



EPISODE 9, 2004: MORGAN'S SADDLE? , PARIS, KENTUCKY.

Wes Cowan: Our next story will reveal a bold military tactic meant to change the course of the Civil War. It's June, 1863. The war is taking a potentially decisive turn. The Confederacy is quickly losing ground and they desperately need to turn the tide. In Kentucky, a group of Confederate cavaliers could have the answer. They begin launching raids deep into Union territory, taking the war to the civilian population. They wreak havoc on the Union's infrastructure and strike fear throughout the Border States. The mastermind of this bold new plan is John Hunt Morgan, the South's most infamous guerrilla General and the scourge of Union forces in Kentucky. 140 years later, a man in Kentucky believes he owns the saddle that carried John Hunt Morgan into the pages of history. John Walden purchased this saddle two years ago at a local antiques show.

John: I called a friend of mine the next day and said, "Hey I got a saddle I bought that belonged to John Hunt Morgan supposedly. He came out and looked at it and went clear goofy about it. I went from this. "Hmm...I don't know about this thing" to "Hey this is a pretty neat piece."

Wes: I'm Wes Cowan, and I have a personal connection to this investigation. My great-great-grandfather, Sam Withers, was a sergeant with Morgan and his raiders, so I'm excited to be in Paris, Kentucky to check out John's story. Wow John, fabulous saddle! Wow! Well, what is it that you want to know?

John: Well, there's a story that this belonged to General John Hunt Morgan and I'd like to know whether it's true or not.

Wes: That's quite a claim. What have you got for me to go on?

John: Well on the back of the saddle right here it has his name and his company and everything. It's been stamped into the saddle.

Wes: Oh yeah, look at that, General John Hunt Morgan, 2nd KY Cavalry, 1862. That's pretty cool. What else?

John: The uh horn up here has 13 stars and then it's got his initials in here, "JHM," on the horn there also.

Wes: Oh yeah, look at that.

John: The story itself comes from this letter right here.

Wes: Oh wow, this letter describes how this saddle was captured when Morgan was captured. It's a fabulous saddle. And if it's authentic, this is one of the holy grails for a Confederate cavalry collector. I mean, it's just, it just couldn't get any better.

John: Well, I think it's something to take pride in I think it's a really neat thing to own. I'd much rather have John Hunt Morgan's saddle than somebody's up north or something like that.

Wes: This is a really exciting investigation for me and I just, I can't wait to get going. John Hunt Morgan was born in Alabama in 1826, but grew up in Kentucky. When the Civil War broke out, Morgan secretly collected a band of 25 men and rode south to Green River, Tennessee where he reported to the Confederate officer in command, as ready for duty. Morgan soon formed a rogue cavalry brigade and conducted lightning raids into Union territory – destroying military stores, blowing up railroad bridges and causing millions of dollars worth of damage. In 1863, Morgan embarked on what became known as his 'Great Raid'. This time, he led 2,500 cavalry men on a daring 1000-mile incursion into Indiana and Ohio - looting and destroying for 24 days straight. Morgan eventually made it farther north than any other Confederate General. But on July 26, 1863, he was captured, and, supposedly, so was his saddle. You know I gotta tell you this saddle is a great saddle. It was a very expensive one when it was made and I've seen lots of saddles and I'm pretty sure it's a period Civil War era saddle. The saddlebags and pommel holsters, don't match the saddle though, they're not of the right period, so I find that kind of odd. What's really interesting about this is this letter, because it's written by Mary Hobson Abercrombie, Edward Hobson's granddaughter. Now, Edward Hobson was the Union General who chased Morgan throughout Kentucky, Indiana, and into Ohio. And it says in the letter that this saddle was captured by Hobson's troops and presented as a prize to General Hobson. So, the first thing I want to do is learn more about General Hobson's involvement in Morgan's capture and how he could have received the saddle. I'm meeting with one of

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the country's leading Morgan historians. Dr. James Ramage – who first told me how Morgan's reputation preceded him on his raid.

