

## Chapter 234– Violence In Kansas Continues At The Battle Of Black Jack



**Dates:**  
June 2, 1856

**Sections:**  
• John Brown Leads His Brigade Against A U.S. Marshal

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### John Brown Leads His Brigade Against A U.S. Marshal

The Potawatomie murders seem to reflect John Brown’s rage over the accumulated humiliations suffered by his anti-slavery camp. Lawrence is helpless against Sheriff Jones’ marauders on May 21; Sumner cannot defend himself against Brooks on May 22; Free State “Governor” Charles Robinson is arrested on May 24, while “Senator” Reeder flees for his own safety.

Brown calls Robinson “a perfect old woman” and the Topeka legislature “more talk than cider.” Potawatomie is his message that the weakness cannot go on:



*We must show by actual work that there are two sides to this thing and that they can not go on with this impunity,*

Robinson views the act differently, saying that the massacre will simply give Governor Shannon another excuse to call in more federal troops against the Free Staters – and indeed that is what he does.

But Brown is undeterred by the criticism, and organizes his Potawatomie Rifles Brigade to pursue the fight. His next target is U.S. Deputy Marshal H.C. Pate, who also serves in the territorial militia and who participated in the assault on Lawrence. In seeking to arrest Brown for his murders, Pate arrests two of his sons – John Jr. and Jason. Brown intends to free them.

Map of the Battle At Black Jack

On June 2, Pate and a band of some two dozen men are camped at Black Jack, twenty miles south of Lawrence, along Captain’s Creek.

They are attacked there shortly before dawn by Brown and Captain Samuel Shore's brigade. A pitched battle ensues, lasting for upwards of three hours. It ends when Brown slips several men into Pate's rear, convincing him that reinforcements have appeared from Lawrence, and that he is surrounded. In response, he raises a white flag and surrenders along with twenty-three of his men. During the skirmish four of Brown's men are wounded in action.

Brown proceeds to draft a formal "Article of Agreement" which calls for an exchange of prisoners: Brown's two sons in return for Pate and his lieutenant, W. B. Bocket. Both sides sign and the battle is over.

Some historians will later refer to this engagement at Black Jack as the "opening battle in the Civil War."

For Governor Shannon it is one more signal that events are out of control in Kansas, and that he is out of answers on restoring order.