

Chapter 207 - Pierce Fires Governor Shannon Amidst Further Battles In “Bloody Kansas”

Time: August 1856

A Free State Offensive Targets Three Border Ruffian Forts

If anything, the move by Governor Shannon to shut down the Topeka legislature only intensifies the Free Stater’s commitment to using force to achieve their ends.



Map Showing Free State Towns Of Topeka And Lawrence And Pro-Slavery Centers at Lecompton And Shawnee Mission. Distance = 20 Miles From Topeka To Lecompton (For Perspective)

To do so, they must assemble enough firepower to confront the Border Ruffians militia, whose strength – 700 men on horseback, armed with rifles and several cannon -- is on display during the May 21 sack of Lawrence.

The task falls to two men: “General” James Henry Lane and “Captain” John Brown. Lane is well-trained in warfare, having fought under Zachary Taylor in the Mexican War, most notably at the Battle of Buena Vista. Brown is strictly an amateur, but one noted for his dogged determination and physical courage.

Like others who enlist, they will fight for very different reasons – Brown to abolish the sin of slavery, Lane to insure that the western lands will belong to white men, free from the threats posed by all blacks and southern planters.

By early August the Free State militia – known alternatively as “Jayhawkers” or “Lane’s Brigade” – is sufficiently organized to go on the offensive. Its focus will fall on three Ruffian strongholds, two south of Lawrence and one north, just below Lecompton.

Pro-Slavery Forts To Be Attacked

Targets	Location Relative To Lawrence
Ft. Franklin	4 miles south
Ft. Saunders	12 miles south
Ft. Titus	15 miles northwest

These “forts” are all modest affairs, no more than sizable storehouses, constructed of logs and guarded by sentries. Their purpose is to act as a meeting place for members of the Pro-Slavery Militia and an armory where weapons, currency and rations can be stored and accessed as needed.

The Jayhawkers hope to move swiftly against all three targets, with General Lane moving south from the Free State capital in Lawrence to capture Ft. Franklin and Ft. Saunders, and his second-in-command, “Captain” Samuel Walker, heading northwest against Ft. Titus, situated only one mile south of the Pro-Slavery town of Lecompton.

Time: August 12, 1856

General James Lane Wins A Victory At Ft. Franklin



James Henry Lane (1814-1866)

The town of Franklin dates to 1854, and becomes headquarters for Pro-Slavery Sheriff Samuel Jones, particularly hated for his role in the attack on Lawrence. A cannon stolen during that incursion – known as “Old Sacramento” – is stored in Franklins Fort, a blockhouse that serves as an armory.

One attempt by the Free Staters to retrieve the cannon is beaten back on June 4, but now General Lane, along with some 75 troops, returns for another try on August 12, 1856.

Ft. Franklin is defended by 20 men who are able to resist Lane’s assault for several hours, until darkness sets in.

But that ends when a wagon load of hay is set on fire at the fort’s entrance and sends the defenders scurrying for their lives. Lane is victorious and “Old Sacramento” is back in the Free-Stater’s hands, along with over 50 muskets and ammunition,

Casualties are modest, with each side losing one man killed and a handful wounded.

The few Ruffians able to escape make their way some eight miles further south to Ft. Saunders, with Lane giving chase.

Time: August 15, 1856

Ft. Saunders Falls Without A Shot Fired

Ft. Saunders is situated along Washington Creek and named after a villager who runs a corn crushing operation at the site.

Just prior to Lane’s arrival, negotiations have been under way between a Pro-Slavery man, Colonel B.F. Treadwell, and a Free-Stater, Major D.S. Hoyt of Lawrence, regarding a possible cease fire.

But Treadwell is convinced that Hoyt is simply spying on the fort, and has him murdered on his way back to Lawrence. His body – reportedly mutilated – is found by Lane’s men as they prepare to attack the fort.

The Pro-Slavery occupants of the fort are just about to enjoy a hot dinner when they learn of Lane’s impending attack. Instead of trying to defend, they make their escape without firing a shot.

