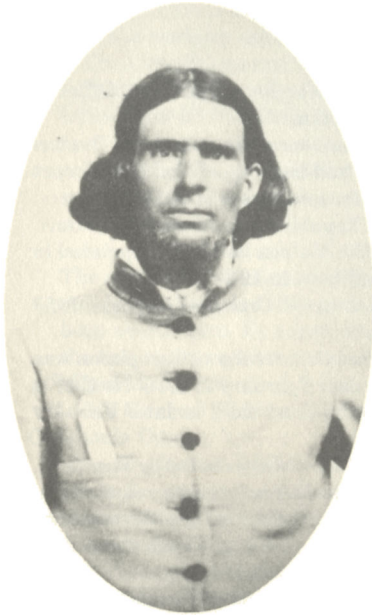


Butternut and Blue



Confederate Uniforms in the Trans- Mississippi

By Whit Edwards

When the War between the States erupted at Fort Sumter, South Carolina, on April 12, 1861, few Southerners in the Trans-Mississippi West were ready to march into the field. They knew unrest and dissatisfaction with United States policies had driven the South into a fever pitch of secession, but that was politics, not war. With secession, Union troops quickly abandoned military posts in the Indian Territory, and as they left, they stripped Fort Washita, Fort Arbuckle, and Fort Cobb of all military

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stores which they carried north to Union Kansas. Other military posts in the Trans-Mississippi, such as Fort Smith and Little Rock Depot in Arkansas, met similar fates. The removal of military supplies, coupled with a poorly-funded Confederate government, had serious consequences for Confederate soldiers when the fighting reached the Trans-Mississippi and Indian Territory.

When the call to arms came, men of the Trans-Mississippi West answered with exuberance. They came equipped with whatever they owned—accouterments, livestock, uniforms, wagons, and weapons. They trusted the promise of the newly-formed Confederate government to supply them with additional clothing, weapons, and pay. Newspapers carried advertisements or “call to arms” notices for volunteers throughout the Trans-Mississippi with promises of supplies and arms:

I have authority from Col. A.H. Jones C.S.A. to raise a company of Infantry for service in Missouri for the term of twelve months. Arms and a complete outfit under Confederate regulations will be furnished as soon as the company is organized and reported. Daniel W. Jones.¹

However, the Confederate quartermasters in the Trans-Mississippi did not have a stockpile of uniforms and arms nor were there armories or many clothiers and milliners in the region. Confederate depots at Washington, Arkansas, and Jefferson and Tyler, Texas, began compiling the weapons of war, as well as clothing and supplies. To accomplish the monumental task of outfitting an army, they purchased materials from Mexico, England, France, and even the United States (through third parties or on the black market).

When it became evident that quartermasters could not meet all the demands placed upon them, the tone of the “call to arms” announcements changed. The Confederate government preferred “to raise companies for the [duration of the] war and furnishes with arms only those that enlist for that time. Companies furnishing their own arms can be received for twelve months.”² For the most part companies were raised by towns or counties and boasted their pride either by name or by dress. Thus units were called “Camden Knights,” “Polk County Invincibles,” “Morehouse Guards,” or the “Red River Dragoons.” James Fremantle observed in 1863, “the Texas Cavalry company dress consist[ed] of Jack boots with huge spurs, ragged black or brown trousers, flannel shirts, and black felt hats ornamented with the Lone Star of Texas.”³

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In an effort to legislate uniformity, the Confederate government asked its troops to follow the section in *Regulations for the Army of the Confederate States* that dealt with proper military uniforms. Depending on rank and branch of service, the uniforms were ornamented slightly differently (artillery trimmed in red, infantry blue, cavalry yellow, medical green, and engineers and pioneers white), but the jackets were to be made from cadet gray wool and the trousers from sky blue kersey wool. The cut of the uniform also varied for rank as well as occasion (dress, parade, or fatigue duty). The specified wools were in short supply from the onset and substitutions were the general order. Consequently uniforms varied in color and cut dependent upon the manufacturer and from lot to lot for dye colors. In the Trans-Mississippi West, the government's specifications were all but impossible to follow. Nonetheless, every attempt was made to appear military.

