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MASTER OF MILITARY STUDIES

TITLE:

**CHASING THE GRAY GHOST:
BLAZER'S INDEPENDENT UNION SCOUTS &
THE SHENANDOAH VALLEY GUERILLA WAR OF 1864**

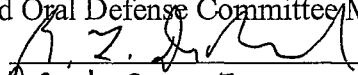
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Executive Summary

Title: Chasing the Gray Ghost: Blazer's Independent Union Scouts and the Shenandoah Valley Guerilla War of 1864

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Thesis: The aim of this paper is to deconstruct and analyze the Blazer's Scouts' 1864 counter-guerilla campaign to draw out successful techniques and best practices, common throughout effective counter-guerilla warfare, which are relevant today.

Discussion: One of the least examined facets of the Civil War is Confederate use of irregular or guerilla-type warfare. Of the many Confederate guerilla bands, none wreaked more havoc on Union forces as did Mosby's Rangers led by Colonel John Singleton Mosby also known as the "Gray Ghost." The Union mounted numerous efforts to thwart Mosby's Rangers but none proved effective with the exception of one: Captain Richard Blazer and his elite Independent Union Scouts. Examined with a modern understanding of irregular warfare, Captain Richard Blazer and his Independent Union Scouts proved to be ahead of their time and stand out as the only effective counter-guerrilla campaign of the entire Civil War.

Conclusion: The Shenandoah guerilla war of 1864 is significant to today's student of warfare and deserves further study and consideration. Employing many of the same methods and concepts practiced today, Captain Richard Blazer and his Scouts developed an effective counter-guerilla campaign against the most fearsome of Confederate guerilla groups, Mosby's Rangers.

Preface

For me, this paper came about very much by accident. Having only a rudimentary knowledge of Civil War history, (a cardinal sin for a Marine officer, I know) few topics could have been further from my mind. It was during a recent battlefield study that a friend recommended a book about Mosby's Rangers. The book was fascinating and I thought it would make an interesting thesis topic. In the following weeks, I read more about Mosby's Rangers and it was during my initial research that I came across an article about "Blazer's Scouts". I was quickly drawn in by the fact the Scouts had been such a formidable match for the Rangers yet they were scarcely referenced in anything I had previously read.

Although I did not realize it at the time, perhaps unconsciously I was drawn to this story by my own personal experiences. As a captain myself, I served in a special operations forces (SOF) unit and, in a matter of days following 9/11, I found myself assigned to a small team which was formed and operated much like Blazer's Scouts. Many of the lessons Captain Blazer learned in the Shenandoah Mountains were the same lessons I would discover myself on the ground in Afghanistan and Iraq. I knew, without a doubt, this would be the topic of my thesis.

Compared to Mosby's Rangers, little is written about Blazer's Scouts. The author Darl L. Stephenson was the first person to write extensively about the Scouts. Source material was scarce so I started with books and articles about Mosby's Rangers and from there I was able to dig deeper and find some out-of-print books, memoirs, and personal papers.

I would like to thank Mr. John Allison Blazer for his help and encouragement. His collection of family history and personal papers helped me immensely. I'll never forget the surreal shot of excitement I felt seeing the "BLAZER" name on my caller ID the first time. As it turns out, John Blazer is himself a hero and a fellow Marine who landed at the Chosin Reservoir in Korea.

My many thanks to Mr. Cy Blazer, Captain Blazer's great-grandson. I gained more insights talking with Mr. Blazer than I did from any other single source.

I need to thank Darl L. Stephenson for his early encouragement and his assistance as I followed in many of his same footsteps. I highly recommend his book, *Headquarters in the Brush: Blazer's Independent Union Scout*, to anyone who wants a more balanced accounting of the events between Mosby's Rangers and Blazer's Scouts in 1864.

For his guidance and patience, I owe a debt of gratitude to my advisor, Dr. Richard L. DiNardo, Ph.D. His knowledge of the Civil War was my "sanity check" and his encouragement challenged me keep digging deeper in my research.

I want to thank my wife for all her support and patience during this process.

Finally, it is important to point out that, in no way, is it my intension defame Colonel John Mosby, his Rangers, or their many accomplishments. Had I stuck with my original topic, this paper could have easily been about a very successful guerilla campaign waged in the hills of the Shenandoah. The bravery, resourcefulness, and competence of both Blazer's Scouts and Mosby's Rangers are, indeed, a testament to the other.