Lane responds by burning the fort to the ground.

Time: August 16, 1856

The Free State Forces Also Prevail At Ft. Titus

While Lane has been marauding south of Lawrence, his main force, purportedly 400 men strong, has traveled northwest from the capital toward Lecompton, a principal population center for the Missouri Ruffian settlers.

Leading this effort is Lane’s second-in-command, Colonel Samuel Walker, a cabinet-maker by trade who joins the Free State militia after moving to Kansas in 1855.

Walker’s objective is Ft. Titus, another of the log blockhouses used by the Ruffians to meet and to store weapons and supplies. Its proximity to Lecompton makes it much more important than either of the more southern forts, and its treasure includes over 400 muskets and \$10,000 in gold bullion.

The “fort” is the residence of the thirty-three year old “Colonel” Henry Titus, a colorful figure, formerly enrolled at West Point and then a member of Narciso Lopez’s failed filibustering attempt to conquer Cuba in 1850. He becomes a sawmill operator in Florida, before moving to Kansas in April 1856, joining the Pro-Slavery militia, and participating in the sack of Lawrence.

On August 16, 1856, Titus encounters an advance unit of Walker's men heading toward the fort and engages them, losing one man killed in action. Clearly facing a much larger enemy force, Titus falls back to the fort for shelter, along with roughly twenty defenders.

A first uncoordinated attempt to rush the fort is repelled, with four Jayhawkers wounded and a Captain Shombre killed. Firing continues for about a half hour until Walker brings up the "Old Sacramento" cannon just recaptured at Ft. Franklin and aims it at the entrance to the fort. After seven cannon rounds are fired, a white flag is flown signaling surrender.

Colonel Titus suffers two wounds in the battle, while also losing two men killed and one other injured. The Free State losses include one death and six others who are wounded.

Walker's effort pays off with the treasure of weapons and gold, along with 17 prisoners. He then burns Ft. Titus and prepares to head north toward LeCompton.

Time: August 21, 1856

Governor Shannon Is Removed After Yet Another Attempt At A Truce



John Sedgwick (1813-1864 KIA)

With Lane's Brigade near the outskirts of LeCompton, Governor Shannon appears in Lawrence in a last ditch effort to forestall the threat to the Pro-Slavery populace.

As a powerful bargaining chip he brings with him Major John Sedgwick, twice breveted for heroic cavalry duty during the Mexican War and now a symbol of federal intervention in the Kansas conflicts.

The result is a flimsy truce agreement involving an exchange of prisoners captured by both sides in the recent battles, and an acknowledgment that the "Old Sacramento" cannon rightfully belongs to the Free Staters.

But Shannon's tenure in Kansas is up. His life is threatened by both sides, and President Pierce finally recognizes that he is the wrong man for the job. On August 21 notification arrives of his removal from office. His subsequent comments sum up his frustrations over the eleven months he has served:

Govern Kansas in 1855 and '56! You might as well attempt to govern the devil in hell.

With Shannon out of the picture, the role of Acting Governor returns to David Woodson for the fourth time. He is a Pro-Slavery man who has previously signed bills passed by the Bogus

Legislature, and now he sees another chance to help the cause. He does so on August 25 by declaring that Kansas is in a “state of insurrection” and calling out the militia to restore order.

The Pro-Slavery newspaper, *Squatter Sovereign*, characterizes Woodson’s proclamation as an invitation to the Border Ruffians to invade Kansas for the “third and last time:”

A crisis has arrived in the affairs of Kansas, and another week will tell a tale that will have an important bearing on the future fate of Kansas. It behooves every citizen to shoulder arms without any further delay... We have been slow to believe that anything like serious fighting would occur; but we are now fully convinced that a deadly struggle must ensue, and one or more hard battles transpire, before the abolitionists can be subdued. . . . Already the smouldering ruins of numerous dwellings, and the reeking blood of many a victim, cries aloud for vengeance.