Even when the government expressed the desire for uniformity in military dress, it usually had more pressing needs such as firearms and food. Colonel Charles DeMorse of the Twenty-ninth Texas Regiment wrote about uniforms in 1862, "I had heard a great deal about Georgia cloth manufacture and Columbus has two mills, but none of the products that I could find or hear of were half as good as our homemade jeans."⁴ The money he received for uniforms he paid to his men as a clothing stipend. Others complained that the quartermaster department was unable to supply them with uniforms or anything else. Colonel Joseph Orville Shelby of the Fifth Missouri Cavalry wrote to his commanding officer, General T. Holmes, in 1862, "We have never drawn any clothing, shoes, salt or anything else from the Quartermaster department. What little clothing the men had they had collected for themselves."⁵

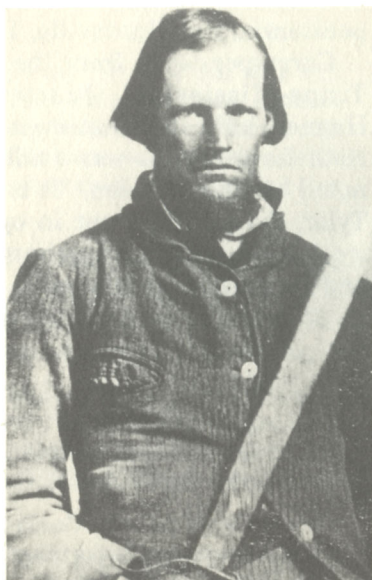
Fighting men wore a combination of military and personal clothing, and according to one historian:

The "uniforms" . . . were, as circumstances of their procurement might suggest, as promiscuous in color and assortment as they were insecure in fabrication. Footwear was of all shapes and types—moccasins, high-cut boots, short-top boots, and low quarter-shoes called pumps. Socks . . . were of all colors. The typical trousers were either gray woolen "Kentucky jeans" or woolen plaid jeans. . . . Coats were both single- and double-breasted and varied widely in color and design.⁶

Colonel DeMorse described the mix of clothing worn by his men:

Aside from a few well worn butternut colored uniforms belonging to some veterans of Company "E," all the men looked strangely alike—

Francis Warford (right) served in Company E of the Nineteenth Arkansas Infantry and fought at Boggy Depot in the Indian Territory. Like many other Confederate soldiers, he wore a combination of military and civilian clothing and carried a saber that was probably locally manufactured. His homemade jacket sported bone buttons. Captain J.E. McCool of the Ninth Texas Cavalry (p. 424) wore a homemade infantry jacket with buckeye buttons when he posed for this photograph (Courtesy Old Washington State Park, Arkansas, right, and Oklahoma Historical Society, p. 424).



mud colored or grey home spun jeans; red and white checked or brown wool shirts muddy brogans, wide low porkpie hats or an occasional stetson.⁷

Cherokee Colonel James M. Bell wrote of the 5,000 troops he saw in one camp in 1863:

[O]ne thousand are without arms[.] [M]any have not Clothing to change, [and are] without shoes . . . any one in their right senses would say [they were] in deplorable condition looking [more] like Siberian exiles than soldiers. . . . We are neglected. The Confederacy certainly does not know our condition. . . . I have been in an almost nude condition. . . . I am a foot.⁸

The quartermaster department in the Trans-Mississippi worked as hard as possible to secure supplies for the fighting men, but the high command considered operations in the Trans-Mississippi insignificant when compared to the crises they faced at Richmond or Vicksburg. Consequently, they moved the men in the Trans-Mississippi to the bottom of the priority list. Quartermasters in the Trans-Mississippi had to secure arms and clothes by any means at hand. As the effects of the Union blockade of the Mississippi River

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and Gulf Coast took effect, the Trans-Mississippi depots and the penitentiary at Huntsville, Texas, became manufacturing centers.

