

TAC NEWS

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“Bull Run of the West” The Battle of Wilson’s Creek August 10, 1861

In 2011, the United States will mark the sesquicentennial of the American Civil War. Plans to commemorate the great events of the War are being laid all over the country, and GHQ will be marking these important anniversaries with a series of Tacnews articles.

Even casual observers of American History are aware of the first great battle of the war, the First Battle of Bull Run, or Manassas (as it was known in the South). While the armies in Virginia struggled for a lightning end of the conflict, field armies were gathering or already maneuvering across the land. From the mountains of northwest Virginia, to Kentucky and northern Tennessee, to the lands west of the Mississippi River, forces girded for war and sought advantageous positions. The first important battle in Missouri was fought in the fields and hills near Wilson's Creek on August 10, 1861, mere weeks after that first fight in the East. In some ways, it's surprising that the fighting didn't first occur west of the "Mighty Mississipp'."

Some historians have suggested that the American Civil War in the west, particularly Missouri and Kansas, actually began years before the guns of Charleston fired on Fort Sumter in April 1861. A strong argument can be made that the passage of the Kansas-Nebraska Act of 1854, which

repealed the Missouri Compromise and opened those territories both to settlement, and "popular sovereignty." The homesteaders would eventually vote as to whether slavery would be permitted in the new lands. This directly led to open guerrilla warfare between the two factions. The most famous (or infamous) figurehead of



the situation was John Brown, a militant abolitionist. While most famous, he certainly was not unique. Both sides broke into armed camps, and guerrilla warlike conditions existed in many regions across the territories and neighboring Missouri. The region was a tinderbox that, once open warfare began nationwide in 1861, erupted rapidly into a raging inferno. The near decade-old lines were well drawn, and forces on both sides quickly organized. Missouri's governor, Claiborne Fox Jackson raised and initially commanded the Missouri State Guard - Missouri's private pro-slavery army.

Meanwhile Unionist forces acted quickly. Franz Sigel, a noted German immigrant in St. Louis, raised thousands of fellow "Dutchies." Several professional soldiers from the US Army, notably Nathaniel Lyons, Samuel Sturgis and Frederick Steele acted quickly to secure an early advantage.



Gov. Claiborne Fox Jackson



Franz Sigel



Nathaniel Lyons

When the regional commander took leave to Washington for orders, Republican Congressman Franklin Blair wrote Washington, and after pulling some strings, got Captain Lyons a commission as a Brigadier General of volunteers! He and Sigel, with a handful of Regulars and 3 battalions of German immigrants assailed the pro-slavery Camp Jackson, and quickly gathered all of the

military stores at the Federal Arsenal near St. Louis. At a conference called to attempt to patch things up in mid-July, Lyons declared to Governor Jackson & his Major General Sterling Price: "Rather than concede to the State of Missouri for one single instant the right to dictate to my Government in any manner unimportant, I will see you, and you, and you, and you, and every man, woman and child in this state, dead and buried." That was the gauntlet of war, and within days pro-slavery forces mustering near St. Joseph, and Unionist forces at Jefferson Barracks near St. Louis.

Lyons, at the earliest convenience, ordered advances on the rebellious Missouri government and their forces commanded by former governor and a colonel of Missouri's troops in the Mexican War, Stirling Price. He was a very charismatic leader, but seems to have lacked the understanding that military training and discipline might be valuable in the near future. With Federal volunteers regiments coming in from not only Missouri, but also Kansas and Iowa, Lyon's vaguely better prepared (and certainly better armed and supplied) force pushed Price's Missouri Home Guard battalions into the southwest corner of the state. Franz Sigel's brigade had led the advance, and despite a brief setback at the Battle of Carthage on 5 July, Sigel had fallen back on Springfield, Missouri. Lyon's dusty column joined forces with Sigel's command there in the pro-Union town on 13 July. Price, near out of supplies, retreated to Arkansas. If the Confederacy didn't soon supply some aid, Missouri might rapidly be lost, once and for all, to their war efforts.



Stirling Price

The aid came in the form of two brigades of Louisiana and Arkansas troops under another West Pointer, Brigadier General Benjamin McCulloch. His force

met with Price's in Northwestern Arkansas. But problems continued: Price commanded state forces, and McCulloch's were mustered into Confederate service. The two commanders had to co-operate, and that became increasingly difficult as McCulloch, a thorough professional, came day by day to dislike and distrust Price personally, and his State Guards, who he believed little more than an armed mob. He described the 8,000 to 9,000 Home Guards as "badly organized, badly armed, and now almost entirely out of ammunition." After sharing CS ordnance supplies to make the Missourian's serviceable, McCulloch did consent to accompany Price back into Missouri, his fears were confirmed by witnessing their performance at a skirmish near Dug Springs.



