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## The Battle of Wilson's Creek

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When Brigadier General Nathaniel Lyon returned to Springfield, Missouri, on August 8, 1861, following his forced reconnaissance to Curran Post Office, most of his Army of the West encamped about the city. Lieutenant Colonel George L. Andrews and Major Samuel D. Sturgis with about 2,000 regulars and volunteers were posted at Camp Hunter on the Telegraph road four miles southwest of Springfield. To guard against a surprise attack and prevent news of his plans and strength from reaching the Confederates, Lyon moved to seal off the city. A close watch was kept on all roads leading into the town. Although the Union sentries permitted anyone to enter the city, no one was allowed to go out except physicians, who first had to present passes signed by the military.<sup>1</sup>

General Lyon consulted freely with his officers and the leading Union men of Springfield following his return to the city. The general clearly saw the developing strategic situa-

<sup>1</sup> Return I. Holcombe and W. S. Adams, *An Account of the Battle of Wilson's Creek, or Oak Hills, Fought Between the Union Troops, Commanded by Gen. N. Lyon, and the Southern, or Confederate Troops, Under Command of Gens. McCulloch and Price, on Saturday, August 10, 1861, in Greene County, Missouri* (Springfield, 1883), 13, 17. General Lyon maintained his private quarters in a house on North Jefferson Street owned by Mrs. Boren. His general headquarters were on the north side of College Street, a little west of Main, in the house owned by John S. Phelps. *Ibid.*, 17-18.

tion. His scouts kept him constantly informed of the Rebels' movements. Lyon said that he was "impatient to fight" Brigadier General Benjamin McCulloch's command (A powerful Confederate force commanded by McCulloch had followed Lyon's army when it retired from Curran Post Office), but he anxiously desired reinforcements to enable him to have a reasonable chance of success. Every day he visited his outposts and sent off pleas for assistance. At times, Lyon would lose his temper and curse and swear violently. Two prominent Union men of Greene county recalled one incident when Lyon received a dispatch from Major General John C. Frémont (Frémont, who, as Lyon's superior, commanded the Western Department, maintained his headquarters in St. Louis), stating that no more troops could or would be sent for the present. As the general strode back and forth in his room with the paper in his hand, he suddenly threw it on the table and, clapping his hands together, the general "cried out 'G-d d--n General Frémont: He is a worse enemy to me and the Union cause than Price and McCulloch and the whole d---d tribe of rebels in this part of the State!'"<sup>2</sup>

On the afternoon of the 6th, Lyon learned from his spies that the Confederate vanguard was encamped on Wilson Creek, 12 miles southwest of Springfield. He accordingly decided to make a night attack on this force with a portion of Colonel Andrews' and Major Sturgis' brigades. Andrews and Sturgis were alerted to have their men in ranks and the artillery horses harnessed by 6 p.m. In the meantime, scouts were sent out to reconnoiter the Confederate position.<sup>3</sup>

Shortly after Lyon had issued the marching orders to Andrews and Sturgis, a report reached the general stating that a Union patrol had clashed with a party of Major General Sterling Price's Confederate cavalry (Price, a former governor of Missouri and a Mexican War hero, commanded the Missouri State Guard) on the Grand Prairie, west of town. Reinforcements were immediately ordered to the support of the patrol.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* 18-19.

<sup>3</sup> *The War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies* (Washington, 1880-1900), Series I, Vol. III, 59. The United States Geological Survey uses the form "Wilson Creek" on its maps.

Evidently Lyon became so engrossed with preparations for the attack on the Wilson Creek Confederates that he forgot the time. When the general left his headquarters it was midnight, two hours after the scheduled hour. Nevertheless, Lyon proceeded to Camp Hunter. When he reached Andrews' and Sturgis' encampment, it was 3 a.m. It was too late to get into position in time to attack the Confederates before daybreak. The general returned to Springfield, taking Andrews' and Sturgis' brigades with him.

On his return to Springfield, Lyon told Major John M. Schofield, his chief of staff, "that he had a premonition that a night attack would prove disastrous, and yet he had felt impelled to try it once, and perhaps should do so again, 'for my only hope of success is in a surprise.'"<sup>4</sup>

Throughout the daylight hours on the 7th, strong Confederate reconnaissance patrols operated on the southern and western approaches to Springfield. The Union cavalry was in frequent contact with these Rebels. An attack was expected at any minute. Lyon kept his troops under arms from daybreak to dark. At frequent intervals, farmers and members of the Home Guard would come rushing into Springfield with reports that the Confederates were coming. This served to worry and exhaust the troops, thus depriving "them of the rest which was absolutely necessary to fit them for battle after their fatiguing march."

About noon, a report from some of his scouts reached Lyon indicating that a strong force of Rebel infantry, supported by two guns, was advancing on the Little York road. A force of regulars and Kansas volunteers with two of Backoff's guns was sent to engage this Confederate combat patrol. After advancing about four and one-half miles, the Federals discovered that only a small Rebel mounted patrol was operating on the Little York road. These Southerners fled at the Northerners' approach. The disgusted Unionists retraced their steps.<sup>5</sup>

These reports of Confederate activity had a telling effect on the civilians. Many of the inhabitants of Springfield became panic-stricken, hurriedly packed their belongings, and departed for supposed havens of safety; others made prepa-

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*; Holcombe and Adams, *Battle of Wilson's Creek*, 19-20.

<sup>5</sup> O. R., Series I, Vol. III, 59.

rations to flee the threatened city. Toward nightfall, the panic began to wane. Nevertheless, many of the people who remained did not retire or make any effort to sleep. Colonel John S. Phelps' Home Guard Regiment (commanded during the colonel's absence by Colonel Marcus Boyd) was on the "qui vive the whole night."<sup>6</sup>

Thursday morning (the 8th) Lyon again received reports stating that the Rebels were advancing on Springfield. Lyon's army was quickly moved into battle stations, while the baggage wagons were concentrated in the center of the city. The troops were kept under arms most of the day. It was late in the afternoon before the Union officers learned that there was not any truth to the rumors telling of the foe's advance.<sup>7</sup>

During the afternoon, Lyon convened a council of war. At this meeting, summoned for the purpose of determining the best way to extricate the army from its precarious position, General Lyon announced to the officers:

Gentlemen, there is no prospect of our being re-enforced at this point; our supply of provisions is running short; there is a superior force in front; and it is reported that [Brigadier General William J.] Hardee is marching with 9,000 men to cut our line of communication. It is evident that we must retreat. The question arises, what is the best method of doing it. Shall we endeavor to retreat without giving the enemy battle beforehand, and run the risk of having to fight every inch along our line of retreat, or shall we attack him in his position, and endeavor to hurt him so that he cannot follow us. I am decidedly in favor of the latter plan. I propose to march this evening with all our available force, leaving only a small guard to protect the property which will be left behind, and marching by the . . . [Telegraph] road, throw our whole force upon him at once, and endeavor to rout him before he can recover from his surprise.<sup>8</sup>

Lyon's principal officers dissuaded him from carrying out this operation. They told the general, "Many of the troops were exhausted, and all were tired." In addition, a supply train had arrived from Rolla. Consequently, Lyon decided it

<sup>6</sup> Holcombe and Adams, *Battle of Wilson's Creek*, 21.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 22.

<sup>8</sup> *O. R.*, Series I, Vol. III, 96.

would be best "to clothe and shoe the men as far as practicable, and to give them another day for recuperation."<sup>9</sup>

On the morning of the 9th, a courier reached Springfield from St. Louis. The messenger carried a dispatch from Frémont addressed to Lyon. Glancing at the letter, Lyon found that Frémont did not consider his situation "critical." Frémont believed that Lyon "doubtless over-estimated the force in his front; that he ought not to fall back without good cause." Lyon was informed that no reinforcements could be sent, and "that he must report his future movements as soon as possible, and do the best he could."<sup>10</sup>

With Frémont's communication before him, Lyon sat down at the table in his headquarters and drafted the last letter that he ever wrote:

I have just received your note of the 6th instant by special messenger.

