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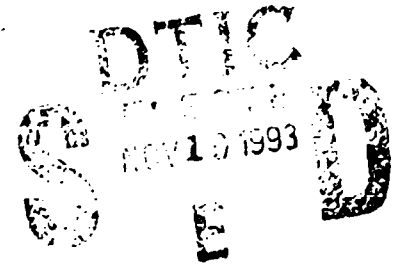
MOSBY'S RANGERS AND PARTISAN WARFARE

A thesis presented to the Faculty of the U. S. Army
Command and General Staff College in partial
fulfillment of the requirements for the
degree

MASTER OF MILITARY ART AND SCIENCE

by

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M.A., S.A.I.S., The Johns Hopkins University
Washington, D.C., 1991



Fort Leavenworth, Kansas
1993

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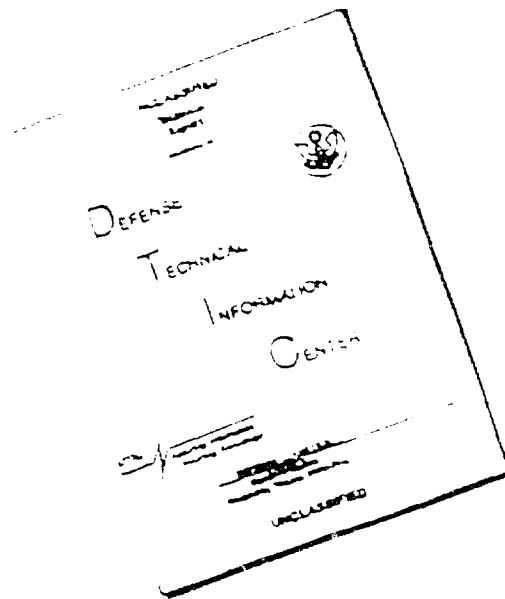
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MASTER OF MILITARY ART AND SCIENCE

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ABSTRACT

MOSBY'S RANGERS AND PARTISAN WARFARE by MAJ Freeman E. Jones, USA, 149 pages.

Colonel John Singleton Mosby led the most successful partisan campaign during the American Civil War. Major General J. E. B. Stuart, the Confederate Cavalry commander, allowed Mosby to form an unconventional unit with nine volunteers in December 1862. Mosby then organized, trained, and equipped the 43d Battalion of Virginia Cavalry, better known as Mosby's Rangers. This unit grew to almost one thousand men in strength and conducted many daring raids on the Union forces and lines of communication. Mosby, nicknamed the Gray Ghost, tied down Union troops in Virginia and Maryland and relieved pressure on General Robert E. Lee and the Army of Northern Virginia. The Rangers also provided timely and accurate intelligence to Confederate corps-level units.

This study examines Mosby's campaign from the unit's formation in 1863 until the termination of the war in 1865. All aspects of this unconventional campaign are described with emphasis on Mosby's tactics, techniques, and procedures. This study provides an excellent example of the successful employment of partisan warfare and the attempts to combat it. It concludes with the lessons learned and their contribution to current Army doctrine.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	<u>Page</u>
APPROVAL PAGE	ii
ABSTRACT	iii
CHAPTER	
1. INTRODUCTION	1
2. UNIT FORMATION AND ORGANIZATION, 1863	17
3. MILITARY OPERATIONS, 1863-64	44
4. MILITARY OPERATIONS, 1864-65	69
5. CONCLUSION	112
ENDNOTES	129
FIGURES	140
BIBLIOGRAPHY	143
INITIAL DISTRIBUTION LIST	149

CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

Colonel John Singleton Mosby led the most successful partisan campaign during the American Civil War. Major General (MG) J. E. B. (Jeb) Stuart, the Confederate Cavalry commander, allowed Mosby to form an unconventional unit with nine volunteers in December 1862. Mosby then organized, trained, and equipped the 43d Battalion of Virginia Cavalry, better known as Mosby's Partisan Rangers. This unit grew to almost 1,000 men in strength and conducted many daring raids on the Union forces. Mosby, nicknamed the Gray Ghost, tied down Union troops in Virginia and Maryland and relieved the pressure on General R. E. Lee and the Army of Northern Virginia. Mosby's campaign provides an excellent example of the successful use of partisan warfare. His operations provide useful information for a study of current unconventional warfare doctrine.

As an introduction to Mosby's campaign, the contemporary relevance of this historical study will be discussed. Then a brief biographical sketch of Mosby is provided, followed by background information on his area of operations. Finally, the military operations in this area before Mosby's arrival will be summarized.

The study of Mosby's operations is especially relevant today because of the nature of future conflicts. The end of the Cold War has led to a new era with unique challenges to U. S. national security. With the termination of the bitter struggle between superpowers, we now face greater uncertainty with new crises and instabilities. The new threats are more ambiguous and less predictable. Though the U. S. cannot hope to be the world's policeman in this new environment, we must be successful in confronting direct and indirect challenges to our national security and the new international order. The American military must be prepared to play an active role in the low-intensity conflict (LIC) arena, which includes both assisting insurgent movements and counterinsurgency warfare. American history provides many examples of successful as well as disastrous military operations in the LIC environment. A study of Mosby's techniques and the Union attempts to counter them can provide useful "lessons learned" for current and future operations.

Definitions

It is necessary to define several terms before continuing this analysis. Military terminology describing the LIC environment is often confusing. The evolution of warfare has led to modifications of the terminology.

Mosby's unit has been described as guerrilla, partisan, and irregular. Within the context of current

doctrine, these descriptions are not accurate. The Department of Defense Dictionary of Military and Associated Terms (Joint Pub 1-02) is the military reference for terminology. It defines a guerrilla unit as usually independent from a regular force and is composed predominantly of indigenous forces. Guerrillas conduct military and paramilitary operations in enemy-held or hostile territory. It defines irregular forces as armed individuals who are not members of the regular armed forces. The Department of Defense dictionary does not define partisan, but states the term should not be used and refers the reader to guerrilla. These are the guidelines for current use of these terms.

In the context of the Civil War, partisan best describes Mosby's unit and is the term that will be used in this study. The distinction between partisan and other armed organizations, including guerrillas and irregulars, was their relationship to the regular armed forces. A partisan unit was a detached body of light troops engaged in unconventional warfare. Mosby was the commander of the 43d Battalion of Virginia Cavalry of the Confederate army. Though they usually operated independently of the regular army, they were officially assigned to the Army of Northern Virginia. Many guerrilla and irregular units operated on both sides of the war and were independent of a higher command. This distinction had important legal ramifications

because partisans were entitled to the same prisoner of war status as conventional combatants. In 1863, the Union War Department's General Orders Number 100 established the legitimacy of partisans as soldiers.

The Union's efforts to combat Mosby's partisans also should be defined within the context of modern terminology. In current doctrine, counterinsurgency (COIN) includes military, paramilitary, political, economic, psychological, and civic actions to defeat an insurgency. The military operations and activities of the total COIN effort are generally classified as counter guerrilla. These efforts are targeted primarily against the active military element of the insurgency. I will analyze the Federal counter guerrilla (or in this context, counter partisan) activities at the end of chapters three and four.

Mosby's Background

A brief sketch of Mosby's background is useful if one is to understand the success of his military career. He lacked formal military training before the war and only reluctantly enlisted in the Confederate army. This frail, boyish-looking lawyer hardly fitted the image of a partisan leader and great war hero.

John Singleton Mosby was born at the home of his mother's parents near Richmond, Virginia in December 1833. Several years later his family moved near Charlottesville. His father, Alfred D. Mosby, operated a small farm with the

assistance of slave labor. John Mosby received a good education and excelled in his studies. He was a sickly and physically weak boy. Far from being athletic, Mosby admitted he "always had a literary taste."¹ This avid reader was very interested in the unconventional campaigns of Francis Marion (the Swamp Fox) and Thomas Sumter against the British during the Revolutionary War. It is revealing that history led Mosby to a similar career against the invading Union forces almost a century later.

In 1850, Mosby entered the University of Virginia where he continued to do well academically. His chronic illnesses lingered during his years in Charlottesville. His poor health and academic pursuits were mixed with some turbulent episodes. During a "town vs. gown" brawl in 1851, Mosby was arrested and charged with assaulting a local police officer with "fists, feet, and gun."² The city fined him ten dollars and he was released.

During the spring of his third year he shot a student, the son of a local tavern keeper. Fortunately for the nineteen-year old Mosby, the victim had a malicious reputation because he had nearly killed a man with a rock and had stabbed another with a knife. The jury agreed Mosby acted in self-defense but found him guilty of "unlawful shooting"; they sentenced him to one year in jail and fined him five hundred dollars.³ The university expelled him and he was failed. After seven months of confinement and

repeated pleas from his parents and colleagues, Mosby received an executive pardon from the governor, and the state legislature rescinded the fine.

While serving his sentence, Mosby began to read legal books. After his release, he continued to study law in the office of his former prosecutor. Mosby was soon admitted to the state bar and opened his practice near Charlottesville. In 1857, he married Pauline Clarke, the daughter of a former U. S. Congressman from Kentucky. They moved to Bristol in southwest Virginia, where Mosby opened the community's first law office. He practiced law successfully and fathered two children.

Mosby's appearance was appropriate for a small town lawyer, not a dashing cavalryman. Age twenty-seven at the outbreak of war, he was only five feet, seven or eight inches in height and weighed 128-pounds. A slight stoop made him appear even shorter. His face was beardless and youthful. Two Ranger recruits recorded their initial impressions of their new commander. John Munson wrote:

Nervously I swept my eyes over the band in search for a big man with a showy uniform, a flowing plume, and a flashing saber. . . . I beheld a small, plainly attired man, fair of complexion, slight but wiry. . . . He did not even strut.

Munson continued:

My eyes sought out Mosby again. What a pity! He had not grown an inch, nor emitted a single war whoop; and his voice was so low that not a syllable of his conversation reached me.⁴

James Williamson wrote:

I could scarcely believe that the slight figure before me could be that of a man who had won such military fame by his daring. . . . a rather slender, but wiry looking young man of medium height, with light hair, keen eyes and pleasant expression.⁵

One aspect of his appearance suggested Mosby may not be as fragile as he seemed. "The secret of his power over his men," was described by Munson as, "his eyes, which were deep blue, luminous, clear, piercing; when he spoke they flashed the punctuations of his sentence."⁶ His icy eyes and cold stare were intimidating. One of Stuart's staff officers described Mosby:

Nature had given no sign but the restless, roving, flashing eye, that there was much worth considering beneath. . . . The commonplace exterior of the partisan concealed one of the most active, daring and penetrating minds of an epoch fruitful of such.⁷

Mosby wore two revolvers in his belt with an "air of 'business' which is unmistakable."⁸ Other compelling traits were his moral courage, keen intellect, and endurance.

Mosby opposed the South's secessionist movement but, due to loyalty to his state, he reluctantly joined the local militia, the Washington Mounted Rifles. The cavalry company was loosely composed of mountain men and farmhands with little military experience. Virginia seceded from the Union after the firing on Ft. Sumter, and Mosby's unit rode eastward to join forces with the Confederate army. The unit was later assigned to the 1st Virginia Cavalry, commanded by

Colonel Jeb Stuart. They had their baptism of fire at the Battle of Bull Run in July 1861. Mosby refused a furlough after his initial twelve-month tour and reenlisted.

Private Mosby later lost interest in the dull routine of camp life and drill and continually volunteered for picket and scout duty. One staff officer remembered him in the militia days as a "rather slouchy rider, [who] did not seem to take any interest in military duties." In February 1862, Colonel William E. "Grumble" Jones assumed command of the regiment from Jeb Stuart, who was promoted to brigadier general after Bull Run. Colonel Jones selected the daring lawyer to be his adjutant and promoted him to first lieutenant.

Lieutenant Mosby disliked his staff job and the inherent paperwork and regulations. After Colonel Fitzhugh Lee, whom Mosby disliked, replaced Colonel Jones, Mosby resigned both his position and his commission as an officer. He approached Jeb Stuart and offered his services as an aide and scout. Though Mosby no longer had a commission, Stuart gladly accepted him. Stuart had earned a reputation as a brilliant cavalryman and appreciated Mosby's courage and resourcefulness.

In June 1862, Mosby accepted a dangerous mission that would serve as a springboard for his military career. At the time, General George B. McClellan's Union Army of the Potomac was only six miles from Richmond, the capital of the

Confederacy. General Robert E. Lee, the defending commander, tasked Stuart to gather intelligence on McClellan's forces. Stuart delegated this critical mission to Mosby. With four volunteers, Mosby rode through unfamiliar territory completely around the Union's rear. He delivered an accurate and timely report to Stuart. Stuart briefed General Lee and then with 1,200 cavalrymen launched a very successful four-day raid on McClellan's unprotected right flank and rear. Mosby rode at the head of the column and earned the trust and respect of the Confederate chain of command. The Confederates eventually drove the Union army from the approaches to Richmond.

Mosby's budding career nearly ended one month later when an enemy cavalry patrol captured him. He was waiting for a train to Gordonsville where he was to report to General Thomas "Stonewall" Jackson. The Union horsemen searched Mosby and found a letter of introduction from Stuart to Jackson describing him as "bold, daring, intelligent, and discreet."¹⁰ He was jailed in the Old Capitol Prison in Washington but had the good fortune to be freed ten days later in a prisoner exchange at Fort Monroe, Virginia.

Even as a prisoner, Mosby proved his value as a reliable source of timely and accurate intelligence. On board the "exchange boat" he counted the Federal troop ships as they steamed up the James River.¹¹ While at Fort

Monroe, he overheard some conversations concerning Union troop movements. Immediately upon his release, realizing the tactical significance of the information, he rushed to Richmond and informed General Lee that Burnside was deploying from the peninsula to reinforce General Pope in Culpeper.¹² This intelligence was critical to the Confederates because General Lee could remain in Richmond to defend against McClellan, and he telegraphed Jackson to move against Pope. On August 9, 1862, Jackson subsequently defeated Pope at the Battle of Cedar Run before Burnside's arrival.

Mosby rejoined Stuart and received valuable combat experience. He rode with him during the Peninsula Campaign in June and July, during Second Bull Run in August, Antietam in September, and an October raid into Pennsylvania. In December 1862, Stuart's cavalry was operating behind General Burnside's lines in northern Virginia. At the end of the month, Stuart prepared his troops for a ride to the vicinity of Fredericksburg for winter quarters. Mosby approached Stuart and discussed the possibility of remaining in northern Virginia and continuing a limited campaign with a few volunteers. Mosby later wrote, "I did not want to rust away my life in camp."¹³ Stuart's approval launched Mosby's career as a partisan leader.

Area of Operations

Mosby's general area of operations was the northern part of Virginia. It included the Shenandoah Valley to the west of the Blue Ridge Mountains and the four counties to the east: Fauquier, Loudoun, Prince William, and Culpeper. The Potomac River and Washington bordered this region to the north. A Federal strategic objective was the occupation and pacification of this area to support the drive on Richmond and protection of lines of communication (routes along which supplies and military forces move).¹⁴ The Confederate army was unable to defend the northernmost section of the state bordering Washington, but would attempt to defend the Shenandoah Valley when forces were available.

Mosby conducted most of his operations on the east side of the Blue Ridge Mountains, principally in the counties of Loudoun and Fauquier. This region was often called Mosby's Confederacy because of his seemingly unrestricted control of the area. Two smaller chains of mountains, the Catoctin and Bull Run, run through the middle of these counties. The countryside contained many small farms, and towns with craftsmen and merchants were scattered throughout the region. The Shenandoah Valley is nestled between the Blue Ridge to the east and the Allegheny Mountains to the west. The valley runs northeast from Lexington for approximately 150 miles to the Potomac River. The Valley varies in width from ten to twenty miles. The

Shenandoah River runs through the fertile region and meets the Potomac River at Harper's Ferry. This area was known for its excellent crops and pasture land. Besides its significance as the "granary of the Confederacy," the valley provided a strategic approach north to Maryland, Pennsylvania, and Washington.

This entire area on both sides of the Blue Ridge Mountains was excellent for partisan warfare. The fertile ground and lush fields provided sustenance for the Rangers and their mounts. The series of forested, mountainous ridge lines and spurs afforded extensive concealment and avenues of evasion and escape. Observation posts on these mountains allowed unrestricted visibility of the enemy's movement. The region's large forests provided safe havens for the elusive partisans. Turnpikes, roads, and country lanes enhanced mobility for rapid maneuver and assembly. There were very few obstacles to the partisan's mobility and they were extremely familiar with mountain passes and river fords. The mountains and rivers were significant obstacles to the enemy's major troop movements. Small towns and secluded farms were excellent safe bases of operation.

The inhabitants of the region were not obsessed with secessionist fever. Because most farms were small, relatively little slave labor existed. This dampened the volatility of the slavery issue that burned intensely in the Deep South. Northern Virginians wanted to stay in the

Union, and the Virginia Convention had voted against secession just two weeks before the firing on Ft. Sumter. Yet, on April 15, 1861, President Lincoln, only in office for six weeks, responded to the attack on the Federal fort by ordering the call for 75,000 three-month volunteers. Virginians across the state interpreted this call to arms to crush the insurrection in South Carolina as a threat to state rights and integrity. Slavery no longer seemed the central issue. They held a new vote and decided to join the Confederacy. Some northern Virginians moved north of the Potomac River into Maryland or Pennsylvania. There was a small contingent of pro-Union supporters, especially isolated, pacifist Quaker and German settlements, that remained in the area. This is significant because Mosby had to avoid these Union sympathizers and informants throughout the war.

The confluence of several river, railroad, and road systems contributed to the area's strategic importance. The Baltimore and Ohio (B&O) railroad was a vital link for the Union. It ran over five hundred miles from Baltimore through Harper's Ferry, Martinsburg (WVa), Cumberland (Md), to Wheeling (on the Ohio River). Two important spurs were the Baltimore-Washington (31 miles) and the Harper's Ferry-Winchester (32 miles). The rail line was a strategic link for manpower from the western territories and garrisons, foodstuffs, lumber, ore, and other resources. Governor

Letcher of Virginia also made plans for the B&O, since most of it ran through his state. However, the Federal army easily pushed Virginia's troops off their northern Potomac border. Later, President Jefferson Davis had to order the evacuation of Harper's Ferry and the destruction of rails, rolling stock, and many bridges.

Federal operations in Virginia depended on extended lines of communication running through Mosby's Confederacy. Mosby's harassment upset the Union operational tempo and forced commanders to commit many forces to guard these vital links. The proximity of the raiding cavalymen to Washington was a constant factor in the Federal campaign strategy and disposition of troops.¹⁵

Regional Military Operations 1861-63

At the outbreak of war in 1861, Union troops crossed the Potomac and occupied the northern towns of Alexandria and Arlington Heights. Lincoln's concern for the safety of the capital guaranteed large concentrations of troops in the northern tip of Virginia. Control of the Shenandoah Valley changed hands several times during the war. The Confederates united their forces from the Valley with those in northern Virginia to defeat the Union at Bull Run in July 1861.

General Stonewall Jackson conducted a brilliant campaign in the Valley in the Spring of 1862, defeating several Union armies (led by Banks, Shields, Fremont, and

Milroy) and relieving the pressure on Richmond. Later that summer, General Lee ordered Jackson to march undetected across the mountains in an attempt to destroy General McClellan's Union army during the Seven Day's Campaign. Jackson's departure opened the valley to northern occupation. The Confederate army regained control of the Valley in the fall of 1862 and the summer of 1863, but were repulsed on both occasions after failed offensives in the North.