Benjamin McCulloch

Dug Springs was the site of a Federal vanguard camp, where several companies of the 2nd US Regulars, under the

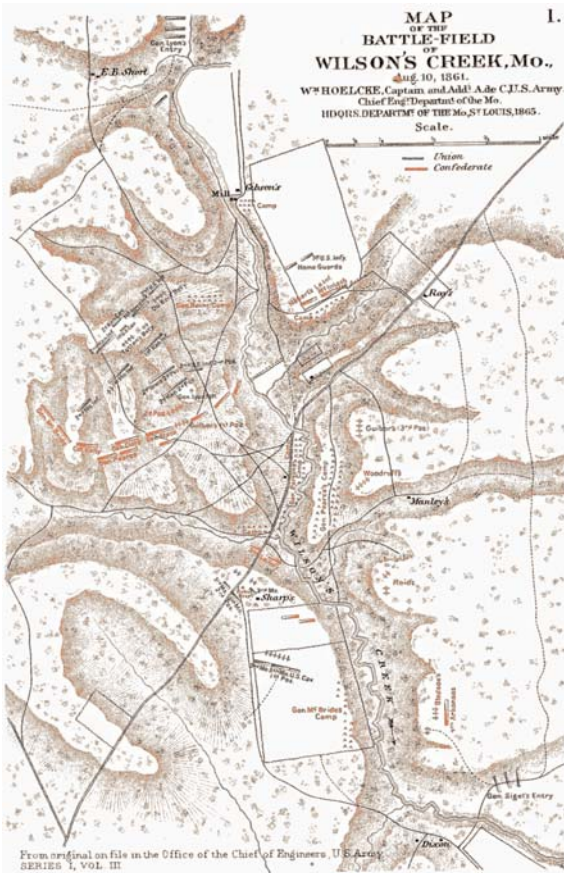


David Stanley

command of Capt. Frederick Steele, had set up a defensive position. They were supported by Captain James Totten's Battery F, Second US Artillery and by two companies of Regular cavalry under Captain David Stanley. On 5 August, 400 Missourians, "about half of them mounted," attacked and were beaten back. Supported by Home Guard reinforcements including 2 mountain howitzers, the lead

Federal companies were momentarily forced back, but then pushed the pro-slavery troops out of their positions. At that moment, Stanley's mounted troops charged the disordered Missourians. Bedlam ensued. Some of Price's Guards didn't stop running for miles, at least as far as the main camp. McCulloch concluded that most of the Home Guards were unreliable.

Though the Confederate forces outnumbered the Federals near Springfield, McCulloch camped near the banks of Crane Creek, and the adjoining Wilson's Creek. Stirling Price, anxious to retake Missouri, near daily entreated for an advance against Lyon's Union troops. McCulloch declined, fearing a sudden defeat. Price openly declared his ally a coward. Things came to a head when Lyon's decided to attack the pro-slavery camp at Wilson's Creek.



Despite the raw nature of his command, Lyon's settled on a daring plan. Despite being outnumbered, he decided to detach a force under Franz Sigel which would attack the Confederate rear at dawn in conjunction with a frontal assault by his own main force.

Sigel's morning attack was at first a huge success and almost totally destroyed the Rebel cavalry. As he stood on the brink of victory however, a case of mistaken identity allowed the Confederate 3rd Louisiana to deliver a devastating close range volley which wrecked Sigel's force and caused it to rout.

Meanwhile Lyon's attack had come to a halt atop Oak Hill where the Union line withstood several successive Rebel assaults. With the rout of Sigel, Lyon's men became outnumbered three to one as the Rebel troops regrouped. Lyon was wounded twice and had his horse shot from under him before taking a fatal shot at 10:30 a.m.

His men tired, thirsty and low on ammunition Major Samuel Sturgis ordered a Federal withdrawal at 11:30 a.m. which was accomplished in good order without losses. Cresting the hill and finding it abandoned the Confederates, also tired, thirsty and suffering from heavy losses, were content to let the Yankees go.

Casualties on the Union side were 223 killed, 721 wounded, 291 missing or captured, for the Rebels the tally read 257 killed, 900 wounded and 27 missing.