I retired to this place, as I have before informed you, reaching here on the 5th. The enemy followed to within 10 miles of here. He has taken a strong position, and is recruiting his supplies of horses, mules, and provisions by foraging into the surrounding country, his large force of mounted men enabling him to do this without much annoyance from me. I find my position extremely embarrassing, and am at present unable to determine whether I shall be able to maintain my ground or be forced to retire. I can resist any attack from the front, but if the enemy move to surround me, I must retire. I shall hold my ground as long as possible, though I may, without knowing how far, endanger the safety of my entire force, with its valuable material, being induced by the important considerations involved to take this step. The enemy yesterday made a show of force about five miles distant, and has doubtless a full purpose of making an attack upon me.<sup>11</sup>

After dispatching this note to Frémont, Lyon received word that one of Captain David S. Stanley's companies of regulars and Company I, 2d Kansas Infantry (Mounted) had clashed with one of Price's mounted patrols on Grand Prairie, five miles west of Springfield. The Confederates fled. From the

<sup>9</sup> William M. Wherry, "Wilson's Creek, and the Death of Lyon," *Battles and Leaders of the Civil War*, I, 289.

<sup>10</sup> Holcombe and Adams, *Battle of Wilson's Creek*, 23.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 23-24; *O. R.*, Series I, Vol. III, 52.

captives it was learned that the Southerners were suffering from a lack of provisions. To get supplies, they were compelled "to do some pretty liberal foraging on both friends and enemies."<sup>12</sup>

This intelligence caused Lyon to send out a reconnaissance patrol. Accordingly, the general asked Colonel Andrews to send him a company of the 1st Missouri Infantry. In response to the general's request, Company C (Captain G. Harry Stone commanding) reported to Lyon's headquarters. Stone was told to take his men and see if there were any Confederate infantry closer to Springfield than Wilson Creek.

Stone's patrol moved out the Telegraph road about four miles. Here Stone halted the infantry. The captain and several mounted scouts advanced a mile closer to the Wilson Creek encampment. Approaching a farm house, the Yankees saw several Rebels making a hurried departure. At the house, Captain Stone learned from the inhabitants that two of the recent visitors were Texans. Having secured this information, Stone's patrol returned to Springfield, and the captain reported to General Lyon.<sup>13</sup>

This constituted the first definite information that the Union general had received that McCulloch and Price had joined forces. Lyon decided he must act at once, before the Confederates were able to consolidate their position. The general called another meeting of his brigade, regimental and battery commanders.

When the council of war assembled, all the principal officers except Brigadier General Thomas W. Sweeny were present. A number of the officers insisted that the Army of the West was too small and poorly equipped to hazard a battle with the powerful Confederate host. Furthermore, it was pointed out that the superior Rebel cavalry would be able to harass the army's rear, cut its communication lines, and capture the supply trains. Frémont's message of the morning was cited as evidence that "there was but scant prospect of being reinforced before the impending battle." In addition, there was every indication that the Southerners, in over-

<sup>12</sup> James Peckham, *Gen. Nathaniel Lyon and Missouri in 1861* (New York, 1866), 325; Holcombe and Adams, *Battle of Wilson's Creek*, 23.

<sup>13</sup> Peckham, *Lyon and Missouri*, 325.

whelming numbers, were about to descend on Springfield. The officers realized that if there were to be a fight, it must necessarily "be victory or annihilation."<sup>14</sup>

Lyon admitted that logic was on the side of the spokesmen urging retreat. He, however, looked at the problem from a different angle. The general reiterated his opinion that a "stubborn contest would be a better guarantee" for the column's security in case of retreat. "A bold dash, skillfully made," Lyon felt, "would astonish the foe and bewilder his judgment, even though it might not succeed in routing him." Amid the confusion of the Southerners in the wake of such a movement, the general explained, the Union soldiers would be able to retire in safety. A retreat which was conducted as proposed, with a powerful foe pressing on the rear of the Army of the West, might be the very means of its utter destruction.<sup>15</sup>

The general also appreciated the great calamity that would befall the people of Union proclivities residing in southwestern Missouri if the Union army were to evacuate the area. Besides, he observed, Springfield was the place to defend St. Louis. In the event that the Federals were forced to fall back, the lines of retreat to Kansas City, Jefferson City, and Rolla were still open. Finally, if Springfield were abandoned without a battle, "it might seriously damage the prestige of the national arms."<sup>16</sup>

Despite the logic behind Lyon's arguments, the council of war, after determining to fall back to Rolla, adjourned. Orders were issued to break camp preparatory to carrying out this movement.<sup>17</sup>

By this time, General Sweeny and Captain Florence M. Cornyn (a surgeon in the 1st Missouri) had learned of the decision to give up Springfield. In separate interviews, these two officers sought successfully to get the general to change his mind. Speaking with the general on the back porch of the Boren house, Sweeny pointed out:

. . . the disastrous results which must ensue upon a

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 326.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.* Lyon theorized that if the rebels occupied southwestern Missouri, they would enforce a ruthless conscription policy.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 326-327.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 327.

retreat without a battle—how the “rebels” would boast over such an easy conquest, how they would terrorize, harass, and persecute the unprotected Unionists if given undisputed possession of the country, how the Unionists themselves would become discouraged, crushed, or estranged.

Sweeny declared himself in favor of holding out to the last moment. Sweeny thundered, “Let us eat the last bit of mule flesh and fire the last cartridge before we think of retreating.”<sup>18</sup>

After the volatile one-armed Irishman had departed, Lyon returned to his room and lay down on his cot. Surgeon Cornyn now called upon the general. He “was equally impressed with the impossibility of successfully retreating 120 miles before such great odds, so largely supplied with cavalry.” Cornyn observed.

The retreat would become a panic, the loss of artillery and transportation would be the smallest portion of the disaster; that the loss in men would not be near so much in a battle; and that the encouragement given to the rebellion would be in proportion to our own demoralization.<sup>19</sup>

Lyon now changed his mind. He would boldly seize the initiative. About this time, Colonel Franz Sigel’s chief quartermaster, Major Alexis Mudd, arrived at headquarters. Not knowing of the change in plans, Mudd asked Lyon, “When do we start back, General?”

Fixing his keen blue eyes on the quartermaster, Lyon replied, “When we are whipped back. Not until then.”

“Yes,” he continued, “that is the order. No craven shrinking from imperative duty now. Let what will come, God is eternal, and just.”<sup>20</sup>

Orders were then issued alerting the officers to hold their troops ready to march at 6 p.m. Before taking the field, the soldiers were to draw all the ammunition that they could carry from the ordnance department. The troops were to move in light marching order, all unnecessary baggage would be left behind.<sup>21</sup>

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*: Holcombe and Adams, *Battle of Wilson’s Creek*, 21.

<sup>19</sup> Peckham, *Lyon and Missouri*, 327.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 328; Holcombe and Adams, *Battle of Wilson’s Creek*, 21-22.

<sup>21</sup> Peckham, *Lyon and Missouri*, 328.