Partisan and guerrilla warfare played a significant role in northern Virginia during the first two years of the war. At the strategic level, the Civil War was a conventional war fought between large armies. Yet the Confederates were inclined to supplement the conventional effort with partisan warfare. Several factors explain this development; primarily, the North enjoyed a numerical superiority, a broad logistics base, and a powerful navy. A weaker army has traditionally resorted to unconventional warfare. Also, the Confederates were defending their homeland and were willing to use every means available within the confines of the laws of war. Unconventional warfare was conducive to enemy-held or occupied territory because the local combatants were very familiar with the terrain and usually had the support of the indigenous population. Finally, there seems to have been a natural temperament for the Southerner to wage irregular warfare.

Mosby's Rangers were not the first partisans to operate in northern Virginia. In addition to independent bands that formed to defend their property, several partisan units operated in the Shenandoah Valley and northern Virginia. These units first assisted the Confederate army as it maneuvered to engage the Federals at Bull Run in July 1861. During his 1862 Valley Campaign, Jackson used mounted partisans in the traditional cavalry role--security and reconnaissance. After Jackson marched east from the Valley later that summer, the partisans were the primary combatants in the area. The three major partisan units in the region preceding Mosby were Colonel Elijah White's 35th Virginia Cavalry (the Comanches), Colonel John Imboden's 1st Virginia Partisan Rangers, and Colonel Angus McDonald's regiment.

This was the status of the military situation in northern Virginia at the end of 1862. The residents had witnessed Union and Confederate armies advancing and retreating through the area, often leaving behind the casualties of war. As winter approached, the Union firmly controlled the northern section of the Shenandoah Valley and northern Virginia as far south as the Rappahannock River at Fredericksburg. The partisans continued to attack behind the Federal lines but they posed no serious military threat. Both sides debated the usefulness of partisan warfare. It was during these trying times that Lieutenant John S. Mosby rode forward with plans to launch his own partisan war.

CHAPTER II
UNIT FORMATION AND ORGANIZATION, 1863

This chapter describes the activities of Mosby's Rangers during their first six months. Mosby's band evolved from nine men at the turn of the year to the formation of a cavalry company in June. He recruited seventy men for his first company, officially Company A, 43d Battalion of Virginia Cavalry.

Genesis

On December 31, 1862, Mosby departed with his nine volunteers for their harassment mission as Jeb Stuart rode toward Fredericksburg for winter quarters. Lieutenant Mosby greeted the new year with his newly formed "command." Elsewhere Americans in both the North and South now realized there would be no quick, glorious victory and the country was mired in a bloody war. Both armies were in winter quarters, licking their wounds and reconstituting their forces for the spring campaigns. The harsh weather and deteriorating roads prevented any troop movements or major battles during the winter months. Yet the cavalry continued to operate year-round, despite the weather and scarcity of forage.

The Union army occupied northern Virginia in the winter of 1862-3. The Army of the Potomac camped north of the Rappahannock River opposite Fredericksburg, fifty miles south of Washington and half-way to Richmond. In December, a costly battle in Fredericksburg had resulted in 12,000 Federal casualties. This was Lee's most pronounced victory of the war, although he sustained slightly more than 5,000 casualties.

The Union took advantage of the winter break from fighting to tighten their grip on the capital's defenses. The Federal army ringed Washington with earthen fortifications and artillery batteries, which provided the main defense. A secondary line of interconnected outposts extended south into Virginia. This defensive line ran from Dranesville, on the upper Potomac, through Centreville (in southwest Fairfax County) to Alexandria, on the lower Potomac. Cavalry outposts were established every half-mile along this line.¹ Mosby focused on this chain of outposts for his first series of operations.

Mosby spent the first ten days of January planning the harassment of the Union lines. He later wrote, "In general my purpose was to threaten and harass the enemy on the border and in this way compel him to withdraw troops from his front to guard the line of the Potomac and Washington. This would greatly diminish his offensive power."² He and his small band probably stayed on one or

two farms in Fauquier County preparing for combat. The volunteers came from the 1st Virginia Cavalry Regiment and it is likely that Mosby knew them from previous operations. A few of them were from the Loudoun-Fauquier region. The local Rangers proved to be invaluable due to their knowledge of the terrain and familiarity with the local populace. These two elements, knowledge of the region and its inhabitants, were critical to Mosby's success and were advantages he usually had over the enemy.

During January the Rangers established their first "safe houses," a term still used today. Local citizens often provided meals and shelter. The Rangers often paid for the meals and they shared their captured supplies. The risk to the civilians increased as the war dragged on and many males were arrested. On a few occasions houses harboring partisans were burned. The Rangers constructed concealed spaces in or under many houses; these areas were accessible by a door in a false wall or flooring. Some Rangers found hiding places in chimneys.³ The Rangers also established "hide positions" in the nearby woods or mountains. They could escape to the secluded hide if Federal forces patrolled the area.

On January 10, Mosby's Rangers conducted their first mission. During the night they attacked Federal pickets near Herndon Station on the Loudoun and Hampshire Railroad. The Union suffered one wounded and six captured. The

raiders whisked the prisoners away deep into a pine forest with their weapons and horses. Two nights later, they struck twice near Herndon Station, capturing thirteen prisoners with horses and equipment.⁴

One week later Mosby rode to Stuart's headquarters and requested more men. Mosby calculated that he could force the Union commanders to draw in their defensive lines. Stuart agreed and temporarily detached fifteen cavalymen of Brigadier General (BG) Fitz Lee's brigade. Stuart directed Mosby to conduct his operations within enemy lines and to provide periodic reconnaissance reports. Mosby operated under Stuart's authority since this was not an official command.

This nucleus of fifteen men accurately reflected the composition of the future battalion. Mosby had the advantage of approving all members. Twelve were from Virginia, three from Maryland. Most were young, in their early twenties, and were experienced cavalymen. As the war progressed, many recruits were teenagers. There were many veterans of regular service, including several officers who chose to forfeit their commissions to ride with Mosby as a private.⁵

First Blood

Mosby returned with his volunteers from BG Fitz Lee's brigade to Upper Fauquier and dismissed them until 28 January, when they were directed to assemble at Mount Zion

Church near Aldie. This would develop into standard procedure. After a military operation the force would disperse to scattered sites, effectively melting away into the countryside. This procedure made tracking the unit impossible. They would assemble later at a predetermined date or as summoned by a courier. The assembly point was "always selected with reference to the vicinity to a blacksmith's shop."⁶ The dispersion technique greatly enhanced the survivability of the unit. One Ranger made the astute comparison that Robin Hood hid his band in the Sherwood Forest and Francis Marion took refuge in Carolina's inaccessible swamps. Mosby's procedure to survive and fight another day was to scatter his forces among many safe houses and farms.

While his men searched for food and shelter, Mosby was busy conducting reconnaissance missions on the enemy in Fairfax County. He often preferred to operate alone. He was very thorough and frequently spent most of each day in the saddle. The result was that the commander was extremely familiar with the enemy situation and with the terrain.

On the appointed afternoon, the Rangers assembled as ordered at Mount Zion Church. No one knew the mission awaiting them. The withholding of information was not because this was their first mission, nor a lack of trust. This technique of reserving the mission brief until final assembly became standard procedure for Mosby. This allowed

for complete operational security. There were no written orders to fall into the enemy's hands. The procedure also eliminated the chance of compromise due to information acquired by the enemy from "loose lips" or interrogated prisoners.

Mosby arrived at the church with very detailed intelligence on the enemy. He had recorded their strength and location and noted weaknesses in security. He also introduced the unit's first recruit, John Underwood of Fairfax County. Underwood was extremely familiar with the area of operations and proved to be a good fighter.

Mosby led the raiders to Chantilly. The objective was to capture and interrogate members of the 18th Pennsylvania Cavalry. First they captured a patrol of two men. Then, under the cover of darkness, the Rangers slowly approached the vedettes, mounted sentinels posted forward of the picket guards. On Mosby's signal, the Rangers galloped to the enemy and captured nine prisoners with their horses and equipment. They immediately rode away into the night without a trace.

Prisoners were a very valuable source of military intelligence and the isolated pickets were vulnerable to the stealthy Rangers at night. The captured weapons, equipment, and horses were often as important as the information. Confederate law allowed Mosby to keep all booty or spoils of war. Mosby maintained the respect of his men and superior

officers by personally refusing to keep war plunder. Raids on the enemy became Mosby's primary source for horses, weapons, ammunition, saddles and other cavalry equipment. This supply source became more important late in the war as the tide turned on the poorly equipped Confederate army.

The Rangers usually carried the prisoners to a concealed place and interrogated them. They then escorted them to the nearest town and paroled them. In the Spring of 1863, the Confederate army ceased this practice and directed all prisoners of war be escorted under guard to the nearest collection point or to Richmond. This placed a strain on Mosby because he had to detail soldiers to carry the prisoners to Stuart or to the nearest unit, often requiring them to travel back through enemy lines. The partisans tried to send the prisoners to the rear as soon as possible because they were a liability to the unit's mobility and security. Mosby never had the luxury of a central base camp with a prisoner collection point.

The Chantilly raid was not a significant military operation tactically, but was very important psychologically for two reasons. First, this was a "confidence mission" for the newly formed unit. It was extremely important for the morale of the unit, confidence in the leadership, and future support from higher headquarters to be successful on the first mission. Secondly, the ability of a small group of

Rangers to capture nine prisoners had a negative impact on the enemy's morale.

The Union forces reacted immediately. Colonel Percy Wyndham, the commander of the 5th New Jersey Cavalry, sent two hundred troopers to Middleburg in search of the Confederate raiders. Mosby was alerted and assembled seven Rangers. They rode through the night and attacked the rear of the enemy's column. They killed one soldier and captured three horses.⁹ The Federals captured three Rangers in a pursuit but released them several weeks later. Wyndham's report stated he captured twenty-four prisoners; if so, they were not Rangers and most likely were local citizens or farmers.⁹

Wyndham, a British soldier of fortune and ex-veteran under Garibaldi (the Italian revolutionary), was furious at the partisans' successes and threatened to burn Middleburg and ravage the country between it and Fairfax Court House. On 4 February, Mosby received a petition from several concerned citizens of Middleburg. They asked him to stop raiding the Union outposts due to Wyndham's threat. Mosby penned the following response, displaying a sense of fairness, his legal background, and characteristic tenacity:

I have just received your petition requesting me to discontinue my warfare on the Yankees because they have threatened to burn your town and destroy your property in retaliation for my acts. Not being yet prepared for any such degrading compromises with the Yankees, I unhesitatingly refuse to comply. My attacks on scouts, patrols, and pickets, which have provoked this threat, are sanctioned both by the customs of war and

practice of the enemy; and you are at liberty to inform them that no such clamor shall deter me from employing whatever legitimate weapon I can most efficiently use for their annoyance. I will say this to you, however, that it was through a misunderstanding of my orders that the prisoners were brought through your town to be paroled. . . . As my men have never occupied your town, I cannot see what possible complicity can be between my acts and you.¹⁰

Without hesitation and despite snow and freezing rain, the Rangers attacked the 18th Pennsylvania Cavalry on the following night. First they captured a two-man foot patrol. Mosby's men then surprised the pickets as they warmed themselves around a fire. They captured ten more cavalrymen. Wyndham, anticipating another attack, had organized a quick reaction force to trap the Confederates. However, the Rangers escaped into the miserable night before the enemy arrived.

Mosby's unit suffered a serious blow on 6 February, one day before the Rangers were to assemble for the next mission. Six Rangers, in violation of orders, attended a dance and were captured by a Federal raiding party. Only five men reported at the rendezvous point on the seventh. Mosby altered his plan and targeted a foraging party that was robbing civilians of their valuables and horses. The Rangers caught a party of seven and sent them to Richmond to be detained as criminals.¹¹ Mosby returned the spoils to the owners.

This police action set an important precedent in Mosby's Confederacy. Mosby installed an ad hoc judicial

system, using his legal training to solve disputes during the war. This role legitimized his presence in the region and clearly distinguished his unit from outlaw independent partisans from both sides of the border who had been raiding for their personal benefit. In addition, it had the effect of solidifying the support of the local populace, the critical lifeline of any partisan organization.

On 7 February, Stuart received Mosby's first report. Stuart forwarded it to General Lee with the following commendation, "Respectfully forwarded as additional proof of the prowess, daring, and efficiency of Mosby (without commission) and his band of a dozen chosen spirits."¹² Stuart then responded to Mosby with a wish for "great and increasing success in the glorious career on which you have entered."¹³

With news of Mosby's success came a wave of volunteers. Mosby would no longer have to use patients from a Middleburg hospital to fill his ranks, a practice recently discontinued after a convalescing soldier was gravely wounded. Many recruits came from nearby Maryland because they opposed the Union. Other volunteers served on temporary duty, often with the goal of getting a horse. The Confederate cavalry expected its men to provide their mounts. Still others were discharged soldiers. Also, Mosby gladly accepted many young men under the conscript age.

The new volunteers included deserters from both armies. Mosby was quick to turn away Confederate deserters, who were often in search of adventure or mere plunder. His refusal to accept deserters maintained the integrity of the unit and legitimized the Rangers in the eyes of suspicious military superiors. Deserters from the Union army were accepted after close observation and a test of loyalty. They were usually required to accompany a raid unarmed. Sergeant James Ames, formerly of the 5th New York Cavalry, joined the ranks after Lincoln's issuance of the Emancipation Proclamation. The disillusioned Ames quickly developed into one of Mosby's fiercest fighters.

On the 25 February, Mosby led his latest recruits, called "conglomerates" by the original members, on a confidence mission. Twenty-seven men gathered at the rendezvous point and rode toward Germantown. At four a.m., they attacked approximately fifty cavalrymen in a log cabin outpost. Despite their superior numbers and defensible position, the Union troops fled. One officer and three enlisted men were killed, and five captured. They seized many horses and much equipment. The "conglomerates" proved themselves as Ranger material.

Two hundred soldiers of the 18th Pennsylvania Cavalry rode through Middleburg one week later. The Union troops, led by Major Gilmer, searched homes, arrested a few citizens, and again threatened to burn the town. Gilmer was

continuing his search through the town of Aldie when a fifty-man detachment of the 1st Vermont Cavalry rode into view. Gilmer, reportedly in a drunken state, mistook the friendly troops for Rangers and ordered a retreat. The horsemen from Vermont caught the panicked troops and convinced them Mosby was not in the area.¹⁵ The Vermont contingent then rode to a mill on the edge of Aldie to rest their mounts.

Mosby and seventeen Rangers were patrolling the area and watched the Vermonters dismount. He then ordered a charge into the middle of the enemy. The Confederates completely surprised the Union horsemen, who attempted to flee. Two captains, seventeen enlisted men, and twenty-three horses were captured.¹⁶ Again this was an excellent confidence booster for the Rangers and a demoralizer for the Union troops.

Fairfax Courthouse Raid

Mosby felt a personal animosity toward Wyndham. The Federal cavalry brigade commander, who threatened to burn Middleburg, described Mosby's unit as a pack of horse thieves. Mosby pointed out that, "All the horses I had stolen had riders, and that these riders had sabres, carbines, and pistols."¹⁷ He internalized the animosity and planned a daring raid to capture the British colonel. Mosby later wrote, "I would put a stop to this talk by gobbling him up and sending him off to Richmond."¹⁸

On March 8, Mosby met his men at Dover Mill, in Loudoun County. He briefed the twenty-nine Rangers on their dangerous mission. They would ride twenty-five miles to Fairfax Court House, infiltrate through heavy security, capture Wyndham and his staff, and then exfiltrate to safety. Ames, the deserter who had been with the unit for only ten days, was the guide. All the other riders must have been concerned about a trap. However, Ames had won the respect of most Rangers several days earlier when he accompanied a raid unarmed. During the skirmish he acquired a weapon and decisively engaged the enemy troopers. Mosby thoroughly evaluated him and found the Northern deserter to be trustworthy.

The night was perfect for irregular warfare: cold, raining, and very dark. A melting snow and thawing ground made the roads very difficult to travel. The Rangers arrived in Fairfax at two a.m., two hours behind Mosby's schedule, after having successfully avoided contact with many units en route. An infantry regiment was camped at Fairfax Station and two regiments at Fairfax Court House. Wyndham's three cavalry regiments were located in the vicinity at nearby Germantown. As the Rangers paralleled the Warrenton Turnpike, they bypassed another infantry brigade with cavalry and artillery.

Once inside the perimeter, they captured several guards for last minute intelligence. Mosby established a

rally point and gave an updated order to his men. Two squads went to the stables and seized the best horses, usually belonging to the cavalry officers. Another team located the supply stores and cut the telegraph wires. Finally, Mosby and his six men went to Wyndham's quarters. Mosby was disappointed to discover Wyndham had departed for Washington that afternoon and would remain overnight. They then learned that BG Edwin Stoughton, commander of a Vermont infantry brigade, had quarters on the edge of town.

Mosby and three men gained access to the house with the excuse to deliver a message. They rushed to the general's bedroom. Mosby abruptly woke the general, reportedly with a slap on his bare buttocks. Mosby commanded the general, "Get up and come with me!" The startled Stoughton responded, "What is this? Do you know who I am?" Mosby replied, "I reckon I do, General. Did you ever hear of Mosby?" Stoughton said, "Yes. Have you caught him?" Mosby informed him, "No, but he has caught you." The Rangers quickly helped the general get dressed.

It was almost 3:30 a.m. when Mosby rejoined the rest of the group near the town square. The Union soldiers knew the perimeter had been breached. The Rangers took advantage of the chaos and rode back through the lines on their same route of entry. Their course of egress deceived the enemy because it was opposite from the direction to Mosby's Confederacy. Then they turned sharply off the road and led

the prisoners and horses through a darkened forest. A couple of prisoners escaped as the Confederates hurried through the difficult passage. The raiding party finally reached Manassas at sunrise and only then did they feel safe from a possible pursuit.

Mosby captured a general, two staff officers, thirty enlisted men, and fifty-eight quality horses. The prisoners were snatched ten miles inside the Union lines and on the outskirts of the capital, without firing a shot or losing a man. This had a tremendous psychological effect on the Union soldiers and government officials in Washington. It now seemed the Confederate horsemen could penetrate the capital defenses at will. There was great concern for the safety of generals, politicians, and even the President. For several months after the raid, Union troops nightly removed the floor planking from the Chain Bridge spanning the Potomac River between Washington and Virginia.²⁰ Lincoln tried to make light of the humiliating raid and reportedly remarked, "I am sorry for that. I can make brigadier generals, but I can't make horses."²¹

The raid provided a psychological boost to the Confederate army and was a turning point for the Rangers. Stuart published a general order praising Mosby's "unparalleled feat" and ordered it read to all cavalry units in his command. General Lee remarked, "Mosby has covered himself with honors."²² Mosby was promoted to captain in

the Provisional Army of the Confederate States. Lee sent him special orders to:

Proceed at once to organize your company, with the understanding that it is to be placed on a footing with all troops of the line, and to be mustered unconditionally into the Confederate service for and during the war.²³

Mosby's Rangers was no longer a temporary conglomerate of irritants, but now a recognized, effective fighting force.