Correspondence from the chief of the Clothing Bureau in the Trans-Mississippi Quartermaster Department, Major W.H. Haynes, indicated that even when the equipment to manufacture cloth for uniforms was available, capable manpower was not. He noted on one occasion, "It is expected that the machinery sent to Tyler, Texas, when put in operations, will turn out 20,000 yards woolen jeans. These mechanics cannot be obtained from civil life, and I suggest that inquiry be made throughout the army for them."⁹

Quartermasters frequently resorted to placing advertisements such as these in local newspapers:

Wanted: jeans, linseys, white domestics, cottonades, yarn socks. For clothing for the soldiers. I will pay liberal prices for the above mentioned articles in any quantities, delivered at Washington [Arkansas] Geo. Taylor Capt + A.Q.M. C.S.A.¹⁰

Cotton Cards for sale. Cards for sale at Government clothing rooms. Linsey, Jeans and Socks taken in exchange at fair prices. Apply to Maj. J.D. Thomas Q.M.C.S.A.¹¹

The quartermasters also relied heavily on home manufacturing of goods. Haynes noted optimistically in one report:

[I have] every reason to believe that the army can be supplied from home products with 108,000 hats, 40,000 jackets, 40,000 pairs of trousers, 100,000 shirts and drawers, 120,000 pairs of shoes, 3,000 tents and cooking utensils to meet pressing demands. To accomplish this, however it will be necessary to keep me amply supplied with funds (I have a very small amount at present).¹²

Funding in the Trans-Mississippi came predominantly through the issuance of Confederate bonds backed with cotton instead of gold. As the war progressed—or regressed for those living and fighting in the Trans-Mississippi—cotton bonds held less and less value, and the Confederate soldiers in the field, unable to secure quantities of clothing from the government, had to fend for themselves.

As a result, soldiers turned to their families and their home towns for help. Private R.P. Edmondson of the Second Arkansas Mounted Rifles wrote to his father, "I wrote to you sometime since for some clothing. If you have not sent them please forward them immediately."¹³ J.W. Hoyte, a member of Quantrill's Raiders, pleaded, "Pa, I wish you would send an overcoat oil cloth."¹⁴ Private

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J. Edwards of Wheeler's Cavalry in a letter to his father, J.T. Edwards, expressed many needs:

I don't know weather [sic] you ever got my letter or not so I will emminate [sic] again[.] [F]irst and foremost I want a heavy comfort lined quilt or blanket or something eaqualy [sic] as warm. A heavy suit of clothes, jeans pants lined, pair of double boots, army overcoat with cape. Heavy woolen shirt[,] one heavy cotton shirt, and anything else you may think I need.¹⁶

In answer to these requests, families enlisted relatives, neighbors, and others to supply their loved ones. Susan Washburn of Fayetteville, Arkansas, assured her husband, Woodward Washburn, "Mrs. Cline came in today to see me and has offered to help me about dyeing my cloth and help me to get it sown[.] [sic] I will soon have some jeans for you and Perry and Claude."¹⁶

From her sister's home near Rusk, Texas, in 1863, Sarah Watie wrote to her husband, then-Colonel Stand Watie of the First Cherokee Mounted Rifles:

I shall go back [home] in a few days so as to get some clothes for you but there is no chance to get only to spin them but C[harlotte, her sister] and I can do it in two or three weeks. . . . I will send you some things as soon as I get back. You[r] black horse is not in good order so I will send you the bay.¹⁷

Through letters and newspaper advertisements, individual soldiers and the government itself made their needs known. In 1861 Lieutenant George M. Williamson sent a plea to the Washington, Arkansas, newspaper:

All clothing designed by the citizens of Hempstead for Capt. Williamson's company, the "Southern Defenders," are requested to be delivered at the store of D. & V. Block by the 10th of November. The clothing needed for each member is one coat, two pairs of pants, two pairs of socks, two pairs of drawers. It is to be hoped the citizens of Old Hempstead will respond to the call, as the members of this company are sadly in need of the above articles. Geo. M. Williamson
2nd Lieut.¹⁸

The *Arkansas State Gazette* in November, 1862, carried a directive from a Confederate officer:

I hereby detail Captain W.S. Haven and Sergeant Stuckey, to go to the State of Arkansas to procure winter clothing and such other articles of bedding as can be had, having lost nearly all on the retreat from Corinth — we are left nearly destitute. James H. Fletcher Lt. Col Comd'g 20th Ark Reg't of Infantry, Holly Springs.¹⁹

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Three weeks earlier, the newspaper's editor had admonished his readers:

We fear that our people at home are not so earnest in their efforts as at first. We fear they depend too much now upon the effort of the government to supply what is needful—forgetting that the government depends alone upon the people. Unless great exertions are made, and made now, our brave defenders will be upon the wet and frozen ground without covering, and be forced to defend our homes exposed to the bleak and piercing winds of winter ragged and barefoot.²⁰

That some goods reached some fighting men was evident in a report of L.P. Chouteau, the Osage Battalion adjutant in 1864. He noted with great joy, "I am glad . . . to see that our government is doing so great a favor to give our poor Osages who are almost necked [*sic*] for want of Clothing an annuity of Goods."²¹

In some areas of the Trans-Mississippi, the conditions surrounding the fighting man's home were intolerable for their families. Vendettas, feuds, and the treachery of bushwhacking plagued Missouri, Arkansas, and particularly Indian Territory. Hundreds of Indian Territory families, such as the Waties, moved to the safety



As a graduate of the Louisiana State Medical College, Junius Bragg received a tailored staff officers uniform (Courtesy Public Library of Camden and Ouachita County, Arkansas).

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of relatives early in the war. But those who stayed behind for whatever reason suffered greatly. Ordinary citizens endured robbery, murder, looting, and burning at the hands of both armies. J.S. Murrow, a Baptist missionary, wrote to a colleague, "The western portions of this Indian Territory are all ruined and laid waste[.] [A]ll improvements are burned, stock all driven off or killed, and entire western settlements are deserted."²²

Conditions at home were often as bad or worse than those in the field. Christian Isley, a Union private for either the Second Kansas or the Second Colorado, probably best described them in a letter to his wife, "The rich folks or rather the ones that were rich before the war look as poor, as poor folks generally can look; and what shall I say then of the poor, I can not begin to describe their intense poverty."²³

No matter how much the people from home wanted to help their fighting men, they struggled to supply even themselves. Sarah Watie in December, 1863, after a visit from her husband wrote him, "I have been busy ever since you left but it looks like we cant keep a head or even. I have spun every day since you left and still all are bare for clothing except Jack and Ninny [Jacqueline and

Most rank-and-file soldiers wore uniforms of undyed homespun cloth. After months of wear and tear without proper laundering, the cloth gradually yellowed to the color of butternuts, hence one of the nicknames of Southern fighting men. The jacket is in the collections of the Oklahoma Historical Society's State Museum of History in Oklahoma City (Courtesy OHS).



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Minnehaha, their daughters] but all are well now and we can do better."²⁴

Soldiers in the field often found more creative ways of supplying their needs—they “borrowed” from the enemy. George Washington Grayson, a mixed-blood Creek who rose from private to captain of Company K of the Second Creek Regiment during the course of the war, recalled:

Our soldiers were poorly clad and most of the time my company presented a motley appearance. . . . So when we caught a prisoner we generally stripped him clean of such of his wearing apparel as we desired, they always being better than our own, and placed upon him instead such of our own duds as he could wear. Our government had issued to our men certain wool hats . . . of the plain sheep’s wool without any coloring. . . . Now these hats, while not comely of shape and general appearance, had the further disadvantage of losing after a short service even the little shape and semblance of figure that had been given them by the manufacturers.²⁵

A Missouri soldier lamented, “After the surrender they took all our arms and ammunition and stripped us of the necessary clothing.”²⁶

For many Confederate soldiers, however, the thought of wearing federal blue was unsettling, so for want of going cold, they tried to “boil the blue out” of the cloth. But as the war continued, they objected less and less to wearing blue and the Southern army of the Trans-Mississippi took on a decidedly blue tint. Christian Isley noted, “I would yet mention that because the people cannot tell us from rebels is simply for this reason: as many of the bushwhacking rebs as can get the Federal uniform wear them, if they kill one of our men or take one prisoner they strip them of all their clothing.”²⁷ And Wiley Britton, a young soldier of the Sixth Kansas Volunteer Cavalry, wrote:

A detachment of this division just arrived from Park Hill, Cherokee Nation, reports that seven of our Indians [Third Indian Home Guard] known as Pins, were killed at that place a few days ago by a party of rebels wearing the federal uniform. . . . This is not the only instance during the past year of small detachments of our troops having been entrapped by the enemy who were dressed in the federal uniform.²⁸

