



S. R. Curtis

MAJ. GEN. SAMUEL R. CURTIS.

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THE ARMY OF THE SOUTH-WEST, AND THE FIRST CAMPAIGN IN ARKANSAS.

BY SAM'L PRENTIS CURTIS,

LATE LIEUTENANT AND AID-DE-CAMP TO MAJOR GENERAL CURTIS.

CHAPTER FIRST.

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH OF GENERAL CURTIS.

On the 13th of April 1861, the news of the fall of Fort Sumter, immediately followed by the President's call for seventy-five thousand three months' volunteers, aroused the entire North to a sense of the real objects and purposes of the Southern revolutionists. Where but a week before existed a divided public sentiment, indecision, despondency for our country, doubts of our ability to subdue an impending rebellion, or half avowed sympathy for secession, now could be found but one feeling, one universal expression. The rebellion must be crushed. The insult to our flag must be summarily and completely punished. From Maine to Minnesota, the roll of the drum, and sounds of active martial preparation, betokened a people aroused at last to a full sense of the awful precipice over which our national destiny hovered. Avowed sympathizers with rebellion became suddenly mute, effect-

ually silenced by the awful majesty of an aroused and imperious public sentiment. For once we were one party. The people, usually slow to act, with unwonted unanimity promptly rallied to the support of the Administration. A nation of peaceful agriculturists, mechanics, merchants and professional men, unused to war, almost entirely ignorant of all military affairs, became suddenly a nation of soldiers, ready to battle in the noblest struggle that has ever yet caused the shedding of blood,—the war for the preservation of American liberty and the American Union.

In connection with the history of an important campaign of that war, a brief biographical sketch of the General by whom it was conducted, is not inappropriate.

Samuel Ryan Curtis, of Iowa, was, at the commencement of the rebellion, a member of the lower house of Congress, representing the then first of the two Congressional districts of the State. He was born in Ohio, February 3d, 1807, while his parents were emigrating from New York to the former State. He was appointed from Ohio to a cadetship at West Point in 1827. After graduating at the military academy, he was, on July 1st, 1831, appointed Brevet Second Lieutenant in the 7th infantry, and served for a time in Arkansas, but resigned June 30th, 1832, and engaged in civil engineering in his native State. He raised and commanded a volunteer company, the "Mansfield Blues," in 1833. He served as a civil engineer on the national road, and as chief engineer of the Muskingum River improvement in Ohio, from April 1837, to May 1839. He was admitted to the Bar in 1841, and resided at Wooster, Ohio, where he was engaged in the practice of the law until the commencement of the Mexican war. At Wooster he was Lieutenant Colonel of a battalion of volunteers, and was also Colonel of a battalion of volunteers in Zanesville, Ohio. He was appointed Adjutant General of the State of Ohio, from May 20th, 1846, to June 24th, 1846, for the special purpose of mustering into service Ohio volunteers for the Mexican war. On June 25th, 1846, he

was made Colonel of the 3d Ohio regiment of infantry volunteers for the Mexican war, which position he held until his regiment was mustered out of service in 1847. Much to their chagrin, he and his regiment arrived in Mexico too late to take part in any battles. Colonel Curtis, however, served honorably and capably as civil and military Governor of Matamoras, and subsequently of Camargo, Monterey and Saltillo. When General Taylor was surrounded and fought the battle of Buena Vista, Colonel Curtis organized and commanded a column of 1,200 men, and went from Camargo in pursuit of General Urrea, driving him and five or six thousand irregular Mexican troops before him for several days, thereby opening a line of communication with General Taylor, whom he met at Remas, near Monterey. Mistaking General Taylor's force for Urrea's, he ordered a charge before perceiving our flag. After his regiment was mustered out of service, he remained by order of General Taylor on the staff of General Wool. After the war he returned to Ohio and resumed his legal pursuits.

