"This Regiment Will Make A Mark"

Letters From a Member of Jennison's Jayhawkers, 1861–1862

edited by Jeffrey L. Patrick

The region along the Kansas–Missouri border was the bloodiest guerrilla battleground of the Civil War. Civilians, conventional soldiers, and partisans all were pitted against each other during four years of cruel and unforgiving warfare that raged back and forth across the state line. Towns such as Osceola, Missouri (sacked by Union forces in 1861), and Lawrence, Kansas (raided by Confederate guerrillas in 1863), became examples of a terrible method of waging war in which pitched battles between mass armies were replaced in many cases by raids that devastated civilian and military lives and property.

Some of the most notorious practitioners of this type of warfare were the men of the Seventh Kansas Cavalry and their commander Colonel Charles Rainsford Jennison. Popularly known as "Jennison's Jayhawkers," the unit was raised in 1861 and had a brief but dramatic tour of duty in Missouri before being transferred east of the Mississippi River in the spring of 1862. The burning, pillaging, and looting activity by Jennison's troops in Missouri was cheered by some Northerners but also protested as excessive by both pro-Southern sympathizers and supporters.

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INDEPENDENT
KANSAS
Jay-Hawkers.

Volunteers are wanted for the 1st Regiment of Kansas Volunteer Cavalry to serve our country

During the War.

Horses will be furnished by the Government. Good horses will be purchased of the owner who volunteers. Each man will be mounted, and armed with a Sharp's Rifle, a Navy Revolver, and a Sabre. The pay will be that of the regular volunteer.

Volunteers from Northern Kansas will rendezvous at Leavenworth. Those from Southern Kansas will rendezvous at Mound City. Volunteers singly, parts of companies and full companies will be mustered into the United States service as soon as they report themselves to the local recruiting officer at either of the above places. Upon arriving at Mound City volunteers will report themselves to John T. Snoddy, Acting Adjutant. Those who rendezvous at Leavenworth will report themselves to D. R. Anthony, Esq. of that place.

C. R. JENNISON,
Col. 1st Regiment Kansas Vol. Cavalry.
MOUND CITY, Aug. 24, 1861.

A recruiting broadside for the First Kansas Cavalry, which later became the Seventh Kansas Cavalry, popularly known as Jennison's Jayhawkers.
of the Union. In the words of one historian, Jennison was one of the first to “show the South the face of war as it really is. . . . His methods were the opposite of romantic. They were destructive, dirty, ruthless, and (one hesitates to use the word) realistic, but they were brutally effective” in helping to win the war by carrying the destruction to Southern noncombatants. Conversely, other historians have argued that Jennison’s tactics actually were counterproductive and helped drive potentially loyal Missourians into the Confederate ranks.1

Stephen Starr’s detailed study Jennison’s Jayhawkers, published in 1973, examines the full history of these controversial Kansas cavalrmen. Since that time additional information has come to light regarding the Kansas–Missouri guerrilla war of 1861–1862 and the movements and actions of the Seventh Kansas.3

Part of this new information includes the letters of a member of Company K of the regiment, known only as “Jo” or “Jayhawker,” who wrote to the Mishawaka, Indiana Enterprise.4 In a series of three letters, the unidentified soldier kept the people of St. Joseph County, Indiana, informed of the activities of his unit as they helped “redeem” Missouri from the secessionists. The letters explain the motives and the justifications underlying some of the behavior of the Seventh’s members and include details about their movements and engagements along the border. “Jayhawker” also recorded a narrative of the events surrounding the only major defeat of Jennison’s men by guerrillas in a skirmish at Columbus, Missouri, in January 1862.

