wabash Express*, Terre Haute, Indiana, August 9, 1861.

¹⁸ D.W. Lindsey, *Report of the Adjutant General of the State of Kentucky* (Frankfort: John H. Harney Public Printer), II, 54-55.

¹⁹ *Louisville Journal*, September 18, 1862.

captain was wearing as a trophy the jacket of one of the colonel's slain subordinates, Constantin W. Rhoulac, the Seventh Kentucky adjutant.²⁰

First Lieutenant John Franklin Gregory was in Paducah, too, lying in a freshly dug grave at Oak Grove Cemetery. He had been in the city recruiting Unionist refugees from West Tennessee for Volunteer State outfits. A grateful Major William Bradford, who commanded a battalion in the Thirteenth Tennessee Cavalry Regiment, purportedly promised Gregory a captaincy and command of Company "A," which he raised. Anyway, in February, 1864, the regiment moved to Fort Pillow, Tennessee, a former Confederate earthwork on the Mississippi River, forty miles above Memphis.²¹

Bad blood brewed between Gregory and Bradford when the colonel made his brother, Theodorick, captain of Company A. Many of the officers and men sided with Gregory; some resigned and others deserted. Bradford accused Gregory of encouraging men to desert and confronted him on February 23. The encounter proved fatal for the lieutenant, though details differ. According to one version of the story, after Bradford told Gregory he was under arrest, the lieutenant went for his pistols. Allegedly, Bradford was quicker on the trigger, outdrawing Gregory and shooting him before he could fire. Wounded in the abdomen, Gregory died five days later. Afterwards, enlistments diminished, partly because of Gregory's death and partly because recruits were not paid bonuses and salaries promised them.²²

According to the *Columbus, Kentucky, War Eagle*, an army paper, Frank's demise was an accident. Bradford told Gregory to surrender his pistol; when the lieutenant withdrew the sidearm from its holster, the colonel thought he meant to shoot him and thus shot Gregory. "No hopes were entertained of his recovery," the paper reported, adding that witnesses justified Bradford's action.²³

Apparently, Gregory's company was on its own until 1864 when Governor Thomas E. Bramlette organized Home Guard companies and other volunteers into State Troops Proper and State Militia Proper. They were to remain in Kentucky and fight guerrillas and rebel raiders, thus freeing Union garrison troops to fight in the big armies elsewhere. Five companies, A through E,

²⁰ George, *History of the 3d, 7th, 8th and 12th*, 79-81.

²¹ James Alex Bagett, *Homegrown Yankees: Tennessee's Union Cavalry in the Civil War* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2009), 211-214.

²² *Ibid.*

²³ *Columbus, Kentucky, War Eagle*, n.d., quoted in the *Louisville Daily Journal*, March 9, 1864; *Nashville Union and American*, March 11, 1864. Bradford's battalion was all but wiped out in the Fort Pillow massacre of April 12, 1864, in which Forrest's forces shot and killed several unarmed and unresisting African American and white soldiers after they surrendered. Bradford was among those who were captured and taken away. Two days later, the rebels shot him. Union sources say they gunned him down in cold blood; the Confederates insisted he was slain trying to escape.

comprised the Paducah Battalion, First Regiment of the Capitol Guards. Gregory was captain of company A. "All of these troops did valuable and efficient service for the State and the General government, as the history of the time would fully show," reported Adjutant General D.W. Lindsey. He added that the Paducah Battalion protected southwestern Kentucky.²⁴

W.W. Tice, a New York-born Mayfield attorney and Union man, knew the guerrilla terror first-hand. He fled from the outlaws and rebel raiders, evidently to Paducah. On June 9, 1864, he wrote Lindsey, begging him to organize local militia units. "The country will be depopulated at least of all loyal and honest men unless protection is afforded to the citizens against the guerrillas and robbers who now hold complete possession of the country." Graves County was defenseless, he said, adding that "militia is not organizing nor can any one now tell when the said organization will be possible."²⁵