He was induced to accept the office of Chief Engineer on the Des Moines River improvement in Iowa, and in 1847, he removed to Keokuk, where he established his present home. He also formed a law partnership with Judge Rankin, and subsequently with Judge Mason and others. From 1850 to 1853, he was engineer in charge of the harbor improvement, and other public works at St. Louis, Mo., during which time he connected Bloody Island with the Illinois shore, and inaugurated under Mayor Kennett, the great sewer and other works of that city. From 1853 to 1855, he was Chief Engineer of several railroads leading through Indiana, Illinois and Iowa, under the name of the "American Central Railroad," and for these companies in 1853, he selected the probable crossing of a Central Pacific Railroad, the place subsequently adopted by the President. In 1855, he was elected Mayor of Keokuk. In 1856, taking a leading part in the organization of the republican party, he was elected to repre-

sent the first Congressional District of Iowa, in the 35th Congress, and was re-elected for the same district to the 36th and 37th Congress. In Congress he was a prominent member of the lower house, serving as one of the standing committee on military affairs, and as chairman of the committee on the Pacific Railroad. He introduced a bill for the construction of this road by the central or Platte River Valley route, with branches at each end, entirely similar to the bill finally passed by Congress.

During the recesses of Congress it was his custom to visit the several portions of his district, (then comprising nearly the southern half of the State,) and address his constituents on the political issues of the day. While at Council Bluffs in the summer of 1858, occurred the Indian war in Nebraska. Colonel Curtis leaving his district served as volunteer aid on the staff of General Thayer, during the campaign.

At the beginning of the secession troubles in Congress, he was a member of the compromise committee of which the Hon. Thomas Corwin was chairman. He also represented Iowa in the "Peace Convention" of which ex-President Tyler was President. In the house and in the convention, he advocated honorable terms of adjustment, but foreseeing the certainty of the civil war in which our country has since been plunged, he early and constantly urged the most extensive and efficient military preparations for the impending conflict.

When the news of the fall of Fort Sumter was received, Colonel Curtis, then at Keokuk, started immediately for Washington. On arriving at Philadelphia, he heard of the troubles in Baltimore, and the destruction of railroad bridges, cutting off communication with the national Capital. The famed "New York 7th Regiment" was about taking passage by sea for Washington. Carpet-sack in hand he pressed through the crowd and reached the boat. The presence of a man in the costume of a civilian excited considerable suspicion, but satisfactory explanations were made, and Colonel Curtis was appointed a volunteer aid to Colonel Lefferts.

During a three days sea voyage in a crowded vessel, there was much suffering alike among officers and men, from lack of sleep and wholesome food. At the mouth of the Potomac was held a council of war. Contrary to expectations, no vessel of war was found in waiting to escort the troops up the Potomac, and rebel batteries on the river bank were to be apprehended. It was debated whether it was advisable to advance or to fall back and await a convoy. An advance being determined, the next question was which of two routes should be followed: the one the Potomac River, the other via Annapolis, and thence overland by railroad. Colonel Curtis alone advocated the route by the Potomac. The Annapolis route was selected.

Arriving off Annapolis, the vessel containing General Butler and the 8th Massachusetts regiment was overtaken. Butler had arrived by a different route, and having been engaged in towing the historical United States frigate "Constitution" out of danger, had run his vessel aground. This difficulty was however soon overcome, and the troops were landed and encamped in the grounds of the United States Naval School.

A reconnoitering party proceeded to examine the railroad. It was found that the rebels had torn up the track and attempted to destroy the engines. But the volunteers with great energy, immediately commenced repairs.

After a night's sleep and the cooking of rations, the advance commenced. Two howitzers were mounted on platform cars and drawn by the men. Skirmishers were thrown out in front. The repairing detachments were protected and the troops proceeded, the locomotive moving in the rear. The rebels had torn up much of the track, but this was quickly replaced.

Day and night during the advance, Colonel Curtis marched on foot and in the front, his counsel and advice as an old soldier and an engineer being of great value, and materially contributing to the success of the expedition.

The 8th Massachussetts remained at the junction. The New York 7th, on reaching Washington weary and dusty but proudly and gloriously marched up Pennsylvania Avenue to the President's house, and the advent of this regiment, an epoch in the history of our national capital, relieved the public mind from all immediate apprehensions of its capture.

Colonel Curtis was unanimously elected an honorary member of the New York 7th regiment, Colonel Lefferts affixing the badge of honor, with generous acknowledgments for the services he had rendered.

On arriving in Washington, Colonel Curtis called on General Scott and the Secretaries of War and of the Navy, and informed them of the great excitement in the loyal States, and the troubles in Maryland, which had been detailed to him by Gov. Hicks in Annapolis. He visited the Quartermaster and Commissary Generals, and advised them of the great rush of troops towards Washington, and the great preparations that would be needed for their comfort and sustenance. When the Assistant Commissary General was informed that he would soon have to feed fifty thousand volunteers in Washington, the idea was received with exclamations of surprise and consternation. "Great God, Curtis! what are you going to do with such an army here?"