At a staff meeting held by General Lyon on the afternoon of the 8th, Colonel Sigel had proposed that his brigade move independently of the main column and strike the foe on the flank and rear. This proposition was unanimously condemned by the officers present; Lyon also turned it down. When Lyon announced that he would attack the Confederates at day-break on the 10th, Sigel procured an interview with the general. This time, he succeeded in persuading Lyon "to allow him a separate command." Sigel was directed to move his command down the Yokermill road. He would then turn toward the southwest and try to gain the Confederates' flank and rear. At Sigel's request, Lyon stated that he would procure guides and cavalry to assist him. The general would also let Sigel know the exact time that his column would march. Next, Sigel asked Lyon whether, on his command's arrival near the Southerners' position, he "should attack immediately or wait until . . . [he was] apprised of the fight by the other troops." After reflecting a moment, Lyon replied, "Wait until you hear the firing on our side." The interview terminated, and Sigel returned to his quarters.<sup>22</sup>

While Sigel's command marched against the Confederates' rear and right, Lyon's column would move out the Little York road to a point nearly opposite the foe's advance pickets on Wilson Creek. Turning off the road, Lyon's troops would wheel sharply to the left, march across Grand Prairie, and attack the Southerners' left flank. If the plan worked, the Rebels would be caught in the jaws of a giant pincers.<sup>23</sup>

Shortly before sundown, the bugles were blown and the drums beaten. The various units constituting the Army of the West fell in on their colors. Since the 1st Iowa was sleeping under the stars, they had no tents on which to form the regimental line. After the Iowans had been standing in line for a few minutes, General Lyon was seen approaching on his large iron-gray horse. He was accompanied by Major Schofield. Lyon, as he rode by, made a brief speech to each company. Private Eugene F. Ware, a member of the 1st Iowa, recalled, "We could not hear what he [the general] said to the

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*; *O. R.*, Series I, Vol. III, 96; Franz Sigel, "The Flanking Column at Wilson's Creek," *Battles and Leaders of the Civil War*, I, 304.

<sup>23</sup> *O. R.*, Series I, Vol. III, 60.

companies on each side of us, owing to the distance apart of the companies and the low tone of his voice." Reining in his horse in front of Company E, Lyon announced:

Men, we are going to have a fight. We will march out in a short time. Don't shoot until you get orders. Fire low—don't aim higher than their knees; wait until they get close; don't get scared; it's no part of a soldier's duty to get scared.<sup>24</sup>

On comparing notes after Lyon had departed from the Iowans' encampment, the soldiers discovered that the gist of the general's remarks to each of the companies was the same.<sup>25</sup>

General Sweeney had also spoken to several of the units. Unlike Lyon, Sweeney had couched his address in terms calculated to increase the men's enthusiasm. He told the cavalry, "Stay together boys, and we'll saber hell out of them."<sup>26</sup>

Shortly after Lyon's visit, the ordnance wagons were driven up and the ammunition distributed. The men of the 1st Iowa filled not only their cartridge-boxes but also the pockets in their breeches. Since the woolen shirts worn by the Iowans had pockets, most of the soldiers likewise stuffed these pockets with ammunition. A wagon from the commissary department soon appeared on the scene. The soldiers were then issued two days' rations of beef and pork, which they cooked immediately.<sup>27</sup>

Before the soldiers had finished preparing the cooked rations, a sergeant drove up in a large covered army wagon. The sergeant asked how many were "present for duty." On being answered by Sergeant Joseph Utter, he threw on the ground an equal number of "large turtle-shelled loaves" of bread. The loaves bounced in the dust, and each of the Iowans picked up one. Private Ware recalled that his:

<sup>24</sup> Eugene F. Ware, *The Lyon Campaign in Missouri—Being a History of the 1st Iowa Infantry* (Topeka, 1907), 310; Henry O'Connor, *History of the First Regiment of Iowa Volunteers* (Muscatine, 1862), 11.

<sup>25</sup> Ware, *The Lyon Campaign in Missouri*, 310; O'Connor, *History of the 1st Iowa*, 11. O'Connor, a private in Company A, reported that Lyon told his unit, "Boys we may have warm work to-morrow. You are from a northern state, loyal to the union. The honor of Iowa and the interests of your country are in your hands; I want you to maintain them."

<sup>26</sup> Ware, *The Lyon Campaign in Missouri*, 310-311.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 312.

... actions regarding my loaf was perhaps descriptive of what the others did. I plugged it like a watermelon and ate my supper out of the inside. When I had finished eating I fried up a lot of beef and pork (my 2 days' rations) and crammed it into the loaf and poured in all the fat and gravy.

Next, he removed the sling from his rifled-musket and secured it to the loaf, and slung it over his shoulder.<sup>28</sup>

\* \* \*

About 6 p.m., the adjutants shouted for the men to fall in. At a word from Lyon, the troops constituting the general's striking force moved out of their encampments located on either side of Wilson Creek at Phelps Grove. Major Sturgis' brigade took the lead as the column turned into the Little York road. Captain Charles G. Gilbert's Company B, 1st U. S. Infantry had the advance as the little army tramped westward. About 20 residents of the area, including Pleasant Hart and Parker Cox, were serving as guides and rode with Gilbert's vanguard.<sup>29</sup>

It was twilight by the time the troops reached the Grand Prairie west of Springfield. Here, the road was flanked by large corn fields. The day had been hot, and with the setting of the sun it grew cooler. Private Ware recalled that "life became more endurable and the marching was anything but a funeral procession. The boys gave each other elaborate instructions as to the materials out of which they wanted their coffins made, and how they wanted them decorated."<sup>30</sup>

Since Lyon hoped to take the Confederates by surprise, he had given instructions for his officers to try to curb all unnecessary noise. Therefore, the cannoneers, before

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 313.

<sup>29</sup> O. R., Series I, Vol. III, 65, 81; Holcombe and Adams, *Battle of Wilson's Creek*, 29. Lyon's column consisted of Sturgis', Andrews', and Deitzler's brigades. Sturgis' brigade included: Plummer's battalion; Osterhaus' battalion; Battery F, 2d U. S. Light Artillery; Company D, 1st U. S. Cavalry; and Company I, 2d Kansas Infantry (Mounted). Andrews' brigade consisted of: Steele's battalion; the 1st Missouri Infantry; and Du Bois' four-gun Provisional U. S. Battery. Deitzler's brigade was made up of the 1st and 2d Kansas Infantry Regiments. In addition, the 1st Iowa Infantry and two Home Guard units were attached to Lyon's striking force.

<sup>30</sup> Ware, *The Lyon Campaign in Missouri*, 314. On the Grand Prairie, there was no water and very little wood. It was possible to leave the road and move across the prairie at almost any point.

leaving Springfield, had wrapped the wheels of their guns, limbers, and caissons with blankets. Both the cavalry and the artillery horses had their hoofs covered with burlap which was banded at the fetlock. Despite the general's instructions, the Iowa and the Kansas volunteers were disposed to exercise their vocal talents. Camp songs of all sorts were sung *con spiritu*, as the troops marched along. The 1st Iowa had a favorite song, the refrain of which ran:

So let the wide world wag as it will,  
We'll be gay and happy still.  
Gay and happy, gay and happy,  
We'll be gay and happy still.

The strains of this song carried out over Grand Prairie loud enough, it was feared, to have been heard by the Confederate outposts. Encouraged by the efforts of the Iowans, the Kansans sang, "Happy Land of Canaan," and raised the neighborhood with their efforts. Toward midnight, however, the column quieted down. Lyon was heard to remark that the Iowans "had too much levity in their composition to do good fighting." He added "that he would give them an opportunity to show what they were made of."<sup>31</sup>

After reaching a point about five miles west of the Springfield square, the head of Lyon's column left the Little York road and turned south. (The place where Lyon left the Little York road was a little east of the present-day town of Brookline.) With the guides leading the way, the Federals marched southward across Grand Prairie. At times, the troops followed unimproved byroads. The pace of the march was accordingly slowed down considerably. To make matters worse, the soldiers now left the level open prairie and moved down into the breaks which flanked Wilson Creek on the west.<sup>32</sup>

Private Ware recalled:

We moved short distances from 20 to 100 yards at a time, and kept halting and closing up, and making very slow progress. Finally, we were practically involved in the timber and among the side-hills of a water-course [Wilson Creek]. There were some little light clouds, but it was light enough to see a short distance around us, by starlight; it was in the dark of the moon. Finally,

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, Holcombe and Adams, *Battle of Wilson's Creek*, 28-29.