The cry is heard and will be answered with tenfold retaliation. If there is one breast still unpenetrated by this call, we urge that it instantly become alive to the importance of the emergency. The want of a few men may turn the fortunes of war against us. Then let every man who can bear arms "be off to the wars again." Let this be the "third and last time." Let the watchword be "extermination, total and complete."

Key Events In Kansas During Wilson Shannon’s Term As Governor

1855	Milestone
August 14-15	Free State Party founded at Big Springs convention
August 17	Governor Reeder removed from office
September 7	Wilson Shannon becomes Governor
November 11	Free State Party completes work on Topeka Constitution
November 21-27	Wakarusa War signal threat of violence to come
December 15	Voting passes Topeka Constitution and Black Exclusion clause
1856	
January 15	Free-Staters elect their own Governor and Legislature
January 24	Pierce declares the Topeka government invalid and revolutionary
March 4	James Lane in DC to request admission under Topeka documents
March 12	Douglas attacks Topeka and calls for starting over on “popsov”
March 17	Douglas proposes bill outlining a proper process to admit Kansas
March 19	Cong sets up “Kansas Investigation Committee”
April 9	Seward attacks Pierce; offers Topeka; SD balks; Lane challenges
April 18	Three man ”Kansas Investigation Committee” arrives in Kans
April 19	Sheriff Samuel Jones shot in back in Lawrence, badly wounded
May 5	Judge Samuel Lecompte’s arrest warrants for Reeder & Robinson
May 18-19	Sumner speech: “The Crime Against Kansas”
May 21	Pro-Slavers sack town of Lawrence
May 22	Sumner caned in Senate by Preston Brooks
May 24	Charles Robinson captured in Missouri and jailed in Lecompton
May 24-25	John Brown’s massacre at Potawatomie
June 2-6	Democratic Convention chooses Buchanan

June 4	Battle of Black Jack
June 15	Northern Know-Nothings choose Banks, then Fremont
June 17-19	Republicans Choose Fremont
June 23	Toombs Bill is proposed in the Senate
June 30	House vote on statehood under Topeka Con – loses 106-105
July 1	Kansas Investigation Committee report read into the record
July 3	Senate passes Toombs Bill 33-12; House rejects it and votes 99-97 to admit Kansas; stalemate follows
July 4	Col. Edwin Sumner disbands Topeka (Free-State) legislature
August 15	Fort Saunders captured by Lane and Free-State men
August 16	Fort Titus burned by Lane and Free-State men
August 18	Congress recesses without any action on Kansas Gov. Shannon removed from office.
August 25	Acting Gov. Woodson declares Kansas Territory in open rebellion
August 30	Pro-Slavers defeat Brown at Battle of Osawatomie
September 9	John Geary begins his term as Governor

Time: August 26, 1856

The Pro-Slavery Militia Destroy The Town Of Osawatomie

The next blow in the cycle of violence is struck by the Pro-Slavery militia at the town of Osawatomie.

Osawatomie is settled in 1854 by members of the New England Emigrant Society. Among its residents are a couple living one mile to the west, the Reverend Samuel Adair and his wife, Florella, who is a half-sister of John Brown. Adair serves as pastor to the town's congregation, while Brown uses their house as a base for his paramilitary activities.

Along with Lawrence and Topeka, Osawatomie becomes a primary target for the Border Ruffians, who assemble a 1200 man force under the command of ex-Missouri Senator David Atchison and John Reid, a native of Virginia who served as a captain during the Mexican War.

A lead contingent, some 150 strong, approach Osawatomie around noon on August 26, where they are met by a Free State band numbering over one hundred. This results in a brief firefight, with the intruders fleeing and eleven prisoners captured in the skirmish.

But three days hence, the Ruffians are back, this time coming from the south with 300 men, and the knowledge that Brown's troops are up north conducting raids. On the morning of August 30, Brown's twenty-nine year old son, Frederick, has just left the Adair house when he encounters an enemy party led by an itinerant Baptist preacher, Reverend Martin Smith. Within seconds Smith shoots Frederick in the chest, killing him instantly. He will be the first of three Brown children to die as part of their father's crusade.