Chasing the Gray Ghost:
Blazer's Independent Union Scouts and the Shenandoah Valley Guerilla War of 1864

Introduction

In 1863, President Abraham Lincoln wrote, "In no other way does the enemy give us so much trouble, at so little expense to himself, as by the raids of rapidly moving small bodies of troops...harassing and discouraging loyal residents, supplying themselves with provisions, clothing, horses, and the like, surprising and capturing small detachments of our forces, and breaking our communications."¹ These "small bodies of troops" were Confederate guerillas. Of all these guerilla bands, none wreaked more havoc on Union forces, as did Mosby's Rangers led by Colonel John Singleton Mosby also known as the "Gray Ghost." The Union mounted numerous efforts to thwart Mosby's Rangers but none proved effective with the exception of one: Captain Richard Blazer and his elite Independent Union Scouts. This paper will deconstruct and analyze the Blazer's Scouts' 1864 counter-guerilla campaign to draw out successful techniques and best practices, common throughout effective counter-guerilla warfare, which are relevant today.

Today's security environment has elevated irregular warfare as a prevailing topic not only in the military but also in national think tanks as well as the mass media. In addition to the standard dose of Clausewitz and Jomini, military college students are once again examining the works of Lenin, Mao, and Che Guevara in an effort to better understand guerilla warfare and the guerilla mindset. With so much material already available why study this little known Civil War guerilla campaign fought almost a century and a half ago? Marine Corps Commandant, General James Conway, recently wrote, "The Long War requires a talented, multidimensional force that is well trained and educated for employment in all forms of warfare."² After years of preparing for

conventional war on the presumption superior technology would give the U.S. a decisive edge, the nation now finds itself playing “catch-up” as it awakens to recognize the irregular threats it faces now and in the decades to come.

As a microcosmic case study, the campaign between Blazer’s Scouts and Mosby’s Rangers reveals some of the most fundamental threads found throughout guerilla warfare. This campaign shows how the right government response, one that understands the populace, intelligence gathering, and the appropriate use of force, can prove extremely effective in a counter-guerilla campaign. Sun Tzu held, “It is doctrine of war not to assume the enemy will not come, but rather rely on one’s readiness to meet him...”³ Not being prepared to confront any enemy is to assume “that enemy” will never arise.

Irregular Forces: Partisans, Guerillas, or Bushwhackers?

During the civil war, just as today, the terms used to describe irregular forces were interchangeable. In 1862, Major General Henry Halleck, commanding all Union forces for the Western Theater, sought to differentiate these terms to determine which groups were legitimate. He turned to a well-known legal scholar of the time, Dr. Francis Lieber, for greater clarity.⁴ The result was a booklet titled *Guerilla Parties* in which Dr. Lieber distinguishes three distinct categories of irregular fighters:

- Partisan – a legitimate combatant, enrolled, uniformed, paid, and subordinated to proper authority.
- Guerilla – member of a self-constituted group, not formally administered by the army, which conducted raids, extortion, destruction, and who gave no quarter.

War Rebel – distinguished by wearing civilian dress, finding shelter among the population; indistinguishable between combatant and non-combatant.⁵

While most Rangers were officially sworn in to Mosby's unit, the 43rd Battalion of Virginia Cavalry, at any given time a fluxuating percentage were not.⁶ It was not unusual for local sympathizers to accompany the Rangers on their raids. Many Rangers wore civilian clothes or even Union uniforms. Most written accounts label Mosby's Rangers as "partisans", but this paper will use the term "guerilla" because it best describes the Rangers, as defined by Dr. Lieber in 1862. Colonel Mosby himself once said, "Although I have never adopted it, I have never resented as an insult the term "guerrilla" when applied to me."⁷

State of the Union – 1863 and 1864

The two years leading up to the Shenandoah Valley Campaign was a pivotal time. In January 1863, President Lincoln issued his final Emancipation Proclamation. That same month, he replaced General Burnside with General Joseph Hooker as Commander of the Army of the Potomac and selected General Ulysses S. Grant to command the Army of the West. In early May, the Union's General Hooker was dealt a stinging blow when he was defeated at Chancellorsville by General Lee. This decisive victory was bittersweet for the South as General Stonewall Jackson succumbed to wounds suffered in the battle.