The idea of an army of fifty thousand men, was, to the people of Washington at the time something marvellous in the extreme. But one who had traveled from the west bank of the Mississippi and witnessed the display of arming multitudes, and vast military preparations, could easily estimate the magnitude of coming events.

While at Washington Colonel Curtis received authority to assist in the raising and organization of Iowa troops. The 1st, 2d and 3d Iowa infantry volunteer regiments had been ordered to rendezvous at Keokuk. Upon reaching his home, Colonel Curtis found the first (three months) regiment already organized and the officers elected. He had succeeded in procuring arms for the first and second regiments, old-fashioned

bronzed muskets, recently rescued, by a skillful deception practiced on the watchful rebels, from the St. Louis Arsenal, and now received from Gov. Yates at Springfield, Illinois. With these guns the first regiment was armed, and went into the first military camp of the war in Iowa, "Camp Ellsworth," near Keokuk. The second regiment was armed but not fully equipped, and was quartered in the town.

On the first day of June 1861, the second regiment (the first regiment of three years' volunteers,) unanimously elected Samuel R. Curtis its Colonel. J. M. Tuttle and Marcellus M. Crocker were respectively elected to the offices of Lieutenant Colonel and Major, and Lieutenant Norton P. Chipman of Company "H," was appointed regimental Adjutant.

Colonel Curtis immediately commenced drilling and perfecting the organization of his regiment. To his energy and military knowledge was it indebted for the honor of having the first dress parade, and of being the first of all Iowa regiments to leave the State for the seat of war.

On the night of June 13th, at about the hour of 1½ o'clock A. M., the following telegram was received from Gen. Lyon by express, from Col. Smith at Quincy, Illinois, (there being then no telegraph line extended to Keokuk):

"HEADQUARTERS, DEPARTMENT OF THE WEST, }
ST. LOUIS ARSENAL, June 12th, 1861. }

"To COL. F. R. SMITH, commanding at Quincy, Illinois:

"Send by express the following:

"To COL. S. R. CURTIS, Keokuk, Iowa.

"A terrible secession movement headed by Gov. Jackson has commenced. I want you to come at once with all the force you can command, to Hannibal, Mo., and move over the road to St. Joseph, and put down traitors everywhere on both sides the road, and if possible strike down upon Lexington.

"N. LYON, Brig. Gen'l U. S. Vols. Comd'g."

When this despatch was received, the first regiment was at Camp Ellsworth. The second regiment was quartered in various scattered buildings in the town. Company "A"

(raised in Keokuk,) was especially scattered, all the men being at their homes. But by day-break the whole regiment was embarked on the steamer "Hannibal City," and moving down the river, the first Iowa regiment ever to bear the national ensign beyond the State boundary.

Muskets had previously been furnished the regiment. On the boat the men received their accoutrements. On arriving at Hannibal, the regiment, in company with a part of the 16th Illinois Infantry, was rapidly distributed over the railroad as far west as Brookfield. On the afternoon of the 13th, the first Iowa regiment arrived and encamped at Macon City, and at night the second regiment moved west for St. Joseph. As the first United States troops on the road, they extinguished the signs of incipient rebellion everywhere conspicuous. Rebel flags were captured, and avowed rebels fled in terror at the approach of the troops. Arriving at St. Joseph on the morning of the 14th, they found the town in possession of some companies of United States regulars—infantry and dragoons. Receiving tents the regiment encamped on the bank of the Missouri River, south of the town.

Col. Curtis assumed command of the whole line of the railroad, with headquarters at St. Joseph. Scouting expeditions were thrown out along the road, and for many miles on either side. Bands of rebels were scattered and disbanded. Arms, ammunition, rebel flags, &c., were seized, and large numbers of rebels were captured. Many fled or concealed themselves in the brush. Among those who escaped may be named Gen. Clark, (of "Helper's Impending Crisis" notoriety,) Gen. Slack, (subsequently killed at Pea Ridge,) Gens. Harris, M. Jeff. Thompson, Martin Green and Atchison.

The seizure of the Hannibal and St. Joseph railroad had been none too rapid. Orders were sent by Price to Slack, to burn the railroad bridges, and the messenger arrived by the North Missouri Railroad, but a few hours after the bridges were placed under the protection of guard parties.

A large number of prisoners were collected at St. Joseph.

These were generally paroled. A system of oaths and bonds was adopted, with a design to break down and overcome the general enrollment which Gov. Jackson had inaugurated, with the object of throwing the State into open rebellion.

