

# THE BURNING AND REPAIR OF MOONEY'S BRIDGE, IRON MOUNTAIN RAILROAD

DE SOTO, MISSOURI SEPTEMBER-OCTOBER 1864

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Mooney's Bridge as it appears today

In the autumn of 1864, Missourians had experienced the ugly face of war for three and a half years. It had to deal with major battles and minor skirmishes. These battles included Lexington and Wilson's Creek in the northern and western section of the state and the Battle of Belmont, Island No 10 and New Madrid in Southeastern Missouri. By the fall of 1861 and the spring of 1862, most southern forces had been driven from the state and had retreated into Arkansas. From this point, Missouri would be subjected to numerous guerilla raids both large and small. Many small groups of men would move about freely in Missouri as independent raiders. This resulted in terrible suffering for the residents on both sides.

The fall of 1861, saw one of the earliest raids into Missouri. This was led by General M. Jeff Thompson. This raid led to the only true battle in Jefferson County, The Battle of North Big River Bridge. General Thompson again, encountered Union forces, a few miles south at Blackwell Station. The main objective of this was to burn the bridges leading from St. Louis to Pilot Knob. At this point in the war the rules of battle were followed, and the Union forces were paroled. As the war progressed, the rules of War were not always followed. Many atrocities were caused to the residents of the state, both military and civilian. The years of 1862 and 1863 saw larger raids led by men like General Shelby and General Marmaduke.

To the residents of Missouri, the late summer and autumn of 1864 had been filled with guerilla activities. But they were still not prepared for the avalanche that was heading their way. The Federal forces in the east had been victorious in many battles, but the cost had been high with thousands of casualties. Notwithstanding this, the Confederacy was in trouble. General Sherman was at the outskirts of Atlanta and General Grant was slowly moving towards Richmond. The Confederate Government would need a bold plan to relieve some of the

#### THE INVASION OF MISSOURI

In order to alleviate the pressure at Richmond and Atlanta, a bold plan was devised to invade the state of Missouri. This would entail capturing both St. Louis and Jefferson City. More than 25,000 infantry were being prepared to move into Missouri from Arkansas if St. Louis was to be captured by Price. This could possibly lead to an invasion of Illinois. At the very least, an invasion of Missouri would force President Lincoln to send troops to repel the Confederate forces.

In mid September General Sterling Price organized a new Army of Missouri. Price's army would consist of three divisions, each led by a veteran cavalry commander. This army would consist of 12,000 men. Brigadier General Joe Shelby would be in command of 3,300 men, making up the first division. The second and largest division would be commanded by Brigadier General James Fleming Fagan. This division numbered over 5,000 men. The last division was commanded by the son of a former governor of Missouri, Brigadier General John Sappington Marmaduke. His division counted over 3,700 men.

By September 26, 1864, Price had moved northward through southeast Missouri and was entering the Shut-in-Gap in Arcadia Valley, just 90 miles south of St. Louis. The resulting Battle of Pilot Knob was a hard fought battle with a large number of Confederate casualties. The bloody battle delayed Price's Army and allowed the Union forces to fortify St. Louis. The Union forces under General Ewing were forced to abandon Fort Davidson and retreat to Rolla. There were constant rear guard skirmishes with the rebels in pursuit. "The great invasion of Missouri now became known as Price's raid. Elements of the Price's army were everywhere in

eastern Missouri. Price moved his army westward towards Jefferson City and later farther west towards Kansas City, where he was defeated at the Battle of Westport. He was driven south. Missouri had been saved but the path of destruction and plunder by the confederate forces would be remembered for a long time.



Trenches located on a hill above the bridge



Trenches located in the woods east of the bridge

### THE DESTRUCTION OF MOONEY'S BRIDGE

As General Ewing was en-route to Pilot Knob, General Andrew J. Smith's infantry occupied De Soto and bridges along the Iron Mountain Railroad. On September 29, fearing that the Confederate forces would get behind him and cut him off from St. Louis, General Smith moved his troops northward and set up lines along the Meramec River. He concluded De Soto was of no military value. On Friday afternoon, September 30, 300 Arkansas troops (probably from General William L. Cabell's Brigade) arrived in De Soto with orders to destroy the depot and water tanks and Mooney's Bridge. The Arkansas troops helped themselves to town supplies and moved on reaching Victoria just 3 miles north. Later, scouts of the thirteenth Missouri Cavalry entered De Soto. These units reported the destruction of three bridges and two water tanks along the railroad and stated that the entire area south of De Soto was infested by rebels.