With newly gained momentum, General Lee initiates a second invasion into the North only to be defeated less than a month later at Gettysburg. With the tide now turned in their favor, General Grant and the Army of the West defeated Confederate forces at Vicksburg and, in turn, split the Confederacy east and west of the Mississippi. On November 19, 1863, President

Lincoln delivered his historic “Gettysburg Address” and in May 1864, he has found “his general” and elevates General Grant to Commander of the Union Army.

In August 1864, the future of the Union was in question as President Lincoln’s first top commander, General George B. McClellan, announced his bid for the upcoming presidential election. Running on an anti-war platform, should McClellan succeed, he would be in position to take the war and the nation in a much different direction. In the months leading up to the November 1864 election, two important events had the potential for derailing President Lincoln’s future for a second term. The first was General Sherman’s capture of Atlanta on September 2nd and the other was the upcoming Shenandoah Valley Campaign.

Guerilla Warfare in the Upper South

One of the least studied aspects of the Civil War is Confederate use of irregular or guerilla-type warfare. At the beginning of the war, many individuals and some small bands of Southern nationalists sprouted up to launch attacks on the Union army. They sniped at passing columns, ambushed patrols, and disrupted supply lines only to melt back into the landscape when confronted.⁸

As the war progressed, these individuals banded together and became more organized. Most groups were from densely rural areas where it was easy to avoid larger Union concentrations yet ideal for causing havoc by attacking outlying detachments or patrols.

Prominent Vietnamese scholar of asymmetric warfare, Truong Chinh, concluded an effective guerilla war needed to be a “people’s war”; meaning it should be employed in close conjunction with regular forces as well as the surrounding populace.⁹ This “people’s war” concept is very

much what Confederate authorities had in mind when they legitimized these bands with the Confederate Partisan Ranger Act of April 1862.¹⁰

Union Response

Early in the Civil War, Union authorities dismissed these guerilla bands as “bushwhackers” and an almost expected annoyance of any war. Eventually these irregular forces proved so effective they were able to disrupt upwards of one-third of the Union Army.¹¹ By 1863, these groups had two distinct advantages: first, they were highly organized by this point, especially groups like Mosby’s Rangers, and secondly, Union forces were not sure how to counter this threat.¹²

According to Bard O’Neill’s *Insurgency and Terrorism*, nothing weighs more heavily on the outcome of an insurgency than a government’s response.¹³ Critical to any success is the ability to properly recognize and understand the problem. Irregular warfare was hardly new in 1861 but many Union commanders chose to counter it with conventional means. Union responses, especially in the Northern Virginia area, varied widely both in method and effectiveness. The Union employed everything from large cavalry sweeps to the use of “retributive justice” in hopes of wiping these bands out.¹⁴ None of these tactics were effective and the latter only galvanized the populace against the Union.

Military use of scouts was also an old and proven concept but traditionally, most scouts solely gathered information or acted as an advance guard for a larger force. Employing these scouts, not only to gather information, but then empowering them to act on that information was a radically new concept for the military.

Colonel Carr B. White, a brigade commander in 3rd Division, VIII Army Corps, operating in West Virginia, first organized Union "Independent Scouts".¹⁵ On September 5, 1863, he issued order number 49 which called for: three officers, sixteen non-commissioned officers, and a hundred men to fill out this new scouting unit. More significant was Colonel White's vision of the type of men needed and how to employ them: "At least half the company will be expected to scout all the time. Its headquarters will be in the woods. None but experienced woodsmen and good shots will be accepted".¹⁶

Captain John Spencer was the first official commander of the Independent Scouts.¹⁷ After a short stint in command he was reassigned and command of the Scouts fell upon the two remaining officers: Lieutenant Richard Blazer, a former coal boatman from Ohio, and Lieutenant Harrison Gray Otis, a printer, who after the war, would go on to some fame as the outspoken publisher of the *Los Angeles Times*.¹⁸

Once stood up, the Scouts set out almost immediately into the dense, rugged terrain in pursuit of local guerilla bands – the foremost of these being Thurmond's Partisan Rangers, a notorious group that operated in the Sewell Mountain area of West Virginia.¹⁹ Lieutenant Blazer wasted no time learning the terrain and gathering information as he led his Scouts into the unknown countryside.

