Thanks to Rhoda Sneller for hosting our website

Des Moines Civil War Roundtable

October 2024
Headquarters District Iowa
General Order No. 495

- The **Second meeting** of the Fall campaign will October 2 at the **Hoyt Sherman Place**
- Guided programs before the meal and the meal served at 6:30
- Our program **Robert Warren (CEO Hoyt Sherman Place) Major Hoyt Sherman: A Pennywise Paymaster**
- Meal by Hy-Vee **Chicken and Beef $30.00**
- **Reservations & payment will be accepted until September 30.**
- **If you DO NOT attend but make a reservation you WILL BE charged.**

By command of Brigadier General Gordon McKenzie

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Our web address www.dmcivilwar.com

For many it is time to renew your membership in the DMCWRT.
$30.00 Newsletter via email
$35.00 Newsletter via USPS
$40.00 for Family

Payments can be combined with your dinner reservation. Contributions are always welcomed
Send to--
Ron Nurmi 1424 E. Walnut Street #4 Des Moines IA 50316
or notify me by email—dmcwrt@gmail.com phone 515-491-3626

I will have a list at the end of the Newsletter for those whose membership expires in the fall.

The Beefsteak Raid

Thanks to WalterCoffey

The Confederates, still under siege around Petersburg, Virginia, needed to come up with new ways to feed themselves, or else be starved into submission. General Robert E. Lee, commanding the Confederate Army of Northern Virginia, urged his cavalry commander, Major-General Wade Hampton, to target the Federal supply base at City Point, eight miles northeast of Petersburg at the confluence of the Appomattox and James rivers. Lee stated, "I judge that the enemy is very open to attack at City Point. A sudden blow in that quarter might be detrimental to him."

City Point had been transformed into a busy seaport that contained scores of warehouses and factories able to easily feed and supply the Federal armies outside Petersburg. Engineers had constructed an extensive railway system to that ran 21 miles from City Point to the front. Over a dozen runs were made daily, with the top Federal commanders also using the railroad to get to and from their headquarters.

Sergeant George D. Shadburne, one of Hampton's top scouts, reconnoitered the area and reported, "At Coggins' Point (six miles below City Point on the James) are 3,000 beeves, attended by 120 men, and 30 citizens without arms." Such a catch could feed the Confederate army for weeks, so Lee quickly approved Hampton's plan to capture the herd of cattle.

Hampton waited until Federal General-in-Chief Ulysses S. Grant, the overall commander, left his City Point headquarters before striking. The command moved out at 1 a.m. on September 14; it consisted of 4,000 men in three brigades, including "several certified Texas cattle thieves." Shadburne guided them as they tried confusing Federal scouts by riding southwest, beyond the Federal left flank below Petersburg, to Dinwiddie Court House.

The Confederates then rode southeast for 11 miles before turning northeast toward Coggins' Point. By day's end, they arrived at Wilkinson's Bridge over Rowanty Creek. The next day, Hampton's men continued northeast for 18 miles to the Blackwater River, where engineers repaired Cook's Bridge.

They crossed the river at midnight and prepared to attack Federal pickets at Sycamore Church, four miles from Coggins' Point, at dawn.



Maj-Gen Wade Hampton | Image Credit: CivilWarDailyGazette.com

Brigadier-General Thomas L. Rosser's Laurel Brigade led the dawn assault. They overwhelmed elements of the 1st D.C. and 13th Pennsylvania Cavalry, then surrounded the cattle before the Federals could stop them. With help from shepherd dogs they had brought, the Confederates rustled 2,468 of the 2,486 head of cattle. They also made off with 11 supply-filled wagons and 304 prisoners while losing just 61 men (10 killed, 47 wounded, and four missing).

Federal gunboats arrived too late to stop Hampton's men, who herded the cattle back along the same route they had taken to get there. Rosser's Confederates stopped to fight off Federal pursuers at Ebenezer Church that afternoon. The rest of the Confederates continued pushing the herd on a line that stretched nearly seven miles.

After an all-night ride, Hampton's men delivered the cattle at 9 a.m. the next day. This was one of the largest cattle-rustling actions in American history, netting nearly two million pounds of beef at a time when Richmond had just a 15-day supply of meat to feed the Confederate army. This greatly helped the defenders outside Petersburg, who taunted the Federals with their own beef across the lines. It also earned Hampton's cavalry the nickname the "cowboys."