Tice had tried to organize a county militia in 1862, and he told Lindsey it was time to try again. He said the Union garrisons at Paducah and Columbus were unsuited to protect Unionists because they were "strangers to the people, and utterly unacquainted with the roads...of the county." He recommended Gregory for commander of a new militia company, praising the captain as "a brave, cool, resolute man who knows every bypath in the country and understands guerrilla warfare probably much better than any [other] man in Western Ky."²⁶

Upon Tice's recommendation, Gregory and M.A. Payne, who had served in the Fifteenth Kentucky Cavalry Regiment, raised in the Purchase and adjacent western Pennyryle region, went to Frankfort to get permission to raise a militia company. He was successful but the recruits lacked uniforms. On July 13, Payne complained to state military authorities that because they were dressed in civilian clothes, it was "a difficult matter for me and other officers to find them" when they were out scouting. Two days later he informed Brigadier General Jeremiah T. Boyle, Union commander in Kentucky, that Colonel Stephen G. Hicks, the Paducah post commander, refused to allow the militia men to draw provisions or forage from army stores. Hicks argued that because the militia volunteers were not regular U.S. troops, he was not responsible for feeding them.²⁷

The *Louisville Journal* took up Tice's cause, editorializing on June 14 that Graves County was "in complete possession of Forrest, Faulkner, Buford, and various other Confederate guerrillas and cavalry." (Colonel W.W. Faulkner commanded the 12th Kentucky Cavalry Regiment, many of whose men were from the Purchase. Brigadier Abraham Buford of

²⁴ Captain Thomas Speed, *The Union Cause in Kentucky, 1860-1865* (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1907), 317-318; Lindsey, *Report of the Adjutant General*, 765-771.

²⁵ Patricia Ann Hoskins, "The Old First Is with the South," unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, 2008, Auburn University, 196.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 198.

²⁷ *Ibid.*

Woodford County, Kentucky, was a Forrest lieutenant.) Consequently, “no one now can tell when the organization of the militia or Graves will be possible.” Meanwhile, “outrages without number are committed throughout all that section. For six months the life of an active Union man has not been safe in any of the Kentucky counties west of the Tennessee River, except within the Federal picket lines. The best citizens have been shot down or cloven with swords or pierced with bayonets in the presence of their families or found hanging in the woods.”²⁸

The enemy had stolen most horses and mules that were serviceable, according to the paper. “Many peaceable citizens are forced to flee from their homes, leaving their families behind for the want of means to remove them. The country will soon be depopulated of all loyal and honest men unless protection shall be afforded against the robbers.” The *Journal* said Gregory was recruiting men and seeking arms from the governor. The paper was confident Bramlette would come through. “Let them have a chance, and they will fight as well as his own noble troops fought recently in defence of the Capital of Kentucky. But what are we to expect if large portions of our State are left open any considerable length of time for the Confederate forces, guerrillas and regulars, to carry off into the rebel service whatever men and means they can find!”²⁹

A guerrilla band found Gregory and his company on the night of July 17, ambushing them at Mayfield Creek between Paducah and Mayfield. “A sharp and severe contest ensued,” the *Louisville Democrat* reported. “We are not informed how long the fight lasted, but our men, being overpowered, were forced to retreat back to towards Paducah as fast as possible, losing about nine men killed and several wounded.” The paper did not know how many men the rebels lost, but understood that “the whole country back of Paducah is infested with guerrilla bands, committing all kinds of depredations.”³⁰

Two days after the ambush, Gregory got a staunch ally in Brigadier General Eleazer A. Paine, who took command at Paducah. Paine cracked down hard on the still rebellious citizenry; smuggling to the enemy was rampant, and many locals helped the guerrillas. Lewis and Richard Collins’ *History of Kentucky* said he foisted on the Purchase “a fifty-one days’ reign of violence, terror, rapine, extortion, oppression, bribery, and military murder.” The equally unsympathetic Coulter wrote that the general “seems to have tried to wreak vengeance for all the blasted hopes of the Federals during the previous three years.” Paine was hardly a saint, but records reveal he was not the brute, Collins, Coulter and other Southern-leaning historians, notably local historians, have made him out to be. More likely, they despised Paine mostly because they considered him the worst sort of Yankee: He was a Republican, a friend of Lincoln and a staunch

²⁸ *Louisville Journal*, July 23, 1864.