Dr Ramage: He's world famous already, his name was a household word. Northern mothers, mothers of young children for years after the war, they scolded their children with "hush child, Morgan will get you".

Wes: The fear of Morgan was so great that the Union assigned one of their best men, General Hobson and 10,000 soldiers to capture him. Hobson first encountered Morgan early in the raid, as Morgan crossed the Ohio River.

Ramage: As he approached within 12 miles of Morgan on the night of July 8th, if he had attacked he could have at least captured some of Morgan's men, but instead he camped. Now, I think that Hobson wished that he had attacked and that was part of his motivation for his vigorous pursuit.

Wes: The two men encountered each other again 21 days later at Buffington Island, Ohio when Hobson captured half of Morgan's men. But Morgan himself once again proved elusive, and fled north. Hobson then assigned his best men to continue the pursuit. After a vigorous, 7 day chase Major George Rue caught up with Morgan in East Lisbon, OH.

Ramage: When Morgan came over a rise, he saw in front of him 400 union cavalry in battle line. Where did they come from? How did they get here? At that point, Morgan surrendered to Rue and said "you have beat me this time."

Wes: So, Morgan did not ever officially surrender to Edward Hobson?

Ramage: That's correct, Hobson was not directly involved, he was the ranking officer in the immediate pursuit.

Wes: Considering Hobson's involvement with all of this, do think that the story about him getting Morgan's saddle might be true?

Ramage: Hobson was interested in saddles. He had apprenticed as a saddler to his father before he became a banker in Greensburg, Kentucky.

Wes: So it makes perfect sense that Hobson's men could have given him Morgan's saddle as a war trophy, but we still need to find hard evidence that was the case. Morgan's capture was big news and there are plenty of first hand accounts available. I've come to the special collections at University of Kentucky library to search those accounts for any mention of Hobson receiving Morgan's saddle. Okay Here's a book written by a member of the 1st Kentucky Cavalry, one of the units involved in Morgan's capture.

"It was told that at the surrender of Morgan that Gen. Shackelford's passion got the upper hand of his judgment and he began to bestow some caustic epithets upon the conquered chieftain, in other words Morgan. Colonel Wolford interposed and rebuked the irate General and told him it was wrong to speak harshly to one whose hands were figuratively confined. Morgan as a token of his appreciation of his kindness, presented to Wolford, his fine silver spurs.

So Morgan's possessions were ending up in the hands of Union soldiers, any of whom could have presented a gift to their commander, General Hobson. But there's nothing about Morgan's saddle in any of these reports. There is one last place we can look. The special collections also have an extensive collection of General Hobson's letters and other correspondence.

If he received his enemy's saddle, there should be some mention of it here.

Here's a letter written the day after Hobson captured Morgan's boys at Buffington Island, one week before Morgan's own capture.

He writes, "I wrote last night and stated that I'd whipped John Morgan. His defeat will injure his cause greatly."

And then a little further down this is really important "I have several little trophies captured in the field which I will bring home with me"



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So clearly, Hobson was coveting Morgan's possessions as souvenirs. But this is all circumstantial evidence, so we need more. There are plenty of other leads in John's letter of provenance that may prove we have the real McCoy. It says here that the saddle was loaned to a GAR post here in Cincinnati. Now, GAR stands for Grand Army of the Republic. That's a Union Civil War Vets. Organization. Most of their records disappeared as Civil War veterans died, but there is one place I can check. Yeah, I'm looking for any remaining records from GAR posts in Cincinnati. Yeah it was a saddle. Well thanks anyway. There's nothing in the GAR records. The letter says that the saddle was sold to a guy named Beverly Dubose of Atlanta GA. Beverly Dubose was a very well-known civil war collector. His entire collection is now in the Atlanta History Center. Yeah it was supposedly sold to Dubose in 1957. Yeah, well thanks anyway. Strange. Dubose has no record of ever receiving this saddle either! Let's see if I can find out anything about the letter's author, Mary Hobson Abercrombie. She would have been General Hobson's granddaughter. Well that's something! According to the records, General Hobson never had any grandchildren! Well, one thing's for sure. Mary Hobson Abercrombie whoever she was, and if she even existed, she could not have been Edward Hobson's granddaughter. This just doesn't add up. This letter seems to be completely bogus, but the saddle itself looks good. Letters are sometimes faked to increase value, so before I write this off completely, I want to get a second opinion on the saddle itself. I've brought the saddle to Steve Munson at the Civil War Museum of the Western Theater. He's seen many Morgan artifacts over the years, so if there's anyone that can tell me if this is the real deal, he can. First, Steve agrees that the holsters and saddlebags are not period and were definitely added later. But in his opinion, those don't necessarily affect the authenticity of the saddle. **You think it's the kind of saddle Morgan would have used?**