The State of the Confederacy

There had been high hopes among southerners that if they could just hold their ground against the Federal offensives that they could expect President Abraham Lincoln to be replaced in the upcoming elections by a candidate that might consider acknowledging Confederate independence. But key defeats at Mobile Bay and Atlanta had shifted momentum to the North and seriously dampened southern morale in September 1864.

One of the direst issues facing the South at this time was a lack of available manpower for the war effort. General Robert E. Lee, commanding the Confederate Army of Northern Virginia at Petersburg, wrote President Jefferson Davis, "Our ranks are constantly diminishing by battle and disease, and few recruits are received; the consequences are inevitable…" Lee urged the Confederate government to restrict exemptions to the conscription law.

Lee also voiced what was becoming a growing sentiment in favor of allowing free blacks and slaves in the Confederate military. Lee urged substituting blacks for whites "in every place in the army or connected with it when the former can be used." Louisiana Governor Henry W. Allen seconded Lee's view by writing, "The time has come for us to put into the army every able-bodied negro man as a

soldier." Such an opinion was considered almost treasonous when Major-General Patrick R. **Cleburne first expressed it** just nine months ago.

Davis wrote to various southern governors that "harmony of action between the States and Confederate authorities is essential to the public welfare." Davis urged the repeal of certain state policies requiring immigrants to either serve in the military or leave the state, arguing that such policies deprived the Confederacy of needed manpower. He suggested encouraging immigrants to serve in non-military capacities.

West of the Mississippi River, Confederates under Brigadier-Generals Stand Watie and Richard M. Gano embarked on a raid from Camp Pike in northeastern Indian Territory (present-day Oklahoma) to draw Federal attention from Major-General Sterling Price's Confederate raid in Missouri. They also intended to capture the large Federal supply trains coming and going from Fort Gibson. According to Gano, "It is true many of my men are dismounted, barefoot, and unarmed, but they would be better satisfied actively employed, than idling in camps. And there would be a pretty fair chance to capture arms, horses and clothing."

The Confederates came up to Cabin Creek on the night of September 18 and advanced under the light of a full moon at 3 a.m. next morning. They routed the nearby Federals and sent them fleeing back to Fort Gibson while capturing their wagon train. A soldier of the 30th Texas Cavalry wrote that "this was a God-send to us, for we were almost destitute of clothing and provisions," having "gone for three days on only a piece of fat bacon and one of my comrades had only an ear of corn."

The Confederates captured an estimated $1.5 million worth of food, clothing, and other supplies intended for troops and refugees at Fort Gibson. This included over 200 wagons, five ambulances, 40 horses, and over 1,200 mules. Federal officials noted that the loss of this train was "of great magnitude, depriving this supply route of its transportation, and put the garrisons on the Arkansas in danger of starvation." Raids such as these would continue in the Indian Territory until the end of the war.

In the North, Confederate operatives led by John Y. Beall planned to attack Federal shipping on Lake Erie. The objectives were to bombard nearby cities such as Detroit, Cleveland, and Buffalo into submission, as well as to capture the steamer U.S.S. *Michigan*, which held Confederate prisoners of war.

Beall and his men seized the steamer *Philo Parsons*, burned the *Island Queen*, then headed for the *Michigan*. Confederate Captain Charles H. Cole was to lead a prisoner uprising aboard the *Michigan* and seize the ship, but the *Michigan's* commander learned of the plan and arrested Cole. With the plot foiled, Beall burned the *Philo Parsons* at Sandwich, Canada, and retreated.

On the Atlantic Coast, the Confederate defenders of Fort Sumter withstood a third major bombardment, which finally ended after 60 days. Nearly 15,000 rounds were fired into the fort, causing eighty-one casualties. Smaller bombardments followed, but the defenders refused to surrender.

The Republicans Look to Unite

President Abraham Lincoln spent time this month gauging the national attitude toward his possible reelection in November. His chances for victory had seemed bleak in August, but since then the Federals had captured Mobile Bay and Atlanta, which emboldened northerners to support the candidate who pledged to continue the war until it was won.

Lincoln also hoped to bring the conservatives and the Radicals together on a united front. In May, the Radicals had joined with some War Democrats at a small convention and nominated former Major-General John C. Fremont to oppose Lincoln. Fremont had **resigned from army command** in 1862, and Lincoln had opted not to reinstate him.