<sup>32</sup> Holcombe and Adams, *Battle of Wilson's Creek*, 29; *O.R.*, Series I, Vol. III, 64, 75.

word was passed along the line that we were inside the enemy's picket, but were two or three miles from their camp. Rumors magnified the number of the foe to 25,000. We could see the sheen in the sky of vast camp fires beyond the hills, but could not see the light. We also heard at times the choruses of braying mules.<sup>33</sup>

Once the Union vanguard had approached to within sight of the Confederate "guard fires," Lyon called a halt. Lyon would wait until daybreak before resuming the advance. Accordingly, the word was passed for the men to lie down and take it easy. The main body of the Union column had halted on the Milton Norman farm three and one-half miles north-east of the unsuspecting Confederate encampment. It was about 1 a.m.<sup>34</sup>.

Many of the troops welcomed the stop. Private Ware wrote of his experiences:

About this time, while we were moving along we passed around the brow of a low, rocky hill, and the line stopped at a place where our company stood on a broad ledge of rock. We all laid down on this rock to get rested. The cool, dewy night air made me feel chilly in the "linings" which I was wearing; but the radiating heat which the rock during the day had absorbed, was peculiarly comfortable.<sup>35</sup>

General Lyon bivouacked in a corn field near the head of the column. He shared a rubber poncho with Major Schofield. As the two officers tried to get some rest, Lyon seemed to be "oppressed with the responsibility of his situation, with anxiety for the cause, and with sympathy for the Union people" in southwestern Missouri in case he should be forced to retreat. The general repeatedly expressed himself as having been abandoned by his superiors.<sup>36</sup>

While the men were resting, Lyon's scouts reconnoitered the ground over which the column would be called upon to attack.<sup>37</sup> They were able to penetrate to within a short dis-

<sup>33</sup> Ware, *The Lyon Campaign in Missouri*, 315.

<sup>34</sup> O. R., Series I, Vol. III, 60, 65, 73, 75; Dixie O'Connor, Personal Interview, June 30, 1960.

<sup>35</sup> Ware, *The Lyon Campaign in Missouri*, 315.

<sup>36</sup> Wherry, "Wilson's Creek and the Death of Lyon," 292-293.

<sup>37</sup> Holcombe and Adams, *Battle of Wilson's Creek*, 29; W. S. Burke, *Military History of Kansas Regiments* (Leavenworth, 1870), 3.

tance of the Confederate camps without encountering any pickets. Having obtained the desired information, the scouts made their way back to Lyon's command post.

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It was between 4 and 5 p.m. on the 9th when Sigel received instructions from General Lyon to move at 6:30 o'clock. At this time, Sigel's brigade was stationed at Camp Frémont on the south side of Springfield near the Yokermill road. Sigel accordingly alerted his subordinates to hold their men ready to take the field.<sup>38</sup>

At 6:30 sharp, Sigel's brigade marched out of the encampment. After the column had traveled about five miles, it turned off the Yokermill road. Moving in a southwesterly direction along the old Delaware road, Sigel's troops left the prairie country and entered a wooded area. It was very dark; about 9 p.m. it started to drizzle. After a short while the rain ceased, but the sky remained overcast. It was with considerable difficulty that the Federals found their way and kept from getting separated. About 11 p.m., Sigel halted his column. So far, Captain Eugene A. Carr's cavalymen, who screened Sigel's advance, had been able successfully to discharge their assignment. No news of the Union movement had reached the foe's encampment, as Carr's troopers had arrested every person encountered, and placed guards on all the houses in the neighborhood. The troops were permitted to rest until 2 a.m., when the march was renewed.<sup>39</sup>

As the first streak of dawn appeared on the eastern horizon, Sigel's command resumed the march. After advancing about one and one-half miles, Carr's troopers succeeded in cutting off and capturing about 40 Confederate foragers. (At the time that they were made prisoners, the Southerners were busy digging potatoes, picking roasting ears, gathering tomatoes, and procuring other supplies for their individual commissary departments.) This operation was carried out in such a fashion that none of the Rebels was able to escape and sound the alarm. On being questioned, one of the prisoners

<sup>38</sup> Sigel, "The Flanking Column at Wilson's Creek," 304; *O. R.*, Series I, Vol. III, 86, 89-90; Holcombe and Adams, *Battle of Wilson's Creek*, 29-30.

<sup>39</sup> Sigel, "The Flanking Column at Wilson's Creek," 304; *O. R.* Series I, Vol. III, 89.

stated "that their army was expecting re-enforcements from Louisiana, and that they had mistaken us for their re-enforcements."<sup>40</sup>

Shortly thereafter, Sigel, who was riding with Carr, came out on a commanding knoll. From this position, the colonel obtained an excellent view of the tents occupied by the Confederate cavalry which were located on the west side of Wilson Creek. Sigel made his dispositions, preparatory to attacking.<sup>41</sup>

When the Union army marched to attack the Confederates, General Lyon had left the Christian and Greene County Home Guards (about 1,200 strong) to hold Springfield. Besides garrisoning the city, the Home Guards were directed to watch the Telegraph road. In case the Federals should fail to defeat the Rebels, Springfield would have to be evacuated. Colonel Boyd of the Home Guard therefore made certain that everything was ready to facilitate an orderly retreat. Wagons were loaded, and the bank deposits were secured for transfer. These were closely guarded by the Home Guard.<sup>42</sup>

\* \* \*

About 4 a.m., Lyon had his officers arouse their men. One of the soldiers recalled, "just as there was a slight flush of dawn in the east, somebody came along and woke us all up, and told us to keep still and fall in line." Captain Gilbert's company again had the lead as the Union column moved off.<sup>43</sup>

Upon resuming the march, the Federals advanced in a southwesterly direction, with a view to striking the most northerly portion of the Confederate encampment. Except for Gilbert's soldiers who were deployed as skirmishers, Lyon's units marched in column by companies. At daylight, the Federals caught their first glimpse of the Confederate pickets. The Rebel outposts fled at the Yankees' approach. Lyon, to

<sup>40</sup> Sigel, "The Flanking Column at Wilson's Creek," 304; *O. R.*, Series I, Vol. III, 89, 91; Holcombe and Adams, *Battle of Wilson's Creek*, 30.

<sup>41</sup> Sigel, "The Flanking Column at Wilson's Creek," 304; *O. R.*, Series I, Vol. III, 86, 89, 91; Holcombe and Adams, *Battle of Wilson's Creek*, 30.

<sup>42</sup> Holcombe and Adams, *Battle of Wilson's Creek*, 30.

<sup>43</sup> *O. R.*, Series I, Vol. III, 60, 65.

be on the safe side, quickly deployed Major Joseph B. Plummer's battalion of regulars into line of battle. Major Peter J. Osterhaus' battalion of Missourians was sent to the right as skirmishers, while Colonel Andrews' 1st Missouri was called up and massed in support of Captain James Totten's battery. When these dispositions were completed, the advance was renewed.<sup>44</sup>

Lyon's troops forged ahead rapidly. About one and one-half miles were covered before the Yankee vanguard sighted any more Southerners. During this portion of the advance, the Northerners passed through a small wheat field, crossed a hill, and entered the valley where E. Ben Short's farm was located. Just as the Shorts were sitting down to breakfast, they glanced out the kitchen window and saw that their yard was full of soldiers. The men were moving on the double and the horses at the trot.<sup>45</sup>

As the Federal skirmishers prepared to ascend the ridge south of the Short house, they were fired upon by the Confederates. Without hesitating a moment, Captain Totten shouted for Lieutenant George O. Sokalski to put his section into battery. Quickly unlimbering their guns, the artilleryists opened fire on the Rebels on the wooded ridge to their front. Totten's other four pieces were "thrown forward into battery on the right on higher ground." Once the artillery had softened up the Rebels with a few rounds, the infantry quickly dislodged them and secured the crest of the hill. Before pressing on, Lyon halted his command to perfect his dispositions. Calling for Major Plummer, Lyon told him to take his battalion and cross to the east side of Wilson Creek. Plummer's mission was to keep the Southerners from turning Lyon's left flank. Once he was in position, Plummer was to regulate the pace of his advance by that of the main column.<sup>46</sup>

The Union advance had taken the Confederates by surprise. On the previous evening, General McCulloch had issued orders for his army to be ready to take the field. He planned to

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 60, 65, 72. The 1st Missouri marched parallel to Battery F, "and about 60 yards distant." Shortly thereafter, Colonel Andrews deployed as skirmishers and threw forward one company (H).