²⁹ *Ibid.* A contingent of Brigadier General John Hunt Morgan’s cavalry raided Frankfort on June 10, 1864. Bramlette, a former Union army colonel, helped Union soldiers and militia defend the capital.

³⁰ *Louisville Democrat*, July 22, 1864.

abolitionist. Pressured by Bramlette and the state's conservative Union Democratic powers-that-be, the army removed him. In 1865, Paine was court martialed on a laundry list of charges and specifications, ranging from abuse of power and corruption to extortion and oppression, but he was exonerated on all but one minor charge: cursing general of the army Henry W. Halleck. Paine's punishment was a reprimand in general orders, which was ultimately set aside.³¹

Meanwhile, Gregory was the kind of fighter Paine admired. The captain expected no quarter from the enemy, and he gave none. In any event, by the time of Paine's advent, the Paducah battalion was armed, equipped and ready to challenge the guerrillas and any rebel raiders who ventured into the Purchase. Payne was pleased to tell Bramlette in a letter that he had "succeeded so far very well in the start of raising a battalion for the Kentucky State Guard. The first company, [Gregory's] organized June 21st numbers at this time nearly 90 members; besides which are five other companies recruiting rapidly." Gregory and his men mustered in on June 24.³²

Payne was confident he could organize the battalion in about 15 days. But he cited a snag: "I received one hundred stands of arms (Austrian rifles) and encoutrements [sic], according to a requisition of Capt. T. J. Gregory of the Graves County Guard, to be forwarded to that gentleman at Paducah Ky. At the time I passed through Louisville, apprehension was intertained [sic], that guerilla's [sic] or some part of the rebel army might make an attack on Louisville or the adjacent country; so that I took a boat at the first opportunity to ascertain, if there was any danger or not; expecting the arms following me. No danger encountered or apprehended afterwards."³³

Payne complained that he had been in Paducah for four weeks, but that the rifles were yet to arrive. He learned they were still in Louisville and could be picked up in the Falls City "provided Capt. T. J. Gregory would come there and give receipt for same. — This receipt I think, could not be asked for at Louisville, but at Paducah Ky the place of destination and direction." Payne vowed he could "get every day, yes! every hour recruits for the State Guard; but what shall I do with the men, without arms? With spurs and hickory sticks, we can not fight the guerillas, armed with Guns, rifles and revolvers." He said he twice wrote Lindsey seeking uniforms. When he received no reply, he went to Paine, who helped supply him uniforms. He told Lindsey that if the state would furnish the battalion Ballard repeating carbines, the army would furnish the

³¹ Lewis and Richard Collins, *History of Kentucky, 1874* (Reprint, Berea, Ky.: Kentucke Imprints, 1976), I, 136; Coulter, *Civil War and Readjustment*, 221; See Dieter Ullrich and Berry Craig, *General E.A. Paine in Western Kentucky: Assessing the "Reign of Terror" of the Summer of 1864* (Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland Press, 2018).

³² M.A. Payne to Governor Thomas E. Bramlette, July 30, 1864, KDLA; Lindsey, *Report of the Adjutant General*, II, 765.

³³ M.A. Payne to Governor Thomas E. Bramlette, July 30, 1864.

required .56 caliber ammunition. Records show that Lindsey answered Payne, but it is unclear if Gregory got the carbines or the Austrian muskets.³⁴