Success in a counter-guerilla fight depends greatly on aggressively learning everything about the guerilla and the surrounding terrain.²⁰ In the 2006 Marine Corps *Manual for Countering Irregular Threats*, it states, "To be effective at countering irregular threats, an intervention force must first understand this mosaic nature that is peculiar to the area of the intervention and will almost certainly have different aspects unique down to the sub-region. A deep rich and

sophisticated understanding of the environment of conflict is a necessary first step in the ongoing journey that an intervention force must take in its role..."²¹

On their first foray, Lieutenant Blazer voraciously gathered information about the land and enemy. After several days in the field, he surprised his Scouts by ordering them to light makeshift torches and then he proceeded to lead them through the hills at night.²²

They did not stop until after midnight and were moving again before dawn. After a short distance, he ordered them to check their rifles.²³ Blazer then led them into a bivouac site of sleeping Thurmond's Rangers. Lieutenant Blazer audaciously led a charge that took the entire guerilla band by surprise. The Scouts, having suffered not so much as a scratch, returned to Union lines with thirteen prisoners, thirteen horses, and twenty-three heads of livestock.²⁴

Over the next few months, the Scouts were highly successful in their counter-guerilla effort as well as serving as the advance guard for Colonel White's 3rd Brigade during two expeditions into Lewisburg, Virginia. Briefly disbanded between the expeditions, the Scouts were quickly reassembled under Lieutenant Blazer for the second incursion into Lewisburg. The Scouts' future seemed uncertain until the arrival of their new Division Commander, Major General George Crook.

General Crook knew something of irregular warfare from his previous experience fighting Indians during the Rogue River War.²⁵ Understanding the guerilla problem he faced in West Virginia, on February 16, 1864, General Crook issued general order No. 2:

"The regimental commanders of this division will select one man from each company...to be organized into a body of Scouts....One man from each regiment so selected to be a Non-Commissioned Officer....All these scouts when acting together will be under command of Commissioned officers....Officers will be particular to select such persons only as are possessed of strong moral courage, personal bravery, and particularly adept for this kind of service....The men selected who are not already mounted will mount themselves in the country by taking animals from disloyal persons in the proper

manner....providing however, that sufficient stock is left these people to attend crops with..."²⁶

These "Division Scouts" of roughly eighty men were charged with suppressing the local guerillas as well as gathering vital intelligence about the surrounding terrain and enemy.²⁷ Lieutenant Blazer was given command of this unit of handpicked men, which quickly became known as "Blazer's Scouts."²⁸

Now mounted, the Scouts ventured out to hunt guerillas in the surrounding area of Charleston, West Virginia. Born and raised only forty miles to the northwest, Lieutenant Blazer, was familiar with the rugged terrain and was quick to learn the immediate area. Selected from a larger pool now, most of the Scouts were from rugged areas in Ohio and many of them were veterans.²⁹ The Scouts continued their counter-guerilla fight with measurable success against Thurmond's Rangers as well as other guerilla bands in the area of the Big Kanawha and Coal Rivers south of Charleston.³⁰

Initially, in August 1864, when Major General Sheridan moved his Army of the Shenandoah into the Shenandoah Valley area he chose to ignore the guerilla problem contrary to the advice of General Ulysses S. Grant who recommended committing an entire cavalry division to deal with the matter.³¹ General Sheridan rejected even to the point of rationalizing the utility of these guerilla bands. In one report he wrote, "I had constantly refused to operate against these bands believing them to be substantially, a benefit to me, as they prevented straggling and kept my trains well closed up, and discharged such other duties as would have required a provost guard of at least two regiments of cavalry."³² Whether General Sheridan believed his own words is a matter of speculation. Eventually, he would expend great resources and devote thousands of troops to guard against this growing threat. He later concluded these guerilla bands and their

leaders caused him considerable trouble and the most fearsome of all was Mosby and his Rangers.³³

The Gray Ghost

John Singleton Mosby joined the Confederate Army in May of 1861.³⁴ In less than two years later he had proven himself one of Major General J. E. B. Stuart's best scout and was given command of fifteen men to act as partisan rangers.³⁵ By the end of the Civil War over 1,880 men would officially serve in the 43rd Battalion of Virginia Cavalry better known as Mosby's Rangers.³⁶