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 60, 73; L. E. Meador, Personal Interview, June 27, 1960.

<sup>46</sup> *O. R.*, Series I, Vol. III, 60, 65, 73.

attack Springfield at dawn. About 9 p.m., it started to rain and McCulloch suspended his projected forward movement.

During the night, the Southerners had recalled their outposts. Accordingly, the Northerners were able to penetrate very close to the Rebels' encampment without being discovered. At dawn, Colonel John Cawthorn (the officer in command of the mounted Confederate brigade assigned to Brigadier General James S. Rains' division of the Missouri State Guard) became apprehensive and sent a patrol up the west side of Wilson Creek.<sup>47</sup> This patrol had not advanced more than one and one-half miles beyond Gibson's Mill before the soldiers discovered that there were Yankees operating in the area. News of this important development was immediately relayed to Colonel Cawthorn. The brigade commander called for Colonel De Witt C. Hunter, who commanded one of his regiments. Hunter was told to take his unit (about 300 effectives) and ascertain whether the foe was advancing in force or not.

It was about 5 a.m. when Hunter's troops reached the crest of the ridge overlooking the Short farm, and sighted the head of Lyon's column. Hunter's first intention was to attack. The aggressive colonel felt that a sudden attack might throw the Union advance into confusion. By this time, Lyon had also spotted Confederates. While Totten's gunners unlimbered their guns, the initial Union assault wave (Osterhaus' battalion on the right, the 1st Missouri in the center, and Plummer's battalion on the left) rolled up the hill. Confronted by this formidable force, Hunter's Confederates fell back upon their encampment.<sup>48</sup>

In the meantime, Colonel Cawthorn had heard the sound of the firing as the Yankees established contact with Hunter's regiment. Cawthorn accordingly proceeded to dismount and form the remainder of his brigade into line of battle on the north face of "Bloody Hill." All told, Cawthorn (after de-

<sup>47</sup> The Missouri commands were territorial, each brigadier general having command of the troops raised within his military district. Parsons, Clark, and McBride had, respectively, only 531, 552, and 649 officers and men on the field, and Slack only 940. Nevertheless, their commands were called divisions. The regiments of the Missouri State Guard consisted of eight companies of 50 men each, present and absent.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, 127; Thomas L. Snead, *The Fight for Missouri—From the Election of Lincoln to the Death of Lyon* (New York, 1888), 269.

tailing the men necessary to hold the horses) was able to deploy about 600 men. When Hunter's men, falling back in the face of Lyon's push, reached Cawthorn's main line of resistance, the brigade commander halted Hunter. Cawthorn told Hunter to retire farther down the creek and dismount his men. When this business had been taken care of, Hunter would return to the front and deploy his regiment on the brigade's right flank.<sup>49</sup>

Upon gaining the crest of the ridge overlooking Cawthorn's camp, Lyon sighted a Confederate brigade (Cawthorn's) massed into line of battle on the opposite slope. Lyon now called up the 1st Kansas. The Kansans were ordered to take position on the left of the 1st Missouri. This order to move to the front reached Colonel George W. Deitzler about 5 a.m. Before leading his Kansans into position, Deitzler rode along his regiment's line, and as one of the soldiers recalled:

. . . electrified the spirits and hopes of his men, by uttering a few sharp, emphatic sentences, that did more to arouse their feeling than the most elaborate speech, delivered by the most gifted and eloquent orator, could have done. Rising in his stirrups, he exclaimed in language more emphatic than reverent, "Boys, we've got them, d-m them."<sup>50</sup>

After the colonel had finished his speech, he led his men up the hill on the double. As they scaled the hill, the Kansans sang:

So let the wide world wag as it will,  
We'll be gay and happy.<sup>51</sup>

After Hunter's mounted regiment had fallen back, Captain Totten shouted for his men to limber up their six field pieces. Once the artillerists had hitched up their guns, Totten led them up the ridge, hard on the heels of the infantrymen of the 1st Kansas and the 1st Missouri. Before Totten could get his guns into battery, the Kansans and Missourians had moved against Cawthorn's main line of resistance. A brief skirmish

<sup>49</sup> Snead, *The Fight for Missouri*, 269. Cawthorn deployed his brigade on the slope south of the ravine, where his brigade had pitched its tents. Subsequent to the battle, the term "Bloody Hill" was given to the area where Price's and Lyon's commands met in bloody conflict.

<sup>50</sup> Burke, *Military History of Kansas Regiments*, 3; O. R., Series I, Vol. III, 60, 66, 82.

<sup>51</sup> Burke, *Military History of Kansas Regiments*, 12.

was necessary to drive the Rebels from their position. Falling back across the brow of "Bloody Hill," Cawthorn's troops took cover on its southern slope. Here, for the time being at least, they were safe.<sup>52</sup>

The remainder of Lyon's command followed the assault wave up the ridge south of the Short farm. Crossing the head of the ravine where the now deserted tents of Cawthorn's brigade were located, the troops ascended the northern slope of "Bloody Hill." The 1st Kansas and the 1st Missouri had already crossed the crest of the hill, as they pressed relentlessly after Cawthorn's defeated brigade. The Union advance, however, was suddenly slowed when a Rebel battery (the Pulaski Arkansas) opened fire. From a masked position on the eastern side of Wilson Creek, the Arkansas cannoneers began to rake the attacking Yankees with shot and shell. This fire slowed the pace of the Federals' drive. Caution now became the watchword. To neutralize the effect of this shelling, Lyon directed Captain Totten to put his guns into battery. Totten accordingly placed his pieces in position on a knoll, which was a short distance west of Cawthorn's abandoned encampment. The ground occupied by the Pulaski Arkansas Battery was within easy range of Totten's guns. Captain Totten reported:

The left half battery was then brought into position, but the right half battery, in reality occupying the most favorable ground, was principally directed against the enemy's battery, although the whole six pieces, as opportunity occurred, played upon the enemy's guns.

Since the position where Captain William E. Woodruff's Arkansans had emplaced their four guns was masked from their view, the gun captains of Battery F had to use as their aiming points the flash and smoke of the opposing guns.<sup>53</sup>

\* \* \*

Wilson Creek has changed very little since the Civil War. Now, as then, Wilson Creek rises in and around Springfield. The stream flows in a westerly direction for about five miles before veering sharply to the south. About nine miles beyond this point, the creek debouches into the James River, a tribu-

<sup>52</sup> Snead, *The Fight for Missouri*, 269-270; *O. R.*, Series I, Vol. III, 60, 73, 75-76.

<sup>53</sup> *O. R.*, Series I, Vol. III, 73.

tary of the White. About one mile above its confluence with the James, Wilson Creek receives the waters of Terrell Creek, which comes in from the west. One and one-half miles above the mouth of Terrell Creek, Skegg's Branch discharges into Wilson Creek. Like Terrell Creek, Skegg's Branch flows from west to east. At the time of the war, the Telegraph road crossed both Terrell Creek and Skegg's Branch near their mouths. About one-half mile north of Skegg's Branch, the Telegraph road crossed Wilson Creek. Springfield lay about twelve miles northeast of this ford.