Few newspaper letters were written by members of Jennison’s regiment during this period, making the “Jayhawker” letters all the more valuable. Their importance is increased when one considers that “Jayhawker” was a member of Company K, for as Stephen Starr wrote, “It is a great loss to history that in the vast mass of Civil War letters and diaries that has survived . . . there should be so little to describe the inner life of what was assuredly one of the most interesting bodies of troops in the Union army, namely . . . Company K of the Seventh Kansas.”5

The uniqueness of Company K was due in large part to its commander, John Brown Jr., son of the legendary abolitionist who waged war against proslavery proponents during the Bleeding Kansas period and seized the federal arsenal at Harper’s Ferry, Virginia, in 1859. The younger Brown had left his father and Kansas for Ashtabula County, and


3. For detailed studies of guerrilla warfare along the Kansas–Missouri border, see Albert Castel, A Frontier State at War: Kansas, 1861–1865 (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1978); Michael Fellman, Inside War: The Guerrilla Conflict in Missouri During the American Civil War (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989).

4. The letters were written to the Enterprise between November 1861 and January 1862. The identity of “Jayhawker” may never be positively established, but two possibilities exist. The first is eighteen-year-old Joel C. Jones, a farmer from Ashatabula County, Ohio, who enlisted in Brown’s company on September 6, 1861, and was mustered into service on November 12. He was discharged in May 1862 due to disability, perhaps accounting for the lack of additional letters. The more likely possibility is Sergeant Joseph Searsett, a twenty-eight-year-old machinist from Columbiana County, Ohio, who enlisted and was mustered at the same time. See Muster Out Rolls and Descriptive Rolls, Seventh Kansas Cavalry, Company K, Records of the Kansas Adjutant General, Library and Archives Division, Kansas State Historical Society. Apparently “Jayhawker” made the acquaintance of the Enterprise’s editor, Archibald Beal, while both were traveling by train in northern Indiana. Beal probably appealed to the soldier to contribute letters to his paper. John W. Miller, Indiana Newspaper Bibliography: Historical Accounts of All Indiana Newspapers Published from 1804 to 1980 (Indianapolis: Indiana Historical Society, 1982), 397.

5. Starr, Jennison’s Jayhawkers, 77.
John Brown Jr., son of the famous abolitionist, recruited troops for the Third Kansas Infantry. These men, however, joined Jennison's Seventh Kansas Cavalry.

Ohio, where he remained until the war began. In the summer of 1861 Brown began recruiting for the Third Kansas Infantry and soon sent a partially formed company west, but his men found that the Third Infantry already was full and instead joined Jennison's command. Brown followed with the rest of his recruits in January 1862 but was then frequently absent from his command due to illness and resigned his captain's commission that spring.8 "Jayhawker" was mustered into service with Company K in November 1861 at Fort Leavenworth and became part of a group of men fiercely dedicated to ending slavery and recruited by the son of a virtual "patron-saint" of abolition.

Because of Brown's ability to recruit only half of Company K by the fall of 1861, his men were relative latecomers to the war by the time they arrived in Missouri. The rest of the regiment was united for the first time on October 12 at Fort Leavenworth and then moved to Kansas City early the following month. On November 11, a portion of Jennison's command fought its first action against the Confederates on the nearby Little Blue River. Half of Company K then joined the regiment at Kansas City on November 13 and participated in a raid on the town of Independence on November 14. After a brief sojourn at Leavenworth, Jennison's Jayhawkers were ordered to West Point in Bates County, Missouri, on December 10. From West Point they moved to the nearby village of Morristown on Christmas Eve and engaged in a six-week period of scouting and raiding over west-central Missouri.

"Jayhawker's" letters appear as written, and the original spelling has been retained.

[Enterprise, November 30, 1861]

LETTER FROM JOHN BROWN, JR.'S SHARP-SHOOTERS.
KANSAS CITY, Mo., Nov. 15, 1861.
EDITOR ENTERPRISE, DEAR SIR:

John Brown Jr.'s "pet lambs" left Chicago on Thursday the 8th inst., for Fort Leavenworth, via Chicago, Burlington & Quincy, and St. Jo & Hannibal Railroads[,] a journey of three days, and met a hearty reception. The Fort is on a beautiful site on the Missouri river, and the country around is lovely, the scenery magnificent. Our boys have all fell in love with Kansas and say that they shall make it their future home.