For the Union, the Rangers were an elusive enemy. They had no base camp or known headquarters. Most were intimately familiar with their surrounding area because most grew up and lived there most their lives. At the end of the day, many Rangers slept in their own homes at night.³⁷ If not at home, most Rangers stayed with local sympathizers who would feed, shelter, and conceal them.³⁸

In a letter he sent to General Stuart in 1863, John Mosby described his form of warfare:

"The Military value of the species of warfare I have waged is not measured by the number of prisoners and material of war captured from the enemy, but by the heavy detail it has already compelled him to make, and which I hope to make him increase, in order to guard his communications, and to that extent diminishing his aggressive strength".³⁹

This falls squarely in line with Clausewitz's concept of a "people's war" in which armed civilian bands would wage war outside of the main theater, careful to avoid the enemy's strength, but sapping the enemy as they "nibble at the shell and around the edge".⁴⁰

By the summer of 1864, Mosby's Rangers had substantial influence in the Virginia counties of Loudoun, Fairfax, Prince William, and Fauquier – an area commonly referred to, even today, as "Mosby's Confederacy."⁴¹ As the Union campaign in the Shenandoah got underway, Mosby's forces began to stretch further west and across the Blue Ridge Mountains. The Rangers conducted daring raids, harassed outlying patrols, and captured wagon trains of Union supplies. Until this point, John Mosby and his Rangers enjoyed operating with almost absolute impunity.

The Hunter Becomes the Hunted

To match a guerilla's asymmetric threat sometimes requires one to think and operate like the guerilla. It is then logical to conclude the qualities required to hunt the guerilla are the same qualities that make a successful guerilla fighter. According to Mao Tse-tung, a guerilla leader needs to be brave, positive, and loyal to his mission. He goes on to say the leader should display endurance in times of adversity and must be able to blend in with the surrounding populace.⁴²

General Sheridan had heard of the Scouts' successes in rooting out local guerilla bands and decided he needed someone to lead a Scouting force specifically for targeting Mosby's Rangers. General Crook knew of such a man in his division – a man he had personally selected to lead his Scouts because of his adeptness for what Crook called, "that kind of work."⁴³ That man was Richard Blazer.

On General Crook's recommendation, General Sheridan sent the following dispatch to Washington on August 20, 1864:

"I have one hundred picked men who will take the contract to clean out Mosby's gang. I want one hundred Spencer rifles for them. Send them to me if they can be found in

Washington.”⁴⁴ Soon, the unit was formed, mounted and armed with seven-shot repeating Spencer rifles.⁴⁵

The insurmountable task of squaring off with infamous John Mosby and his hardened Rangers now fell squarely on the shoulders of newly promoted Captain Richard Blazer and his Independent Union Scouts.

Although common characteristics pervade, every guerilla campaign is unique and no single model solution fits all.⁴⁶ Creativity and adaptability are crucial for leading a counter-guerrilla campaign. Since their inception, Captain Blazer taught his Scouts to live and operate much as the Rangers did. Selected for this special duty, many were experienced woodsmen themselves. They camped only very late at night and broke camp before daybreak.⁴⁷ Their operations lasted only a few days and when Captain Blazer came across information he deemed reliable they would launch into action.

There are three essential tenets of modern counter-guerilla intelligence doctrine: 1) intelligence drives operations 2) intelligence is about the people 3) intelligence and operations are mutually supporting in that they feed one another.⁴⁸ General Crook understood these precepts even before the Civil War when he was fighting Indians. He had been careful to select some of his best officers for scouting duties and would send them out to learn everything they possibly could about the people in the surrounding areas.⁴⁹

In many ways, Richard Blazer was his own best intelligence officer. According to accounts from his Scouts, Captain Blazer was careful to question every single “man, woman, and child” he met.⁵⁰ Perhaps his greatest strength was his natural ability to blend among a populace that was largely sympathetic towards Mosby’s Rangers and the Confederate cause. The most

revelatory accounts come from the Rangers themselves. One Ranger wrote, "By his [Captain Blazer's] humane and kindly treatment, in striking contrast with the usual conduct of our enemies, had so disarmed our citizens that instead of fleeing on his approach and notifying all soldiers, this giving them a chance to escape, little notice was taken of him. Consequently, many of our men were 'gobbled up' before they were aware of his presence."⁵¹ Even John Mosby himself once joked he feared the locals would make Blazer a "naturalized Confederate citizen."⁵²