The railroad was now completely in the hands of the federal troops. Col. Curtis had gone to Keokuk and made arrangements for the third Iowa regiment to occupy a portion of the track, and with their assistance, and that of Illinois troops, and the gallant "home guards" raised by the lamented Col. Peabody, the second regiment could easily hold North Missouri, while scouting parties allowed the rebels no rest, and prevented them from making any considerable rally.

The first Iowa regiment left Macon City and marched to Boonville, arriving a few days after the battle, and subsequently joining Lyon in his southwestern campaign, nobly distinguished itself at Wilson's Creek, or, as the rebels more musically named the battle, "Oak Hills."

In two weeks time North Missouri had thus been effectually seized and occupied by federal troops. A railroad which, but a short time before, had, under the orders of Gov. Claiborne F. Jackson, refused permission for United States regular troops to cross the State, forcing them to march through Iowa, was now a federal military route. The sentiment and signs of open rebellion, but a few weeks before everywhere prevalent, were completely subdued. The towns were strongly garrisoned, bridges and strategic points protected, and the hitherto suppressed loyal sentiment of the people allowed an open expression.

Having thus accomplished the military occupation of North Missouri, on June 30th Col. Curtis bade what proved to be a final adieu to the second regiment. During the time he was Colonel of the regiment, he had completely gained the respect and esteem alike of officers and soldiers, and all deeply regretted his departure, truly surmising that he would soon be promoted to a higher position, thus depriving them of his services as Colonel.

He was still a member of the 37th Congress, and hastened to attend the extra session called on July 4th, 1861. Having long served in the house as a member of the committee on military affairs, he was anxious to urge some important modifications of military law. He advocated the adoption of a plan for a volunteer army both in time of peace and of war, securing harmony among our forces by a system that would exclude all distinctions and consequent jealousies between regulars and volunteers. His views were in part adopted by equalizing the term of service, pay, and emoluments in both classes of our army, and by extending the opportunities of regular officers to secure promotion in the volunteer service. While in Washington upon this occasion, occurred the terrible battle of Bull Run. Col. Curtis upon hearing of the disastrous retreat of the federal forces, went at once to the field and did all in his power to turn our panic stricken soldiers back towards the scene of conflict. At this session of Congress Col. Curtis was, at the instance of Gen. Scott, appointed and confirmed Brigadier General, his commission dating from May 17th, 1861. Resigning his seat in Congress, he was ordered to report for duty to Major Gen. Fremont, who had assumed command of the Western Department, with headquarters at St. Louis.

Gen. Curtis arrived in St. Louis in August 1861, and was ordered to organize a camp of instruction. The camp was first organized at Jefferson Barracks, but, for greater convenience and better accommodation, it was, on September 12th, removed to Benton Barracks, in the outskirts of St. Louis, where Gen. Curtis assumed command.

Troops were at this time pouring into St. Louis. Public enthusiasm was at its height, and thousands were rushing to serve under Fremont. The work of organization, drilling and disciplining the raw mass of volunteers, was an arduous task, but an undertaking well and faithfully performed.

While Gen. Curtis was in command at Benton Barracks, Fremont left St. Louis for Jefferson City and assumed com-

mand of the "Army of the West." During the absence of Fremont, Curtis was placed in command of St. Louis. At this time arose the cry which finally resulted in the removal of Fremont, and the substitution of Halleck in the command of the then Western Department. The determination of the authorities at Washington to change commanders in the west, imposed upon the General some very delicate and intricate duties. He met the responsibility as became a subordinate officer, although compelled to perform some very unpleasant work in the execution of orders from superiors upon those for whom he had always entertained the most cordial and friendly personal feelings.

When Halleck assumed command of the new "Department of the Missouri," Curtis was retained in the District of St. Louis. His command extended over the troops for fifty miles around St. Louis, except the troops at Benton Barracks, with headquarters at St. Louis. His knowledge of the topography, people, and condition of the Department was of great use to Halleck, and the regulation of the steamboat commerce on the Mississippi occupied considerable of his attention.

Such was the position of the General when, Fremont having been relieved from the command of the "Army of the West," and the federal troops having fallen back to Rolla, and Price having taken position at Springfield, Halleck determined to again press the army forward to Springfield and drive Price from the State of Missouri. Gen. Curtis was selected to command the new movement, and the troops to be under his command were what were subsequently known as the "Army of the South-West."

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