Steve: Absolutely, Wes. This is a high grade saddle - It's a general officers style. It's got the nice padded seats, which the southern officers liked a little more comfort.

Wes: You know I gotta tell you, it looks like it's from the Civil War period to me, you know, what do you think?

Steve: Well, Wes I think you're absolutely correct, it is from the civil war period. And I'd like to just take a peak at the top of the pommel. It's unusual, it's a cross between an engraving and an acid etching. It has the nickel finish on it which has deteriorated over the years. You know that looks good, and looks good. And then I look back here and it's a block type lettering. It is the correct type of letters you'd see in the 1800's. But if a saddle maker was going to make this quality of saddle, and engrave it and etch it up here, why would they just block stamp it here? Wes, I think maybe this was added later. But it's certainly been on there for a tremendous amount of years. Could have been added if it was ever at a UCV post.

Wes: Some vets post put that on there to say, "Hey, look what we have".

Steve: Right, a-a war trophy:

Wes: So, someone at the time seems to have thought this was John Hunt Morgan's saddle. Steve also notices something familiar about the makers mark, Lexington Saddlery.

Steve: I had run into a saddle that was almost identical to this which was also marked Lexington right here, and it belonged to Capt. Gano, who was one of Morgan's favorite Captains. And that's why I seen this, it was like a flashback. I said whoa.

Wes: Huh, that's an interesting observation! But then I tell Steve all about the letter.

Steve: Uh, it's unfortunate that it doesn't have the great providence paper trail that you were looking for, but, you know, in this day and time, unfortunately things get embellished. And I gotta go back to my basics of collecting and my basics of collecting is what is the saddle itself and then merit of the saddle.

Wes: Steve in your heart of hearts, do you think this is John hunt Morgan's saddle? John is going to find Steve's answer to that question very interesting. I'm back in Paris to tell John everything I've learned about his saddle. First, I tell him all about the letter.

John: You got any good news!



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Wes: Then I tell John about Steve's assessment of the saddle.

Steve: It looks good to me and I have to go with my heart and my passion I think it is and I'd be proud to own it

Wes: So, while the letter is definitely a fake, the saddle itself looks good. But there are still some questions about its authenticity. Chances are we'll never know the true story.

John: I'm back to where I was to begin with. I bought a neat looking saddle and it looked like to me it belonged to John Hunt Morgan and I was happy with it. I just have to cancel that steak dinner tonight.

Wes: Well, uh, there is some good news. I wanted to give you right out of my personal collection of Morgan memorabilia. This is a photograph of Morgan's men in Camp Douglas, the prison camp after they were taken to Chicago.

John: Oh that's great. What a neat picture that is! Thank you very much, this is very, very thoughtful and I appreciate you doing that, that's nice of you. Thank you sir.

Wes: It's been great coming down to the bluegrass.

John: Well, it's been a little slice of heaven, here hasn't it.

Wes: John Hunt Morgan escaped from prison and continued fighting for the Confederates until he was shot and killed by a Union trooper on September 3, 1864. But Morgan's legacy lived on. Ironically, the Union eventually turned Morgan's guerrilla tactics against the south, helping the North win the war.

ENDS