Although General Lee's special orders stated "to proceed at once," Captain Mosby did not immediately form his new company. In fact, he did not officially organize the unit for another two months. Lee had also written that the company should be mustered when a "requisite number of men are enrolled."²⁴ Mosby was very cautious and wanted to test his men in combat. It seems he followed Stuart's guidance that "there is no time within which you are required to raise this command. . . . you ought to be very fastidious in choosing your men, and make them always stand the test of battle."²⁵

The Proving Ground

Mosby was not content to rest on his Fairfax raid laurels and was ready to test his men. On 16 March he assembled approximately fifty troopers and rode to Herndon Station to harass enemy outposts. This was Mosby's first daylight raid. The Rangers overran a reserve picket

position and captured twenty-five prisoners (including a major, captain, and two lieutenants).²⁶

Mosby refined the execution of offensive operations one week later. On 23 March the Rangers attacked the vedettes of the 5th New York Cavalry near Chantilly. A Union reaction force of two hundred men chased the partisans for several miles until the rebels reached some fallen timber. They dismounted and fired into the Federal front and flanks. The Union troopers hesitated, losing their initiative. Mosby ordered a counter-charge and the remounted Rangers again pursued a larger force. They captured thirty-six men and fifty horses.²⁷ Like Herndon Station, Mosby suffered no casualties. The Confederate policy of parole of enemy prisoners had recently been discontinued; for the first time Mosby had to send all the captives to Richmond.

Though they outnumbered the Confederates by 4:1, the undisciplined Union troops had broken ranks and fled. The rebel success proved the shock effect of a disciplined, offensive maneuver. Mosby respected the force multiplier effect of a relentless attack and constantly took advantage of it. He later wrote, "They expected to see our backs and not our faces. It was a rule from which, during the war, I never departed, not to stand still and receive a charge, but to always act on the offensive."²⁸

Mosby's successes intensified the Union's efforts to trap him. They had an excellent opportunity to destroy the partisan leader and sixty-five Rangers on 31 March near Dranesville. The Confederates had canceled an evening raid and had gained permission to spend the night on a local farm, owned by Thomas Miskel. Mosby and a few others stayed in the house while a lone sentry was posted at the barn with the other sleeping Rangers. A local woman reported Mosby's presence to a Federal camp near Union Church. Five companies, approximately 150 men, of the 1st Vermont Cavalry rode to Miskel's farm to get revenge.

Fortunately for the awakening rebels, a Ranger was staying at a neighboring farm and at dawn was alerted of the approaching troopers. The Confederate sped to Miskel's farm and arrived with the alarm only minutes before the enemy. Only twenty Rangers had the chance to mount at the moment of the Union attack. The vulnerable rebels were fenced in the barnyard. Luck was still on the Southern side, as the Union officers ordered a saber charge toward the confined space, rather than dismount and engage the confused rebels with accurate carbine fire. The Rangers turned the momentum of the attack with their first volley of pistol fire and charged the Vermont troopers, who fled the chaotic scene. Mosby pursued them for several miles. The Rangers suffered only one killed and three wounded, compared with the Union's loss of nine killed (including two captains), fifteen

abandoned wounded, eighty-two prisoners, and more than one hundred horses captured.¹⁷

There are several reasons why the Miskel farm incident did not result in the annihilation of Mosby's small unit. The Rangers were tactically and technically proficient cavalrymen who quickly saddled their mounts and directed deadly pistol fire at the enemy's saber charge. The psychological effect of the screaming rebel charge turned the enemy. The 1st Vermont Cavalry was a veteran unit but underestimated the enemy; the officers paid dearly for their folly, either killed in combat or court-martialed after the mission. Luck was a factor in the skirmish. The result would have been very different if the Vermont troopers had arrived unannounced earlier in the morning.

This engagement demonstrated the superiority of the pistol over the saber. Though the saber was a traditional cavalry weapon, Mosby never prescribed its use. He felt the bulky weapon had a very limited use and made too much noise when worn by a cavalryman. Most of Mosby's recruits had no saber training and he concentrated on pistol marksmanship. Mosby later wrote:

I dragged one through the first year of the war, but when I became a commander, I discarded it. The sabre and lance may have been very good weapons in the days of chivalry. . . . But certainly the sabre is of no use against gunpowder.¹⁸

He described the ineffectiveness of the saber at Miskel's Farm when he stated, "My men were as little impressed by a

body of cavalry charging them with sabres as though they had been armed with cornstalks."³¹

Mosby also learned a valuable lesson in operational security. Local informants were a serious risk to his unit's survival. He realized adequate security must always be posted, regardless of the estimated distance to the nearest enemy unit or the condition of his men. He admitted to Stuart in his report:

I confess on this occasion I had not taken sufficient precautions to guard against surprise. It was 10 [o'clock] at night when I reached the place. . . . We had ridden through snow and mud upward of forty miles.³²

Surprise, a critical element to the outnumbered partisans' tactical success, was just as dangerous in the hands of the enemy.

Mosby was promoted to major, effective 26 March, because of his recent successes. In a period of two weeks, he advanced from lieutenant to major. His unit continued to grow in strength and by the first of May he had almost 125 men. However, many of these soldiers were attached on temporary duty or horse detail.

As the weather improved in the spring of 1863, the massive armies, camped on the Rappahannock River, began to stir. Both commanders were eager to start a spring campaign and destroy the other's forces. Before General Lee could launch his planned northern offensive, he was flanked by a surprise maneuver of several Union corps of the Army of the

Potomac. The new Federal commander, General "Fighting Joe" Hooker, crossed the Rappahannock River north of Fredericksburg and marched through the Wilderness to Chancellorsville. The Confederates successfully flanked the Union force with a brilliant maneuver by the corps under Stonewall Jackson, who would later die of wounds received during this attack. General Lee won a bold victory, though very costly. The Union army withdrew and recrossed the river.

During the Chancellorsville campaign, Major Mosby was very active with his Rangers. Stuart was concerned with General Hooker's movements and ordered Mosby to scout the area around Centreville.³³ One day later he directed Mosby to interrupt the operation of the Orange and Alexandria Railroad. The Federals recently reopened this rail line and the Confederate command was anxious about troop movements and Union resupply. Stuart again urged Mosby to report any large troop movements.³⁴ These orders, like many to follow, are evidence that Mosby was not independently raiding the Union lines for personal benefit, but was acting in coordination with orders from Stuart. During the Chancellorsville campaign, Stuart's cavalry was spread across Virginia from the tidewater area south of the James River to the mountains in western Virginia. Mosby's partisans were a valuable source of intelligence.

On 1 May, Mosby rallied almost one hundred men, the largest force assembled to date. At dawn on the following

morning, they attacked a regimental sized garrison, approximately three hundred men, of the 1st West Virginia Cavalry at Warrenton Junction. Some Union troopers quickly surrendered but most took refuge in a large house. The Rangers separated and assaulted the building. They stacked hay bales on the first floor and torched them in attempt to smoke the enemy out of the house. Simultaneously, another assault team smashed their way into the house and demanded a surrender. Unfortunately for the scattered Rangers, reinforcements from the 1st Vermont and 5th New York regiments arrived on the scene. Mosby attempted to reorganize and rally his men but they fled in all directions. The three different units of Union horsemen had the novel pleasure of pursuing the Southern "bushwhackers." Mosby lost one man killed, fifteen to twenty wounded, and fourteen captured. The enemy suffered approximately twenty killed and wounded.¹⁵

The skirmish at Warrenton Junction was Mosby's first defeat in the unit's four-month history. He must have realized a hundred-man force is too unwieldy to execute an operation without organization into subordinate units. He had lost command and control over the unit at the objective. His command was scattered across the rail junction disarming prisoners, gathering horses, and assaulting a defensive position while it was being torched. He was no longer Lieutenant Mosby with a handful of volunteers; the growth of the unit necessitated refined tactics and organization.

Mosby's problems did not end at Warrenton Junction. The Federal cavalry, inspired by their victory, began a massive search of Mosby's Confederacy. The Union soldiers swept across the countryside and captured horses and military-aged men. By the end of May, Mosby lost approximately another twenty men in the Northern dragnet. Compounding these losses, BG Fitz Lee convinced Stuart to recall his men from Mosby's command. Of the original fifteen men, only seven still rode with Mosby. However, only three men returned to Lee's brigade because one was wounded and three were imprisoned.³⁶

Despite his personnel losses and Union pressure, Mosby continued his raids on the Orange and Alexandria Railroad. On 10 May he burned two bridges, removed track, and caused a train derailment.³⁷ The Rangers continuously cut telegraph wires and ambushed mounted security patrols. Mosby wrote Stuart that he was having limited success with his attacks on the rail line because of no ammunition for the carbines and because of infantry guards riding the trains. He requested a mountain howitzer to reinforce his train attacks. Mosby indicated his awareness of the partisans' value as a force detractor from the enemy's front line units when he wrote, "The effect of such annoyance is to force the enemy to make heavy details to guard their communication."

Mosby received the howitzer before the end of the month. The twelve-pound, bronze mountain howitzer had been

recently forged by the Tredegar Iron Works in Richmond. He assigned a team of former artillerymen to the gun and they began training immediately. A two-horse team pulled the howitzer.

Mosby planned a train ambush on the next day. Approximately forty Rangers rode to an isolated section of the Orange and Alexandria Railroad near Catlett's Station. The experienced partisans loosened a section of track on a curve. They tied a length of telegraph wire to the rail with the intention of jerking the rail from the bed as the train approached. A locomotive is more easily derailed on a critical portion of track, such as a curve.

The twelve-car supply train screeched to a halt after the rail was pulled from the track. The howitzer crew immediately placed a well-aimed shot into the boiler of the engine and the other Rangers drove off the thirty-man infantry guard. The partisans looted the cars and then torched them, burning rations, forage, supplies, and mail. Reinforcements from three different regiments heard the cannon shot and rode toward the scene of the ambush. They spotted the fleeing Rangers and began a pursuit.

Mosby realized he could not outrun the Yankees with the artillery piece. He detached a rear security element and deployed the howitzer on a knoll near Grapewood Farm. He selected an excellent ambush site in which the charging Union horsemen were channelized four abreast on a country lane between high fences on both sides. A shot of grape

charge devastated the first Union attack. The disciplined Federal troopers reformed out of gun range and charged again. A second shot of grape cleared the first rank, but the second rank closed on the howitzer crew before they could reload. A vicious hand-to-hand fight followed. Mosby and a few mounted Rangers escaped, leaving one mortally wounded, three prisoners, and the newly acquired howitzer. The Federal cavalry victoriously towed the gun back to the division headquarters at Fairfax Court House.

Mosby underestimated the strength of the Union cavalry. It was necessary to reconnoiter miles on both flanks of an ambush along a rail line because of many mounted patrols. Though the howitzer was extremely effective against the train and repulsing the first charge at Grapewood Farm, there was insufficient fire support to permit time to reload. If a wagon or artillery piece is necessary for a particular mission, then it must be expedited to the safety of the rear, not used as part of a delaying rear guard action. Any towed or heavy equipment negates two factors that are critical to a partisan unit's success--speed and mobility.

Mosby's setbacks at Warrenton Junction and Grapewood Farm were indicative of the general improvement of the Union cavalry corps. The rebel's heyday of cavalry superiority was waning throughout the theater of operations during the summer of 1863. The Confederate ranks of horsemen were thinning and the quality of mounts declining; conversely,

the quality of leadership, weapons, and cavalrymen continued to improve in the North.

The Company Is Formed

The Confederate War Department debated the merits of partisan warfare during the winter. In February 1863 the Virginia General Assembly had symbolically transferred its troops, including the partisans, to the Confederate government. The War Department issued a general order in June that authorized the military department commanders to integrate the partisan rangers "into battalions and regiments with the view to bringing them under the same regulations as the other soldiers in reference to their discipline, position, and movements."¹⁹

In early June Mosby must have realized the time had come to organize his men into a company of soldiers. The faces changed with each mission and he had little command or control. In compliance with recent orders from the War Department, he was expected to organize his company under the overall command of the Army of Northern Virginia. On 10 June he summoned four Rangers and announced their selection as officers in the company (a captain, a first lieutenant (LT), a 2LT, and a 3LT). They were Captain William Foster, 1LT William Thomas Turner, 2LT William L. Hunter, 3LT George A. Whitescarver.

Mosby then assembled his men and announced that the seventy men present who were not assigned to other units

were now officially members of Company A, 43d Battalion of Virginia Cavalry, Army of Northern Virginia. He then presented the four officers for "election." Though the Confederate army regulation dictated the men would select their officers, Mosby chose to ignore it. He presented the four candidates for the four positions and the mock election was completed. This became standard procedure for Mosby personally to select officers and not election by popular vote of the soldiers. The noncommissioned officers were directly appointed by Mosby, which was the normal practice in the armies at the time. This procedure ensured Mosby's absolute confidence in his chain of command.

Company A would eventually grow into the 43d Battalion of Virginia Cavalry, which was actually a regimental-sized force with two battalions and eight companies. More than one thousand men would serve with Mosby by war's end; however, the active force was never larger than seven to eight hundred men at one time. Operationally, Mosby would never conduct a mission with more than 350 troopers.⁴⁰

CHAPTER III
MILITARY OPERATIONS, 1863-64

Mosby's military operations are examined in this chapter from the official organization of the unit in June 1863 until the summer of 1864. Major events will be analyzed with particular emphasis on tactics, techniques, and procedures. Though there is no evidence of any written doctrine or standard operating procedures, there is a distinguishable pattern in the conduct of his operations. Mosby continued to practice successful techniques and instilled them in his subordinates.

Gettysburg and Summer of 1862

Mosby wasted no time with formalities or celebration after the formation of Company A on June 10, 1863. On the same afternoon he led approximately one hundred troopers north from Rector's Cross Roads to the Potomac River. He established a standard procedure of sending each new company on a mission immediately after formation. This very effective technique established confidence within the new unit.

Mosby had planned a night attack on two enemy cavalry companies near Seneca Mills, Maryland; however, the

civilian guide lost his way and the Rangers lost several critical hours. The guide's mistake forced the partisans to cross the river at daybreak on the following morning. The enemy, eighty to one hundred troopers, was alerted of Mosby's crossing and formed for battle. In spite of the loss of surprise, Mosby ordered a charge into the Federal camp. The Union troopers of the 6th Michigan Cavalry broke in the face of the charging rebels and were pursued for several miles. The Rangers returned to the camp and burned it. They killed seven and captured seventeen men and twenty-three horses.¹ Although Mosby only lost two men killed in the frontal assault, they were both officers. Captain Brawner had commanded a company of approximately thirty partisans that was temporarily riding with Mosby. Lieutenant Whitescarver had just been appointed as Company A's third lieutenant on the previous day. The Rangers' leadership suffered another blow two days later when Company A's commander, Captain Foster, was ingloriously captured in a barbershop in Middleburg.²

Mosby was following a policy that is a primary maxim of guerrilla warfare: practice a strategic defense but a tactical offense. One of his Rangers described it as "defensive in its object, yet aggressive in principle." Though not a major skirmish, the combat at Seneca Mills was significant for several reasons. Mosby must have questioned his judgement to make a daylight attack on a prepared enemy

without the element of surprise, especially after twenty-some hours in the saddle. Mosby was anxious to field test his unit and take the war to the enemy. This was the Rangers' first raid into Maryland.

Mosby never concentrated his force in one geographical area. The Rangers showed great mobility covering large distances between targets. Once the unit expanded into a battalion, Mosby sent several teams striking simultaneously in different counties, giving the enemy a false impression of his strength. The Rangers were unpredictable and never established patterns.

A sign of success from the Seneca Mills skirmish was the resulting consternation in the headquarters of the Army of the Potomac and Washington. General Hooker ordered his cavalry to search for the partisans in the entire area from the Blue Ridge Mountains to Middleburg. BG Stahel's cavalry division combed the countryside for weeks.

Northern Virginia was soon inundated with infantry and cavalry units in blue and gray as they moved northward toward Pennsylvania. General Lee had brilliantly checked the Union southward advance at Chancellorsville, and now he led his forces north. The Rappahannock Valley could no longer sustain Lee's army, and, like Mosby, he wanted to take the war to the enemy on his grounds. The two massive armies would soon clash again at Gettysburg.

Mosby played an active role in the Confederate advance northward and was partially responsible for Stuart's conspicuous absence from the first day's battle in Gettysburg. After providing critical information on the enemy's troop strength and location, Mosby recommended that Stuart ride between General Hooker's army and Washington. A similar feat near Richmond the previous year proved very successful and upset General McClellan's operational tempo. It seemed logical that a similar operation might cause panic in the capital and force Hooker to forfeit front line troops to defend Washington. Mosby also suggested that Stuart take advantage of a gap between two Federal corps and cross the Potomac River at Seneca Mills Ford. Unfortunately for Stuart, Union infantrymen had blocked the crossing by the time he arrived and he lost two valuable days riding further east in search of an open ford. Rather than ride west to find the Confederate right flank, Stuart began a raid north. The effect of Stuart's absence on the outcome of the battle of Gettysburg is still the subject of historical controversy.

Mosby's Rangers played a significant role as scouts during the Army of Northern Virginia's march north in the Shenandoah Valley, but they did not continue to Gettysburg with the army. On 28 June, Mosby assembled fifty troopers and rode into Pennsylvania. For an unknown reason, they

returned to the Confederacy several days later with captured horses and cattle.

After the Confederate defeat, northern Virginia again experienced two massive armies rolling through the region. The Confederates marched south through the Shenandoah Valley, shadowed by the Army of the Potomac on the east side of the Blue Ridge Mountains. General George G. Meade was the Union army's new commander.

The presence of large enemy units forced the partisans from the comfort and convenience of their safe houses. They established "Camp Spindle" near Hopewell Gap in the Bull Run Mountains. The Rangers returned to camp life and lived in tents. Mosby did not allow his men to sit idly in the mountain hideout; more enemy troops meant more targets. The Rangers constantly raided picket lines and captured straggling troops. During the last week of July, Mosby captured 186 prisoners, including a major, captain, surgeon, and two lieutenants. They also captured more than one hundred horses and mules, wagons, and other equipment.⁴ BG Rufus King, a Federal division commander of the Department of Washington, reported the difficulties in stopping Mosby, "They themselves owed their escape to their intimate knowledge of the country . . . the gang scattered in all directions, and thus ended the pursuit."⁵

General Lee's report on 18 August included a mild rebuke of Mosby's operations when he wrote:

I fear he exercises but little control over his men. He has lately carried but too few men on his expeditions, apparently, and his attention has been more directed toward the capture of wagons than military damage to the enemy. His attention has been called to this.

The commander wrote Stuart on the same day. He stated:

The capture of wagon trains is advantageous, but the supply of the Federal Army is carried on by the railroad. If that should be injured, it would cause him to detach largely for its security, and thus weaken his main army.

General Lee's correspondences referred to a recent raid near Fairfax Court House by Mosby and twenty-seven men. Their target was a train of sutlers' wagons. The sutlers were Northern civilian provisioners who sold goods to the Union troops. Mosby captured twenty-nine loaded wagons, approximately one hundred soldier escorts, and 140 horses. Before the partisans reached the safety of the wooded mountains, a large cavalry force drove them away and freed the prisoners and wagons. General Lee questioned the military value of the sutlers' goods and the possibility of partisans selecting targets for their personal benefit, as opposed to the army's. Because partisan units could retain the spoils of war, the sutlers were provocative targets and never safe from attack.

Mosby's limited raids and General Lee's frustrations exposed a weak link in partisan operations. The presence of large enemy forces greatly restricted movement and therefore combat effectiveness. The Union had developed an efficient

communications network and could telegraph Mosby's movements to intercepting patrols. The Rangers were forced to operate in smaller units to avoid detection but this limited the scope of the raid. Their strength also was depleted because of the requirement to guard large numbers of prisoners at the mountain camp. To attack the Orange and Alexandria Railroad, as Lee suggested, Mosby needed a large force because of the increased number of sentries and mounted patrols along the tracks. To make matters worse, between 15 July and 20 August Mosby lost twenty-one men as Federal prisoners.⁹ This was approximately one-fifth of his command. It must have been extremely frustrating for the partisan leader after his accomplishments in April and May to be so effectively restricted.