Federal Forces: Army of the West: Brig. Gen. Nathaniel Lyon

First Brigade: Maj. Samuel D. Sturgis

Plummer's Battalion. 1st U.S. 300 men, Rifled Muskets, [4 stands] cohesion = 16
 Osterhaus' Battalion. 2nd Missouri Infantry. 160 men, Rifled Muskets, [2 stands] cohesion = 12
 Wood's Cavalry. 300 men, Breech Loading Carbines, [4 stands] cohesion = 12
 Battery F, 2nd U.S. Cohesion = 16
 2 stands - 6lb SB,
 1 stand - 12lb Howitzer

Third Brigade: Lt. Col. George L. Lawrence

1st Missouri Volunteer Infantry. 800 men, Rifled Muskets, [11 stands] cohesion = 12
 Steele's Battalion, 2nd U.S. Infantry. 300 men, Rifled Musket, [4 stands] cohesion =16
 Du Bois' Provisional Battery. Cohesion = 14
 1 stand 6lb Smoothbores,
 1 stand 12lb Howitzers

Fourth Brigade: Col. George W. Deitzler

1st Kansas Volunteer Infantry. 800 men, Rifled Muskets, [11 stands] cohesion=12
 2nd Kansas Volunteer Infantry. 600 men, Rifled Muskets, [8 stands] cohesion=12
 1st Iowa Volunteer Infantry. 800 men, Rifled Muskets, [11 stands] cohesion=12

Sigel's Detachment: Second Brigade - Col. Franz Sigel

3rd Missouri Volunteer Infantry. 500 men, Rifled Muskets, [7 stands] cohesion = 12
 5th Missouri Volunteer Infantry. 600 men, Rifled Muskets, [8 stands] cohesion = 12
 I, 1st U.S. Cavalry & C, 2nd U.S. Dragoons 120 men, Breechloading Carbines, [2 stands] cohesion = 16
 Backoff's Missouri. Battery. Cohesion = 12
 1 stand 6lb Smoothbores,
 2 stands 12lb Howitzers

CSA Forces: Western Army - Brig. Gen. Benjamin McCulloch

McCulloch's Brigade

3rd Louisiana Infantry. 700 men, Rifled Muskets, [9 stands] cohesion = 14
3rd Arkansas Infantry. 220 men, Rifled Muskets, [3 stands] cohesion = 12
2nd Arkansas Mounted Rifles, 400 men, Rifled Muskets, [5 stands] cohesion = 12
South Kansas.-Texas. Mounted Infantry. 600 men, Shotguns, [8 stands] cohesion = 12

Pearce's Brigade: Brig. Gen. Bart Pearce

1st Arkansas Cavalry, 140 men, RM, green
3rd Arkansas 500 men, Rifled Muskets, [7 stands] cohesion = 14
4th Arkansas 540 men, Rifled Muskets, [7 stands] cohesion = 14
5th Arkansas 640 men, Rifled Muskets, [9 stands] cohesion = 14
Pulaski Arkansas Battery. Cohesion = 12
1 stand 6lb Smoothbores,
1 stand 12lb Howitzers
Reid's Arkansas Battery. Cohesion = 12
1 stand 6lb Smoothbores,
1 stand 12lb Howitzers

Missouri State Guard: Maj. Gen. Sterling Price

Rains' Division: Brig. Gen. James S. Rains

First Brigade: Col. Richard H. Weightman

1st Missouri State Guard. 260 men, Smoothbore (p), [4 stands] cohesion = 12
2nd Missouri State Guard. 200 men, Smoothbore (p), [3 stands] cohesion = 12
3rd Missouri State Guard. 300 men, Smoothbore (p), [4 stands] cohesion = 12
4th Missouri State Guard. 280 men, Smoothbore (p), [4 stands] cohesion = 12
5th Missouri State Guard. 260 men, Smoothbore (p), [4 stands] cohesion = 12
Bledsoe's Missouri Battery. Cohesion = 12
2 stands 6lb smoothbores

Second Brigade: Col. James Cawthorn

Peyton's Mounted Inf. 400 men, Smoothbore (p), [5 stands] cohesion = 12

Parson's Division: Brig. Gen. Mosby M. Parsons

Kelly's Infantry. 140 men, Smoothbore (p), [2 stands] cohesion = 12
Guibor's Missouri Battery. Cohesion = 12
2 stands 6lb smoothbores

Clark's Division: Brig. Gen. John B. Clark

Burbridge's Infantry. 280 men, Smoothbore (p), [4 stands] cohesion = 12

Slack's Division: Brig. Gen. William Y. Slack

Hughes' Infantry. 340 men, Smoothbore (p), [5 stands] cohesion = 12
Thornton's Infantry. 300 men, Smoothbore (p), [4 stands] cohesion = 12

McBride's Division: Brig. Gen. James H. McBride

Wingo's Infantry. 300 men, Smoothbore (p), [4 stands] cohesion = 12
Foster's Infantry. 300 men, Smoothbore (p), [4 stands] cohesion = 12

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