On October 1, a scout train moving south, reported all the tracks and bridges were undamaged to the bridge one mile south of Victoria (Mooney's). The south advised the rebuilding of the bridge to open the railroad for another 19 miles south, A howitzer was requested along with a repair company. On October 2, De Soto was re-occupied by Union troops.

SPECIAL Order No. 2006 was issued from Headquarters Saint Louis District, St. Louis, Mo. October 3, 1864. This order directed the 138<sup>th</sup> Illinois Infantry under the command of Colonel John W. Goodwin to proceed via the Iron Mountain Railroad to Carondelet, MO. As at an early an hour tomorrow morning as practicable. Upon arriving, Colonel Goodwin reported to Brig. Gen. Madison Miller for orders. The regiment was to proceed south to repair the bridge south of Victoria.

The 138<sup>th</sup> Regiment, Illinois Infantry, was organized June 21, 1864. This was a 100 day Regiment consisting of 10 companies. It was organized at Camp Wood, Quincy Illinois. Colonel John W. Goodwin was in command. After its muster, the regiment was ordered to Fort Leavenworth Kansas, for garrison duty. They scouted the western counties of Missouri where they drove the guerillas out. They were finishing their 100 days as Price's raid began. The regiment, seeing the emergency, voluntarily extended their term of service. They were assigned to guard and duty along the Iron Mountain Railroad.

Conflicting reports as to the numbers and positions of guerillas south and west of De Soto were reported to General Rosecrans in St. Louis.. He ordered that the 138<sup>th</sup> be issued entrenching tools and ordered to fortify their positions around Mooney's Bridge. This became known as Camp Goodwin.

By October 4<sup>th</sup>, the 138<sup>th</sup> is camped around Mooney's Bridge and trenching has begun on several locations on the hillside surround the bridge. Colonel Goodwin orders a moon shaped redoubt dug near the bridge and the road leading north to Hillsboro. On October 5<sup>th</sup> at 3:00 P.M. Goodwin reports, "My regiment has finished trenching at this camp." He is ordered not to wait for bridge building supplies to arrive by train but to cut timber from the surrounding area and put up a temporary trestle work. His men begin the repairs and on October 6<sup>th</sup> Goodwin reports that the repairs will be finished the following day. Brigadier General Miller took the first train across the bridge on October 7<sup>th</sup>. The train then proceeded south to the next burned bridge.

Colonel Goodwin reported that his men were unwilling to go farther south to do repair work. As Price's army had moved westward and the threat to St. Louis subsided, the men were unwilling to serve longer because their term of service had expired. The regiment was then returned to Camp Butler, Illinois, where they mustered out October 14, 1864. The regiment had lost ten of their men killed in 100 days.

The area around Mooney's Bridge would be guarded for the remainder of the war. In the years following, the bridge was rebuilt with iron and steel. It would never again be destroyed in combat. The trenches and redoubt were soon forgotten and would remain hidden for the next



150 years. It was rumored that a fort once stood in De Soto but no one knew where it was located. Only recently has the redoubt and trenches of Camp Goodwin been rediscovered.



Under this dense area of brush lies the remains of Camp Goodwin

A number of Civil War relics were found at Mooney's Bridge. They were lost by members of the 138<sup>th</sup> Illinois Infantry or other companies who were stationed at the bridge. The relics included tips from bayonets, scabbards, buttons, coins, square nails and bullets. Part of a powder flask was found in near-by trenches. There was also the remains of an entrenching shovel. The shovel spoon had broke and was left by the men of the 138<sup>th</sup> Illinois Infantry.



#### Civil War relics found at Mooney's Bridge

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#### Entrenching shovel

The remains of this entrenching shovel was found in the area of Mooney's Bridge. The shovel spoon broke and was left by men of the 138<sup>th</sup> Illinois Infantry.