Bounded by Wilson Creek on the east, Terrell Creek on the south, and in part by the Telegraph road on the west, were several large corn fields. In these fields were encamped most of the mounted units belonging to McCulloch's army. Brigadier General Alexander E. Steen was in charge of the cavalry encampment.<sup>54</sup>

Between Skegg's Branch and the ford where the Telegraph road crossed Wilson Creek, the valley was quite narrow. At this point, the road paralleled the west bank of the stream. West of the road rose a commanding eminence known since the battle as "Bloody Hill." The crest of the hill was almost 170 feet higher than the creek at this point; its sides were deeply scarred with ravines, and dented here and there with sink-holes. In 1861, as it is today, the hill was covered with a dense growth of underbrush and scrub oak. At numerous places on the hill, especially near its crest, there were outcroppings of rocks.

In the narrow valley between the foot of the hill and Wilson Creek were bivouacked all the infantry of the Missouri State Guard except Colonel Richard H. Weightman's brigade. (Weightman's brigade was camped at Manley's Spring, about two-thirds of a mile east of the point where Skegg's Branch flows into Wilson Creek.) Price's headquarters were next to the road, about 200 yards south of the ford.<sup>55</sup>

East of Wilson Creek (opposite the area where Price's infantry had encamped) was a plateau. This ground was about 30 feet above the stream. The infantry and artillery assigned to Brigadier Generals Ben McCulloch's and N. Bart Pearce's

<sup>54</sup> Snead, *The Fight for Missouri*, 259.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 259-260; *O. R.*, Series I, Vol. LIII, 435.

commands were encamped on this terrain. Captain Woodruff's Pulaski Battery was posted on a partially detached portion of the plateau near the Guinn house. Captain J. G. Reid's Fort Smith Arkansas Battery camped at the southern edge of the plateau, opposite the mouth of Skegg's Branch.<sup>56</sup>

Colonel Cawthorn's mounted brigade of Rains' division camped in the ravine, which debouched into Wilson Creek from the west about one-half mile north of the ford. This ravine bounded "Bloody Hill" on the north. Rains' quarters, however, were on the opposite side of the creek at Gibson's Mill. A few of Rains' troopers also bivouacked on the left bank of Wilson Creek.<sup>57</sup>

\* \* \*

General Rains, to whose division Cawthorn's brigade was attached, had established his headquarters on the east side of Wilson Creek near Gibson's Mill. About the time that Hunter's regiment moved to the front, Rains received reports from his foraging parties indicating that the Yankees were "advancing in force" on the west side of Wilson Creek and had penetrated to within three miles of his camp. Rains called for Colonel Snyder, his chief of staff. Snyder was directed to go and "see what was the matter." On reaching the prairie west of the creek, Snyder saw the Federals approaching. Hastening back to Rains, Snyder told the general that the Yankees were advancing in great force, "their soldiers and cannon covering the whole prairie." Rains ordered Snyder to carry this news to General Price.<sup>58</sup>

It was after 5 a.m., and neither Price nor McCulloch (who was at the Missourian's headquarters) suspected that the Northerners had marched out of Springfield. Suddenly, Colonel Snyder galloped up on a sweat-flecked horse. The colonel, almost breathless from excitement, announced that "Lyon was approaching with 20,000 men and 100 pieces of artillery." The

<sup>56</sup> Snead, *The Fight for Missouri*, 260; Map titled, "Field of Battle of Oak Hill, August 10, 1861," W. E. Woodruff, *With the Light Guns in '61-'65* (Little Rock, 1903); N. Bart Pearce, "Arkansas Troops in the Battle of Wilson's Creek," *Battles and Leaders of the Civil War*, I, 298.

<sup>57</sup> Snead, *The Fight for Missouri*, 260.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, 271.

staff officer reported that, at the moment, the Yankees were "within less than a mile of Rains' camp."<sup>59</sup>

"O, pshaw," said McCulloch, laughingly, "that's another of Rains' scares," alluding to the Dug Springs affair. (At Dug Springs on August 2, Rains' cavalry had fled in confusion when fired on by the Union artillery.) "Tell General Rains I will come to the front myself directly," he added.<sup>60</sup>

The three officers (McCulloch, McIntosh, and Price) resumed eating. Inside of two or three minutes, another officer rode up. The newcomer reported that "Rains was falling back before overwhelming numbers, and needed instant and heavy reinforcements."<sup>61</sup>

McCulloch again expressed disbelief, remarking, "O, nonsense! That's not true."<sup>62</sup>

Glancing up from the table, however, the officers were able to "see a great crowd of men on horseback, some armed, and others unarmed, mixed in with wagons and teams and led horses, all in dreadful confusion, scampering over the hill and rushing toward us—a panic-stricken mob." Moments later, the Confederate officers "saw the flash and heard the report" of Totten's guns. Then, in quick response, the sound of Sigel's guns came drifting in from the south. (Sigel's artillery had just opened fire on the encampments occupied by the Confederate cavalry.)<sup>63</sup>

Within seconds, McCulloch, followed by McIntosh, was in the saddle and on his way to take charge of the troops stationed on the east bank of Wilson Creek. At the same time, Price ordered the "long roll" beaten. After leaving instructions for the members of his staff to hurry forward his infantry and artillery, Price galloped up "Bloody Hill." "Old Pap" planned to rally Cawthorn's shattered brigade which was falling back in confusion before Lyon's advance. The general hoped that he could rally enough of Cawthorn's troopers to delay the Fed-

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, 271-272; *O. R.*, Series I, Vol. III, 127.

<sup>60</sup> Holcombe and Adams, *Battle of Wilson's Creek*, 53.

<sup>61</sup> Snead, *The Fight for Missouri*, 272. Colonel James McIntosh served as McCulloch's chief of staff.

<sup>62</sup> Holcombe and Adams, *Battle of Wilson's Creek*, 53.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*; Snead, *The Fight for Missouri*, 272.

eral advance, pending the deployment of the remainder of his Missourians.<sup>64</sup>

The enfilade fire delivered by Captain Woodruff's Pulaski Battery had slowed the pace of the Union advance. Therefore, Price was able to regroup a portion of Cawthorn's brigade. "Old Pap" re-formed the dismounted cavalymen several hundred yards south of the crest of "Bloody Hill." Here, the shaken troopers were screened by the dense undergrowth. Better still, they were in defilade and no longer exposed to the fire of Totten's battery.<sup>65</sup>

The infantry contingents belonging to Brigadier Generals John B. Clark's, James H. McBride's, Mosby M. Parsons', and William Y. Slack's divisions of the Missouri State Guard which were camped on the west side of Wilson Creek formed on the double. As soon as they had mustered their units, the officers led their cheering soldiers up the southeastern face of "Bloody Hill." Within a few minutes after the alarm had been sounded, the Missourians were in contact with Lyon's battle line. From right to left, Price's troops were deployed: the remnants of Cawthorn's brigade, Slack's, Clark's, Parsons', and McBride's divisions.

Weightman's infantry brigade of Rains' division had camped on the east side of Wilson Creek at Manley's Spring. While the soldiers were busy preparing breakfast, the sound of firing came drifting in from the northwest (Totten's guns firing on Hunter's combat patrol). Shortly thereafter, the troops were startled when the roar of cannon came rolling up from the southwest. (Sigel had launched his attack on the encampment of the Confederate cavalry.) Without a moment's hesitation, Weightman turned his command out under arms.

The colonel eagerly awaited his marching orders, which were not long in arriving. An aide came galloping up and directed Weightman to move to Price's assistance. At a word from Weightman, the brigade moved off in a northeasterly direction. Reaching the plateau near the Guinn house, Weightman called for Major Ezra H. Brashear of the 2d Regiment. Brashear was directed to take his command and post it in

<sup>64</sup> Snead, *The Fight for Missouri*, 272-273; O. R., Series I, Vol. III, 100, 104-105.