While Paine's headquarters were in Paducah, Gregory usually operated out of Mayfield, where the commander was Colonel Waters W. McChesney of Chicago. Because the Graves County seat had been a frequent target for guerrilla raids, Paine decided the town needed to be garrisoned. He also ordered an earthen fort built around the courthouse. To punish the disloyal town, Paine ordered civilians to build the fort under guard. Gregory could have watched the toilers from his headquarters in a court square building owned by Anderson and Bolinger. But most often, the captain and his men were out scouring the countryside for guerrillas. James Kesterson, one of the most notorious Purchase outlaws, managed to elude Gregory and his men. A Graves County farmer, he bossed a gang of forty or fifty ruffians who terrorized and murdered Union men. Before Kesterson was wounded and captured on July 9 in a shootout with Union troops near Clinton, the Hickman County seat, he and his band allegedly murdered about thirty Unionists. The guerrilla chieftain was known as "Old Kess" though he was only twenty-five-years-old when he was taken prisoner. Kesterson's gang was suspected of gunning down James B. Happy, an unarmed and unresisting Mayfield Unionist. Reportedly, Happy's wife and children witnessed the grisly scene.³⁵

On July 26, Paine ordered Kesterson, still recovering from his wounds, to be sent to Paducah. The general had been warned that if he had Kesterson executed, "all the Union men, women and children would be shot in the district." Paine scoffed at the threat and locked him in the guardhouse. When he was interrogated, Kesterson bragged that he shot Happy, a Reverend Owens and two other men. The prisoner said he killed Happy because he was a "damned Union man and would not keep quiet." After hearing that Kesterson had confessed, Paine ordered him to face a firing squad. He advised the condemned man to "turn his whole attention to [God]...and if he has reassures laid up in heaven he had better draw for the full amount." The next morning, Kesterson was led to the riverbank near Fort Anderson and shot by soldiers of the Eighth U.S. Colored Artillery (Heavy), a mostly Jackson Purchase outfit.³⁶

The capture of another guerrilla, William Shelby Bryan, might have lessened Gregory's disappointment at not getting his hands on Kesterson. A Tennessean, Bryan had moved to Dublin in 1860. He and the Gregorys were neighbors, but far from friends. Bryan was secesh; his older brother, Jonathan Tate Bryan, rode with Faulkner. Gregory brought Bryan to Mayfield; a Home Guard firing squad shot him dead on the courthouse lawn.³⁷

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Ullrich and Craig, *General E.A. Paine*, 34.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Ibid., 36.

McChesney relied on his chief guerrilla hunter in other ways. Once, he gave the captain a list of known Southern sympathizers in the county and ordered him to organize a band of cavalry to seize all their property that might be useful to the outlaws. He merged men from his company with Mayfield-based troopers from the Third Illinois Cavalry, and they raided farms and homes on McChesney's list. Besides commandeering horses and mules, they carried away "hay, oats, hogs, apples, chickens, bacon, sweet potatoes, barley and grain." A Mayfield resident complained later that the Yankees had "ravaged the whole country, drove off and slaughtered nearly all the cattle and hogs within reach of town, both Union men and others, killing those unfit for beef for the hides [and] tore down nearly every log stable and house and barn in the town, burned rails for wood, destroyed the growing crop near town [and] cut down almost every shade tree in the village."³⁸

Apparently, a private in Gregory's company exploited the captain's ardor for guerrilla hunting to settle a pre-war score. Private Albert T. Riley purportedly told McChesney that Eli Enoch, who lived east of Mayfield, harbored guerrillas and was a rebel spy. It was evidently a lie; Riley reportedly nursed an "old grudge" against Enoch and deceived McChesney to "procure Enoch's death." At dusk on August 17 a militia squad rode out to the farm of Robert Beasley, where they found him and Enoch threshing wheat in a field. After demanding that they and their horses be fed, the militia ordered the two men to identify themselves. When Enoch told them who he was, they arrested him, tied his hands, put him on horse and took him away toward Mayfield. They stopped at nearby Spence Chapel Methodist Church, ordered Enoch to dismount and shot him in the church cemetery. Two soldiers returned to fetch Beasley and his father to bury Enoch, who was still alive when they arrived, but the wounded man bled to death within the hour. When Beasley asked the militia why they slew Enoch, they replied that they had orders to "kill all guerrillas." When the Beasleys protested Enoch's innocence, some of the men apologized. It is not clear if Riley was among Enoch's killers, but he deserted as a "Date and place unknown."³⁹