As I informed you when we met on the cars between Mishawaka and Laporte we intended to join Col. Montgomery's Regiment.9 On our arrival at the

8. Starr, Jennison's Jayhawkers, 82-123. Further information regarding the early activities of the regiment may be found in S.M. Fox, "The Early History of the Seventh Kansas Cavalry," Kansas Historical Collections, 1909-1910 11 (1910): 238-53.

9. Born in 1814 in Ashitaba County, Ohio, James Montgomery came to Linn County, Kansas, in 1854. He then led "jayhawkers" raids into Missouri over the next several years, plundering farms and freeing slaves. In July 1861 he was commissioned colonel of the Third Kansas Infantry, but the unit later was disbanded. He left Kansas in December 1862, journeyed to Washington, and secured authority to raise the Second South Carolina Volunteers, a black regiment. He later led a brigade of black troops in South Carolina, Georgia, and Florida. Montgomery died in 1871. See Starr, Jennison's Jayhawkers, 30-31, 45; F.B. Sanborn, "Some Notes on the Territorial History of Kansas," Kansas Historical Collections, 1913-1914 13
Fort we found that Montgomery's Regiment already contained ten companies, the requisite number. Col. Jennison's First Kansas Cavalry were quartered at the Fort with nine companies and we concluded that the best thing we could do was to fill up the little Colonel's Regiment. Accordingly on Tuesday we were mustered into his regiment. On Wednesday we were armed and took a boat for this place to join the regiment which had moved down on Monday. Col. Jennison is known as chief of the Jayhawkers. He is the most energetic officer we ever saw; not a moment of time is lost; he is after the traitors every day. Yesterday the regiment went down to Independence, took possession of the city and captured 100 negroes, 60 horses[,] 40 head of cattle, 50 set of harness[,] 20 wagon loads of flour, a number of hacks and buggies and various other articles. Today some of the company have gone out on a similar errand, and this will be the work of every day until this whole country is dressed up.

On Monday 120 of our boys went to the little Blue River, about 15 miles below here and routed 700 rebels with a very small loss. The enemy had greatly the advantage of the ground, being on the bluffs among the rocks. Our loss is eight killed and about the same number wounded. 10

Although this is a cavalry regiment, we fight principally on foot, Indian fashion, or any way to take advantage. We calculate to jayhawk our horses and not call on "Uncle Sam" for any more. We think this is the proper way and the only way to crush this rebellion. Take everything that can be of value to the traitors and they will be unable to continue this rebellion. We take negroes from traitors only; Union men are protected.

This sheet of paper was jayhawked from a rebel. You will find enclosed a proclamation of the Colonel. He proposes to overrun the four counties therein named in twenty-four days. 12 This regiment will make a mark. You will hear from me again as soon as anything of interest occurs.

Yours Truly, JO.

[Enterprise, January 18, 1862]

LETTER FROM JOHN BROWN JR.'S SHARPSHOOTERS.

CAMP JOHNSON, Jan. 1st, 1862.

ED. ENTERPRISE: This is New Year's day, and rather a rough day too, and here we are at Harrisonville, Cass Co., Mo., a deserted Secesh village. We are encamped in our little tents among the brush, and are


11. On November 11 Lieutenant Colonel Daniel R. Anthony led three companies of the Seventh Kansas in an attack on three hundred to four hundred Confederate recruits encamped along the Little Blue River. Although driven from their camp, the Confederates fell back to a rocky, wooded area nearby and in turn forced the Kansans to retreat. See Starr, Jennison's Jayhawkers, 91–92.