Distinguishing one army from the other was not often easy at first glance. Christian Isley remarked to his wife, “The Old man was quite a pleasant man and not a little bit pleased to see so many feds or *regular blue coats* as we are often called in this place.”²⁹ Hannah Worcester Hicks, whose Cherokee husband, Abijah, was



Many Confederates in the field looked more like civilians with a few pieces of military equipment than like soldiers. They or their families often supplied what clothing and equipment they wore (Courtesy Library of Congress, LCB8184-1794).

killed by bushwhackers in 1862, and whose home near Park Hill was looted and burned, kept a poignant diary during the war. She also remarked on the trend of Confederates wearing blue, "We heard the other day of southern men in Federal disguise coming down the Grand River."³⁰ Whether they were in disguise or just happy to have clothing is unclear. But it is certain that supplies were few and far between unless they came from the North.

Confederates targeted northern supply trains for two reasons—strategy and need. In cutting supplies to the enemy, they could supply their own army. Colonel G. Sweet of the Fifteenth Texas Cavalry, boasted in a letter from Batesville, Arkansas:

On the morning of July 5th I learned that there was a train of 10 wagons loaded with U.S. Sutler goods on the way to Jacksport via Sulfur Rock and then some 10 or 12 miles from Batesville. I immediately dispatched 50 men to capture them which they succeeded in

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The reality of service in the Confederate army meant that few soldiers dressed according to military regulations, especially in the Trans-Mississippi West.

doing. . . . On July 6 I received information of another similar train of wagons on the same road. They were in like manner captured. . . . These captures put us in possession of a considerable quantity of goods much needed by our army.³¹

Chaplain George Primrose of the Fourth Missouri Cavalry wrote to an Arkansas newspaper, "I send you the following daring exploit of Capt. J.W. Jacobs, of Burbridge's Regiment, who, on last Wednesday evening captured a train of the enemy in ten miles of Little Rock, burning the wagons and bringing off 22 prisoners and 60 mules and harness, also a large lot of clothing."³² In another report nearly a year later, T.S. Bell of Stand Watie's Brigade reported of one engagement, "The men that were along say we captured between 300 and 400 wagons loaded with supplies and commissary stores there were only 127 brought out, and the clothing divided among the men, all got a tolerable good out fit."³³

Confederates wearing Federal uniforms presented many problems for the soldiers of the United States. In October, 1864, Union General W.S. Rosecrans cautioned Confederate General Sterling Price of the severe penalties his men faced if captured wearing Federal uniforms:

Lt. Graves C.S.A with forty enlisted men, bearers of flag of truce, arrived here on the 20th, escorting prisoners captured by you. The

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escort to this flag [of truce] was clothed in *our* uniform. I have always adopted as a rule, necessary for my own protection, that soldiers of your army captured in our uniform, should be treated as spies. The necessity of this rule must be obvious to you. I cannot object to you wearing captured clothing, provided its color is changed so it cannot deceive me. I have not interfered with Lt. Graves, for he was protected by the flag he carried. I am not unmindful, General, of your humanity and courtesy toward Federal prisoners in times past, but I consider it my duty to express my regrets that you permitted this practice, which exposes your men to the rigorous punishment demanded by military prudence as a protection from surprise.³⁴

Union soldier Wiley Britton described the Union army's orders for dealing with such circumstances:

Orders were issued early in the war in regard to the punishment to be inflicted upon rebels caught wearing the federal uniform. Every one captured wearing it should be tried by a drum-head court-martial, condemned and immediately shot.³⁵

In his November 17, 1864 report, Colonel John Phillips of the Seventh Missouri provided an account of the "rigorous punishment" alluded to in Rosecrans's letter when he wrote, "A number of prisoners taken in this fight were dressed in our uniform, and in obedience to existing orders from departmental headquarters, and the usages of war, they were executed instanter."³⁶

The Trans-Mississippi Confederates were a hardy group of warriors who from the outset of war found themselves required to provide their own arms and supplies. That is not to say that the Confederate quartermasters failed to supply them with goods. The men in the field did receive shipments of food, harness, tentage, ammunition, some arms, and even infrequent shipments of clothes. However, those shipments were far from adequate, leaving some companies going into battle with full knowledge that their arms would come from fallen comrades in their front. When faced with situations like that, it is understandable that uniforms were low priority. It also is clear that the Confederate soldiers in the Trans-Mississippi, if not for their military discipline and formations, would have more closely resembled a mob of angry citizens.