A week after Enoch was shot, Gregory's men caught a guerrilla named Walters, most likely Robert A. Walters. They described their prisoner as a "notorious bushwhacker." On August 25, McChesney sent three officers from his regiment, the 134th Illinois Infantry, to question their captive. One of the interrogators, Lieutenant Andrew Lucas Hunt, said Walters was surly, impudent and "a most ignorant person." Hunt added that Walters admitted that he was with Forrest at Fort Pillow on April 12, 1864, when the general's troops shot several unarmed and unresisting African American and white troops after they surrendered. Walters said he joined the massacre and added that he had recently fired at Union pickets at Paducah. He also vowed that he was a Confederate soldier, not a guerrilla. Chaplain Amos K. Tullis, who also questioned Walters, besought the prisoner to seek the Almighty's forgiveness. Walters was

³⁸ Ibid., 51.

³⁹ Ibid., 52; Lindsey, *Report of the Adjutant General*, 766.

defiant, according to Hunt; he sneered that his captors “could do what we wished with him” but should “expect to be avenged” if his comrades captured them.⁴⁰

Walters faced a firing squad, evidently comprised of ten men from Gregory’s company, on the morning of August 26, a Sunday. At eight o’clock, Lieutenant Colonel John C. Bigelow, McChesney’s second-in-command, marched the 134th Illinois beyond the picket lines to Walters’ execution site. Though he strode to his doom “with a firm step,” he begged for mercy before ten shots buried into his chest.⁴¹

McChesney forced the laborers working on the courthouse fortifications to witness the execution. He warned them, “this shall be your fate if you are ever caught harboring guerrillas or bushwhackers or if any of you know of the approach or whereabouts of guerrillas and do not inform the Federal troops.” Four of the workers were ordered to drop Walters in his wooden coffin and bury him.⁴²

With the courthouse fort nearing completion and the town full of soldiers supported by artillery, guerrillas continued to give Mayfield a wide berth. Gregory kept after the guerrillas where they were, relentlessly hunting them down in the countryside. On August 30, he and his company rode into town with a young prisoner they bagged the night before in a firefight with sixteen guerrillas. Gregory’s men managed to kill one of the foe; the rest got away except for seventeen-year-old schoolboy Henry Bascom “Bud” Hicks from Farmington, a small community about nine miles southeast of Mayfield. Hicks’ brother was a Confederate officer; the prisoner confessed to Gregory, McChesney and some of the colonel’s staff officers that he was a guerrilla, but only for two weeks. No matter, McChesney ordered Hicks to be shot at 3 o’clock. The teen almost nonchalantly replied that “they had him in their own hands and they could dispose of them as they pleased – he was man enough to face the music.” He was locked in the county jail to await his fate.⁴³

At the appointed hour, Gregory and his men took Hicks to the edge of town and stood him next to a shallow grave. Some off-duty soldiers and curious civilians watched as an eight-man firing squad chosen from Gregory’s company readied their weapons. The lad allegedly stood silently and unflinching as one of Gregory’s officers read the death sentence. Hicks reputedly nodded and requested that his executioners not bind his hands or blindfold him. His first request was granted, but a militiaman tied a handkerchief over his eyes. Hicks asked the man not to tie it too tightly. After they shot Hicks, they flung his corpse into the hole and put his hat over his face. One of the fort workers filled in the grave, which was left unmarked on

⁴⁰ Ibid., 52-53.

⁴¹ Ibid., 53.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Ibid., 56.

McChesney's orders. A Union soldier wrote in his diary that Hicks was "game to the last" and that "his bearing was worthy of one who was to die in a better cause." In 1882, Hicks was ceremoniously reinterred in Mayfield's old Maplewood Cemetery. Rhoulac is buried next to him.⁴⁴

It is impossible to tell how many guerrillas Gregory and his men dispatched before one of the marauders ended the captain's life in a gunfight. Ironically, their commander killed Gregory's nemesis Faulkner. Two McDougal brothers, one of whom had been a guerrilla leader, joined Faulkner's outfit at Dresden, Tennessee, in 1864. The colonel promised the McDougals that if they joined his regiment, they would not be arrested "or otherwise be molested for any misdoings that might be drawn up against them," George wrote.⁴⁵