Three More Companies Are Formed

The Summer of 1863 was not a very successful period for Mosby's Rangers. Their military targets were relegated to wagon and horse trains, although this had been criticized by the commander of the Army of Northern Virginia for lack of military significance. A local newspaper printed a story falsely accusing Mosby's men of selling the stolen sutlers' goods, earning "thirty odd thousand dollars."¹⁰ To add injury to insult, Mosby was wounded in a skirmish on 24 August during a raid on a horse train. One carbine bullet struck him in his thigh and two in his groin. Two

Confederates were killed and three wounded. The Union lost six killed, twelve wounded, and many horses captured.¹¹

During Major Mosby's convalescence, Lieutenant Turner commanded the unit. Turner continued to raid outposts and wagons. Mosby quickly recovered and was back in the saddle one month later for a raid.

One week after Mosby's return, he and four men slipped through Federal lines and infiltrated Alexandria, located across the Potomac River from Washington. Mosby planned to capture the governor of West Virginia, Francis H. Pierpont. Like Colonel Wyndham during the Fairfax Court House raid, the governor spent the night in Washington and thus avoided capture. In consolation, Colonel D. H. Dulaney, Pierpont's military aide, was snatched. Ironically, Dulaney's son, French, was one of the four Rangers accompanying Mosby on this raid. They safely returned to the base camp with the prisoner, burning the railroad bridge over Cameron's Run en route.¹² The mission was significant because it confirmed the rebels' ability to infiltrate the capital's defenses and ended all rumors of Mosby's death. Mosby defended his latest operations in a report at the end of the month when he wrote:

The military value of the species of warfare I have waged is not measured by the number of prisoners and materiel of war captured from the enemy, but by the heavy detail it has already compelled him to make, and which I hope to that extent diminishing his aggressive strength.¹³

In October, Stuart recommended a promotion for Mosby for the third time since Gettysburg. He pointed out that, "the capture of these prominent Union officials, as well as the destruction of bridges, trains, &c., was the subject of special instructions which he is faithfully carrying out."¹⁴ One month later General Lee praised Mosby's "boldness and skill" but pointed out:

I have hoped that he would have been able to raise his command sufficiently for the command of a lieutenant-colonel, and to have it regularly mustered into service. I am not aware that it numbers over four companies.¹⁵

Mosby had already decided to "raise his command sufficiently." On 1 October the Rangers assembled at a remote location in the Blue Ridge Mountains near Ashby's Gap. Despite the dozens captured during the summer, approximately 150 men were present. Mosby read a list of sixty names and announced they now belonged to Company B. He then followed the same formality with the election of the four company officers. They were Captain William R. Smith, 1LT Franklin Williams, 2LT Albert Wrenn, and 3LT Robert Gray. The Rangers merely "ratified" his choice, giving the affair a hint of legality. One of his men later described the mock election:

He saw at a glance that the law of Congress, which ordained the election instead of appointment of officers, would, if executed, prove even more destructive in his command than it had done in the regular service. He did not hesitate, therefore, to put it aside with that vigor and promptitude which belong only to men qualified to command.¹⁶

Mosby was anxious for the new company to experience combat as a unit. He sent Smith's men on a raid one day after the company's formation. Company B returned several days later with six prisoners and twenty-seven horses. The Rangers suffered no losses.¹⁷

Mosby and the two companies spent the autumn harassing the Union lines, supplies, and communications. Operations were conducted by a single company, the two combined, or a selected force from both. During a mid-October raid, a combined force captured seventy-five to one hundred prisoners (including five captains and one lieutenant), more than one hundred horses and mules, and several wagons loaded with valuable stores.¹⁸ On 26 October a fifty-man force attacked a wagon train and captured "upward of 30 negroes and Yankees (among them 1 captain)," 145 horses and mules.¹⁹ A month later Mosby reported capturing seventy-five cavalymen, more than one hundred horses and mules, and six wagons.²⁰ He also wrote he was attempting to detain the Union soldiers in Fairfax by annoying their communications and harassing their front. He described the Orange and Alexandria Railroad being under constant surveillance; he added, "they have sentinels stationed all along in sight of each other, in addition to the guards on each train."²¹

On 7 December Mosby assembled his entire force at Rectortown. He announced the formation of Company C and

presented the four officer candidates. They were Captain William H. Chapman, 1LT Dolly Richards, 2LT Frank Fox, and 3LT Frank Yager. Mosby ordered the company to reassemble in several days for their next operation.

The new company's target was Brandy Station on the Orange and Alexandria Railroad. Upon arrival at the target, the Rangers discovered the station had been fortified and many mounted patrols were in the area. The partisans resorted to camp raids and captured four prisoners on the first night and twelve on the second.²² Though they returned to the base camp with sixteen prisoners, the Federal supplies continued to flow uninterrupted on the railroad.

By this period in the war several factors limited the success of partisan raids on the Union controlled railroads. Stations were heavily fortified and block houses were constructed near bridges and other key points along the tracks. The roving Union cavalry patrols now had a couple of years experience against the Rangers and were more inclined to resist the attacks than they had previously. Telegraph lines were extended to the cavalry camps, greatly reducing the response time. Also, even if the Rangers were successful in destroying track or burning a bridge, the Union army had a very efficient organization to repair the damage immediately. New track could be placed in hours and bridges rebuilt in a day. A Confederate commander had to

consider the risks involved and the repair capability when considering a raid on the rail line.

Loudoun Heights

Mosby conducted very few operations in December 1863 as he reorganized his command; however, he estimated the Rangers captured one hundred prisoners and more than one hundred horses and mules during the month. A "considerable amount" were killed or wounded.²³ The seasoned Union cavalry continued their search for Mosby's men. The Federal troopers now had valuable counterpartisan experience and were familiar with the region. Major Cole's company of the Potomac Home Brigade Cavalry, an unattached Maryland brigade, was one of these tough Federal units braving the cold and partisan attacks during the winter of 1863-4. Mosby's unit was their primary target. On New Year's Day eighty Marylanders under the command of Captain Hunter, one of Cole's officers, skirmished with Captain Smith's Ranger company near Rectortown. Though they had twice as many men, the Union troopers suffered fifty-seven casualties, more than half their force.²⁴ The Federal cavalrymen retreated to their camp at Loudoun Heights, near Harper's Ferry where the Shenandoah River flows into the Potomac.

Early in the morning of 7 January a party of Rangers led by Lieutenant Turner attacked the camp of the 3d Pennsylvania Cavalry near Warrenton. Approximately thirty-five partisans found a gap in the defensive

perimeter. Taking advantage of the darkness and a strong wind covering the sounds of movement, they moved to the rear of the camp and attacked. The Rangers wounded eight and captured eighteen men and forty-three horses. Three Rangers were captured in the pursuit. General Meade was upset after receiving the news of the raid. He demanded a "thorough investigation" to determine if someone was "greatly derelict in duty."²⁵

Three days later Captain Frank Stringfellow, one of Stuart's scouts, proposed to Mosby a combined force raid on the Maryland cavalry camp at Loudoun Heights. Mosby agreed to the attack because Major Cole's Federal unit was becoming a serious threat. The Maryland troopers were seasoned veterans and had considerable experience from previous clashes with other partisans in the area, including Imboden, White, Ashby, and Munford. Stringfellow had already scouted the Union camp and estimated that several companies, 175 to 200 men, were bivouacked on the high ground at the river junction. There was also a large infantry force at Harper's Ferry, only one-half mile away.

Mosby called for a battalion assembly on 9 January at Upperville, twenty miles south of Harper's Ferry. Only 106 partisans rallied for the mission because travel was hampered by a foot of snow and bitterly cold weather. The ride to the objective was so cold the men reigned their mounts with their teeth and placed their hands under the

saddle blankets. They also dismounted and jogged alongside the horses to maintain blood circulation in the legs.

Mosby met Stringfellow and ten men near the enemy camp. Stringfellow led Mosby and his men to a rarely used path to ascend Loudoun Heights. The partisans dismounted and filed up the steep trail bringing them to the rear of the camp. Mosby conducted a leader's reconnaissance of the objective and then returned to his men and gave them the mission brief. Stringfellow's men would move to the other side of the perimeter and lead the attack by capturing Cole and his staff in a house on the edge of the main camp. Captain Smith and his Rangers would capture the horses. Mosby sent seven Rangers back down the steep path to prevent the pickets on the main road from riding to Harper's Ferry for reinforcements. Mosby would then lead a charge on the camp from the enemy's rear.

Mosby's hope for a complete surprise and total rout of the Marylanders was shattered when a shot rang out from the direction of the pickets at approximately 3:30 a.m. The enemy was now alerted and the pickets rode to the Ferry for assistance. By the time Stringfellow reached the headquarters, the veteran staff had abandoned the building and had begun to organize a defense. Stringfellow raced his men across the camp but the Rangers fired on the unidentified riders approaching from the direction of the house. Six were immediately killed or wounded in the

darkness by friendly fire. Realizing their terrible mistake, the Rangers mounted their horses and charged the camp.

This gave the Union soldiers time to run out of the tents into the freezing night and take cover, some clad only in underwear. Though some troops attempted to surrender, Cole was able to rally most of them and instructed them to shoot any mounted target. A Federal trooper described the confusion as hand to hand combat as they stuck their carbines into the side of the cavalrymen and fired; he continued, "It was so dark you could not see the face of the enemy you were shooting. It was a perfect hell!"²⁷ There was little organization on either side and the night became an individual fight for survival. Captain Smith was shot dead from his horse and Lieutenant Turner would die a week later from his wound. Mosby heard a signal cannon from Harper's Ferry and realized the tide had turned on him and ordered a retreat. Though the Rangers killed four, wounded sixteen, and captured six prisoners and fifty to sixty horses, they suffered a psychological defeat. Mosby reported, "My loss was severe; more so in worth than the number of the slain. It was 4 killed, 7 wounded (of whom 4 have since died), and 1 captured."²⁸ Mosby's younger brother, William, was one of the wounded, though slightly.

This was a serious setback for Mosby. He was despondent over the loss of eight men, especially his two

best officers. It must have been extremely frustrating for him to see a perfect surprise attack fail miserably. It is unknown who fired the shot at the pickets; Mosby and Stringfellow each blamed the other for the rest of their lives.

In the preparation for the attack, Mosby exhibited excellent techniques that are still used today. The mission was conducted on one of the coldest nights of the winter with a deep snow to muffle the sounds of movement. Mosby took advantage of adverse weather on many occasions to attack an unsuspecting enemy. He personally conducted the leader's reconnaissance and then formulated the final plan. The plan was not simple--remove the enemy's security and replace it with his own, divide his force into teams and assign specific missions, and strike the enemy with surprise and lethality before they can consolidate a defense. The operation failed because of the vigilance of the enemy's guard force, no natural illumination that night, the difficulty of operating with another unit, and simply bad luck. A "running password" coordinated between units beforehand might have prevented the fratricide and the mission's failure.

The defeat at Loudoun Heights and the loss of revered leaders, combined with unusually cold weather, kept the Rangers inactive for the rest of the month. Mosby assigned areas of responsibility to the companies for

patrols to alert the Rangers of the enemy's presence. Company A was responsible for covering the eastern sector of the Confederacy below Middleburg. The northern approaches between Bloomfield and Upperville were the responsibility of Company B. Company C would maintain surveillance on the southern routes from The Plains (or White Plains) to Salem (present-day Marshall).²⁹ This security measure was necessary because the Union cavalry knew they could surprise the Rangers in the houses and farms at night. Also, the civilian intelligence network was less active during the winter months due to less travel and less time spent outdoors where enemy activity might have been observed. A partisan was most vulnerable in his safe house or base camp where he might be unarmed and his horse unsaddled.

Winter's Bitter Struggle

By the end of January, the Rangers killed, wounded, or captured forty enemy soldiers, seized between seventy-five to one hundred horses and mules, and derailed a train.³⁰ Stuart again campaigned for Mosby's promotion. He wrote, "[Major Mosby's] sleepless vigilance and unceasing activity have done the enemy great damage. He keeps a large force of the enemy's cavalry continually employed in Fairfax." Stuart added, "if Major Mosby has not won it [promotion], no more can daring deeds essay to do it."³¹

During the last week of January, Mosby left his command under the leadership of Captain Chapman and rode to Richmond. Mosby discussed future operations with the Secretary of War, James Seddon. This personal coordination is another indicator of the legitimacy of Mosby's command; no other partisan had this relationship with the Secretary or General Lee. During the visit, Lee recommended Mosby's promotion to Secretary Seddon. Lee wrote:

He is zealous, bold, and skillful, and with very small resources has accomplished a great deal. I beg leave therefore to recommend his promotion to be lieutenant-colonel, under the act approved April 21, 1862, authorizing the President to commission such officers as he may deem proper, with authority to form bands of partisan rangers, in companies, battalions, or regiments. I do this in order to show him that his services have been appreciated, and to encourage him to still greater activity and zeal.³²

Mosby was promoted on 6 February, with an effective date of 21 January, the date of Lee's recommendation.

Lieutenant Colonel (LTC) Mosby now had three companies operating independently of the battalion or combined. The Rangers were constantly attacking enemy outposts and picket lines, as well as lines of communication. The expansion of the Federal telegraph system made the Union commanders more dependent on rapid communications, increasing the disruptive effect of the cut wires. Because of the fortifications and security along the Orange and Alexandria Railroad, the Rangers concentrated on wagon supply trains. The command was well-trained and

tactically proficient. They proved themselves twice in February in skirmishes with the Union cavalry.

The first clash occurred on 20 February. Cole's cavalry, the victors at Loudoun Heights, made a very successful sweep of Upperville and captured eleven Rangers. This effective operation came just two days after a large Federal raiding party netted twenty-eight of Mosby's men in the Rector's Cross Roads area.³³ When informed of Cole's raid, Mosby assembled fifty to sixty riders and pursued the two hundred man force through Upperville to Blakeley's Grove School. Cole stopped his men at the school because his withdrawal from the Confederacy was constantly under the fire of Ranger sharpshooters. Both sides sought revenge from the January night raid.

The two experienced groups formed for combat, both with excellent leadership. Cole immediately dismounted his marksmen and positioned them with carbines behind a stone wall. The Rangers were drawn into the school yard for battle. Covered by his sharpshooters, Cole led three successive charges but was repulsed every time. Mosby stood firm during the charges and then sent a team to flank the dismounted men behind the wall. The larger Union force was driven from the school and they resumed the withdrawal north toward Harper's Ferry. To prevent further attrition from his rear, Cole continually deployed sharpshooters behind walls during the move. Most Rangers were armed only with

pistols and were forced to flank each of the delaying positions, giving the main body time to escape. Cole's casualties were fairly light--six dead (including a captain and lieutenant) and six captured. Only two Rangers were wounded but Mosby was unable to free the eleven men previously captured.

The second skirmish took place two days later near Dranesville. On 21 February a 150-man force of the 2d Massachusetts Cavalry clashed with an equal-sized band of Rangers. The forces then broke contact. Mosby and a few men followed the Federal troopers until the Union force stopped and established a camp at 2:00 a.m. Mosby left a surveillance team watching the enemy and he rode back to collect his force. He selected an excellent ambush zone on the enemy's route of march near Dranesville. He skillfully organized his Rangers for the trap. Montjoy and twenty men armed with carbines hid in a stand of pines on the side of the road. Company A and part of Company B were mounted in a column of fours to the right of the kill zone. Company C and the remainder of Company B were similarly positioned to the left.³⁴ At this "point offering fine natural advantages for surprising the enemy" where he could "attack their flank, front, and rear simultaneously," Mosby waited for the Federal cavalry.³⁵

The Union troopers approached the trap late the next morning. Their commander was conscious of security and

positioned an advance guard of twenty men in front of the main column. Mosby had placed two men as decoys on the road at the far side of the ambush zone and they drew fire and a charge from the advance guard. The well-trained and wary Union troopers took immediate action; while the twenty men chased the two Rangers, the column halted outside the kill zone. Montjoy's team delivered a deadly fire into the flanks of the advance guard. With a blast on a whistle, Mosby signalled the mounted troopers on the flanks for the assault. The attacking Rangers attacked the surprised Federal main body. The enemy offered a slight resistance and then fled. The Rangers killed fifteen (including the commanding captain), a "considerable number wounded," and captured seventy (including a captain and two lieutenants). Mosby suffered one killed and four wounded.³⁵

These two skirmishes at the end of February 1864 are evidence of improvements in battlefield performances of Mosby's Rangers and his cavalry adversaries. In one year the Rangers evolved from a dozen roaming raiders to a trained battalion capable of defeating a Union force twice its size. Their battle tested tactics, techniques, and procedures were now more sophisticated. A simple ambush was well planned and included mutually supporting teams-- security, assault, and support. The technique of support elements practiced at Blakeley's Grove Schoci and Dranesville is very similar to that employed today by the

Army's light infantry and special operations forces. It is standard procedure during a raid or ambush to place right and left security teams near the objective; the assault element is always covered by an overwatching support team. Mosby also proved there was no safe area of operations south of the Potomac River, day or night, nor under any adverse weather conditions.

After a month of raids and harassment the Rangers assembled at Paris for the formation of Company D. The officers were presented and "elected unanimously"; they were Captain Richard Montjoy, 1st Lieutenant (LT) Alfred Glascock, 2d LT Charles Grogan, and 3d LT David Briscoe. Montjoy, from Mississippi, was a fierce fighter and was respected by all battalion members. Grogan and Briscoe were both from Baltimore and the company was "almost entirely from Maryland, who have cast their lot with the South."

The additional company extended the range and frequency of Mosby's operations. The spring's activities were characterized by small raiding parties rather than large skirmishes. Mosby summarized his operations in March and April as "continual annoyances . . . causing them to exert great vigilance in guarding against surprises and interruptions of their communications." Mosby spent most of his time scouting for Stuart while many Rangers collected forage. Stuart directed Mosby to monitor both the Baltimore and Ohio and the Orange and Alexandria Railroads. He also

tasked Mosby to report troop movements on both sides of the Blue Ridge Mountains.³⁹

LTC Mosby's 43d Battalion had earned the respect of both armies, North and South. The four companies were very efficient and had excellent leadership. Mosby gradually gave his company commanders more authority in target selection and mission execution. A year earlier the Rangers' mission planning had been very centralized and tightly controlled by Mosby, but now both planning and execution were decentralized. As daring and active as he was, Mosby realized he could not participate in every raid and reconnaissance. To facilitate operations, he organized a small staff, including a quartermaster and an adjutant.

The spring of 1864 marked the end of the first year of Mosby's Rangers. Overall they had been very successful. During the approaching year, Mosby will form four more companies and greatly enlarge the scope of his operations. The Rangers will be faced with their most serious threat to survival as the Union counterinsurgency strategy is formulated and General Grant brings the concept of total war into the front yard of Mosby's Confederacy.

Counterinsurgency

The North went through two distinct phases of counterinsurgency strategy during the war. The first phase will be covered in this section and the second part will be discussed at the end of chapter four. On the national

level, there was no counterinsurgency strategy during the first two years of the war. The military leaders in Washington were able to ignore the partisans early in the conflict because the irregulars were not very effective. Even the division commanders and below at the tactical level generally were not bothered by the limited guerrilla warfare.

As partisan units began to organize and conduct limited raids after the initial months of the war, the Union army slowly responded. The Federal commanders realized that couriers, signal units, and telegraph repair crews needed military escorts to prevent their ambush and capture. The unprotected rail lines and trains were easy targets for the untrained partisans, especially since this did not require large forces or special equipment. Mosby's raid on Fairfax Court House and the capture of BG Stoughton generated genuine security concerns in Washington. It was obvious the standard defense of a network of strong points linked by cavalry was incapable of preventing enemy cavalry raids.