12. Jennison issued a proclamation on November 14, 1861, to the residents of five Missouri counties (Jackson, Pettis, Johnson, Cass and Lafayette) in which he swore to protect the lives and property of loyal Unionists but promised vengeance on the "traitors" who supported the Confederates. See Hildagarde Rose Herklotz, "Jayhawkers in Missouri, 1858–1865," Missouri Historical Review 18 (October 1923): 72. The full text of the decree is in Starr, Jennison's Jayhawkers, 87.
In November 1861 Lieutenant Colonel Daniel R. Anthony led three companies of the Seventh Kansas in an attack on Confederate troops encamped along the Little Blue River.

having rather a disagreeable time, while our friends at home are enjoying themselves during the holidays in their accustomed manner, but we don’t envy them their pleasures. It is enough to know that the soldier will reap a reward for the privations that he has to endure. It is some consolation to know that in after years we can reflect upon the hardships and dangers we have had to endure to sustain the best Government the world ever saw. It is gratifying too to know that we are striking Secesh on a tender chord, by destroying their property and liberating their slaves. The 1st Kansas Cavalry have liberated more slaves than there are men in the regiment. Where is there another regiment that can say as much? Had the Government adopted this plan in the beginning, the cause of this war would be well nigh wiped out by spring. On the 15th ult., sixteen slaves came to our camp from Missouri; we were then encamped eight miles below Leavenworth City. On the 16th we started for West Point, Bates County, Mo., where we arrived after five days march. For a scope of eight or ten miles through the country over which we passed, we left only black spots to mark the places where there once stood secesh buildings, and their live stock followed up the regiment. On our arrival at West Point we found Col. Nugent there with a regiment of Home Guards, and also two companies of the 8th Kansas regiment. We remained there only a few days as forage was rather scarce. On Christmas we marched to this place where we will probably remain some time, at least long enough to relieve the Secesh of their loot property for a scope of twenty miles around. On the 30th we brought in fifty negroes. This is nothing unusual, many run off and come to us. You ought to hear them rejoice when they meet in camp. Gen. Pope has driven Price from Osceola and burned Papinsburg and a large quantity of Price’s stores. I will give you a pedigree of the Jayhawkers in a week or two.

Yours truly, JAYHAWKER.

[Enterprise, February 1, 1862]

For the Enterprise.

LETTER FROM JENNISON’S REGIMENT.

HEADQUARTERS 1ST KANSAS CAVALRY,
CAMP JOHNSON, MORRISTOWN, MO,
Jan. 15th, 1862.

MR. BEAL—On the 5th inst[,] there came a squad of Union men to our camp from Johnson Co.[Missouri] for assistance. Accordingly on the 6th a detachment of 190 of us, under command of Major Herrick, went down with them to help the poor fellows out. The

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15. Major Thomas P. Herrick of Highland, Kansas, was mustered into service on October 28, 1861, and was promoted to lieutenant colonel in September 1862. See Report of the Adjutant General, 214.
first day we marched to Holden, Johnson Co. [Missouri], 33 miles from camp, where we took up quarters. On the 7th we scouted the country for some distance, ran several parties of rebels into the brush, and captured some stock &c. Capt. Utt, with a detachment of 35 men was sent to Columbus, 14 miles east of Holden, to occupy the place and remain over night. It was well known that a considerable force of rebels was collecting in the vicinity of Columbus, and that Capt. Utt was in great danger of being attacked, but the Capt. kept them off by stratagem, telling the citizens that he was the advance guard and that the command was coming in. Early on the following morning Capt. Merriman of Co. D was sent with 47 men to reinforce Capt. Utt.17 (Permit me to state here that the command was made up of parts of several companies.) By my request Lieut. Bostwick permitted me to detail ten men from Co. K and fall in with Merriman’s company.18 We were among the 47 that went to reinforce Capt. Utt. Our guides were citizens, whom we learned after proceeding some distance, knew nothing about the road; consequently we were led in by the wrong way.