Samuel Adair hears the killshot, discovers the body some 200 yards from his front door, and sends a rider off east to warn the citizens of Osawatomie and to locate John Brown.

Brown and a small band of some thirty fighters race back toward town and set up a defense to the west along the south bank of the Marais des Cygnes (“Marsh of the Swans”) River. They hold this position until John Reid brings up a cannon and fires grapeshot into their midst. Panic ensues, and the Free-Staters are forced to cross the river to save their lives.

Jason Brown wades across to safety along with his father, seen holding revolvers in both hands above his head, while his linen duster floats along in the water. A George Partridge is killed while swimming and six other men are taken prisoner.

Instead of chasing Brown, the Pro-Slavery troops head east into Osawatomie and wreak havoc there. All but three structures, those containing women and children, are destroyed. A Theron Parker is beaten to death, and a Charles Keisler is tried for treason and executed on the spot. After the marauders leave, John Brown returns. Looking at the ruins, he tells son Jason:

God sees it. I have only a short time to live – only one death to die, and I will die fighting for his cause. There will be no more peace in this land until slavery is done for. I will give them something else to do than extend slave territory. I will carry this war into Africa.

The Battle at Osawatomie will prove to be the last pitched conflict of the Kansas War before secession, owing to the firm hand of the next Governor, Colonel John Geary.

Time: Fall 1856

John Brown Flees Kansas To Pursue His Insurrectionist Plan

After the defeat at Osawatomie, John Brown makes another of his eerily prophetic dedications – this time promising “to die fighting” on behalf of his invasion into the heart of “Africa,” the state of Virginia.

I have only a short time to live – only one death to die, and I will die fighting for this cause. There will be no more peace in this land until slavery is done for. I will give them something else to do than to extend slave territory. I will carry the war into Africa (i.e. the South).

By the Fall of 1856, Brown is now famous and notorious nationwide for his exploits in Kansas.

He has become “Osawatomie Brown” and “Captain Brown,” ready to pursue all forms of violence to rid Kansas and the nation of slavery.

His personal losses in this crusade are punishing. On August 30, 1856, Brown loses his son Fred during the futile effort to defend Osawatomie. He becomes the first of three sons who will eventually die alongside their father.

His acts have made him a hunted man both among the pro-slavery forces and the local U.S. Marshal, who is intent on jailing him and trying him for murders committed.

He flees for his life in early October, smuggled in a wagon to Tabor, Iowa, an Underground Railroad stop, where he recuperates before heading back east to advance his plan to invade Virginia.

Sidebar: Recorded Battles In Kansas During 1856

Little reliable data exists on the casualties suffered in “Bloody Kansas” during the summer of 1856. A 1995 paper by Dale E. Watts identifies a total of 56 individuals by name who are killed, often in small raids. In most of the larger encounters, one side or the other has overwhelming strength of numbers, and the opponents flee or surrender. The chart below attempts to sum up what can be gleaned from various sources.

Significant Engagements in Bloody Kansas During The Summer Of 1856

Battles	Date	Free Staters	Pro-Slavers	Outcome
Lawrence	May 21	Defenseless	Marshal Sam Jones (700) David Atchison	Sack of Lawrence 1 K
Potawatomie	May 24-5	Cpt. John Brown (7) 4 of his sons	Defenseless	5 P-S men massacred
Black Jack	June 4	Cpt. John Brown (30) Cpt. Samuel Shore	Marshal H.C. Pate (30)	Pate surrenders 28 men captured
Ft. Franklin	August 12	Genl. James Lane (75)	Captain Ruckles (20)	2 K, 14 PS capture
Ft. Saunders	August 15	Genl. James Lane (75)	Col. WB Treadwell	PS men flee
Ft. Titus	August 16	Col. Sam Walker (400) Cpt. Shombre	Col. Henry Titus (25) Cpt William Donalson	3 K, 6 W 17 PS capture
Osawatomie	August 26	Cpt. John Brown (40) Frederick Brown	Col. John W. Reid (300) Rev. Martin White	5-10 K