By August, most Radicals withdrew their support for Fremont because they felt that he had no chance to win. Still unwilling to back Lincoln, they met to decide upon an alternate candidate, but they finally agreed that there was none, and so most reluctantly backed Lincoln. Thurlow Weed, a party boss supported by conservatives, informed Secretary of State William H. Seward on September 10, “The conspiracy against Mr. Lincoln collapsed on Monday last.”

To placate the conservatives, Lincoln replaced Hiram Barney as New York customs collector with Simeon Draper, a prominent New York businessman and close friend of Weed and Seward. To placate the Radicals, Lincoln made it known that he would be willing to remove their hated rival, Montgomery Blair, as postmaster general in the cabinet.

Senator Zachariah Chandler of Michigan became the intermediary between Lincoln and the congressional Radicals. He presented Lincoln’s offer to them and added a condition: that Fremont drop out of the race. With no chance at winning, Fremont could only prevent Lincoln from winning by drawing enough votes from abolitionists and German immigrants to hand the presidency to the Democratic nominee, George B. McClellan.

Chandler met with Fremont at New York’s Astor House and presented him with a deal: if he stepped down, he would get a new army command and Blair would be removed from the cabinet. As Fremont consulted with his advisors, Gustave Paul Cluseret of the *New Nation* wrote that Fremont would listen to “any man who causes imaginary popular enthusiasm to glitter before his eyes, spends his money, profits by his natural indolence to cradle him in an illusion from which he will only awaken ruined in pocket and in reputation.”

Fremont agreed to drop out the same day this editorial appeared. He told Chandler, “I will make no conditions–my letter is written and will appear tomorrow.” On the 18th, Fremont announced his “intention to stand aside from the Presidential canvas.” He declared that he would continue supporting the “radical Democracy” (i.e., the group of Radicals and War Democrats who nominated him), but he wrote, “The union of the Republican Party has become a paramount necessity. In respect to Mr. Lincoln I continue to hold exactly the sentiments contained in my letter of acceptance. I consider that his administration has been politically, militarily, and financially a failure, and that its necessary continuance is a cause of regret for the country.”

President Abraham Lincoln and Major General John C. Fremont | Image Credit: Wikimedia.org

Fremont acknowledged that he would divide the Republican vote if he stayed in the race, and allowing McClellan to win would mean either “separation or re-establishment with slavery.”

Even though Fremont would not exchange his withdrawal for Blair’s removal, Chandler reminded Lincoln that Fremont had done him a service by dropping out. Lincoln therefore went ahead and requested Blair’s resignation anyway: “My dear Sir, You have generously said to me more than once that whenever your resignation could be a relief to me it was at my disposal. The time has come.”

Blair agreed to resign, and Lincoln replaced him with William Dennison, the former Ohio governor and president of the Republican National Committee. David Davis, who had helped secure Lincoln’s election in 1860, called Dennison “honorable, highminded, pure, and dignified.” Blair’s resignation prompted Radicals such as Benjamin F. Wade and Henry W. Davis to begin campaigning for Lincoln, despite having recently excoriated him in their Wade-Davis manifesto.

Covering all his bets, Lincoln began arranging for soldiers to come home on furloughs and vote in the northern states that did not allow absentee voting. One of these states was crucial Indiana, so Lincoln asked Major-General William T. Sherman, commanding the Military Division of the Mississippi, to furlough all his Indiana regiments for the state elections in October. Lincoln wrote, “They need not remain for the Presidential election, but may return to you at once.” Secretary of War Edwin M. Stanton also worked to furlough as many troops as possible.

Some Republicans feared that furloughing troops in the East might backfire since many soldiers in the Army of the Potomac still felt a deep loyalty to their beloved McClellan. But Lincoln felt that the troops would back him for another term because he pledged to finish the job of winning the war, which was what most soldiers were fighting for.

Members with expiring membership and need to renew

Boardman Chase
Campbell Bill
Haskins Robert
Hayhurst-Thomas Susan
Hobbs Todd & Deb
Kavanagh Colin
Ransey Renney
Rasmussen Jim
Sandstrom Harry
Springer John
Swartz Kevin
Tayner Randie

If you have paid please let me know so I can correct the record.