Despite most written accounts, popular support for the Rangers was not an absolute. More the exception than the rule, not all Rangers were benign to the locals.⁵³ On April 1, 1864 General Robert E. Lee wrote in an official correspondence, "Experience has convinced me that it is almost impossible, under the best officers even, to have discipline in these bands of Partisan Rangers, or to prevent them from becoming an injury instead of a benefit to the service, and even where this is accomplished the system gives license to many deserters and marauders, who assume to belong to these authorized companies and commit depredations on friend and foe alike".⁵⁴ General Lee went on to conclude Partisan Rangers upset regular units' troop morale and it was his final intension to muster Partisan Rangers, to include Mosby's Rangers, into regular service.⁵⁵ General Lee had great admiration for Colonel Mosby as a leader but understood partisan life was a powerful attraction for the wrong sorts of individuals.

On September 3, 1864, General Crook's forces set out for Berryville in the northeast corner of West Virginia. Blazer's Scouts screened the Union forces along the Shenandoah River attempting to keep Mosby's Rangers at bay.⁵⁶ Gathering information along the way, the Scouts realized a sizable Ranger force, possibly as large as one hundred and fifty, was near.⁵⁷ The following day, two local citizens provided the Scouts with a location for the Rangers and, mindful of a possible trap, the Scouts proceed there with great caution.⁵⁸

Feeling safe on the west side of the Shenandoah River, the Rangers had unbridled some of their horses and were resting when Blazer's Scouts attacked.⁵⁹ Confused and frantic, the Rangers attempted to flee in every direction.⁶⁰ Realizing they were still outnumbered and fearing the Rangers would be re-enforced, the Scouts made their way back toward the river.⁶¹

Captain Blazer's official report from Myer's Ford, dated September 4, 1864:

SIR: I came upon Mosby's guerrillas, 200 strong, at this place, and after a sharp fight of thirty minutes we succeeded in routing him, driving them three miles, over fences and through cornfields. They fought with a will, but the seven-shooters proved too much for them. My loss is 1 killed and 4 wounded, 1 severely; his is, 1 commissioned officer and 6 privates killed, and 1 commissioned officer and 4 privates wounded. I have 6 prisoners....I have my wounded and entire command over the river....⁶²

Recounting the events at Myer's Ford, Major John Scott, the first official historian of Mosby's Rangers, called Captain Blazer, "the most formidable Federal officer with whom we have had to cope in the Valley."⁶³ Another Ranger went on to admit, "I did not imagine there was an enemy on our side of the river and thought the only danger would be from the other side..."

On November 16, 1864 Ranger Captain R. P. Montjoy was leading his company back from a raid on a Union cavalry unit. After reaching the Shenandoah River, he allowed about half his unit to return to their homes in Loudoun County.⁶⁴ He then proceeded on with his thirty Rangers with about twenty prisoners in tow.⁶⁵ The Rangers were only about two miles west of the Shenandoah River when he decided to stop for a rest under the trees. Suddenly, caught by total

surprise, the Rangers found themselves under attack from Blazer's Scouts. Using surprise and violence of action, Captain Blazer knew he had the upper hand.

Frantically, the Rangers fled east to the "Vineyard", a familiar home of one of General Stuart's officers. There, the Rangers attempted to make their stand but proved unsuccessful. As one Ranger later recounted, "In less time, almost, than it takes to tell it, they [Blazer's Scouts] recaptured the prisoners and horses, killed two of our men, wounded five others and galloped away, while Montjoy and his badly whipped men sought much needed cover in the direction of the river."⁶⁶

Showdown at Kabletown

When word of the Rangers' humiliating defeat at the Vineyard reached Colonel Mosby he was furious. Finally, Mosby concluded, he and Captain Blazer "could not long inhabit opposite sides of the Blue Ridge Mountain."⁶⁷

Mosby dispatched one of his most trusted officers, Major Adolphus "Dolly" Richards with two companies of Rangers to "wipe Blazer out! Go through him!"⁶⁸ Mosby sent them off with a warning, "You let the Yankees whip you? I'll get hoop skirts for you! I'll send you into the first Yankee regiment we come across!"⁶⁹

Early, on November 19, Richards rode out with his Rangers in search of the Scouts. Various accounts number the Ranger force anywhere between 110 and 319.⁷⁰ They headed toward Snicker's Gap just east of the Shenandoah River. He soon got word the Scouts were nearby and pointed his Rangers in the direction of Kabletown, West Virginia – a known stop for the Rangers.⁷¹