Union forces gradually increased their vigilance on the rail lines and replaced the infantry patrols with cavalry. Federal engineers built blockhouses and garrison stockades near rail stations and bridges. Infantry escorts rode the trains to provide immediate protection. Wagon trains were also vulnerable targets and required armed escorts. Mosby's Rangers were so successful with wagon

raids that infantrymen eventually had to march between the wagons, and cavalry rode in the front and rear. Another "soft" or easy target was the pickets. The Rangers knew the soldiers on picket duty could easily be captured, especially at night. Once the guards were removed, the sleeping camp was open to attack. In general, these increased security measures were manpower intensive; they depleted the Union commander's front line strength.

The Union counterpartisan efforts during the first half of the war were defensive in nature. Federal commanders had the tendency only to react to this new form of warfare; there was very little proactive planning or strategy. After a partisan raid on a rail station or outpost, the Union commanders had the natural tendency to place more infantry or artillery units in the vicinity. Our experience in Vietnam in the 1960s is a more recent reminder of a very similar situation. A powerful, resource-rich country never analyzed the threat as an insurgency in an unconventional environment. Money and more troops were thrown at the problem instead of developing a counterinsurgency strategy to deal with the guerrillas. The second phase of the Union's campaign to combat the increasing partisan threat reflects a national-level strategy to solve the problem.

CHAPTER IV
MILITARY OPERATIONS, 1864-65

The last year of the war began with the appointment of General Ulysses S. Grant as general-in-chief of the Union army. Grant immediately reorganized the command and the regional forces that encompassed Mosby's Confederacy, the Shenandoah Valley, and West Virginia. He selected a young general, MG Philip H. Sheridan, as the commander. Grant knew Sheridan from the western theater and had unwavering faith in his ability. The significance of the appointment of these two generals is that they changed the style of warfare in Virginia, much like General Sherman did in the Deep South. Now Mosby's Rangers and the citizens of northern Virginia were subjected to total war. They bore the heavy burden of the war until General Lee's surrender at Appomatox in April 1865 and Mosby's subsequent disbandment later that same month.

Total War

As Mosby planned his tempest of operations for spring and summer, a vicious storm was brewing in Washington. After three years of protracted war, President

Lincoln finally found a war fighting general, Ulysses S. Grant. Congress approved the revival of the rank of lieutenant general. George Washington had been the only commander of American troops to wear three stars (the Confederacy awarded the rank to Lee in the fall of 1862). General Grant was appointed as general-in-chief of the Union army.

Grant's previous successes came in the western theater, first at Forts Henry and Donelson, then Shiloh and Chattanooga, and finally at Vicksburg. He believed the war could still be won by the end of the summer with his grand strategy encompassing both eastern and western theaters. A coordinated offensive would drive south across the wide front from the Atlantic to the Mississippi. Sherman would take Atlanta, the South's logistic center, and Grant would oversee the capture of Richmond, the political and psychological objective.

Grant realized the importance of defeating Lee's Army of Northern Virginia, preferably in a decisive battle and not a long siege of Richmond. Grant's Virginia offensive had three prongs. Meade would command the main effort to destroy Lee's army. Butler's Army of the James would attack up the Peninsula and capture Petersburg, south of Richmond, and sever the capital's rail lines. Sigel would drive south through the Shenandoah Valley, cut the western lines of supply, and march on Richmond from the

west. Grant knew Lee's depleted army could not muster enough men and resources to block the simultaneous offensives.

Grant's plan included the brutally effective strategy of total war. To bring the war to a close, the Union strategically targeted the Southern population and their resources. In his version of a Napoleonic total war, Grant directed his subordinates to destroy the Confederate infrastructure and morale. He commanded the generals to destroy rail lines, bridges, industry, mills, storage facilities, livestock, and even crops in the fields. All Southerners would be forced to bear the heavy burden of the war. Grant wanted to capitalize on the practically unlimited resources of the North while destroying the limited assets in the South. Lincoln's support for Grant's offensive and his style of war was intensified because he needed tangible progress toward victory for his presidential reelection campaign.

Grant's grand strategy changed the pace of operations in Mosby's Confederacy. Mosby felt the effects of the renewed offensive on all sides. Sigel was advancing up (southward) the Shenandoah Valley on one side and Meade was moving toward Richmond to his east. Mosby's battalion began conducting raids on the extended Union lines of communication on both sides of the Blue Ridge Mountains. Generally, Companies B and C operated against Sigel in the

Valley, and Companies A and D concentrated on Meade.¹ Thousands of Union soldiers were deployed to protect the lines of communication and to search for the active Rangers. A Ranger documented one instance when six partisans tied up 375 Union troopers for days.²

Hot Summer in the Valley

The Federals met a determined Confederate resistance in all three Virginia offensives. On 15 May MG John C. Breckinridge stopped Sigel at New Market. Butler did not have better success; his drive on Petersburg was bogged down at Bermuda Hundred. Meade's army was conducting a very costly offensive against Lee's successive maneuvers in the Wilderness and at Spotsylvania Court House. On 12 May Jeb Stuart died of wounds received the day prior at Yellow Tavern. The Confederacy lost her daring cavalry commander and Mosby lost his "best friend in the army."

Companies A and D focused on Meade's supply trains near Fredericksburg. Rather than depend on the Orange and Alexandria Railroad, most of the Union's supplies came down the Potomac River to Belle Plain (northeast of Fredericksburg) and were loaded on wagons. The Rangers had to interdict the wagon trains between the river and the well-protected rear of the Union lines. The partisans conducted quick strikes and hastily retreated to the relative safety of Mosby's Confederacy.

On 22 June Mosby ordered the first official roll call of the 43d Battalion. Two hundred and sixty Rangers assembled at Rectortown.³ The commander prescribed the boundaries of the area of operations. Every man was expected to live within the borders and leave only with authorization. The Confederacy area was a large trapezoid, encompassing approximately 125 square miles. The western border was formed by the Blue Ridge Mountains from Snicker's Gap (at Snickersville) in the north to Manassas Gap (at Linden) in the south. The southern edge ran east from Linden, through Salem, to The Plains. The Bull Run Mountains formed the eastern limit, from The Plains north to Aldie on the Little River Turnpike. The turnpike was the northern border from Aldie west to Snicker's Gap.⁴ Mosby also announced that roll call would be conducted at every assembly. If any Ranger missed two successive meetings without explanation, he would be sent to the Army of Northern Virginia.

The battalion dispersed for limited operations and reassembled four days later at Upperville. Two hundred and fifty men were present and rode into the Shenandoah Valley. Mosby had scouted the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad and planned an ambush between Harper's Ferry and Martinsburg. A partisan artillery crew towed a twelve-pound howitzer, which was recently acquired from Richmond. As Mosby approached Duffield's Station, he positioned twenty-three men on his

right flank on the Harper's Ferry-Charlestown road. He instructed them to delay any Union force from Harper's Ferry attempting to cut off their retreat. Mosby probably placed the blocking element out of concern of losing another artillery piece to the pursuing Union cavalry. Using the indigenous population as an intelligence asset, Mosby sent a local woman into the station to get a train schedule.

Mosby quickly deployed the Rangers for an ambush. One company with the howitzer established a support position on a hill top. The other two companies formed for an assault. They captured four pickets and learned that only sixty-five infantrymen were garrisoned at the station. Mosby sent a company commander into the station under a flag of truce and he convinced the outnumbered Federal commander to surrender. Another team of men cut the telegraph wires and captured a Federal signal flag detachment. When the train did not arrive as scheduled (it had passed through before Mosby's arrival), he ordered two partisan companies to loot the station and burn it and the garrison. The Rangers retreated with fifty prisoners and captured supplies.⁵

Perhaps the cavalry garrison in Harper's Ferry saw the smoke, because sixty troopers rode southwest toward Charlestown to block the Confederate escape. Lieutenant Nelson's men had established an ambush on this route and successfully turned back the force, though it was thrice the

size of his unit. The partisans killed and wounded several, took nineteen prisoners and twenty-seven horses.' The Rangers continued their retreat to the Confederacy. Mosby spread the companies out along the dirt road to deceive the enemy with a large dust cloud. BG Max Weber, the commander of the Harper's Ferry forces, reported Mosby's strength was between five to six hundred men.'

Back in the Confederacy, Mosby learned of General Lee's bold plan to invade northwards again. Lee planned to detach secretly LTG Jubal A. Early's Second Corps and two artillery battalions and send them west to the Shenandoah Valley. On 13 June Early's corps, representing one-quarter of Lee's forces, moved rapidly by foot and rail to block the Federal drive on Lynchburg, a critical rail and canal junction at the southern end of the Valley. Early was successful and routed MG David Hunter's forces from Lynchburg and drove them west across the Allegheny Mountains into West Virginia. This left the Valley open, and Early marched north for the second part of his mission. Lee gambled that Early's 9,000-man force moving down the Valley would be an effective strategic diversion. This route was a strategic avenue of approach previously used twice to launch attacks into the north. Lee hoped Grant would be forced to pull troops from Meade's army to protect the capital and drive Early back across the border. This might give the Army of Northern Virginia a chance to drive Butler back down

the Peninsula or to retake lost ground north of Richmond. A similar strategy had proven successful two years earlier during Stonewall Jackson's Valley Campaign. On 5 July Early's corps, supplemented with Breckinridge's soldiers, crossed the Potomac River and began a raid into Maryland and toward Washington.

Apparently Mosby was not informed of Early's operation and discovered the plans after talking to one of Early's quartermasters.⁹ This may be indicative of a loss of coordination between the partisans and Lee's army after Stuart's death. Another indicator of a breakdown in communication in the Confederate cavalry was the fact that Mosby did not write his official reports of the summer's operations until September. The absence of coordination resulted in Mosby designing his own tactical plans, and the Army of Northern Virginia lost the use of a valuable asset.

On 3 July Mosby assembled approximately 250 men and crossed the Potomac River near Point of Rocks. He cut the telegraph, rail, and canal communications in hope of keeping Early's crossing a surprise. They routed a Federal 250-man garrison near the river. Mosby sent a few men to find Early and inform him of the interdiction and to suggest plans of coordination. One Ranger was detailed to stay with the corps as a guide. On 6 July, still having no communication with Early, Mosby moved back across the river with most of

his force and rode toward Aldie to intercept a Federal cavalry raid.

The Rangers clashed with the troopers of the 2d Massachusetts Cavalry at Mount Zion Church. The Federals estimated they lost twelve killed, thirty-seven wounded (twelve fatally), and over one hundred horses.⁹ Mosby reported fifty-seven Union prisoners. He lost one killed and six wounded.¹⁰

Mosby's victory at Mount Zion Church proved his ability to cover long distances with a large force. The veteran Federal cavalry still could not operate with impunity in northern Virginia. Mosby used his artillery piece during the skirmish, but the only round fired missed its mark. Yet, the psychological impact of the partisans backed by artillery probably contributed to the enemy's fear and subsequent flight. The Washington Evening Star described the skirmish three days later:

This had been Moseby's [sic] bravest and largest capture and there is something about it almost unaccountable, when we know how efficient this cavalry force [Lowell's command] has been heretofore, the numerous times they have fought Moseby [sic] the past year, and the number of captures we have made.

On the following day a Ranger returned from Early's headquarters. The corps commander sent a message that his targets were Frederick (Maryland) and then Washington. There was no real coordination between the two men. Early ignored a valuable asset for his strike into Maryland. This lack of coordination may be due to a personality conflict or

perhaps reflected Early's lack of confidence in the partisans' capabilities.

On 9 July the Rangers rode north again and crossed the Potomac in hope of assisting Early's march. They routed a cavalry camp near Seneca. Mosby sent two small teams to destroy lines of communication; they raided outposts, threatened the rail line, cut telegraph wires and support poles, and burned several canal boats. After threatening Washington, Early's corps moved back across the river and returned to the Valley. Mosby used the Rangers to screen Early's eastern flank and to control the passes in the Blue Ridge Mountains.

On 16 July Mosby had his first face-to-face meeting with Early. There is no record of their conversation, but Mosby probably offered his assistance again. Mosby conferred with him two weeks later, but again no joint plans were agreed upon. Mosby planned his own operations and continued to harass the Union cavalry forces and lines of communication on both sides of the Blue Ridge. The Rangers reported enemy movements to Early.

On 28 July Mosby assembled the battalion at Upperville and announced the formation of Company E. Ninety six men were assigned. As usual, Mosby presented the four officer candidates. They were CPT Samuel Chapman, 1LT Fount Beattie, 2LT William Martin, and 3LT William Ben Palmer. The Rangers still had a steady stream of recruits.

Mosby never dropped his standards; each man had to prove himself to stay with the unit. Sometime during the last week of July, Mosby formed a sixth company, an artillery battery. Three more mountain howitzers were received from Richmond giving the battalion a four-gun battery. The four officers were Captain Peter Franklin, 1LT John J. Fray, 2LT John P. Page, and 3LT Frank H. Rahm.

As was standard procedure, the battalion rode north on the day of Company E's formation. They crossed the Potomac River and rode into Adamstown. The partisans did not encounter any enemy units. Mosby sent the new company further to the north to skirmish with the enemy, and he led the battalion back to Virginia. Company E did run into a detachment of the 8th Illinois Cavalry but with no significant results. Unknown to the Rangers, on the same day Confederate BG John McCausland torched Chambersburg in a reprisal raid for Hunter's wanton burnings in the Valley. More than two hundred buildings were destroyed in the fire that consumed approximately eleven square miles of the town.¹²

Sheridan Marches South

President Lincoln was embarrassed by the Chambersburg raid and upset by the slow pace of Grant's grand strategy. Atlanta and Richmond were still in Confederate hands. The attack on Petersburg resulted in a time-consuming siege. Early had driven all forces from his

route down the Valley and threatened Washington. After a meeting with the President on 31 July, Grant made an organizational change that would eventually reverse the Union's fortune in the western theater of Virginia. He established the Middle Military Division and appointed MG Philip H. Sheridan as the commander of the Army of the Shenandoah. Sheridan's new army was composed of the Army of the Potomac's Sixth Corps, one infantry division of the Nineteenth Corps, two infantry divisions of Crook's Army of West Virginia, and two cavalry divisions.¹³

The Union army's leadership questioned Grant's selection of Sheridan for the command. Sheridan was only thirty-three years old and had previously served as Meade's cavalry corps commander. Like Lincoln's blind trust in Grant, the general-in-chief knew he had selected a war fighter and someone he could trust. Grant wrote MG Halleck, the Army's Chief of Staff, "I want Sheridan put in command of all troops in the field, with instructions to put himself south of the enemy and follow him to his death. Wherever the enemy goes let our troops go also."¹⁴ President Lincoln wired Grant that he had seen the dispatch and it "is exactly right, as to how our forces should move." However, the President bluntly reminded Grant that the Union commanders in the Valley would not carry out the instructions "unless you watch it every day, and hour, to force it."¹⁵

Sheridan consolidated his new army at Harper's Ferry and planned his sweep up the Valley. It is surprising that there is no record of formal coordination even at this stage between Early's outnumbered force, 3:1, and Mosby's command. The partisan leader launched his own operations to harass Sheridan's cavalry and lines of communication. Mosby's main objective was "to vex and embarrass Sheridan and, if possible, to prevent his advance into the interior of the state."¹⁶ Mosby also continued to threaten Washington in an attempt to hold the forces in the capital and thus away from the fronts.

Sheridan needed a secure supply line to operate in the Valley and eventually to drive on Richmond. Unlike the Army of the Potomac, he lacked a secure river system and Atlantic coast to move supplies. Sheridan probably had learned a valuable lesson from Hunter's failed offensive one month earlier. Hunter left his supply base and marched toward Lynchburg with a limited supply of rations and ammunition. The Federals foraged in the Valley but were dangerously low on food and ammunition when Early arrived from the east. With no supply train and destroyed crops behind him in the Valley, Hunter was forced into West Virginia.

Mosby recognized the importance of raiding Sheridan's rear and denying the Union commander secure lines of communication. On 10 August Sheridan marched south to

destroy Early's corps. Two days later Mosby assembled between 250 to 300 Rangers and rode west across the Blue Ridge with two howitzers. He found Sheridan's supply trains, more than five hundred wagons, near Berryville. Three regiments of "100-days' men" (recruits with only a one hundred day obligation) and a large cavalry force escorted the wagons. A company of infantrymen was positioned every twenty or thirty wagons.¹⁷ Mosby halted his column at dark, and he infiltrated a section of the vast convoy. After his reconnaissance, Mosby aroused his partisans and deployed them for an ambush. He selected a part of the train that had stopped late for a couple of hours sleep. Most of these wagons belonged to Sheridan's cavalry corps.

Concealed by the early morning fog, one group of Rangers rode ahead and turned to attack the convoy from the front. Mosby instructed a larger force to strike the wagons from the flank and rear. He positioned the howitzer (the second one broke a wheel in transit) on top of a small hill. Mosby positioned himself and a reserve near the gun. The signal to attack was two rapid shots from the howitzer.

As the teamsters and infantry guards were preparing to continue the march, Mosby gave the attack signal. The first round decapitated a mule, followed closely by a second shot. The teamsters and infantry scattered in the wake of the screaming partisans. The infantry troops of the Ohio National Guard were green and had never experienced combat. The Union cavalry offered a brief fight and then dispersed.

Many wagons were looted and seventy-five were torched, one containing \$112,000 in Federal currency (unknown to the raiders). The Rangers rode east to the Confederacy with approximately two hundred prisoners (including seven officers), one hundred wagons, two hundred cattle, and between five to six hundred horses. Mosby lost two men killed and three wounded.¹⁸

A Union force, which was dispatched to cut off the Rangers, failed to catch them, but they did recover the payroll chest from the burning wagon. Once back in the Confederacy, Mosby sent the prisoners, mules, and cattle to General Lee in Petersburg. The horses were distributed within the battalion.

Sheridan's staff received reports of heavy reinforcements marching to Early's assistance. Sheridan was determined not to be caught by a large Confederate force without his supplies at hand. He was forced to march back to his base near Harper's Ferry. The partisan activity troubled him. Because of Mosby's raid, veteran troops were withdrawn from the front to escort wagons. The 100-days' soldiers could not be relied upon in the Valley's unconventional warfare environment. Sheridan also decided to take more drastic measures to deal with the partisans.

Sheridan continued Hunter's policy of scorched earth in the Valley. In mid-July, Halleck had relayed Grant's blunt instructions to Hunter:

If Hunter cannot get to Gordonsville and Charlottesville to cut the railroads he should make all

the valleys south of the Baltimore and Ohio road a desert as high up as possible. I do not mean that houses should be burned, but every particle of provisions and stock should be removed, and the people notified to move out . . . he wants your troops to eat out Virginia clear and clean as far as they go, so that crows flying over it for the balance of the season will have to carry their provender with them.¹⁹

Grant reiterated these instructions in August; he wrote, "take all provisions, forage, & stock wanted for the use of your command; such as cannot be consumed, destroy."²⁰

Sheridan's cavalry, embittered by the loss of their equipment and supplies during Mosby's wagon raid, began to carry out the destruction of the northern end of the Valley. Trails of smoke marked the burning barns, mills, and crops. They usually spared private residences. The news of the burnings reached the Confederacy, and Mosby led the battalion to the Valley to stop the barn burners. This intensified the vindictiveness between the two groups of cavalry and led to atrocities by both sides.

