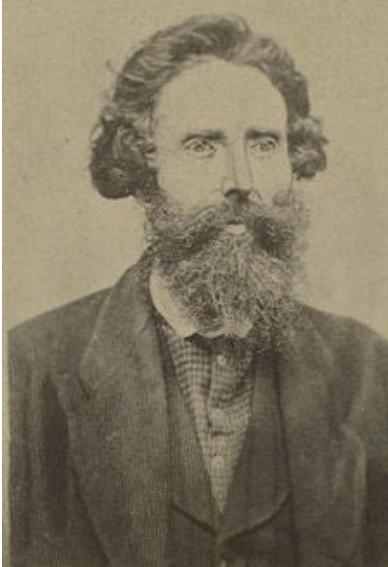


## Colonel James Montgomery Mike Bell



James Montgomery, a Jayhawker during the Bleeding Kansas Affair and a Union colonel during the American Civil War (ca. 1858). [Leonard & Martin](#), Public domain, via Wikimedia Commons.

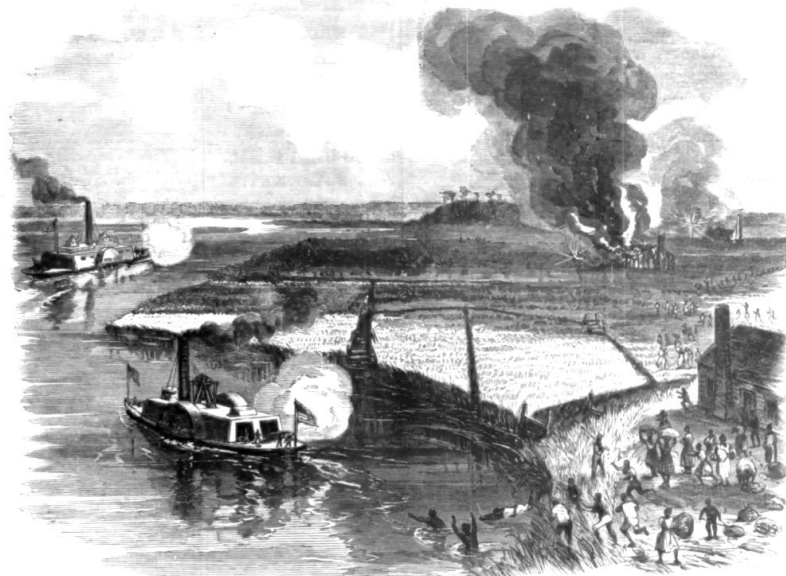
If Americans remember the name of Colonel James Montgomery at all, it is likely because of the image created of him in the film *Glory*. Actor Cliff DeYoung plays the Ohio born, fire and brimstone political activist as a morally suspect, sycophantic, toad of an officer. As is the case with most people whose stories dot our country's past, there is much more to his tale.

Born in Ohio in 1814, Montgomery found some fame as a fiery abolitionist on the plains of "Bleeding Kansas" prior to the war. The violence advocated by elements on the abolitionist side swept Montgomery up in its path. His guerrilla group of "free staters" gained a reputation for physically removing pro-slavery men from Kansas. While some saw Montgomery as one who could follow in John Brown's shoes, the questionable tactics that he displayed gave

many cooler heads cause for concern. But then the war came.

After joining the Union cause in 1861, Montgomery served in the border states for a period. As the year 1863 dawned, Montgomery found himself serving in the deeper south where he was allowed to raise a regiment of African-American troops. This regiment, the 2nd South Carolina, took part in raids throughout the coastal area of South Carolina as federal troops made inroads into the heart of the Confederacy.

In early June of that year, Montgomery joined forces with Harriet Tubman on the raid of the Combahee Ferry. That raid



RAID OF SECOND SOUTH CAROLINA VOLUNTEERS (COL. MONTGOMERY) AMONG THE RICE PLANTATIONS ON THE COMBAHEE, S. C.—(See Page 427.)

"Raid of Second South Carolina Volunteers (Col. Montgomery) among the Rice Plantations of the Combahee." *Harper's Weekly* 7, No. 340 (July 4, 1863): 429. Courtesy Internet Archive, [https://archive.org/details/sim\\_harpers-weekly\\_1863-07-04\\_7\\_340](https://archive.org/details/sim_harpers-weekly_1863-07-04_7_340). (Cropped and enhanced for presentation.)

liberated hundreds of enslaved persons and destroyed countless supplies meant for rebel troops. Later that month, he crossed paths with Colonel Robert Gould Shaw of the 54th Massachusetts, after a combined raid upon the town of Darien, Georgia. That action led to wanton destruction of supplies and buildings. Shaw, a product of a different military outlook, saw Montgomery's actions as uncivilized. But, as Sherman and Grant would soon demonstrate, total war was a tactic whose time had come.\*

Montgomery served in Florida in 1864, most notably at the Battle of Olustee in February. He later served again in Kansas as part of Union efforts to repel Confederate General Sterling Price's raid in the month of October 1864.

After the war, Montgomery retired to his farm in Kansas where he died in December of 1871. He rests to this day in the soldiers' section of Woodland Cemetery in Mound City, Kansas.

\* The June 11, 1863, burning of Darien, Georgia was an exceptionally controversial act that was widely reported in contemporary newspapers. There are many print and online discussions, one is shown below.

<https://www.masshist.org/beeiveblog/2017/10/the-pretty-little-place-was-burnt-to-the-ground-the-destruction-of-darien-georgia/>