

LAKE GAZETTE

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Bloodshed on North Fork soil; Civil War brings unsafe territories

One nation; two visions

Monroe County was no exception to the rest of rural Missouri during the American Civil War. Two flags were bitter, angry and groping for combat contact with each other. Two rival state governments, under a disputed status with sporadic threats from irregular armies.

One flag, stars and stripes, followed by Union soldiers in blue. The other flag, stars and bars, followed by butternut grey confederate soldiers. It did not take long until the black flag of the grim reaper rode alongside both sides, blue and grey, as several men lost their lives fighting for what each believed in.

One particular day, near North Fork, turned dark for three young men, their wives and a few friends. It was Sunday, July 20, 1862, the weather was hot and humid, as Northeastern Missouri weather usually is. The group, left their farm homes to travel to the morning church service and were on their way back.

Unbeknown to the group, who was enjoying the summer day, another group with different intentions had arrived in the area shortly after their departure for church. A squad of nine, made up of Union soldiers, Missouri State Militia, Eleventh Regiment Cavalry, who were encamped with guards at the Hannibal St. Joseph railroad bridge. The squad was under the command of Captain G.W. Bearnes. They first went to the home of Mr. Joel Ridgeway and no one was home. Next, the soldiers went to the farm home of Mr. and Mrs. Lasley, who were also gone, but had left one person behind with the slaves. The soldiers entered the home, sticking bayonets into the wall and demanding dinner be prepared for them. The soldiers, in an attempt to be in control, broke the house clock and destroyed rooms.

While the soldiers were eating, Mr. and Mrs. Lasley, Mr. Ridgeway, Mr. Thaddeus

Price, along with his son James and three young ladies arrived. Upon their arrival, the Soldiers allowed Mr. Ridgeway and James to go inside for a drink of water, but ordered Mr. Lasley to remain outside of his own home. Thaddeus Price was told to stay with the women, children and slaves.

With their families watching the chaos of the soldiers' actions, Mr. Lasley, Mr. Ridgeway and Mr. Price were taken about 100 yards, shot several times and murdered with the bayonets before returning to camp.

Mr. Joel Ridgeway, 21 years old, was born July 15, 1841, murdered July 20, 1862. Ridgeway was the last surviving child of 12 children of his living parents, William and Harriett Ridgeway.

Mr. James G. Price, 18 years old, son of Robert and Mary Matilda Price, was born December 25, 1843 and murdered on July 20, 1862, left a widowed mother, two sisters and two brothers.

Ridgeway and Price were buried in the Cox Cemetery, located about three miles upriver from North Fork. Mr. Lasley's gravesite still remains a mystery and is unknown where he was buried at. Porter Moss explained memories of the late David Utterback, former Monroe County Presiding Commissioner, was very active in his search for the burial location and to his knowledge never was able to locate it.

Moss stated, "My neighbors, the Weldon Hardesty family, told me Mr. Lasley was buried in an unmarked grave on the dwelling site, on the Mr. and Mrs. Slymacher farm, located about one mile south of the railroad bridge. David thought secure in his decision the unmarked grave was in another location." Although the whereabouts of his grave is a mystery, the facts of him being murdered are not.

The reasoning for these three men's murders has not been solved. Mr. Lasley

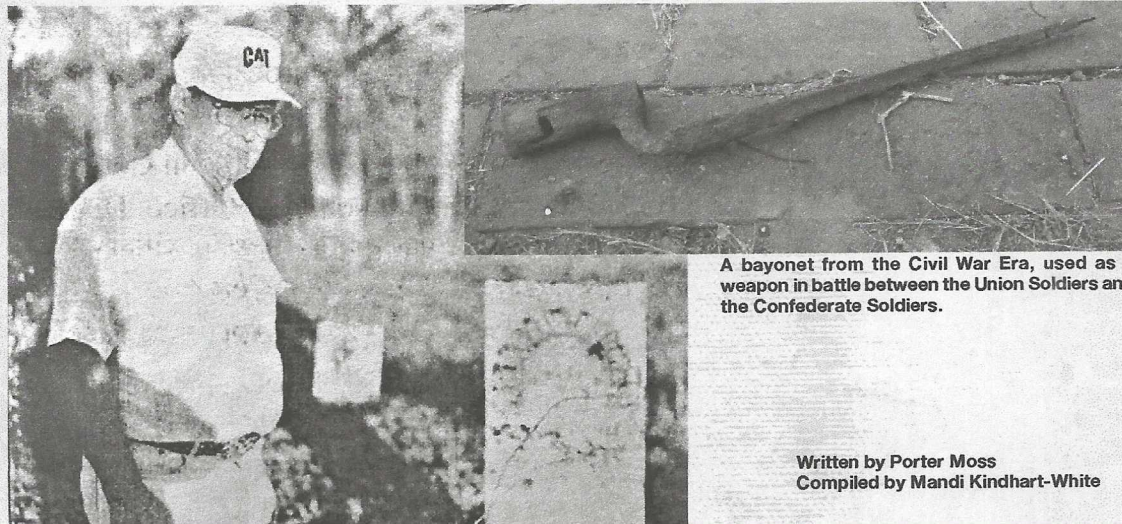
and Mr. Ridgeway had previously signed the oath of allegiance and paid heavy bonds. Mr. Price was young and had not been involved in any bush whacking and simply was in the wrong place at the wrong time.

The local papers and residents of the time did not always concur or get the facts, but they all agree that three young farm boys were murdered in front of their families, children and slaves by the Union Army Soldiers guarding the Hannibal-St. Joseph railroad bridge over the north fork of Salt River.

There was a printed rebuttal by Captain G.W. Bearnes, Missouri State Militia, Eleventh Regiment Cavalry in the Macon City News on July 28, 1862. Captain Bearnes stated, "We were leaving with the three rebels when firing by other rebels in the woods caused the three men to break and run to the woods in the direction of the firing. The command then fired on the running rebels killing them."

If the three rebels were running away from the Union troops, who shot and killed them, there is no explanation for the men having front entrance bullet wounds. The three men also did not have any bullets entering from the back and were unarmed, lined up and executed by frontal firing squad with bayonet wounds entering the front of the bodies according to their families who witnessed the attack.

This unfortunate event occurring at North Fork is just one of several occurring during the Civil War times. Countless people of all races lost their lives fighting to end slavery. This is an important part of American History. Two governments in one nation divided caused growth, increase and freedom for the human race by standing united. History, when read and studied, gives the reader much to learn.



A bayonet from the Civil War Era, used as a weapon in battle between the Union Soldiers and the Confederate Soldiers.

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