<sup>65</sup> Snead, *The Fight for Missouri*, 273.

support of the Pulaski Battery. In the next breath, Weightman told Colonel Thomas H. Rosser to take his command (the 1st Regiment and the 4th Battalion) and Captain Hiram M. Bledsoe's battery and hasten to the cavalry's assistance. After fording Wilson Creek, Rosser led his men down the Telegraph road toward the Sharp house.

Accompanied by the 3d and 5th regiments (about 700 strong), Weightman crossed Wilson Creek at the ford. Pushing up the southeastern face of "Bloody Hill," Weightman used his two regiments to plug the gap that had opened between Slack's division and Cawthorn's brigade. Weightman's hardy soldiers reached the field about one-half hour after McBride's troops had moved into position on Parson's left.<sup>66</sup>

The main line of resistance which Price succeeded in organizing to dispute Lyon's advance, following the arrival of Weightman's two regiments, was held by over 3,100 men and four cannons. Furthermore, Price's Missourians received considerable assistance from the four guns of the Pulaski Arkansas Battery emplaced on the east side of the creek. From their position at the Guinn house, the Arkansas cannoners were able to enfilade the Union line of advance.<sup>67</sup>

\* \* \*

In the meantime, Lyon's initial assault wave (the 1st Kansas and the 1st Missouri) had driven across the crest of "Bloody Hill." The Federals now endeavored to force their way down the south slope. General Price, by this time, had succeeded in forming his main line of resistance. The Federals had lost the advantage that the element of surprise had previously given them.

At this time, the "bang" of a cannon was heard drifting up from the south. It came from the direction where Sigel was supposed to be operating. Sturgis mistakenly thought he heard an answering report.<sup>68</sup>

Lyon's battle line now pressed forward. The firing, which

<sup>66</sup> O. R., Series I, Vol. III, 128; Snead, *The Fight for Missouri*, 274-275.

<sup>67</sup> Snead, *The Fight for Missouri*, 274.

<sup>68</sup> O. R., Series I, Vol. III, 66. The first firing that Sturgis heard was when Sigel's guns opened fire on the Confederate encampment. Sigel put his guns into action two other times. Apparently, only the first of these two bombardments was audible to Sturgis.

had been spirited for the past one-half hour, now increased to a continuous roar, heard in Springfield. For the better part of the next 30 minutes, the battle waxed hot and heavy.<sup>69</sup>

At first, the battle lines were not more than 300 yards apart. Except in a few isolated instances, the combatants were concealed from one another by the intervening foliage. Since Price's Missourians were armed almost exclusively with shotguns and common rifles, it was mandatory for the general (since the opposing forces were so near to each other) either to close with Lyon's battle line, or wait for the Federals to assail his position. Price chose the latter alternative—he would let the Yankees attack.

Price did not have to wait long. In a few minutes, the command "Forward!" was distinctly heard. It was followed by the tramp of men, and the crackling of brush. When Lyon's soldiers closed to within easy range of Price's Missourians, "there rang upon the air the sharp crack of 1,000 rifles and the report of a 1,000 shotguns." Missourian and Kansan now fought to the death against Missourian on the leafy hillside while, from the opposing heights, Totten (who had been stationed at Little Rock, where his family resided) fought furiously against the Pulaski Arkansas Battery.<sup>70</sup>

When Guibor's battery (which was emplaced on the southern slope of "Bloody Hill") started to rake his advance, Colonel Andrews shouted for the men of the 1st Missouri to get ready to charge the guns. Before the colonel could complete his dispositions, he observed that a strong force of Rebels (McBride's division) were about to turn his right flank. Andrews accordingly decided to abandon his attempt to capture the artillery. Simultaneously, the colonel sent a messenger to point out the location of the Rebel battery to Captain Totten. To cope with this threat to his right flank, Andrews posted part of his regiment at right angles to his line of battle. Opening fire, these men succeeded in throwing back McBride's soldiers.

All this time, the left wing of Andrews' regiment had been trading volleys with Parsons' and Clark's troops. Satisfied that the right wing would be able to hold its own, Colonel An-

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*; Holcombe and Adams, *Battle of Wilson's Creek*, 33-34.

<sup>70</sup> Snead, *The Fight for Missouri*, 275.

drews rode toward the left. As he passed each company, the colonel "found it well up to its work, both officers and men cool and determined, using their guns with care and precision."<sup>71</sup>

The 1st Kansas held the ground on the left and slightly in advance of the 1st Missouri. A ravine (about 60 yards across) separated the two regiments. In crossing the crest of "Bloody Hill," the Kansans were exposed to an enfilading fire from the Pulaski Arkansas Battery. The Confederates, however, were putting too much elevation on their pieces. Consequently, the round shot from their guns went howling high over the trees under which the Kansans marched.<sup>72</sup>

After Price had thrown Parsons' and McBride's divisions of the Missouri State Guard into the fray, Captain Totten reported that the fighting raged "in the thick woods and underbrush to the front and right of the position occupied by . . . [his] battery." When Lyon learned that the 1st Missouri was being hard-pressed by Clark's, Parsons' and McBride's troops, he ordered Totten to advance one of his sections to Andrews' assistance. Taking charge of one of his sections, Totten moved forward. In addition to the crews serving the guns, Totten was assisted by Captain Gordon Granger and Lieutenant David Murphy. These two guns were placed in battery in front of Colonel Andrews' right flank company. Within 200 yards of the position where the guns had been unlimbered was a Confederate regiment. This Rebel unit displayed two flags—one the National Emblem, the other a secessionist banner. At first, Captain Totten was uncertain of his proper course of action. He was afraid "that by some accident a portion of our own troops might have got thus far in advance." Totten's qualms were soon dispelled when the opposing battle

<sup>71</sup> *O. R.*, Series I, Vol. III, 76. The 1st Missouri was massed on a small elevated plateau. Captain Nelson Cole of Company E had been shot in the lower jaw and had to be sent to the rear. Before being evacuated, the captain, although unable to speak, by the use of gestures sought to encourage his men. Captain Cary Gratz had observed a force of Confederates led by a mounted officer carrying a Union flag approaching his unit. Drawing his revolver, Gratz fired and knocked the Rebel officer off his horse but, upon striking the ground, the Southerner immediately arose and rushed through his lines. Gratz fired a second shot, which pitched the Confederate headlong out of sight. The foe now opened fire, and the captain fell, pierced by five shots.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, 82-83; Burke, *Military History of Kansas Regiments*, 3.

line fired a volley at his gunners. The Yankees replied with cannister.<sup>73</sup>

By this time, Lieutenant John V. Du Bois' provisional battery had reached the front. Since no position had been assigned him, Du Bois had his cannoneers unlimber their four smoothbore guns (three 6-pounders and one 12-pounder) on the eastern slope of "Bloody Hill" about 400 yards west of the Pulaski Arkansas Battery. (Du Bois' guns were about 70 yards to the left and rear of Totten's position.) Once his men had placed their pieces in battery, Du Bois had them open fire on the Arkansans' guns.<sup>74</sup>

Captain Frederick Steele's battalion of regulars was posted in support of Du Bois' battery.<sup>75</sup> The 1st Iowa was drawn up in line of battle on the left of Du Bois' guns. Two companies (D and E) of the 1st Iowa were deployed as skirmishers and thrown forward. Throughout the artillery duel, the Iowans grimly held their ground. Private Ware recalled:

Across . . . [Wilson Creek] which was not very far, perhaps one-third of a mile, a battery [the Pulaski] made a speciality of our ranks, opening out thunderously. We all lay down on the ground, and for some time the shells, round shot and canister were playing closely over our heads.

Our company [E] did not have much to do for a while in the way of shooting; we simply laid down on the ridge and watched the battery . . . [to our right], or sat up or kneeled down.