Once arriving in Kabletown, Richards received a report of a Scout camp nearby. They sprinted to the reported spot only to find an empty bivouac. Richards knew that he had only just missed them and they could not be far. He sent two of his best Rangers, John Puryear and Charley McDough, back to Kabletown with orders to keep an eye out for any signs of Blazer and his Scouts.⁷²

Early the next day, a small group of Scouts spotted the two Rangers. The Scouts quickly netted Puryear but Ranger McDonough managed to escape. McDonough rejoined the Rangers a few miles away and made his report. Richards now knew the Scouts were close.

Possibly unaware he was outnumbered and being hunted, Captain Blazer and his sixty-two Scouts were themselves searching out the Rangers.⁷³ Blazer, possibly thinking he could get the upper hand, was intent on finding the Rangers.

Reports of what occurred next are sketchy and sometimes conflicting. Some accounts say Richards baited Blazer into an ambush and others say Blazer simply did not suspect such a large force of Rangers. Either way, Captain Blazer had no indication of what he was about to encounter.

When the Scouts and Rangers finally squared off, it was a close range fight and Blazer quickly lost up to a third of his force in the initial attack.⁷⁴ The Scouts' repeating rifles proved a disadvantage at close range, which was better suited for the Ranger's Colt pistols.⁷⁵ In disarray, the remaining Scouts fled towards Myerstown, West Virginia. Disregarding his own safety, Captain Blazer attempted, unsuccessfully, to consolidate his remaining force in Myerstown. This attempt to rally his men probably cost Captain Blazer valuable time he could have used to save himself. Forced to flee, Captain Blazer was soon overtaken and captured by four pursuing Rangers.

General Sheridan sent the following casualty report to General Halleck, then Chief of Staff for the Army:

Captain Blazer, with his company of scouts, had a fight with Mosby on the 18th...killed seven or eight of Mosby's men, and followed him across into Loudoun County. Blazer then returned and went to Kabletown. On the 19th Mosby recrossed the mountains and attacked Blazer; killed 16, wounded 6, and scattered the command. Twenty-nine have come in; eleven are still missing. Blazer had 62 and Mosby 115 men.⁷⁶

In his personal memoirs, General Crook credits Captain Blazer for his efficiency against Mosby's Rangers but states his force was too small to finish the job.⁷⁷ Ironically, about the time Blazer's Scouts were defeated at Kabletown, General Crook was preparing a plan to greatly increase the size of Scouts' force.⁷⁸

Describing the events at Kabletown, a former Mosby Ranger wrote, "The day Blazer's command fell, he had just as good odds of beating us as we had of beating him."⁷⁹ Most written accounts from Rangers show noting but the utmost respect for Captain Blazer, both as a man and a commander. In light of all of Colonel Mosby's accomplishments, he stated his defeat over Captain Blazer "passed anything that had been done in the Shenandoah campaign".⁸⁰

Incidentally, one of the four Rangers who took part in the actual capture of Captain Blazer was Lewis Thornton Powell - better known as Lewis Paine or "the terrible Powell."⁸¹ After leaving the Rangers, Powell found fame as one of John Wilkes Booth's co-conspirators in the assassination of President Lincoln.⁸² For his crimes, specifically the attempted murder of then-Secretary of State, William Seward, Powell was tried and later hanged.⁸³

Conclusion

The modern-day understanding and doctrine, as they pertain to counter-guerrilla warfare, are for the most part, the same as those used by Blazer's Scouts in 1864. This is not an indictment against modern doctrine and concepts but rather to point out the enduring fundamentals of guerrilla warfare and the fact Captain Blazer and his Scouts intuitively grasped these concepts with little or no formal training.

General George Crook understood the enemy, the nature of the threat, and knew how to counter it. Not unlike our special operations forces today, General Crook created an elite unit of screened and selected men with the skills and aptitude for countering this irregular type of warfare. Specially trained, equipped, and led for a specific mission – Blazer's Scouts were created to take the fight to Mosby's doorstep. Moreover, they did so, by understanding the enemy, gathering intelligence, and meeting the enemy's asymmetric threat on their own terms.

