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Des Moines Civil War Roundtable

April 2024
Headquarters District Iowa
General Order No. 491

- The Forth meeting of the Spring campaign will be **April 17** at the **Machine Shed Restaurant**
  The bar will open at 5:30 with the meal served at 6:30.
- Our program ***Andrew Versanyi (PhD student/ U of Nebraska) Unity Beyond Uniform: Civil War Veteran in the Agrarian Revolt***
- Meal **Pork Loin and Old Fashioned Pot Roast**
- **Reservations & payment will be accepted until April 14**

By command of Brigadier General Gordon McKenzie

Ronald R. Nurmi
Colonel & Adjutant
email- dmcwrt@gmail.com
1424 E Walnut St #4 DM 50316

Our web address www.dmcivilwar.com

Osage Orange tree grafts from Lincoln's tomb will be planted at the Hoyt Sherman Place at Noon. General Grant (Pete Grady)will make comments, as will Robert Warren - CEO. DMCWRT members are invited, as are Sons of Union Veterans and other re-enactors.



Brig Gen Thomas Ewing | Image Credit: Wikipedia.org

The Burnt District

Following the sack of Lawrence, William C. Quantrill's Confederate partisans rode back to sanctuary in Missouri. Brigadier-General James H. Lane's Kansas Jayhawkers briefly pursued them but could not track them down. Lane retaliated by murdering over 100 people in western Missouri suspected of helping Quantrill and destroying the property of any alleged Quantrill sympathizers.

Panic-stricken Unionists in Kansas and western Missouri turned to Brigadier-General Thomas Ewing, commanding the Federal District of the Border from Kansas City, to punish anyone not clearly professing Unionist sympathies. Many saw the reluctance of Ewing to exact such harsh revenge as a sign of weakness or incompetence. An editorial in the *Missouri Democrat* stated, "Ewing is frightened, and in the chase after Quantrill was in a complete quandary. He is looked upon as being a general without heart and brains."

Kansas Governor Thomas Carney frantically asked the War Department for military aid after hearing rumors that Confederates in Mississippi were on their way up to invade his state. He also demanded that partisans such as Quantrill "be steadily pursued and surely punished, for there can be no safety in the present or in the future while these miscreants are permitted to live."

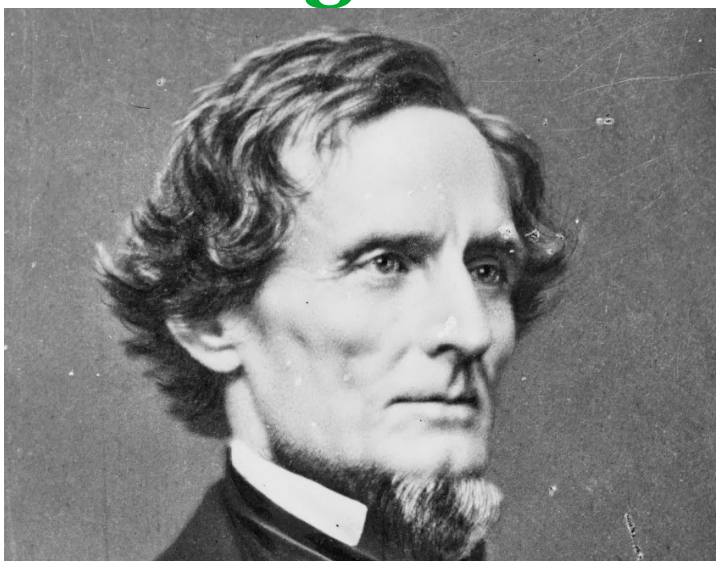
Lane drew up a vindictive military order and, as a U.S. senator with strong political connections, threatened to end Ewing's career if he did not issue and enforce it. Under General Order Number 11, Federal troops were to depopulate the Missouri counties on the Kansas border south of the Missouri River: Jackson, Cass, and Bates, plus part of Vernon County. All people, regardless of age, race, gender, or loyalty, were required to leave their homes within 15 days. Those who proved themselves loyal to the Union could reside in military camps under protection. Those who could not had to leave without protection. Anyone resisting the order would be executed.