ENDNOTES

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² *Ibid.*, June 8, 1862.

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³ Walter Lord, ed., *The Fremantle Diary: Being the Journal of Lieutenant Colonel Arthur James Lyon Fremantle, Coldstream Guards, on his Three Months in the Southern States* (New York: Capricorn Books, 1960), 7.

⁴ *The* (Clarksville, Texas) *Standard*, October 18, 1862.

⁵ J.O. Shelby to General T. Holmes, October 27, 1862, in *The War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies* (128 vols., Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government, 1880-1901), Series 1, Vol. 13: 981 (hereafter cited as *OR*).

⁶ Stephen B. Oates, *Confederate Cavalry West of the River* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1961): 60-61.

⁷ John Grady, *Suffering to Silence* (Quanah, Texas: Nortex Press, 1975), 9.

⁸ James M. Bell to Caroline Bell, September 2, 1863, in Edward Everett Dale and Gaston Litton, *Cherokee Cavaliers: Forty Years of Cherokee History as told in the Correspondence of the Ridge-Watie-Boudinot Family* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1939), 137.

⁹ Major W.H. Haynes, Chief of Clothing Bureau, Confederate States Army, January 18, 1864, *OR*, Ser. 1, Vol. 22, Pt. 2: 1135.

¹⁰ *The Washington Telegraph*, October 1, 1862.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, November 25, 1863.

¹² Haynes report, *OR*.

¹³ Private R.P. Edmondson to John Edmondson, March 24, 1861, private collection.

¹⁴ Private J.W. Hoyte to John Hoyte, October 17, 1861, private collection.

¹⁵ Private J. Edwards to J.T. Edwards, October 17, 1861, private collection.

¹⁶ Susan Washburn to Woodward Washburn, September 27, 1862, Archives and Manuscripts Division, Oklahoma Historical Society, Oklahoma City (hereafter cited as *AMD OHS*).

¹⁷ Sarah C. Watie to Stand Watie, May 20, 1863, in Dale and Litton, *Cherokee Cavaliers*, 125.

¹⁸ *The Washington Telegraph*, November 6, 1861.

¹⁹ *The* (Little Rock) *Arkansas State Gazette*, November 7, 1862.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, October 18, 1862.

²¹ L.P. Chouteau to James M. Bell, September 1, 1864, in Dale and Litton, *Cherokee Cavaliers*, 185.

²² J.S. Murrow to "Bro Hornaday," January 11, 1862, Grant Foreman Collection, Box 24, Volume 97, Gilcrease Institute, Tulsa, Oklahoma (hereafter cited as *GI*). For an excellent study of the suffering in Indian Territory see Mary Jane Warde, "Now the Wolf Has Come: The Civilian Civil War in the Indian Territory," *The Chronicles of Oklahoma*, 71 (Spring, 1993): 64-87.

²³ Christian Isley to Eliza Isley, October 19, 1864, Special Collections, Wichita State University, Wichita, Kansas (hereafter cited as *WSU*).

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²⁵ W. David Baird, ed., *A Creek Warrior for the Confederacy: The Autobiography of G. W. Grayson* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1988), 97.

²⁶ Colonel R. Poser, Thirty-fourth Missouri Militia, report, October 10, 1864, *OR*, Ser. 1. Vol. 41: 336.

²⁷ Christian Isley to Eliza Isley, December 5, 1863, *WSU*.

²⁸ Wiley Britton, *Memoirs of the Rebellion on the Border, 1863* (Chicago: Cushing, Thomas and Company, 1882; Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1993), 198.

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³⁰ Hannah Hicks, diary, November 16, 1862, GI.

³¹ Colonel G. Sweet, July 15, 1862, *Supplement to the Official Records* (Wilmington, North Carolina: Broadfoot Publishing Company, 1994), Pt. 1, Vol. 3: 34.

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³³ T.S. Bell to Mrs. M.M. Bell, September 30, 1864, AMD OHS.

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³⁵ Britton, *Memoirs*, 198.

³⁶ Colonel J. Phillips, Seventh Missouri State Militia, report, November 7, 1864, *OR*, Ser. 1, Vol. 41: 352.