On 20 August Captain Chapman and a group of Rangers caught enemy cavalymen burning houses. "Such was the indignation of our men at witnessing some of the finest residences in that portion of the State enveloped in flames," Mosby reported, "that no quarter was shown, and about 25 of them were shot to death for their villainy."²¹ The Rangers were very active that month. An examination of Mosby's official August reports reveals the partisans killed more than fifty and captured more than three hundred enemy

soldiers, and seized more than six hundred horses and two hundred cows.²²

Sheridan intensified his campaign against the troubling partisans. Grant gave him clear instructions on dealing with Mosby in particular. He wrote, "The families of most of Mosby's men are known, and can be collected. I think they should be taken and kept at Fort McHenry, or some secure place, as hostages for the good conduct of Mosby and his men." Grant ended the message with the incredible order, "Where any of Mosby's men are caught hang them without trial."²³

Two hours later Grant telegraphed:

If you can possibly spare a division of cavalry, send them through Loudoun County, to destroy and carry off the crops, animals, negroes, and all men under fifty years of age capable of bearing arms. In this way you will get many of Mosby's men. All male citizens under fifty can fairly be held as prisoners of war, and not as citizen prisoners. If not already soldiers, they will be made so the moment the rebel army gets hold of them.²⁴

Sheridan's constant concern for security and Grant's issuance of his version of the laws of warfare further attest to effectiveness of Mosby's operations. Grant recommended sending an entire division of cavalry to raid Loudoun County. Some Union commanders incorrectly reported that several guerrilla units had banded together under Mosby's leadership with an estimated strength between five to six hundred men. The commander of the Harper's Ferry garrison proposed sending a 1,000-man force with a section

of artillery to drive Mosby out of the Valley.²⁵ A Federal cavalry brigade commander reported maintaining "a regiment standing to horse to meet any emergency."²⁶ Maintaining a constant state of readiness probably wore down the Union troopers and their mounts. The 43d Battalion's success meant intensified Union pressure and hard times in the future.

On 17 August, Sheridan wired Grant that he had burned fields of hay and wheat and confiscated "all stock, sheep, cattle, horses, &c., south of Winchester." He mentioned Mosby's annoyance and reported "we hung one and shot six of his men yesterday."²⁷ The identity of these seven men is unknown but they were not assigned to Mosby's command. Sheridan never officially sanctioned the execution of Mosby's Rangers without trial. He did issue a circular to arrest all "able-bodied male citizens under the age of fifty who may be suspected of aiding, assisting, or belonging to guerrilla bands."²⁸

Grant exempted the Quakers in Loudoun County from arrest. He wrote Sheridan, "In stripping Loudoun County of supplies, &c., impress from all loyal persons, so that they may receive pay for what is taken from them."²⁹ Sheridan decided he could not spare any cavalry to strip Loudoun County and tasked MG Augur, commander of the Department of Washington, to send any available men. Augur sent the

experienced 8th Illinois Cavalry, with 650 men, on this mission.

There were two skirmishes during the first two weeks of September. On 3 September Captain Chapman and two Ranger companies encountered a regiment of the 6th New York Cavalry near Berryville. The Union troops had advanced warning of the approaching partisans and established a hasty defense on a local farm owned by the Gold family. The Rangers, primarily armed with pistols, charged the enemy and received effective fire from the repeating carbines of the Union's dismounted skirmishers. The New Yorkers launched a mounted counterattack but could not seize the initiative from the Confederates. The Federal cavalry retreated across an open field with the partisans in pursuit. The Union cavalry suffered forty-two casualties; four Rangers died of wounds.³⁰

The Rangers were not as fortunate on the following day. Two other companies were resting near Meyer's Ford on the Shenandoah River while Mosby and Captain Richards led two reconnaissance teams. An independent Federal cavalry company, Blazer's Scouts, tracked the Rangers' route and found the resting partisans early in the afternoon. Blazer's men swept the surprised partisans out of the woods and into an open field near the ford. While some partisans put up a defense, many fled. The Scouts overran the defenders, killing seven, wounding five, and capturing six.

The Scouts suffered one killed and four wounded. Blazer wrote in his report, "They fought with a will, but the seven-shooters [Spencer repeating rifle] proved too much for them."³¹

On 13 September Mosby rallied his battalion at Piedmont and formed his seventh company, Company F. The officers were Captain Walter Frankland, 1LT James Ames, 2LT Walter Bowie, and 3LT James Frank Turner. In a departure from standard procedure, Mosby did not assign an immediate mission to the new company. He departed on the following day with two men on a scouting mission and skirmished with five cavalymen from the 13th New York Cavalry. A bullet ricocheted off one of Mosby's revolvers and struck him in the groin. Mosby rode to The Plains and a surgeon dressed the wound, deciding not to remove the round. He spent two weeks in Lynchburg convalescing at his father's house.

On 19 September General Lee wrote Mosby and thanked him and his unit for "the valuable service rendered to the country." Lee added, "I hope you will continue to harass the enemy's troops as much as possible and to restrain his efforts to exercise civil authority in the counties in which you are operating."³²

At the same time Grant finally convinced Sheridan to launch an offensive and sweep Early from the Valley. Sheridan had been in command for six weeks and had not

broken the stalemate. Sheridan's numerically superior Army of the Shenandoah steadily pushed up the Valley and on 22 September routed the Confederate army at Fisher's Hill. Sheridan maintained the initiative and continued his march south. He captured 1,100 prisoners and sixteen guns.³³ In reference to the convention preceding the November elections, Grant wrote, "This decisive victory was the most effective campaign argument made in the canvass."³⁴

Captain Chapman, acting Ranger commander, received reports of Early's defeat and realized Sheridan's line of communication would be extended. On 23 September the Rangers attacked a wagon train but the operation was poorly organized and a Union cavalry force scattered the partisans. During the skirmish Union LT Charles McMaster was fatally wounded. The Rangers claimed he was wounded in the heat of battle. One partisan admitted the officer dismounted his horse " . . . it is supposed intending to surrender. But he imprudently retained his arms."³⁵ McMaster was supposedly shot as the Rangers rode past.

LT McMaster lived long enough to tell Union soldiers he was shot after surrendering. As the Federal cavalry rode to Front Royal word of the officer's death spread through the ranks. In an act of revenge, six captured Rangers were brought forward for execution. It is unclear which Union officer ordered the deaths but Colonel Lowell, a cavalry brigade commander, was aware of the decision. In a letter

home, Lowell blamed the decision on MG Merrit, his division commander. MG Torbert, the commander of Sheridan's cavalry, gave the men permission to proceed.³⁶ Many blamed BG Custer for the atrocity but there is no evidence suggesting he gave the order. LT McMaster was a member of Custer's cavalry brigade and some of his men participated in the executions.

Two Rangers were executed by firing squad in a town lot and left to be collected by the local citizens. The Union troopers hung a third man on a nearby farm. Two other Rangers were interrogated and given a chance to live if they gave the location of Mosby's headquarters. Both partisans refused to cooperate. The Union troopers marched them across town and hung them. A placard was placed on one of the bodies reading, "Such is the fate of all of Mosby's men."³⁷

The death of the sixth victim was even crueler. Henry Rhodes, seventeen years old, was not a member of Mosby's battalion. He borrowed a neighbor's horse and followed the Rangers as they rode through Front Royal on their way to the raid. Rhodes was captured after his mount fell and was returned to town, dragged with his arms tied to the horses of two Federal troopers. They passed his house and his widowed mother begged for his release. The cavalrymen, members of Custer's Michigan brigade, continued through town and shot the boy in front of his mother on a local farm.³⁸

A group of Rangers rode into town on the following day. They buried three men and carried the other three back to their families. Captain Chapman appealed to his men to wait for Mosby's return for revenge. On 29 September Mosby arrived and was briefed on the affair. Many Rangers and citizens of Front Royal blamed Custer. There was never a Federal official report describing the incident. For the rest of his life Mosby believed Custer was responsible.

Mosby later wrote:

I don't care a straw whether Custer was solely responsible for the hanging of our men, or jointly with others. If we believe the reports of the generals, none of them ever heard of the hanging of our men; they must have committed suicide. Contemporary evidence is against Custer.³⁹

Three weeks later Union soldiers hung a seventh Ranger in Rappahannock County.

The Rangers had to wait until 6 November for revenge. Mosby's men were busy attacking the enemy on both sides of the Blue Ridge Mountains. He reported to General Lee that since the Union's advance up the Manassas Gap Railroad the Rangers had killed, wounded, or captured over three hundred enemy soldiers. Mosby's losses were only four wounded and one captured.⁴⁰ Another reason for the delay was Mosby's insistence on obtaining Lee's approval of his plans for reprisal executions. Lee agreed with the plan. On 3 November he wrote the Secretary of War, "I have directed Colonel Mosby, through his adjutant, to hang an

equal number of Custer's men in retaliation for those executed by him."⁴¹

Three days later the partisans assembled twenty-seven Union prisoners near Rectortown. Each drew a piece of paper from a hat and seven unfortunate soldiers picked a marked slip of paper, condemning them to death. The Union soldiers were forced to repeat the agonizing procedure after it was discovered one of the condemned seven was a drummer boy, a noncombatant and thus spared. A dozen partisans led the prisoners across the mountains through Ashby's Gap to the vicinity of Custer's headquarters near Berryville. Mosby directed the execution party to shoot four and hang three. As the Rangers prepared to carry out their grisly task, one prisoner freed his hands and escaped. The partisans immediately shot two prisoners in the head, but another escaped in the confusion. The other three soldiers were then hung, one body bearing the note, "These men have been hung in retaliation for an equal number of Colonel Mosby's men hung by order of General Custer, at Front Royal. Measure for measure."⁴² Incredibly, the two soldiers shot in the head survived their wounds.

Mosby was relieved the incident was finally settled. His intention was "to prevent the war from degenerating into a massacre . . . It was really an act of mercy." He was not bitter about the escape of the two soldiers; he explained, "If my motive had been revenge I would have ordered others

to be executed in their place & I did not. I was really glad they got away as they carried the story to Sheridan's army."¹³

One week later Mosby sent a letter to Sheridan, hoping to settle the matter. He wrote:

Some time in the month of September during my absence from my command, six of my men who had been captured by your forces were hung and shot . . . Since then another . . . was hung. . . . Since the murder of my men not less than 700 prisoners, including many officers of high rank, captured from your army by this command, have been forwarded to Richmond. . . . Accordingly on the 6th instant seven of your men were, by my order, executed. . . . Hereafter any prisoners falling into my hands will be treated with the kindness due to their condition, unless some new act of barbarity shall compel me reluctantly to adopt a course of policy repulsive to humanity."¹⁴

Manassas Gap Railroad

During the fall of 1864 Mosby focused his attention east of the Blue Ridge Mountains on the Manassas Gap Railroad. This line branched west from the Orange and Alexandria Railroad in Manassas to its terminus at Strasburg in the Shenandoah Valley. The route paralleled the southern edge of Mosby's Confederacy and crossed the Blue Ridge Mountains at Manassas Gap. The rails were destroyed early in the war and neither side attempted to use them. Sheridan had convinced Grant he could not move south without a secure line of supply. Grant, eager to bring Sheridan's army to bear on Richmond, directed the reconstruction of the line. MG Augur, commander of the Department of Washington, was responsible for the project and dispatched thousands of

soldiers to reopen the route. Engineer crews began their work during the first week of October, protected by large units of infantry, artillery and cavalry.

The Rangers carefully selected isolated work crews and overwhelmed their guard forces. The partisans effectively used their artillery on several occasions. MG Augur was frustrated by the continued rebel success and dispatched another six hundred cavalrymen to the area. The Union troops cleared many trees from the sides of the tracks and built more block houses. They collected slaves, crops, and livestock and shipped them by rail to Alexandria. They arrested male citizens and forced them to ride the trains, hoping to deter further attacks. MG Halleck, the Union Chief of Staff, wrote Augur, "Your plan of putting prominent citizens on trains is approved, and you will carry it into effect." He added, "They should be so confined as to render escape impossible, and yet be exposed to the fire of the enemy."⁴⁵ Augur wrote Halleck that Mosby had warned most of the males to flee and only a "few old and infirm men" were captured.⁴⁶

The intensity of the conflict increased after Halleck directed harsher measures. On 12 October he wrote:

As a measure necessary to keep that road in running order, you proceed to destroy every house within five miles of the road which is not required for our own purposes, or which is not occupied by persons known to be friendly. . . . The women and children will be assisted in going north or south. . . . Printed notices will be circulated and posted that any citizen found within five miles of the road hereafter will be

considered as robbers and bushwhackers. . . . The inhabitants of the country will be notified that for any further hostilities committed on this road or its employees an additional strip of ten miles on each side will be laid waste, and that section of the country entirely depopulated.⁴⁷

Mosby refused to be distracted from his military mission. He wrote General Lee to "bring through you the notice of the Government the brutal conduct of the enemy manifested toward citizens of this district since the occupation of the Manassas road." Mosby stressed the legitimacy of his campaign on the trains; he added, "As my command has done nothing contrary to the usages of war it seems to me that some attempt at least ought to be made to prevent a repetition of such barbarities."⁴⁸

As the war heated up in Mosby's Confederacy, Mosby sent raids into the Valley and Maryland. He led eighty Rangers on an attack of the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad near Harper's Ferry. Early in the morning of 14 October they derailed a train and discovered a payroll box containing \$168,000. The partisans ordered all passengers off the train and collected valuables as they passed. They then torched the train. The spoils of the "Greenback Raid" were divided among the eighty-four raiders, approximately \$2,000 each. Mosby refused to accept any of the payroll.⁴⁹

During the period of the raid Mosby lost his four artillery pieces. A defector led the 13th New York Cavalry to the artillery battery's camp near Big Cobbler Mountain. Mosby reported the embarrassing loss to General Lee. Lee

regretted the loss and explained there may be a "considerable delay" in their replacement because of heavy losses in the Valley. Lee recommended capturing some from the enemy. He also advised Mosby to be "extremely watchful as to the character of the man you enlist." He ended the message by directing Mosby to "spare no pains to interrupt the work and use of the [Manassas Gap] railroad."⁵⁰

At the height of Mosby's struggle against MG Augur's troops along the railroad, Sheridan changed his strategy. He travelled to Washington and convinced the military leadership his mission was accomplished in the Valley and most of his troops were available to assist Grant's final assault against Petersburg. The Manassas Gap Railroad was no longer essential to support his Valley campaign. Ironically, as Sheridan spent the night in Winchester on his return from Washington, the Confederates proved they were still a military threat in the Valley. Early's force marched all night along a concealed route and hit the Union camp at Cedar Creek at dawn on 19 October. The Federals were completely surprised and the three corps retreated north. However, Sheridan arrived and rallied his men. The Union commander took advantage of Early's failure to continue his pursuit and launched a successful counterattack. The Confederate lines collapsed and again they withdrew southward. Sheridan reestablished his front. Convinced that the Union army had complete control of the

northern end of the Valley, Halleck ordered the rails removed from the Manassas Gap Railroad.

Mosby was no longer restricted by large units of Union troops in the Confederacy. He wrote in his memoirs that his efforts against the establishment of the Manassas Gap Railroad as a supply line for Sheridan "was of greater military value than anything I did in the war, for it saved Richmond for several months."⁵¹ He then focused his efforts on the Valley. Mosby realized the Rangers had a more important role in that area after Early's defeat. There is no explanation for the lack of coordination between Early and the partisans. Mosby could have hit the Union rear at Cedar Creek, severely hampering the consolidation for the counterattack.

Mosby's troop strength by the fall of 1864 was approximately eight hundred men.⁵² On 11 November he assembled the battalion at Rectortown and five hundred men reported. Mosby conducted an inspection and roll call to eliminate deserters and "undesireables" from his ranks. A partisan force marched the dismissed soldiers to a provost marshall in Rectortown.

Several days later Mosby lost some men to the veteran counterpartisan force, Blazer's Scouts. One hundred Scouts caught thirty Rangers escorting twenty prisoners and horses to the Confederacy. Two Rangers were killed and five wounded.⁵³ Mosby was frustrated by the efficient Union

partisan fighters and ordered two companies to find the Scouts and, "Wipe Blazer out! Go through him."⁵⁴ The one hundred Rangers snared Blazer and sixty men in a trap. Blazer and approximately twenty men were captured and about twenty were killed. Mosby lost one man killed and five wounded.⁵⁵ Blazer's Scouts ceased to exist as an efficient fighting force.

On 28 November the Rangers assembled in Fauquier for the formation of Company G. The new company was composed primarily of new recruits and Rangers from the artillery battery, which was disbanded on 2 November. The officers were Captain Thomas W. R. Richards, 1LT John N. Murphy, 2LT W. Garland Smith, and 3LT John Puryear. The 43d Battalion now had seven companies.

The Burning of Loudoun County

As Mosby was reorganizing his command, the Union forces formulated plans for his destruction. Sheridan and Halleck were concerned about the partisan threat as they transferred Federal soldiers from the Valley to Petersburg. On 26 November Sheridan wrote Halleck, "It seems to me before any cavalry is sent away Mosby's band should be broken up, as he is continually threatening our lines."⁵⁶ Later that day Sheridan sent another dispatch to Halleck outlining his intentions:

I will soon commence work on Mosby. Heretofore I have made no attempt to break him up, as I would have employed ten men to his one, and for the reason that I have made a scape-goat of him for the destruction of private rights. Now there is going to be an intense hatred of him in that portion of this Valley which is nearly a desert. I will soon commence on Loudoun County, and let them know there is a God in Israel. . . . when they have to bear their burden by loss of property and comforts they will cry for peace.

Sheridan selected MG Wesley Merritt's 1st Cavalry Division for the mission. Merritt received very explicit orders to be "literally executed." Sheridan directed him to "consume and destroy all forage and subsistence, burn all barns and mills and their contents, and drive off all stock." He justified these harsh measures because the partisans' goal was "the total destruction of all private rights in the country occupied by such parties." He stated the partisan raids only had a slight effect on the Union military forces but "the injury they have inflicted upon the people, and upon the rebel army, may be counted by the millions." He washed his hands of guilt and informed Merritt, "The responsibility of it must rest with the authorities in Richmond, who have acknowledged the legitimacy of guerrilla bands."

On 28 November Merritt's 3,000-man force rode across the Blue Ridge Mountains and began their four day mission of destruction. The Union cavalry brigades swept through the heart of the Confederacy. Fires raged around Paris, Upperville, Rectortown, Salem, The Plains, Middleburg, and Aldie. The three brigades rejoined at Snickersville and

rode through the northern portion of Loudoun County. They torched barns, mills, and haystacks near Union, Philomont, Snickersville, Lincoln, Hamilton, Purcellville, Hillsborough, Waterford, and Lovettsville.

Mosby's Rangers were unable to prevent the widespread destruction. They were greatly outnumbered and could only make limited attacks on the Federal flanks. The frustrated partisans conducted a few raids in the Valley.

On 6 December Mosby rode to Petersburg and met General Lee. They dined that evening and Mosby submitted a proposal to reorganize his unit as a regiment with two battalions. Lee approved the plan and Mosby rode to Richmond on the following day. He delivered the proposal to Secretary of War Seddon. Mosby wrote:

I beg leave to recommend, in order to secure greater efficiency in my command, that it be divided into two battalions, each to be commanded by a major. The scope of duties devolving upon me being of a much wider extent than on officers of the same rank in the regular service, but small time is allowed me to attend to the details of organization, discipline, &c. I am confident that the arrangement I propose would give me much more time both for planning and executing enterprises against the enemy.⁵⁹

In January 1865 Mosby was promoted to Colonel. He already had reorganized his unit as a regiment. William H. Chapman was promoted to lieutenant colonel and commanded a battalion formed by Companies C, E, F, and G. "Dolly" Richards was promoted to major and assumed command of a battalion composed of Companies A, B, and D.