Major-General John Schofield, commanding Federals in Missouri, explained, “The utter impossibility of deciding who were guilty and who innocent, and the great danger of retaliation by the guerrillas upon those who should remain were the chief reasons for adopting the present policy.” Though the move was severe, Schofield believed it to be “wise and humane.” Ewing stated, “Though this measure may seem too severe, I believe it will prove not inhuman, but merciful.” He admitted that such harshness would “possibly lead to a still fiercer and more active struggle,” but “with much unmerited loss and suffering,” it would ultimately bring peace.

Ewing directed the 15th Kansas Cavalry, led by hated Jayhawker Colonel Charles R. Dennison, to enforce the order. Jennison displaced an estimated 20,000 people, many of whom were harassed and robbed by Jayhawkers as they clogged roads hauling wagons filled with all their worldly possessions. Once the counties were emptied, Federals looted and burned all remaining homes, barns, and crops.

Ewing’s order, at Lane’s insistence, was one of the most brutal ever enforced in U.S. history. Predictably, it did little to stop Confederate partisan activity in the area; if anything, it made the raiders even more determined to resist Federal authority. The order also ruined western Missouri’s economy and caused deep resentment for generations. For years, the desolate region was known as the “Burnt District.”

Forestalling the Public Judgment



Following the devastating surrenders of Vicksburg and Port Hudson, the southern press generally concluded that Lieutenant-General John C. Pemberton, who had surrendered Vicksburg, was the most to blame. President Jefferson Davis disagreed, noting that General Joseph E. Johnston, commanding all Confederates in the Western Theater, had urged Pemberton to abandon Vicksburg, and when Pemberton got trapped there, Johnston did little to try to rescue him.

A letter circulated among southern newspapers from Johnston’s medical director, Dr. D.W. Yandell, in which Yandell (apparently writing to a fellow doctor) praised Johnston while condemning Pemberton and Davis for lacking decisiveness and wisdom. When Davis read this “article/letter,” he resentfully

forwarded a copy to Johnston with a message of his own: “It is needless to say that you are not considered capable of giving countenance to such efforts at laudation of yourself and detraction of others, and the paper is sent to you with the confidence that you will take the proper action in the premises.”

A few days later, Pemberton, now awaiting a prisoner exchange at Gainesville, Alabama, submitted his official report on the Vicksburg campaign. In it, he sought to “disprove many charges made against me through ignorance or malice.” However, “I fully acknowledge the correctness of the principle, that in military affairs, ‘Success is the test of merit.’”

That quote came from General Albert Sidney Johnston when he was assembling Confederate forces for a counterattack after the fall of Fort Donelson in 1862. A.S. Johnston, a close friend of Davis’s who had been killed at the **Battle of Shiloh**, had said, “The test of merit in my profession with the people is success. It is a hard rule, but I think it right.”

Davis responded on August 9. He tried to ease Pemberton’s resentment by noting that in the eyes of the press, success was not necessarily the test of merit; for press favorites, the test was simply doing “what they are expected to do.” Such favorites were “sheltered when they fail by a transfer of the blame.” Those whom the press disliked often had their success “denied or treated as a necessary result.” “The test of success,” Davis wrote, “though far from just, is one which may be accepted in preference to the popular delusion so readily created by unscrupulous men who resort to the newspapers to desseminate falsehood and forestall the public judgement.”

To Davis, both Pemberton and General Robert E. Lee had recently received harsh press criticism due more to opinion than fact. He stated, “General Lee and yourself have seemed to me example of the second class, and my confidence has not been diminished because letter-writers have not sent forth your praise on the wings of the press.”

