



Confederate Colonel John Singleton Mosby (31015), 'The Gray Ghost'

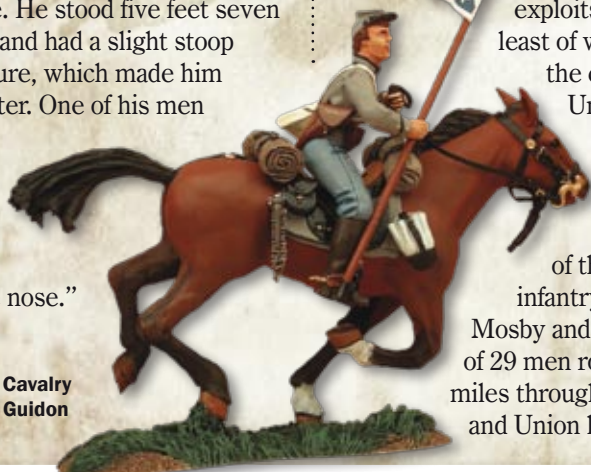
John Singleton Mosby was born in Edgemont, Virginia, on December 6, 1833. An avid learner, he enrolled at the University of Virginia and excelled at his studies. A diminutive man weighing just 125 pounds, when confronted by a town bully, he leveled his pistol at the bully and shot him. For nearly killing an unarmed man, Mosby was sentenced to a year in jail.

After serving seven months of his sentence, he was pardoned. During incarceration, Mosby began the study of law and shortly after his release he was admitted to the bar.

Though opposed to the secession of the lower southern states, he joined a militia company, the Virginia Washington Mounted Rifles. This unit was absorbed into the 1st Virginia Cavalry under the command of the legendary 'Jeb' Stuart.

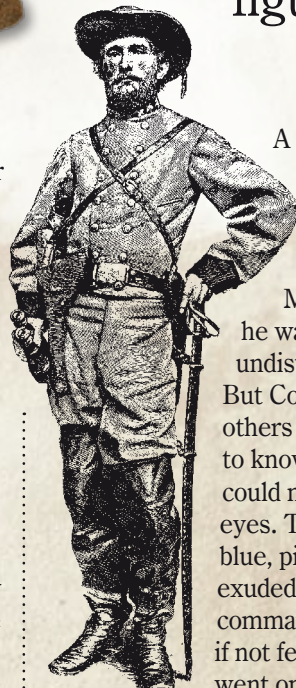
Physically, Mosby was far from impressive. He stood five feet seven inches tall and had a slight stoop in his posture, which made him seem shorter. One of his men described him as "hatchet-faced" with a "hawk-like nose."

A charging Confederate Cavalry Trooper with Guidon (31019)



The Gray Ghost

James H. Hillestad, Member No. 6, profiles a larger-than-life figure, John S. Mosby



Col. John S. Mosby

penetrating minds of an epoch fruitful in such."

A member of Stuart's staff, John Eaton Cooke said of Mosby that he was "wholly undistinguished." But Cooke and others who came to know Mosby could not forget his eyes. They were blue, piercing, and exuded a power that commanded respect, if not fear. Cooke went on to say that Mosby had "one of the most active, daring, and

Fairfax, Virginia, where they found the General in bed. Scooping him up along with two captains and 30 enlisted men, they returned to their base without firing a shot or losing a man.

Like his Union adversary George Armstrong Custer, Mosby had an eccentric passion for sartorial splendor. On occasion, he would sport a black beaver-cloth overcoat and a cape lined with English scarlet cloth. His hat was adorned with an ostrich plume, a gold cord and a star. The materials for the entire outfit he had secured from the North. It is no wonder that the Yankees called him the "Scarlet Cloak."

It should be noted that when they rode into battle, Mosby and his men (who shared his vanities) reverted to gray jackets and pants typical of Confederate cavalymen. They knew that a horseman dressed in a flowing red cape made a conspicuous target.

Mosby was made a captain in March 1863, after some daring exploits – not the least of which was the capture of Union Brigadier General Edwin Stoughton, commander of the Vermont infantry brigade.

Mosby and his party of 29 men rode 25 miles through the night and Union lines to

Mosby's command, the 43rd Battalion of Virginia Cavalry, was formed in the summer of 1863. The battalion never exceeded 350 men at any period. The youngest member was 14 years old; most were in their early 20s. While Mosby's reputation and successes attracted recruits from other states, Virginians made up more than 80 percent of the command. The men joined because of devotion to the Confederate cause and also because of the image of being



Gen. George A. Custer



Mosby's arch nemesis, Union Cavalry Brigadier General George Armstrong Custer (31017)

RIGHT 'Mosby's Confederacy'
(courtesy of Simon and Schuster)

a 'Partisan Ranger.' They viewed it all as a romantic adventure – living in secluded hideouts, with no camp duties, and experiencing none of the routine and drudgery of regular army life.

The area of operations encompassed Fauquier, Loudon, Fairfax, and Prince William counties, which became known as 'Mosby's Confederacy.' Here they struck supply wagons and railroads. They harassed and pinned down Union troops that sometimes vastly outnumbered them.

Mosby's Rangers so infuriated General Ulysses S. Grant that he ordered the immediate execution, without trial, of any captured Ranger. This led to a disturbing series of bloody incidents. In September 1864, a party of Union soldiers discovered

the bodies of several members of the 5th Michigan Cavalry. The Michiganers had been foraging for food at a farmhouse and the Confederate 'guerillas' captured and hung or shot every one of them – leaving a note that this would happen to every Michigan man caught foraging.

Later that month, Rangers attacked an ambulance train near Front Royal in the Shenandoah Valley. They were repulsed, and six Rangers were taken prisoner. George Custer, who commanded the Michigan Brigade, was in the area and was accused of having the prisoners executed, both as retribution for the slaughter of the Michiganers earlier in the month and in accordance with Grant's directive. Though he was never directly linked to the 'murders,' in Mosby's eyes, Custer was responsible.

Retribution came on November 6. When Mosby learned of what had happened, he instructed his men to separate out prisoners who served in Custer's Brigade and to hang a number equal to those who died at Front Royal. So it was at Goose Creek near Rectortown that, with

the approval of Robert E. Lee, three Union cavalymen were hung and two others were shot. One escaped. A note was left that read: 'Measure for measure.' This at last put an end to the summary executions on both sides.

John Mosby and the 43rd Battalion had no equal as a guerilla force in the Civil War. The casualties they inflicted, and the horses, supplies, and armament they commandeered, far outweighed the losses they incurred. They prevailed against Union cavalymen and earned a place in history.

After the war, Mosby became friends with President Grant, joined the Republican Party, and became American consul in Hong Kong. He died in Washington, D.C. in 1916, at the age of 82. ■



One of Mosby's Confederate Cavalry Troopers charges forth, pistol drawn (31016)

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THE COLT REVOLVER

The Rangers, almost to a man, used the six-shot, single action, .44 caliber Army Colt revolver. Mosby boasted after the war, "We did more than any other body of men to give the Colt pistol its great reputation." Mosby's men carried a brace of Colt pistols in two holsters.