At the time of receipt of the orders from Richmond Mosby was near Lynchburg recovering from a serious abdomen bullet wound. LTC Chapman, the acting regiment commander, took his battalion, approximately six hundred men, to Northern Neck, Virginia for the winter. General Lee suggested the deployment because of the shortage of supplies and forage in the scorched Mosby's Confederacy. The Northern Neck region is between the Rappahannock and Potomac Rivers, northeast of Fredericksburg. This area was not as devastated by the war. Major Richard's battalion, three to four hundred men, remained in southern Loudoun County for the winter.

The winter of 1865 was marked by inactivity in northern Virginia. This can be explained by Mosby's absence, the division of the command, scarcity of food and forage, and little action by the enemy. The war had shifted south to the siege of Petersburg and Richmond. The Rangers had a few skirmishes, but spent most of their time on security patrols. Mosby returned to the Confederacy at the end of February.

On 5 April Mosby formed an eighth company, Company H. Some of the men were new recruits; many were members of the Prince William Partisan Rangers, recently disbanded. The officers were Captain George Baylor, 1LT Edward Thompson, 2LT Jim Wiltshire, and 3LT B. Franklin Carter, Jr.

The new company immediately departed for the Valley for their initiation raid. Early the next morning they discovered a Union cavalry camp. Reconnaissance revealed the unit was the Loudoun Rangers, an independent company of Unionists primarily from Loudoun County. The Loudoun Rangers were organized in January 1862 under special orders from Secretary of War Stanton. They often served as Federal scouts because of their familiarity with northern Virginia. An intense hostility raged between these two Ranger units because of the personal and regional nature of the conflict. The Confederate partisans routed the Union troopers; they captured forty-seven men and seventy-seven horses.⁶⁰ The Loudoun Rangers ceased to operate as an effective force.

Mosby was very busy during the first week of April. On 28 March he had received a message from General Lee's adjutant assigning the responsibility to patrol and protect the Gordonsville-Fredericksburg area and the Shenandoah Valley. The message read:

Collect your command and watch the country from front of Gordonsville to Blue Ridge and also the Valley. Your command is all now in that section, and the general will rely on you to watch and protect the country. If any of your command is in Northern Neck call it to you.⁶¹

These orders reflected the constrained state of the Army of Northern Virginia. Lee's army was confined to the trenches in Richmond and Petersburg and therefore lacked mobility. Unknown to Mosby, the Union army captured most of the Petersburg trenches on 2 April and the Confederates

evacuated the Richmond area. General Lee marched west but, unable to elude the pursuing Union army, was stopped near Appomatox. On 9 April Lee surrendered his forces to Grant at Appomatox Court House.

The Disbandment of Mosby's Rangers

Mosby read an account of General Lee's surrender in a Baltimore newspaper. He discovered that President Davis and his cabinet had escaped Richmond and that General Joseph Johnston's army in North Carolina was still at war. Mosby considered his options, none of which were surrender. He knew the Rangers could not survive much longer in the Confederacy and considered riding south to join forces with Johnston. Mosby sent a courier to retrieve Chapman's battalion.

As Sherman concentrated on the destruction of Johnston, Grant explained the terms of surrender to Secretary Stanton. The surrender applied only to the soldiers at Appomatox but Grant was confident all Confederate soldiers of the Army of Northern Virginia would accept the same lenient conditions of surrender. He specifically excluded Mosby's Rangers and directed MG Winfield Scott, Sheridan's successor as the commander of the Middle Military Division, to handle the partisans. On 10 April Chief of Staff Halleck wrote Hancock and Augur directing that Mosby "will under no consideration be paroled." On the following day Hancock sent a letter to

Mosby offering the same generous conditions as Lee's surrender for his men (not mentioning Mosby personally). Hancock speculated Mosby's forces would be unwilling to give up their "fine animals" and pistols, and the Union cavalry would have to hunt them down.⁴⁴

The conditions for Mosby's surrender were complicated by President Lincoln's assassination on 14 April. A former member of Mosby's Rangers attempted to kill Secretary of State Seward. The former partisan was acting in conspiracy with John Wilkes Booth, the President's assassin. There is no evidence implicating Mosby and such an act would have been totally uncharacteristic. On the morning of Lincoln's death, Stanton wrote Hancock:

In holding an interview with Mosby it may be needless to caution an old soldier like ycu to guard against surprise or danger to yourself; but the recent murders show such astounding wickedness that too much precaution cannot be taken. If Mosby is sincere he might do much toward detecting and apprehending the murderers of the President.⁴⁵

On 16 April several Rangers rode to Hancock's headquarters with Mosby's response to Hancock's surrender offer. Mosby wrote that Hancock's letter was the only "source of the facts concerning the Army of Northern Virginia" and added, "nor in my opinion, has the emergency yet arisen which would justify the surrender of my command." Hancock accepted Mosby's offer of a temporary cease fire.

During an extension of the cease fire, a Ranger slipped through the Union lines at Richmond and spoke with General Lee. Lee explained that he could give no orders because he was under parole. When pressed for advice, Lee replied, "Go home, all you boys who fought along with me, and help build the shattered fortunes of your old state."⁶⁷

On 18 April Mosby and all his officers met Hancock's delegation, led by BG Chapman, in Millwood. Hancock's surrender terms allowed Mosby and his men to return to civil peace after signing a parole and turning in weapons and horses. Mosby explained he was still waiting for the news of Johnston's fate and requested a third extension of forty-eight hours. Chapman agreed and reported the results to Hancock.

On the following day Grant wired Hancock, "If Mosby does not avail himself of the present truce end it and hunt him and his men down. Guerrillas, after beating the armies of the enemy, will not be entitled to quarter."⁶⁸ On 20 April Mosby returned to Millwood to negotiate with Chapman. Johnston still had not surrendered, so Mosby asked for another extension of the truce. As Chapman explained the truce had expired and could not be extended, a Ranger rushed into the conference and told Mosby, "The infernal devils have set a trap for you."⁶⁹ During a horse race with some Union troopers, the partisan saw a brigade of Union cavalry in the woods nearby. Mosby told Chapman, "Sir, if we are no

longer under the protection of our truce we are of course at your mercy of your men. We shall protect ourselves." The Ranger officers tensely left the room. They quickly mounted their horses and returned to the Confederacy.

On the following day, 21 April, Mosby assembled his entire command in Salem. Approximately two hundred partisans were present; some had already surrendered. He conducted his final inspection and presented a farewell address:

I have summoned you together for the last time. The visions we have cherished of a free and independent country have vanished, and that country is now the spoil of the conqueror. I disband your organization in preference to surrendering it to our enemies. I am no longer your Commander. After an association of more than two eventful years, I part from you with a just pride in the fame of your achievements and a grateful recollection of your generous kindness to myself. And at this moment of bidding you a final adieu, accept the assurance of my unchanging confidence and regard.
Farewell."

On 22 April LTC Chapman led 380 men to Winchester and they turned in their arms. By the end of the day most of the Rangers had surrendered. Mosby and a few men rode southward to North Carolina to find Johnston, but near Richmond they heard the news of his surrender. During the next month he escaped a concerted Union dragnet near Richmond, Charlottesville, and Lynchburg. Reportedly, even some former Rangers searched for the Gray Ghost, possibly motivated by Hancock's \$5,000 reward." Finally on 17 June Colonel John S. Mosby rode into Lynchburg and turned in his revolvers and received a parole.

Counterinsurgency

The Federal government was more successful with its counterinsurgency efforts during the second half of the war. Though Mosby's Rangers continued to operate for the rest of the conflict, several other partisan units were captured or destroyed. The Federal successes were primarily due to a coordinated strategy approved at the national level. President Lincoln acknowledged the threat and directed his military chain of command to combat it. Federal funds were available to reimburse loyal citizens in Virginia for losses, and to bribe others for assistance.

An important aspect of the Federal counterpartisan strategy was unity of command. Previously the tactical commanders were handicapped by a lack of coordination. There was very little cooperation between different infantry and cavalry commanders. The infantry lacked the necessary mobility to counter the threat. After Grant's appointment, the Union chain of command made a concerted effort to destroy the guerrilla threat. There was constant coordination between the Middle Military Division, Department of Washington, and the Army of the Potomac. This was facilitated by the extensive use of the telegraph. The active involvement of the general-in-chief ensured that the necessary manpower and resources were committed.

Another significant aspect of the Federal strategy was the issuance of guidance concerning civilians and their property. Though the policy was inconsistent, the military commanders were issued instructions and could act accordingly. The Union commanders eventually learned that indiscriminate burning of residences was detrimental to their military operations. Home burning caused morale problems with the troops assigned to carry out their orders, and was not an accepted practice within the general laws of warfare. These burnings also caused refugee problems, and the destruction strengthened the resolve of the indigenous population to resist. Rather than discourage partisan activity, the burnings rallied the partisans for revenge. In some cases, previously neutral civilians took up arms individually or joined partisan units.

The indiscriminate destruction of nonresidential property (barns, mills, crops, and livestock) was not an effective deterrent to partisan warfare. During Hunter's march up the Valley, his piecemeal incendiarism did not turn the local populace against the partisans nor seriously threaten the guerrilla supply source. However, Sheridan's concerted efforts on a larger scale in the Valley and Loudoun County were effective. The civilians could no longer provide food and forage for the partisans, and some of these families were dependent on Federal food sources to survive the winter. Mosby's local support abated during the

winter of 1864-65 as more public sentiment shifted to acknowledge the Union control of the area. Because of the lack of food and the presence of a Union cavalry brigade quartered in Lovettesville, Mosby had to divide his command for several months. Also, the Rangers were probably more inclined to surrender during the spring of 1865 because of these hardships.

Federal tactics evolved from a static defense to a dynamic offense. At the initial stage of the Union offensive operations, the cavalry conducted unproductive, time-limited sweeps. By the end of the war, large mounted forces launched multiple-day search and destroy missions into the heart of the partisan sanctuary. Conventional cavalry tactics occasionally were abandoned, and they employed partisan techniques against the Rangers, such as ambushes, deep strikes, and night and all-weather raids.

The Union army created special units to combat the partisans. Blazer's Scouts were very effective fighters and could retire to their native West Virginia after raids. They were good horsemen and were accustomed to operating in the mountains. Sheridan handpicked these experienced combat veterans. In August 1864 he wrote Augur, "I have picked 100 men who will take the contract to clean out Mosby's gang. I want 100 Spencer rifles for them." A critical element of Blazer's success was his policy of treating the local citizens with respect.

Another effective unit was the Loudoun Rangers. They were a constant thorn in Mosby's side. These Unionists were very familiar with the territory and enjoyed limited local support in northern Virginia. Cole's cavalry of Marylanders was also very efficient. They took advantage of the sanctuary in Maryland during the war.

The Union army fielded an unconventional company in the Valley known as Jessie's Scouts. General John C. Fremont, commander of Federal forces in West Virginia, authorized the company's formation (named after his wife). These men conducted operations disguised as Confederate soldiers (with captured furloughs or passes), farmers, or laborers. Their primary function was to collect intelligence, but they did conduct a few direct action strikes. Jessie's Scouts were hung as spies when captured. They were disbanded after Fremont's departure because the Union army was uncomfortable with the unit's irregular techniques.⁷⁴

Grant's lenient terms of surrender were extremely effective in ending the partisan resistance. Many Northerners feared Mosby would continue his campaign long after Lee's surrender. The possibility of a protracted guerrilla war in the South was reflected by the strategy of President Jefferson Davis after Lee evacuated Richmond. Davis hoped Lee would join forces with Johnston and defeat Sherman. He explained that Grant would be "far removed from

his base supplies, and in the midst of a hostile population." The war would enter a guerrilla stage; Davis announced:

We have now entered upon a new phase of the struggle. Relieved of the necessity of guarding particular points, our army will be free to move from point to point, to strike the enemy far from his base.⁷⁵

Lee's surrender and acceptance of Grant's terms encouraged all Confederate soldiers to lay down their arms. The generous terms and amnesty may be the most important lesson learned for effectively and expediently terminating an insurgency or partisan warfare.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

This study has provided an analysis of Mosby's campaign from 1863 until 1865. As military operations were recounted, the tactics, techniques, and procedures were described. The evolution of the Federal counterinsurgency efforts was discussed in the final portions of the last two chapters. This conclusion will summarize the partisan operations in the context of their contribution to current unconventional warfare doctrine. This will be accomplished using the theoretical principles of war and listing lessons learned. Then the issue of determining the success or failure of Mosby's operations will be addressed. The chapter will end with two short sections concerning the relationship of this work to previous studies and suggestions for further research.

Principles of War

The foundation of Army operations rests upon a sound doctrine. Our current doctrine is based on nine principles first published in a 1921 Army training regulation; they are: objective, offensive, mass, economy of force, maneuver, unity of command, security, surprise, and simplicity. The

Army adopted most of these principles from a pre-World War I study by British Major General J. F. C. Fuller. They represent a basis for historical analysis and doctrinal development. They provide an excellent conceptual framework for comparing Mosby's activities to current military operations. Because the principles are derived from theory, they are applicable to both conventional and unconventional warfare, from the tactical to the strategic level.

1. OBJECTIVE Direct every military operation toward a clearly defined, decisive, and obtainable objective.

The ultimate objective in any war is the destruction of the hostile armed forces and their will to fight. Mosby's objective was more limited in scope because of the size of his unit and the unconventional environment. The Rangers' immediate tactical objective was the destruction of enemy cavalry and infantry patrols. Even more important on the strategic level, Mosby's objective was to draw Union troops away from the front line to guard lines of communication, supply points, and Washington. All actions should have contributed directly to achieving the military objective. Mosby should have avoided raids on the sutlers' wagons and missions based on personal vengeance because they violated this principle.

2. OFFENSIVE Seize, retain, and exploit the initiative.

In general, offensive operations are the most effective way to attain the final objective. The defense

should be a temporary stage in an operational plan, not a strategy. However, in unconventional warfare the partisan can only conduct limited offensive actions at the tactical level while maintaining a strategic defense. This is primarily due to the partisans' limited resources. The Rangers knew to avoid being forced into a defensive situation and in this case they would usually break contact and disperse. Mosby capitalized on the shock effect of the offense. For example when cornered by a larger force at Miskel's farm, Mosby led his men on an immediate counterattack to seize the initiative and maintain freedom of action.

3. MASS Mass the effects of overwhelming combat power at the decisive place and time.

Mass is more than concentrating forces to achieve a superior combat strength ratio; it involves delivering combat power against a weak point of the enemy. Attacking with a numerically superior force was infrequently an option for the outnumbered partisans, unless attacking pickets or vedettes. The key to applying the principle of mass was to attain the proper combination of combat power by capitalizing on partisan strengths (unconventional tactics, stealth, mobility, environment, and intelligence) and other principles of war (surprise, offensive, maneuver and security). During the periods of heavy Union presence in Mosby's Confederacy, there was a dynamic tension between the

size of the force required based on the target and the risk of detection. An example was the period when the Union concentrated on the dual missions of keeping the Orange and Alexandria Railroad open and vigorously patrolling the Confederacy for partisan prisoners. Mosby realized the improvements in communication and railroad defenses required a larger raiding force on the target; however, he could not stealthily move such a large force from the Confederacy to the rail line.

4. ECONOMY OF FORCE Allocate minimum essential combat power to secondary efforts.

The partisans' principal objective was an economy of force mission. By diverting enemy troops, the Rangers were very successful combat multipliers. Mosby wrote, "The military value of a partisan's work is not measured by the amount of property destroyed, or the number of men killed or captured, but by the number he keeps watching."² Concerning the employment of his men, Mosby was very judicious and concentrated on his principal tasks.

5. MANEUVER Place the enemy in a position of disadvantage through the flexible application of combat power.

Maneuver is accomplished by fire and movement. The partisans in the Civil War had very limited fire support and basically relied on the single-action, six-shot revolver. Mosby's artillery battery was never fully developed into an

efficient battlefield operating system. The mounted Rangers did have excellent mobility. Mosby wrote, "I think that my command reached the highest efficiency as cavalry because they were well armed with two six-shooters and their charges combined the effect of fire and shock."³ He described the value of this principle when he wrote, "A small force moving with celerity and threatening many points on a line can neutralize a hundred times its own number." He continued, "The line must be stronger at every point than the attacking force, else it is broken."⁴ The combination of accurate pistol fire and rapid movement demonstrated the extremely effective use of the principle of maneuver.

6. UNITY OF COMMAND For every objective, seek unity of command and unity of effort.

Unity of command was a major strength of Mosby's operations. Mosby was the sole commander and ensured that all operations had a unified purpose. By ignoring the regulation requiring the election of officers, Mosby maintained an efficient command structure at the company level. At the skirmish at Warrenton Junction, Mosby realized he personally could not lead a 100-man force; a chain of command was established soon afterwards.

Unity of effort was a strength within the battalion but was a major weakness in the Confederate cavalry corps and the Army of Northern Virginia. After Stuart's death there was very little coordination between Mosby and his

higher commands. Early ignored an invaluable asset during his summer raid to Washington in 1864 and on subsequent attempts to defend the Shenandoah Valley.

7. SECURITY Never permit the enemy to acquire an unexpected advantage.

In an unconventional environment, security is the enduring bedrock of survival. Mosby had an excellent grasp of the importance of this principle. Operational security was maintained by not distributing a written operations plan and not issuing the operations order until the unit was assembled and riding to the objective. The unit's survival depended on the support of the local populace who provided food, shelter, and vital intelligence. On the tactical level, Mosby usually conducted a thorough reconnaissance of an objective and established flank security for early warning and to protect their withdrawal. The Miskel farm incident reminded Mosby that Union sympathizers were a dangerous security threat and adequate base security must be established on all overnight stops.

8. SURPRISE Strike the enemy at a time or place or in a manner for which it is unprepared.

Surprise was Mosby's critical combat multiplier during tactical operations. It was attained by striking when and where it was unexpected. The following techniques were used: operating in adverse weather, night operations, exploiting the indirect approach, unorthodox methods,

audacity, deception, and decoys. Mosby realized surprise was a precondition for success. He learned at the skirmish at Loudoun Heights that surprise is only a temporary condition and any pause in operations may allow the enemy to seize the initiative.

9. SIMPLICITY Prepare clear, uncomplicated plans and concise orders to ensure thorough understanding.

Simplicity was critical to Mosby's operations because many of his recruits lacked prior military experience. Uncomplicated plans were also necessary because the Rangers were often fatigued when they reached the objective. Night operations were even more difficult and required a simple scheme. Mosby's plan to raid Cole's Cavalry at Loudoun Heights violated the principle of simplicity. A seemingly easy rout of the enemy instead resulted in fratricide and costly casualties. There were too many maneuver elements involved in the plan. Also, the plan was not concise enough and did not cover contingencies. Mosby learned the difficulties of operating with other units, especially in an environment where rehearsals were not possible. Partisan plans should be simple: hit and run.

Lessons Learned

There were several factors that were critical to Mosby's success. These will be discussed in context of Civil War partisan activities, but are applicable to current military operations. The modern military leader must always

be prepared for unconventional warfare and can benefit from history's lessons. The following statement concerning guerrilla warfare by President John F. Kennedy in 1962 could have easily been attributed to President Abraham Lincoln:

This is another type of war new in its intensity, ancient in its origins, a war by guerrillas, subversives, insurgents, assassins; war by ambush instead of by combat; by infiltration, instead of aggression, seeking victory by eroding and exhausting the enemy instead of engaging him . . . it requires in these situations where we must counter it . . . a whole new kind of force, and strategy . . . and therefore a new and wholly different kind of military training.⁵

1. STRATEGY

Mosby's operations proved the value of partisan forces to the regular army. They were used in the traditional cavalry roles, such as reconnaissance and security, but also in more unconventional ways, such as raids, interdiction of lines of communication, economy of force, and diversion. If properly used, partisans can supplement the regular forces and conduct strategic missions.