The country about Columbus is timbered and the underbrush is very thick. As we neared the village, I was sent with three men in advance to see that the way was clear. When within a quarter of a mile of town two or three men ran by me and rushed on, thinking to find our men still there, but instead of that they were saluted by a shower of bullets; but fortunately no one was hit. They rushed back to us and we returned to the company, where we all dismounted and marched through the brush to within sight of the village, but could see no one and came to the conclusion that they had all left. We had our horses brought up, mounted them and charged into town, when we learned that Capt. Utt had left in the morning and that the rebels came in an hour after his departure. On inquiry we were informed that there was only 18 of the rebels and that they had fled. Capt. Merriman took the precaution to station pickets around the town, and gave the boys ten minutes time to get what they wanted out of a little store that belonged to a rebel. This done, we mounted and started back. We came to a halt about 75 rods from the village, sounded the bugle to call in the pickets, when whistling, came a volley of bullets from 300 rebels who were concealed in the brush. Four gallant boys fell here; some were thrown from their horses and a few dismounted. I attempted to dismount but my spur caught in the blankets that were strapped to my saddle and prevented me from dismounting, and a lucky thing for me that I did not get off, for the horses that were wounded began to kick and plunge about, and the rebels yelling like so many demons, so frightened my horse that he became unmanageable. Twenty or thirty shots were exchanged, when we were forced to fly. As I ran out on the road two shots were fired at me, but I ran the gauntlet unharmed. A retreat was effected in pretty good order; Capt. Merriman was the last to leave, and the last volley was directed at him. His clothes and cap were riddled with bullets, his horse was slightly wounded in one foot [hoof], but the Capt. came out without a scar. Some of the men that were in the rear retreated back through town. One was killed in the street.

Two of my men that lost their horses were taken on others and thus escaped. Our chief bugler was slightly wounded on the forehead and his horse was killed. He escaped on a wagon. Private A.L. Blanchard, of Co. K, Orderly Sergeant Holmes, and two privates of Co. D and one private of Co. C, were

16. Company A’s Levi H. Utt of White Cloud, Kansas, was mustered into service on October 28, 1861. He was promoted to major of the Seventh Kansas Cavalry in 1864. See ibid., 215.
17. Clark S. Merriman of Wyanet, Illinois, was a railroad station agent who recruited most of Company D from his hometown and offered them for service in Kansas when the quota for troops from Illinois was satisfied. He was mustered as captain on September 3, 1861, and promoted to major in October 1862. See Starr, Jenison’s Jayhawkers, 68-69; Report of the Adjutant General, 228.
18. First Lieutenant Burr H. Bostwick of Harr’s Grove, Ohio, was mustered into service on November 12, 1861, and promoted to captain in October 1862. See Report of the Adjutant General, 252. The fact that “Jayhawker” was allowed to lead a detail of men by Lieutenant Bostwick reinforces the theory that his true identity is Sergeant Joseph Seacrist, identified in footnote 4.
killed; and several very slightly wounded. The rebel loss is unknown. Asa Evans, of Co. K, and two of Co. D, were taken prisoners, but fortunately we had two secesh prisoners that we had taken the day before, and thus effected an exchange. Our men taken prisoners were released on the morning of the 10th and reached camp at 9 in the evening, after a march of 30 miles. Their great coats boots and caps were taken, and old shoes and ragged clothes given in exchange. Our dead were also stripped of their clothes.

"We calculate to jayhawk our horses," wrote Jo in his letter of November 30, 1861. The confiscation is depicted in this scene of jayhawkers raiding from Missouri farms.

The prisoners were grossly insulted by some of the rebels. They were once tied to trees to be shot, but others interfered and saved their lives. This band of rebels was led [by] Col. Elliott.

We retreated about five miles, overtook Capt. Utt's company who were driving off a lot of stock. Seventeen of our men were then missing, but 16 of Utt's men turned back with us; this made our number 46, one less than we had at first. We went into town by another road, burned every building and slipped off. Elliott attempted to cut us off again but we were on the alert this time. The boy that had strayed from us came in in the evening.