When Faulkner told the siblings to hand over their weapons, they "commenced firing on the colonel, and did not stop until he was dead." George added that "there seems to have been no effort on the part of Faulkner's men to protect him, owing to the alleged fact that the McDougals had more friends in the regiment than had the colonel." Faulkner, George conceded, "was a courageous, dashing soldier, but for some reason did not seem to be popular with his men." George did not provide a first name for the McDougals. But at least one of them evidently got his comeuppance in a March, 1865, skirmish with Gregory's Home Guards. It was Gregory's last battle, too.⁴⁶

Like much of his life, Gregory's demise is shrouded in mystery and misinformation. His battalion had mustered out of Federal service on February 12, 1865, yet he was remained a captain leading troops. According to *History of Kentucky*, he perished on March 29 in "a desperate fight," with guerrillas "30 miles from Paducah." The April 4, 1865, *Frankfort Commonwealth* reported that he died on March 22, the death date on his tombstone. The paper identified him as "Capt. Gregory...formerly of the 3d Battalion, Capital Guards." The *Commonwealth* said he went after the guerrillas with a twenty-two man company "at the solicitations of Gen. [Solomon] Meredith [who succeeded Paine] and citizens of Paducah." Gregory encountered McDougal's gang at Thomas Hayden's Hickman County home, about "thirty five miles south of Paducah." After ordering five men to guard the horses, Gregory and the rest surrounded the house. Gregory smashed open the door with the butt of his Spencer repeating carbine, charged inside and shot McDougal dead, according to the paper.⁴⁷

⁴⁴ Ibid, 56, 124-125.

⁴⁵ George, *History of the 3d, 7th, 8th and 12th Kentucky*, 139.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Craig, *Kentucky Confederates*, 287-288; The dead guerrilla chieftain might have been Bill McDougal. In early 1865, he tangled with Gregory and his men at Hickman Bridge, between Hickman, the Fulton County seat, and Troy, Tennessee, according to the December 13, 1907, *Hickman Courier*. "Three Federals and one Confederate were killed and buried near the bridge," the paper said. Oak Grove Cemetery records say he died on March 22, 1864.

Gregory "was himself fired upon and instantly killed." His men avenged Gregory's death by "wrenching the pistols from the hands of the guerrillas and firing upon them with their own weapons," the *Commonwealth* said. The Home Guards slew a half dozen of the enemy and wounded twenty more, "most of them mortally." The rest of the band got away, but abandoned "forty horses and sixty guns and pistols, together with a number of blankets, hats caps &c.," the paper said.⁴⁸

On the Union side, nobody was wounded, but a corporal also perished. Like Gregory, he had been in the 20th Kentucky Infantry. He and Gregory were placed in a wagon and carried back to Paducah for burial. Hayden and his neighbors buried the guerrillas. "The loss of Capt. Gregory is much lamented," the *Commonwealth* reported. "He has proved himself an officer of great ability, both for his fighting and administrative qualities." The Frankfort paper claimed Gregory "was also a conscientious and accomplished gentleman, and stood firmly by his State and country while most of his friends were seduced into the rebellion." The paper added, "He has suffered greatly from guerrillas by reason of his patriotism. The paper insisted that "he was never actuated by feelings of revenge in his treatment of them" but that "his death was well and terribly avenged by his men." The *Commonwealth* noted that Gregory was a Graves countian and that McDougal was "a great scoundrel, having served four years in the Penitentiary." He had been "the terror of South Western Kentucky and Western Tennessee."⁴⁹

The *Chicago Tribune* republished a *Cairo Times* story that provided a detailed and decidedly different account of Gregory's demise. Reportedly, he and twenty mounted men rode out of Paducah on March 21. "When 35 miles from the city, Col. Cunningham, volunteer aid[e] to Capt. Gregory, received information that the notorious bushwhacker, Capt. McDougal, with 75 men, was quartered at a house some two miles distant." Cunningham was probably Second Lieutenant William P. Cunningham of the Eighth Artillery. Gregory hastily gathered his men, who had been scouting in squads, and headed for the guerrilla hideout. It was well past dark, close to ten o'clock, when they approached the dwelling.⁵⁰