2. TACTICS

The partisan must always operate offensively at the tactical level, but defensively at the strategic level. History is replete with examples of the defeat of partisan units that adopted conventional tactics when attempting to launch a major offensive action. The partisan leader must never forget his limitations. Mosby knew when and where to strike and when to run away. Mao Tse-tung, the renowned

Chinese revolutionary, concisely explained guerrilla tactics: "Enemy advances, we retreat. Enemy halts, we harass. Enemy tires, we attack. Enemy retreats, we pursue."⁶ Finally, these tactics are simple and do not require a formal military education. Mosby admitted, "I got all my military education in war."⁷

3. DOCTRINE

There was no doctrine for partisan or counterpartisan warfare. Mosby should have at least established standard operating procedures for his unit. The lack of doctrine clearly reduced the Rangers' effectiveness, and this was reflected in the slowed operational tempo and the lack of success during periods of Mosby's absence. In our current doctrine we do not adequately consider the unconventional threat on the future battlefield. The traditional, linear military theater may not be applicable to future scenarios. There is a good chance that conventional army units will find themselves on a nonlinear battlefield, lacking adjacent units on their left and right and a clearly defined front and rear boundary. Two or more rival partisan units might infiltrate the unit's area of operations. The partisans might be difficult to identify as combatants or noncombatants and blend into an equally hostile civilian populace, embittered by years of ethnic, racial, or religious strife. Doctrine should be developed

now to address these concerns and adjusted accordingly to each situation.

4. INDIGENOUS POPULATION

The local populace is the lifeline of any partisan organization. It provides food, shelter, transportation, and intelligence. The partisans must establish themselves as the legitimate military force in the area. Mosby's Rangers survived in their area of operations because of the people's support. This principle of partisan warfare was especially relevant to Mosby's unit because his men lived with the local families. Mosby's judicial and law enforcement role greatly enhanced his legitimacy. He lacked tolerance for any Ranger who mistreated local citizens or property.

5. ENVIRONMENT

Favorable terrain is another critical factor in the survival of a partisan. Mosby's Confederacy was well suited for guerrilla warfare because of the forested mountain ranges. The thick vegetation in the mountainous draws and valleys provided concealment from Federal search parties. The partisans' familiarity with the terrain was very important and contributed to quick escapes and stealthy, indirect approaches on enemy positions. Also, the fertile lands provided food and forage for the men and their mounts.

6. LOGISTICS

Mosby proved that a partisan unit does not require a conventional logistics system. Weapons, ammunition, medicine, clothing, food, horses, equipment and other supplies were usually captured from the enemy. The local citizens contributed other logistical support. Rather than being a logistical liability to the Confederate army, the 43d Battalion provided the Southerners with horses, mules, cattle, wagons, and other captured equipment and supplies.

7. INTELLIGENCE

The partisan has an extensive intelligence network. Mosby received valuable information from defectors, prisoners (especially couriers), spies, civilians, newspapers, and reconnaissance. A counterpartisan strategy should target these sources.

8. COMMAND AND CONTROL

Mosby had an excellent command relationship with Stuart and Lee. Their open communications resulted in timely intelligence and coordinated operations. After Stuart's death the coordination decreased, and Mosby communicated directly with Lee. Within the 43d Battalion, command and control was very effective though the Rangers lacked a permanent base and headquarters. Stuart's advice to Mosby to "not have any established headquarters but 'in the saddle'" was very appropriate for partisan operations.

The technique of post-mission dispersal and reassembly on a predetermined date or as summoned by courier was another excellent control and security measure.

9. TRAINING

Mosby lacked a formal training program. His emphasis on marksmanship was responsible for the unit's proficiency. Rangers were taught to shoot (while mounted) to kill, not intimidate, the enemy. Also, Mosby's procedure to assign immediately a mission to a newly formed company resulted in self confidence.

10. LEADERSHIP

Mosby's style of leadership was directly responsible for the unit's success. He led by example and from the front. His men knew he would not assign any mission that he was unwilling or unable to undertake personally. Grant's following statement is a testimony of Mosby's leadership ability:

There are probably but few men in the South who could have commanded successfully a separate detachment in the rear of an opposing army, and so near the border of hostilities, as so long as he did without losing his entire command.'

11. DISCIPLINE

Discipline is very difficult in an unconventional environment. It requires excellent leadership. The partisans could not afford to alienate the local populace or to compromise the unit's security. Mosby demanded strict discipline and lacked tolerance for any criminal behavior.

He was determined to minimize the use of alcohol, and he ordered all stills in the area destroyed. Well disciplined partisans resulted in a motivated unit with a strong martial spirit and high morale.

12. PSYCHOLOGICAL OPERATIONS

The unconventional techniques of the partisans created fear in the Union ranks. The Rangers continually routed larger units of Federal cavalry and infantry. Exaggerated rumors spread through the enemy's camps. Many Union soldiers wrote of the fear of night attacks and ambushes by the partisans screaming the Rebel yell.

13. COUNTERINSURGENCY (COIN) OPERATIONS

As a COIN guideline, any response to a partisan threat should be appropriate, be justifiable, use minimum force, do maximum benefit for the population, and cause minimum damage.¹⁰ The military commanders should exhaust all options before resorting to destructive operations. Sheridan's brutal destruction missions in the Valley and Loudoun County violated these guidelines. He never attempted to establish the legitimacy of the Federal troops in Mosby's Confederacy by a continual presence representing law and order. Kind treatment of the populace proved more effective than harsh measures. One may argue the most effective COIN technique is to kill all the inhabitants as a means to remove the partisan threat. However, the US military will not employ such ruthless techniques and will

prosecute any serviceman who violates the accepted laws of land warfare. Brutal COIN operations, My Lai for an example, are usually counterproductive in the long term.

Success or Failure

Mosby led the most effective partisan campaign in the American Civil War, but were his efforts successful? How does one measure success or failure of an independent unit?

Military operations can generally be analyzed at three different levels: tactical (division and below), operational (corps and higher), and strategic (national level). Mosby successfully operated at all three levels. His fundamental achievement at the tactical level was unit survival. Mosby's Rangers operated against Union forces for more than two years and never were stopped. The Rangers killed, wounded, or captured hundreds of enemy soldiers. Despite Federal counterpartisan efforts, Mosby always fielded a combat force. The Union pressure never prevented continued military activities.

Mosby triumphed at operational warfare. The Rangers provided timely and accurate intelligence to corps-level units. Before Stuart's death, Mosby was a key source of information for the Confederate cavalry and the rest of the Army of Northern Virginia. The Rangers were decisive "eyes and ears" for General Lee's two invasion marches north through the Valley and again for the subsequent withdrawals.

Mosby provided limited information during Early's campaign in the Valley in 1864. It is unfortunate that the Army of Northern Virginia did not capitalize on the partisans' unique capabilities.

Mosby's operations were also strategically successful. Though difficult to quantify, the Union army detached thousands of soldiers from the front to guard lines of communication, supplies, and the defenses of Washington. One historian has estimated thirty-five thousand Northern soldiers were "kept in a defensive attitude . . . which would have otherwise been employed in the active theater."¹¹ This calculation is probably exaggerated, but one can accurately state that the number of Union casualties, prisoners, and diverted troops exceeded many times the number of soldiers drawn from the regular Confederate army's ranks to Mosby's Rangers.

Another measure of strategic success was the delay of Sheridan's deployment to the siege of Richmond. Mosby's harassment activities prevented Sheridan from marching up the Shenandoah Valley and thus probably delayed the fall of Richmond for several months. Though his forces grossly outnumbered the Confederates in the Valley, Sheridan considered the force ratio was equal because of many detachments committed to guarding the Potomac border and lines of communication.¹²

This conclusion analyzed Mosby's operations as described in the previous chapters. The value of this study is the application of the lessons learned from the Rangers' tactics, techniques, and procedures to current military doctrine and operations. Useful guidelines are provided for both partisan and counterpartisan strategies, especially in the LIC environment. A review of the spectrum of war reminds us that a low intensity type of conflict is more likely than a conventional war. This historical account of Mosby's Rangers and partisan warfare can assist modern military leaders in preparing for the probable, unconventional nature of future conflicts.

Relationship to Previous Studies

This work conforms to previous studies. There is no information presented for the first time. The principal contribution of this analysis is the description of Mosby's operations in context of current unconventional warfare. This is not another description of the historical events by a historian but an analysis of the operations by a military officer experienced with small unit tactics and special operations.

Suggestions for Further Research

Mosby's operations have been covered in many books, academic documents, and periodicals. There has also been a great deal written about Turner Ashby and John H. Morgan. The other units in the Shenandoah Valley have not been covered as extensively. Research of Elijah White, John Imboden, or Angus McDonald would contribute significantly to the study of Confederate partisan warfare during the Civil War. Another issue that deserves further research is the degree of coordination effected between the partisan commanders, within the same theater or externally.

ENDNOTES

Chapter One

1. John S. Mosby, The Memoirs of Colonel John S. Mosby (Boston: Little, Brown, 1917), 6.
2. Kevin H. Siepel, Rebel: The Life and Times of John Singleton Mosby (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1983), 25. In the melee, Mosby broke a gunstock over the head of a Charlottesville constable.
3. Jeffry D. Wert, Mosby's Rangers (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1990), 22.
4. John W. Munson, Reminiscences of a Mosby Guerrilla (Washington: Zenger Publishing, 1983), 15.
5. James J. Williamson, Mosby's Rangers (New York: Sturgis & Walton, 1909), 14.
6. Munson, 17.
7. John E. Cooke, Wearing of the Gray (New York: EB Treat & Co, 1867), 121.
8. Ibid.
9. Ibid, 121.
10. Ibid, 30.
11. John Bakeless, Spies of the Confederacy (Philadelphia: JB Lippincott, 1970), 104.
12. Ibid, 116.
13. Virgil C. Jones, Ranger Mosby (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1944), 68.
14. Department of the Army, FM 100-5, Operations (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, January 1993). Glossary-5. Lines of communication include all routes (land, water, and

air) that connect an operating military force with a base of operations and along which supplies and military forces move.

15. The issue of Mosby's success will be discussed in the conclusion.

Chapter Two

1. John Scott, Partisan Life With Col. John S. Mosby (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1867), 21.
2. John S. Mosby, The Memoirs of Colonel John S. Mosby (Boston: Little, Brown, 1917), 149.
3. J. Marshall Crawford, Mosby and his Men (Gaithersburg, Md: Olde Soldiers Books, 1987), 179.
4. Scott, 23.
5. Kevin H. Stjepel, Rebel: The Life and Times of John Singleton Mosby (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1983), 102.
6. Ibid, 395.
7. Ibid, 392.
8. The War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies (Washington: US Government Printing Press, 1880-1901), Series I, V 25, P I, 5. Hereafter referred to as OR.
9. Ibid.
10. Scott, 27.
11. Ibid, 30.
12. OR, V25, P1, 6.
13. Ibid, 29.
14. Ibid, 37.
15. Ibid.
16. OR, 1121.
17. Mosby, 151.
18. Ibid, 151.
19. Virgil C. Jones, Gray Ghosts and Rebel Raiders (McLean, Va: EPM Publications, 1984), 156. During an interview with the author, I questioned the veracity of this episode. He replied this account was later verified by Mosby. In addition, Mrs. Henry Fairfax told the author she heard Mosby describe Stoughton's capture several times and this encounter is accurate.

20. Mosby, xxi.
21. "John S. Mosby," Civil War Times Illustrated 4(7) November 1965, 49.
22. OR, V25, PII, 664.
23. OR, V25, PI, 857.
24. Ibid.
25. Ibid.
26. OR, 65.
27. OR, 71.
28. Mosby, 37.
29. OR, 72.
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FIGURES

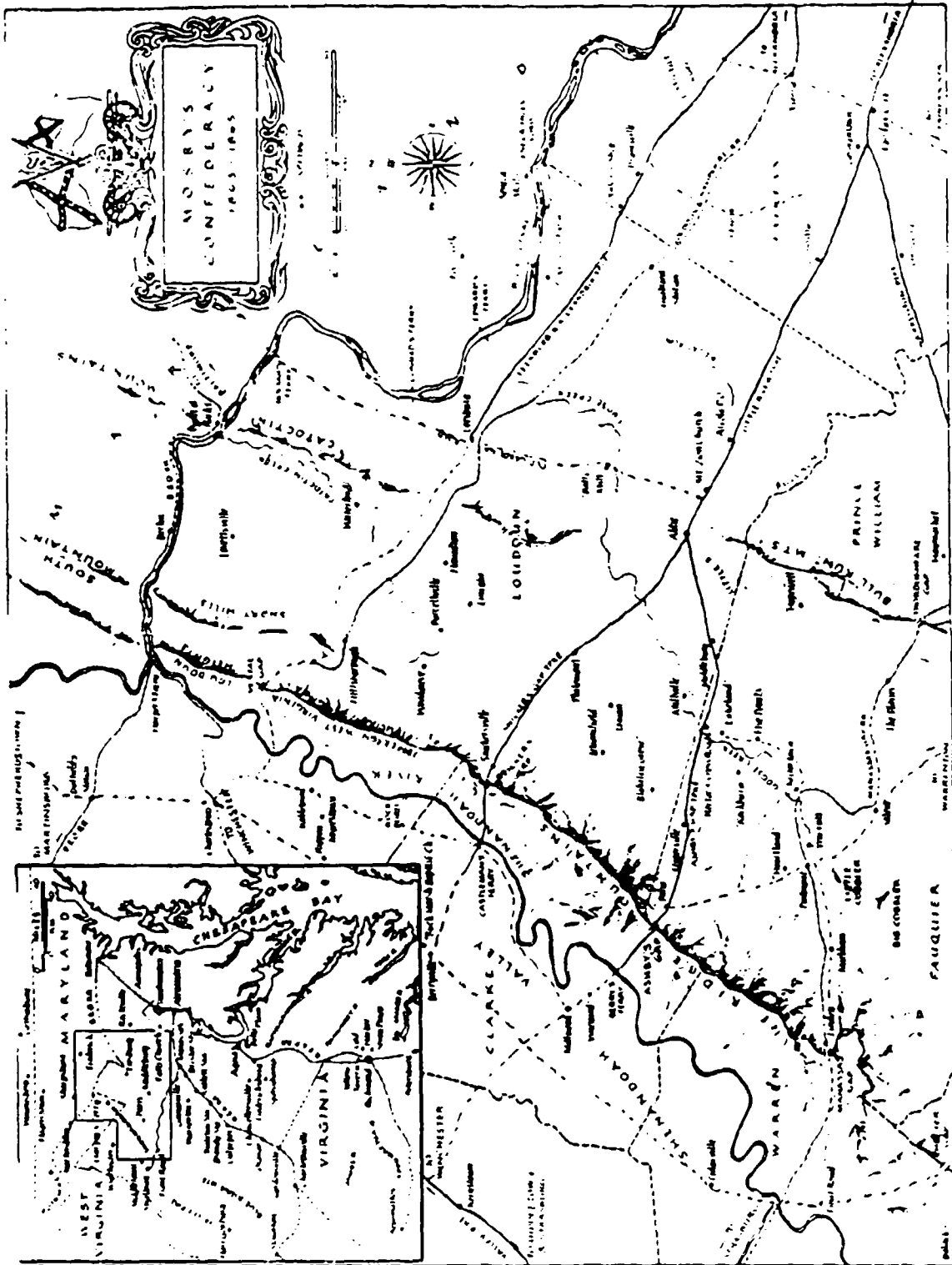


Figure 1 Mosbys Confederacy
 Wert. Mosby's Rangers, inside cover.

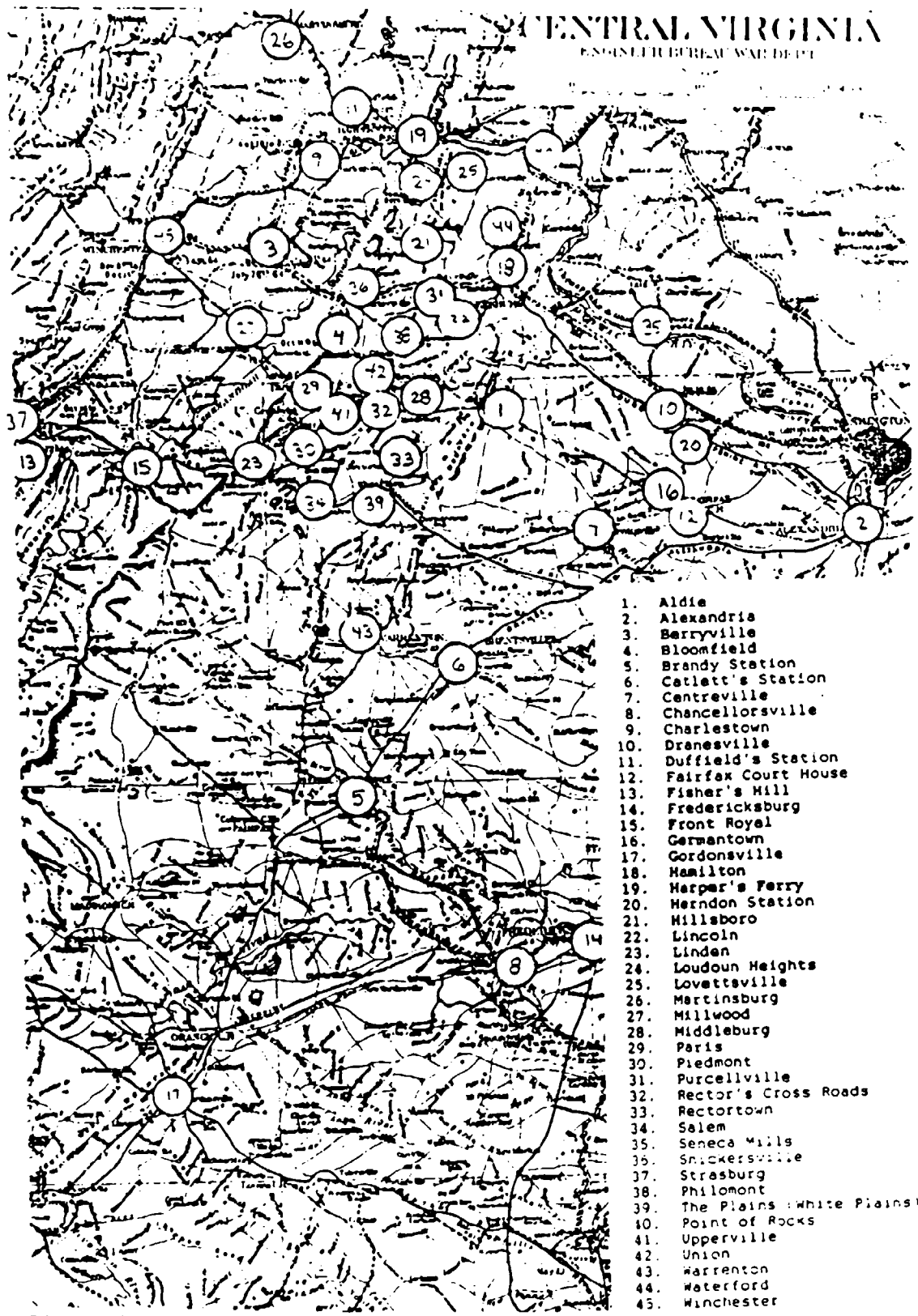


Figure 2 Map of Central Virginia
 U. S. War Dept. The Official Military Atlas Of the Civil War, Plate C.

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