In the Marine Corps' *Small Unit Leader's Guide to Counterinsurgency*, then Lieutenant General James Mattis wrote, "[Our small unit leader] must utilize tactical cunning, the art of employing the skills of our profession in shrewd and crafty ways to out-adapt our enemies. They must be perceptive in their understanding of culture and its impact on operations. Our small unit leaders must be able to lead in tough environments, be aggressive decision-makers, and always act with moral integrity".⁸⁴ Captain Richard Blazer and his Scouts personify every aspect of that statement.

The Scouts' defeat at Kabletown should not overshadow their accomplishments or the insights they provide today. Their 1864 campaign has all the elements of a model case study for students of modern warfare. The "what" is not nearly as significant as how the Scouts were able to accomplish what numerous efforts before them were not able to do. Suspend reality for a

moment and image what Captain Blazer and his Scouts would have done differently armed with the multitude of recently published counter-guerrilla and counter-insurgency manuals and publications available today. It is hard to envision they would have done anything differently. Examined with a modern understanding of irregular warfare, Captain Richard Blazer and his Independent Union Scouts proved to be ahead of their time and stand out as the only effective counter-guerrilla campaign of the entire Civil War. The Gray Ghost himself, Colonel John Singleton Mosby, admitted the greatest threat he and his Rangers ever faced were Blazer's Scouts.⁸⁵

Epilogue

In his closing chapter on the Civil War, General George Crook wrote in his autobiography, "I regret to say too late that it was not what a person did, but it was what he got credit of doing that gave him a reputation and at the close of the war gave him position."⁸⁶ Although well known for his exceptional service, Richard Blazer never sought fame or fortune after the war. In fact, personal pride kept him from asking for a pension though he easily would have been granted one.⁸⁷

After his capture outside Myerstown, Captain Blazer was sent to Libby Confederate Prison in Richmond, Virginia. He spent nearly four months in prison until he was paroled in exchange for a Confederate Colonel.⁸⁸ Upon his release, Captain Blazer was presented with his personal effects to include his Union cavalry sword – a gesture which had been personally arranged by Colonel Mosby.⁸⁹

Captain Blazer returned to his unit, the 91st Ohio Volunteer Infantry, and eventually left active service on June 24, 1865. He returned to his wife, Dolly, and their five children in

Gallipolis, Ohio and eventually, their family would grow to thirteen in all. Richard Blazer became a leader in the Gallipolis community and served as the Gallia County sheriff.

John Mosby and Richard Blazer were in contact and even exchanged letters after the war.⁹⁰ John Mosby even sent Richard Blazer a "Mississippi rifle" which was put to good use hunting squirrels.⁹¹

In the summer of 1878, the "John A. Porter", a steamboat from New Orleans, arrived near Gallipolis with passengers and crew who fallen ill with yellow fever. Turned away by other ports and running dangerously low on provisions the Porter became disabled and was forced to land near Gallipolis. Desperate at this point, the passengers and crew found relief in the aid of a handful of brave citizens, among them, acting sheriff Richard R. Blazer.⁹²

Ignoring his own safety, Richard Blazer proved once more he was a man of great courage and humanity. Captain Richard Blazer contracted yellow fever and passed on October 29, 1878 in his home of Gallipolis, Ohio.⁹³

A small pension request for Mrs. Dolly Richards was eventually vetoed by President Grover Cleveland. In response, one journalist pointed out, "Captain Blazer captured at one dash...more prisoners from the rebel army than the government can pay at the rate of \$30 per month in one hundred years..." Finally, with a continued grass-roots effort from people who knew Captain Blazer, the small pension of twenty dollars per month was approved. Among Captain Blazer's advocates was President Rutherford B. Hayes who had served in the 23rd Ohio Volunteer Infantry – a source of many of Blazer's Scouts.⁹⁴

Absent any known memoirs attributed to Richard Blazer, there is little doubt he was a vanguard in his grasp and practice of irregular warfare. Personal letters and memoirs are often skewed but actions on the ground and proven results speak volumes about Captain Blazer's

knowledge and abilities. What are needed to fight a counter-guerilla campaign are imagination, daring, and ingenuity. Not hindered by a formal military education, Captain Blazer was unbound from the restraints and constraints of conventional military science and allowed to apply the true art of war. In a eulogy written for Captain Blazer, Colonel Mosby called Blazer his "most formidable foe".⁹⁵



Captain Richard R. Blazer

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