

MORGAN'S FAILURES

It is a matter of historical record that during the American Civil War, members of the Confederate Army initiated a series of raids across the Ohio River into Southern Indiana. For over a month this band, known as Morgan's Raiders, struggled with Union forces and struck fear into the hearts of civilians. When attempting to return to Southern territory, however, that dreaded company experienced setbacks that led to their eventual capture in Ohio, finally ending these depredations.

While precise information is hard to come by from that era, certain local legends paint a vibrant portrait of an Indiana initiative that stymied the Raiders and contributed to their collapse. Even today these tales cannot help but inspire every Hoosier, as they speak to a state spirit and enterprising legacy that endures to this very day!

"General, sir," the scout saluted as he rode up on his lathered mount. "I'm afraid the way ahead is impassable."

Brigadier General John Hunt Morgan, commander of Morgan's Raiders, brought his horse up at the head of the column to regard him. The sounds of nature surrounded them on this sunny day.

"Impassable? Nonsense!" he insisted, indicating back behind the scout. "Have you forgotten we passed along this very road but two days past? There has been no rain to cause flooding since then and no reports of enemy forces coming upon our flanks. What could possibly keep us from returning by the same route?"

The scout fidgeted uncomfortably under his superior's glare. "Sir, perhaps you should see for yourself."

Two minutes later, the General gazed in complete bewilderment at what lay before him. The dirt lane on which he stood, wide enough for two wagons to pass by without touching one another, was blocked off by orange-painted wooden planks set on poles. Behind this barrier there was a commotion of activity going on. Men with picks and shovels were digging pits in the road all along its length. Dirt was piled up in mounds beneath the trees, and blue-collared workers loafed in shady spots away from the sun's glare. They looked to be locals of the region, none of them armed or wearing military dress.

The purpose of this escapade completely escaped Morgan's understanding. As he continued staring, a worker came walking up to the blockade, hooking his thumbs into his belt self-importantly to address the mounted men.

"Folks, this road's closed for repairs. You'll have to turn around."

Astride his towering steed, the cool-eyed officer looked down upon this unimpressive specimen. "Do you have any idea whom you are addressing, my good man?"

The Hoosier sucked his teeth. "Doesn't matter who. Road's being repaired. Nobody gets through."

"Repaired?!" Morgan cried indignantly, feeling his temper flare. "What utter hogwash! This is a dirt road through the countryside, not a cobbled city street! What possible repairs could be warranted here?"

A shrug of his shoulders was the foreman's only response. This simple gesture summed up his lack of interest in the topic for now and the foreseeable future.

"We have heavy artillery and wagons that cannot be moved over uneven ground!" the raider growled. "How are we expected to transport them?"

At this the foreman's face brightened. "There's the detour!"

"By all the graces of heaven!" Morgan thundered, eyes frantically searching for any sign that what he saw before him was not true. "How can *this* road be closed as well?!"

"Construction," the man in charge of this work detail declared. "The state legislature's approved a new road to be built from Martinsville to Indianapolis. It'll save time and improve trade. They told us so."

"But why not leave this road open until the new one is finished?!"

"They told us so," his stocky opponent stated bluntly, snapping cobalt suspenders.

"This is the tenth detour in half an hour!" the desperate soldier screamed. "Are there no working avenues of transportation in this entire misbegotten *state*?!"

In response, the civil servant pointed towards a muddy track next to which a detour sign had been planted before heading back to his mess of mud and construction.

With unutterable weariness, the Confederate soldiers turned their mounts down this new route barely worthy of being called an animal trail.

The Battle of Corydon was finished, and the battle-sore Raiders rode triumphantly into the city whose defenders they had vanquished. A party of representatives came out to meet them, dressed in their Sunday best.

"I am Brigadier General John Morgan," the victorious leader declared as he approached this group. "We offer the citizens of Corydon no harm, but I must insist on requisitioning supplies for my men from your stores."

One fellow he took to be the mayor came forth smiling pleasantly. "I'm very sorry, but we have no foodstuffs to offer you at this time."

Morgan frowned warningly. "Do not mock me, sir. Indiana is famed across the nation for its corn. At the very least you must have a large amount on hand for the feeding of livestock."

"That was before the miracle!" a woman in a sky-blue dress declared brightly.

"Miracle?" He peered at her, suspicion written large on his face.

"Indeed!" The mayor drew himself up in a very proud manner. "One of our local inventors managed to find a way to produce a new type of kerosene derived solely from corn!"

"Was by decree of the state senate, it was," a gammy elder yapped from beside him. He spat a stream of tobacco juice into the dirt before continuing. "Indiana's gotta find a way to gain renown for herself, beyond just corn and limestone! So one of our boys what got himself an education up north turned his sights on biology."

"He did some work, and happened upon an amazing chemical discovery!" the mayor cut in. "The result is what we like to call 'bio-fuel'." He then produced a small paraffin lamp. "Just look here! Only six fields of corn produced enough bio-fuel to fill this entire lamp... halfway!"

Another woman spoke up then. "Once the state senate heard about the miracle, they awarded us a contract to produce as much as we could! Every last ear of corn was requisitioned for the effort, and now we are the leading bio-fuel producer in Southern Indiana!"

The general could not believe his ears.

"Are you telling me..." he snarled, voice rising in pitch and fervor, "that you turned your entire food harvest into LAMP OIL?!"

"Bio-fuel!" they all acclaimed in chorus.

Starving, exhausted, and on the run from Union cavalry, the remnants of Morgan's Raiders had planted themselves at a ferry on the Ohio River south of the town of Harrison. Their leader was currently engaged in negotiations with the captain of a riverboat docked there.

"I'll give you all the money we have, anything of value!" Morgan declared. The once proud figure was now travel-stained and considerably worse for wear. His features were gaunt from lack of food and sleep, and a savage tic caused one eye to blink uncontrollably. "Just get me out of this madhouse of a state!"

"Not a problem," the captain grunted and indicated up the gangplank behind him. "Come on board."

"*Thank you!*" the grateful officer declared. He then turned back about to his men. "Forget the horses! Bring only what you can carry! We're *going home!*"

A ragged, desperate cheer went up at that. Twenty minutes later the Raiders were settled in and their transport had slipped into the pull of the river.

Having been granted a private cabin, John Morgan lay back upon his bed and closed his eyes with a grateful sigh. Images of endless orange bulwarks, detour signs and corn-powered lamps swam through his brain. At last the nightmare was over. In a short while they would be safely back in Confederate territory.

All of a sudden the cabin lurched, and Morgan toppled from his bed.

"What the devil...?!"

Moments later he was standing on the boat's bridge.

"Captain, why are you changing course?!"

The man looked up from the wheel, surprised. "Oh, did I forget to mention? We're only a riverboat from six in the morning 'til six in the afternoon. The rest of the time we're a casino. By order of the county council!"

For a while the two of them just stared at one another. Then with a scream Morgan tore out of the room. Racing down the corridors, he came upon the hall where his men must be bivouacked and flung open the doors.

"Abandon ship, we're...!"

The words died in his throat. Before him a lively and vivacious gambling hall was lit up like a star on the river. And sitting at the tables, over two hundred men in navy blue uniforms turned their heads in surprise at his entrance.

"Oh, Shenandoah," Morgan muttered.

While Morgan's Raid came to an end in Ohio, it must not be overlooked that the valiant actions offered by the citizens of Indiana contributed to his defeat. So even today, we celebrate the courage and determination that our bold forefathers exhibited in defense of their state.

Go Hoosiers!

Thomas Bruce Wiggins