Davis assured Pemberton that he was “no stranger to the misrepresentation of that which malignity is capable, nor to the generation of such feelings by the conscientious discharge of duty.” He knew firsthand “how slowly the messenger of truth follows that of slander.”

But southerners continued railing against Pemberton, with some speculating that his Pennsylvania roots may have played a role in his surrender. Davis received a letter from an army chaplain expressing the sentiments of many troops in the western armies “that every disaster that has befallen us in the West has grown out of the fact that weak and inefficient men have been kept in power,” including Pemberton. The chaplain asked, “I beseech of you to relieve us of these drones and pigmies.”

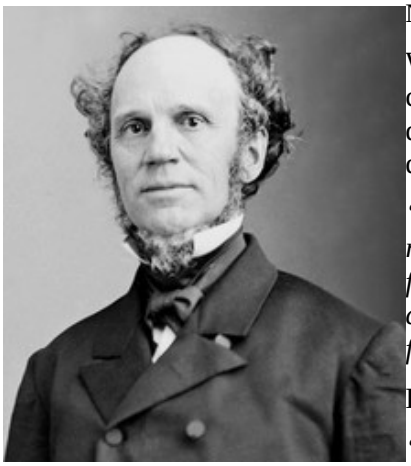
Pemberton remained disqualified from service until paroled in October. He did not take up active field operations again.

The Federal Draft Must Go On

The **Enrollment Act**, passed in March, required all able-bodied men in the North between the ages of 20 and 45 to register for a military draft. This law was deeply resented by people who opposed the war on various grounds (religious principles, refusal to fight to free slaves, refusal to fight to preserve the Union, supporting the Confederacy, etc.). In July, the drawing of draftee names sparked riots through the North, including the worst draft and race riot in American history in New York City.

As the violence simmered down in early August, New York Governor Horatio Seymour, one of the most prominent critics of the Lincoln administration, wrote the president urging him to suspend the draft. He argued

that conscription was unconstitutional (and thus required judicial review before enforcement), that the quota assigned to New York was "glaringly unjust," and that drafting men would encourage more rioting. Seymour, who many Republicans accused of emboldening the rioters, provided more detailed objections to conscription in subsequent letters.



New York Gov Horatio Seymour | Image Credit: Wikipedia.org

While he awaited Lincoln's response, Seymour also exchanged correspondence with Major-General John A. Dix, commanding the military department that encompassed New York, which included overseeing the draft's enforcement. Seymour wrote Dix on August 1:

"I have this day sent to the President of the United States a communication in relation to the draft in this State. I believe his answer will relieve you and me from the painful questions growing out of an armed enforcement of the conscription law in this patriotic State, which has contributed so largely and freely to the support of the national cause during the existing war."

Dix responded:

"It is my duty, as commanding officer of the troops in the service of the United States in this department, if called on by the enrolling officers, to aid them in resisting forcible opposition to the execution of the law; and it is from an earnest desire to avoid the necessity of employing for the purpose any of my forces, which have been placed here to garrison the forts and protect the public property, that I wished to see the draft enforced by the military power of the State, in case of armed or organized resistance to it… I designed, if your cooperation could not be relied on, to ask the General Government for a force which should be adequate to insure the execution of the law and to meet any emergency growing out of it."

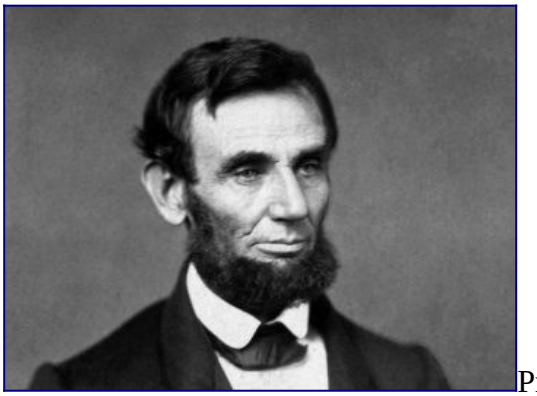
Seymour wrote:

"As you state in your letter that it is your duty to enforce the act of Congress, and, as you apprehend its provisions may excite popular resistance, it is proposed you should know the position which will be held by the State authorities. Of course, under no circumstances, can they perform duties expressly confided to others, nor can they undertake to relieve others from their proper responsibilities. But there can be no violations of good order, or riotous proceedings, no disturbances of the public peace, which are not infractions of the laws of the State; and those laws will be enforced under all circumstances. I shall take care that all the executive officers of this State perform their duties vigorously and thoroughly, and, if need be, the military power will be called into requisition. As you are an officer of the General Government, and not of the State, it does not become me to make suggestions to you with regard to your action under a law of Congress. You will, of course, be governed by your instructions and your own views of duty."

President Abraham Lincoln responded four days later. He wrote that if Seymour could prove his claim that New York's draft quota was "glaringly unjust," Lincoln would modify the allotment "so far as consistent, with practical convenience." But he refused Seymour's request to suspend the draft until the courts could rule on its constitutionality: "I can not consent to suspend the draft in New-York, as you request because, among other reasons, *time* is too important for the nation to take such a course." Lincoln agreed to allow the Supreme Court to review the law in due time; "In fact, I should be willing to facilitate the obtaining of" such a judicial review. But for now:

"We are contending with an enemy who, as I understand, drives every able-bodied man he can reach into his ranks, very much as a butcher drives bullocks into a slaughter pen. No time is wasted, no argument is used. This produces an army which will soon turn upon our now victorious soldiers already in the field, if they shall not be sustained by recruits, as they should be."

According to Lincoln, the **Confederate Conscription Act** "produces an army with a rapidity not to be matched on our side, if we first waste time to re-experiment with the volunteer system, already deemed by congress… to be inadequate; and then more time, to obtain a court decision, as to whether a law is constitutional, which requires a part of those not now in the service, to go to the aid of those who are already in it; and still more time, to determine with absolute certainty, that we get those, who are to go, in the precisely legal proportion, to those who are not to go."


President Abraham Lincoln | Image Credit: Wikimedia.org

Lincoln concluded with a familiar appeal to solidarity in the fight against the Confederacy: "My purpose is to be, in my action, just and constitutional; and yet practical, in performing the important duty, with which I am charged, of maintaining the unity, and the free principles of our common country."

The president shared both Seymour's letter and his own with his cabinet. Navy Secretary Gideon Welles wrote in his diary that Seymour's letter "is a party, political document, filled with perverted statements, and apologizing for, and diverting attention from, his mob." In contrast, Welles called Lincoln's letter "manly, vigorous, and decisive. He did not permit himself to be drawn away on frivolous and remote issues, which was obviously the intent of Seymour."

On August 18, the day before the draft was set to resume in New York, Dix notified Seymour, "I applied to the Secretary of War on the 14th inst. for a force adequate to the object. The call was promptly responded to, and I shall be ready to meet all opposition to the draft." Secretary of War Edwin M. Stanton had dispatched 42 Federal regiments and two batteries to enforce conscription in New York City. This dubious action overrode Seymour's authority over his own state, but the draft would proceed, no matter what.

Lincoln offered a concession to New York by reducing its draft quota. But he also wrote an order forcing the New York militia into Federal service to help impose the draft if Seymour tried to stop it. About 20,000 troops patrolled Manhattan with three artillery batteries to ensure that no further violence broke out. Seymour did not interfere with the draft, but he bitterly noted that "the long arm of the president now reaches into the shops and homes of every hamlet, town, and city in the nation!" No unrest occurred.

Federal officials drew 292,441 names for the draft this month. Of these, 52,000 paid the $300 commutation fee to avoid service. The New York City Council appropriated money to pay commutation fees for many poor draftees. Those who could not afford to pay such a fee resented the commutation process, and the draft tended to net poor citizens and immigrants not necessarily loyal to the cause.