They dismounted about a quarter-mile from the home and hid their horses in the woods; Gregory ordered his men "to crawl up and surround the house, trusting to the darkness and caution to effect a surprise," the paper said. "Fearing that in the hand to hand encounter that was likely to ensure friends might be mistaken for foes, a password was given out, with instructions that any one failing to give it when challenged was to be shot down." When the men crept to "within easy pistol range of the house" a lookout spotted them and gave the alarm. "Immediately there were signs of commotion in the house and attempts made to escape—but

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 288.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*; Ullrich and Craig, *General E.A. Paine*, 112.

⁵⁰ *Cairo Times*, n.d., quoted in the *Chicago Tribune*, April 11, 1865; Ullrich and Craig, *General E.A. Paine*, 106.

Gregory had completely surrounded them, and every one who had the temerity to show his head was shot.”⁵¹

“Gregory, with an Ellsworth rashness,” rushed for the door alone, aimed his weapon at the enemy and pulled the trigger, according to the *Times*. Yet “for some cause unknown, the gun did not go off, whereupon the guerrillas fired and the brave Captain fell dead, pierced by a bullet through the brain.” Gregory’s death “so exasperated the men that they rushed upon the enemy with a shriek of revenge, and commenced an indiscriminate slaughter,” the paper said. “But the enemy, as soon as they discovered the actual strength of the Unionists, rallied and drove them out of the house, but dare not pursue beyond the friendly shelter of its walls.”⁵²

The Yankees again surrounded the house and stayed until near morning when Cunningham learned that the enemy was about to be reinforced by another guerrilla band a mile away. He “thought it prudent to withdraw before daylight, which he did, bringing away with him eight horses and other plunder.” The paper said the guerrillas killed another militia soldier, adding that Gregory’s men dispatched twenty of the enemy. “It was impossible to get Captain Gregory’s body to bring it away, consequently it was left at the house,” the story explained. Another force of 100 men started from Paducah on the 24th inst., to recover the bodies if possible, and clear that section of marauders.⁵³

Troops brought Gregory’s corpse to Paducah and buried him next to his brother. Few Purchase dwellers lamented Gregory’s demise. Mattie J. Beasley was an exception. She penned a song titled “The Gregory Avengers.” It was to be sung to the tune of “Spare the Old Homestead.” Published in *The Federal Union*, Paducah’s army paper, it began:

“Oh hero, of heroes!
Brave veteran of fame.
On our State’s bright Escutcheon
There is no prouder name,
When threatened—invaded
By an insolent foe,
The strong arm of Gregory
Death, terror and woe”⁵⁴

⁵¹ *Cairo Times*, n.d., quoted in the *Tribune*, April 11, 1865.

⁵² *Ibid.* Colonel Elmer Ellsworth, 24, died on May 24, 1861, while attempting to remove a large Confederate flag from atop a hotel in Alexandria, Virginia, across the Potomac River from Washington. The flag was visible from the White House. Determined to tear down the flag, Ellsworth led his regiment, the Eleventh New York “Fire Zouaves,” across the Potomac River to Alexandria. Ellsworth and four men climbed the hotel stairs to get the enemy banner. On their way back down, the hotelkeeper confronted them and killed the colonel, who had the flag, with a shotgun. One of Ellsworth’s men slew the hotelkeeper by shooting him or stabbing him with a bayonet. Ellsworth, the first Union officer to lose his life in the war, and the soldier who avenged his death became instant heroes in the North.

⁵³ *Ibid.*

⁵⁴ Ullrich and Craig, *General E.A. Paine*, 112.

The poem, like its hero, is forgotten in Graves County. Apparently, nobody knows where the Gregory brothers stood off the vigilantes, or posse, in 1861, or where, in 1865, Thomas Jones Gregory fought his last battle. Such was the unhappy fate of this Yankee son of Kentucky's South Carolina who "could not hear treason uttered without rebuking it."

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