We left Holden on the 11th after applying the torch to 225 secesh buildings. We brought out 50 Union families, who burned their own buildings, so that they could be of no service to the rebels. Burning rebels' buildings and turning their families out of doors in winter may seem rather rough to you, but this is our only resort. If we go into the country with a large force the hounds are all at home to work and pretend to be good Union men. If we go with a small squad, so that they can collect five to one, they will give us fits in the brush and run home and go to work again. The families that we brought out are going to Kansas; the secesh had robbed them of nearly all their clothing, household furniture, &c. We arrived at camp on the 12th; the weather was bitter cold. I froze my feet and ears on the prairie. It was pitiful to see

19. All sources generally agree with "Jayhawk" regarding the casualty figures for this action. One contemporary source states that the regiment lost a total of five killed, three wounded, and three taken prisoners. Of that amount, Company D is reported to have suffered a first sergeant and two privates killed, two taken prisoner, and one wounded slightly. Company K reported one man killed and one taken prisoner. The Confederates supposedly lost one captain and four privates killed. Company D also reported the loss of five horses killed "belonging to troopers," plus their captain's horse lost "by being shot," along with seven "minie" rifles, seven navy revolvers, and five sets of cavalry equipment, while Company K lost three horses and equipment, four rifles, two revolvers, and one saber. See Compiled Records Showing Service of Military Units in Volunteer Union Organizations, RG 94, 407, National Archives, Washington, D.C.

20. Private Alfred L. Blanchard of West Andover, Ohio, enlisted on September 6, 1861, and was mustered into service on November 12, 1861; First Sergeant Daniel Holmes of Company D, a resident of Wyandotte, Illinois, enlisted on August 8, 1861, was mustered on September 5, and was promoted to first sergeant on November 3, 1861; Asa Evans of Morgan, Ohio, enlisted on September 6, was mustered into service on November 12, and was discharged for disability on October 23, 1862, at Corinth, Mississippi. See Report of the Adjutant General, 228–29, 252–53.

Members of the Seventh Kansas Cavalry at Butler, Missouri, 1863.

the poor women and children shivering in their wagons as we came along, but such is the effects of war.²²

Yours truly, JAYHAWKER.

By early February, the Kansas troops had been moved back over the border to the town of Humboldt in the southeastern part of Kansas, largely due to their excesses against civilians in Missouri. As the war continued around them, Jennison's regiment languished in inactivity in Humboldt until March 29, when they arrived in Lawrence. Ordered in late April to gather at Fort Riley to prepare for a proposed expedition to support Union forces in New Mexico, the Seventh Kansas Cavalry remained there until May 18, when the idea of a southwestern foray was abandoned and the regiment was moved once more to Fort Leavenworth. From there its members sailed down the Missouri River on steamboats for Tennessee and a new theater of war on May 27–28, 1862.²³

The men of the Seventh Kansas Cavalry were noteworthy in the annals of Civil War regiments. Rather than leading grand saber charges against the enemy in Missouri, Jennison's Jayhawkers became proficient in the brutal style of guerrilla warfare that plagued portions of the Trans-Mississippi theater throughout the war. It is hoped that more letters like those written by "Jayhawker" will be uncovered to provide additional details about the lives of the men and women who experienced the Civil War in Kansas and Missouri.

²² Detailed accounts of the action at Columbus may be found in a letter from Sergeant F.E. Newton to "Dear Friends," Camp Johnson, January 15, 1862. See Daniel B. Holmes Collection, Library and Archives Division, Kansas State Historical Society; John Utt and Levi H. Utt, "History of the Seventh Kansas Regiment," ibid. Levi Utt wrote in his account that this was the only time during the war when any considerable portion of the Seventh Kansas was completely routed by the enemy. He blamed the defeat entirely on Captain Merriman for "allowing his men to scatter and rob in the presence of an active enemy" when they first arrived in Columbus.

²³ Starr, Jennison's Jayhawkers, 123–62.