The duel was very interesting and our boys stayed close to the earth. Considerable damage was done to our artillery, but they were not silenced. One of the large roan artillery horses was standing back of the gun over the crest of the hill. A shell from the battery in front of us struck this horse and tore off its left shoulder. Then began the most horrible screams and neighing I ever heard. One of the soldiers shot the horse through the heart.<sup>76</sup>

Major Osterhaus' battalion was stationed on the extreme right of Lyon's battle line. The right flank of Osterhaus' com-

<sup>73</sup> O. R., Series I, Vol. III, 74.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, 66, 79-80; Holcombe and Adams, *Battle of Wilson's Creek*, 92; Burke, *Military History of Kansas Regiments*, 3; "Field of Battle of Oak Hill, August 10, 1861," *With the Light Guns*.

<sup>75</sup> O. R. Series I, Vol. III, 78.

<sup>76</sup> Ware, *The Lyon Campaign in Missouri*, 317-318.

mand rested on a ravine which turned abruptly to Lyon's right and rear. Osterhaus had the task of keeping the Rebels from turning the right flank of Lyon's main line of resistance.<sup>77</sup>

The 2d Kansas, the other regiment which had accompanied Lyon's column, was held in reserve. Colonel Robert B. Mitchell accordingly stationed his men on the hill west of and overlooking Ray's corn field.<sup>78</sup>

Captains Theodore A. Switzler's and Clark Wright's Home Guard companies and Captain Samuel N. Wood's mounted company of the 2d Kansas were stationed on the high, open ground north of "Bloody Hill." It was their mission to watch Lyon's rear and right flank.<sup>79</sup>

For fully one-half hour, the armies struggled for the possession of "Bloody Hill." Back and forth over the ground the battle ebbed and flowed. On two or three occasions, the Union troops retired "in more or less disorder." Each time, however, the officers succeeded in rallying their soldiers. They then pressed forward with increased vigor and forced the Secessionists to recoil a few steps. At last, the Federals were left in possession of the ground, the Confederates falling back to regroup.<sup>80</sup>

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After crossing to the east side of Wilson Creek near Gibson's Mill, Major Plummer's regular battalion advanced into Ray's corn field. The regulars hoped to capture the Pulaski Battery. Before Plummer's men had reached their objective, they encountered a Confederate force commanded by Colonel McIntosh and were repulsed. Falling back, the regulars recrossed Wilson Creek. When McIntosh's Confederates tried to follow the retreating bluecoats, the fire of Du Bois' battery and the sharpshooters of the 1st Iowa forced them to fall back in disorder.

<sup>77</sup> O. R., Series I, Vol. III, 66.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, 84. The 2d Kansas was probably stationed on the hill north of Cawthorn's abandoned encampment.

<sup>79</sup> Burke, *Military History of Kansas Regiments*, 3; Holcombe and Adams, *Battle of Wilson's Creek*, 96.

<sup>80</sup> O. R. Series I, Vol. III, 66; O. R. Series I, Vol. LIII, 423; Holcombe and Adams, *Battle of Wilson's Creek*, 33-34.

In the meantime, Colonel Sigel's column had routed Steen's mounted division from its encampments in the large fields north of Terrell Creek. As soon as the Rebel horsemen had scattered, Sigel pressed rapidly northward. After sweeping through Steen's encampments, Sigel's blueclads took up a strong position astride the Telegraph road near the Sharp house.

From this position, Sigel's battery opened fire on the rear of Price's troops, who were battling Lyon's troops on "Bloody Hill." So far, Sigel had taken a number of prisoners, and had blocked the Telegraph road. Many of his men, however, had fallen out of ranks and were busy plundering the Confederate encampments.

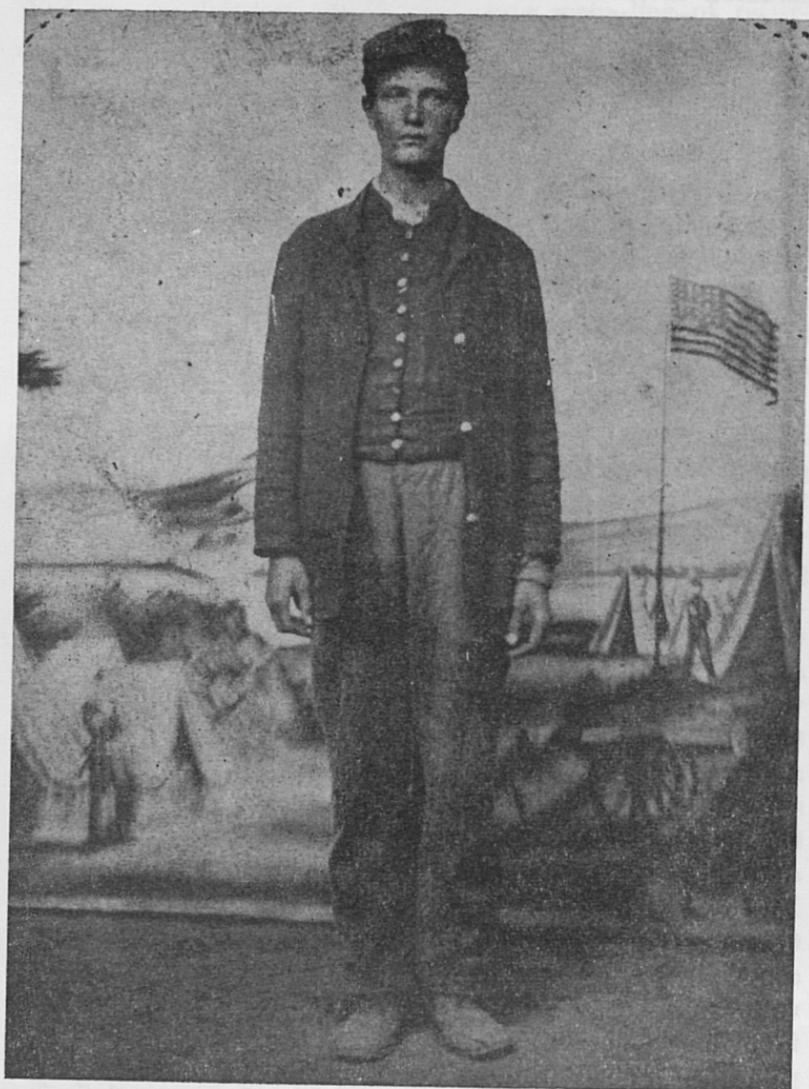
About this time, there was a lull in the firing on "Bloody Hill." A squad of unarmed Southerners came up the Telegraph road and were easily captured by Sigel's command. To Sigel, it looked as if the Confederates were about to give way. What Sigel did not know was that McCulloch was organizing a force with which to counterattack his brigade.

Suddenly, out of the dense smoke that clouded the Wilson Creek bottom, marched a column of gray-clad troops. Sigel and his men mistook the approaching force for the 1st Iowa, which wore gray uniforms. Unfortunately for the Federals, the newcomers belonged to a battalion of the crack 3d Louisiana. "I did not trust my own eyes," Sigel later wrote, "but sent Corporal Tod, of the 3d Missouri, forward to challenge them. He challenged as ordered, but was immediately shot and killed. I instantly ordered the artillery and infantry to fire. But it was too late—the artillery fired one or two shots, but the infantry, as though paralyzed, did not fire; the 3d Louisiana which we had mistaken for the gray-clad 1st Iowa, rushed up to the plateau, while Bledsoe's battery in front and Reid's from the heights on our right flank opened with canister at point-blank range against us."<sup>81</sup>

Sigel's men panicked and fled, those who escaped fleeing down the Telegraph road. During the retreat, Sigel lost all his guns except one, and most of his command.

\* \* \*

In the next issue of the ANNALS Dr. Bearss continues the narrative of the Battle of Wilson's Creek to its violent conclusion with the defeat and retreat of the Union forces to Springfield.



JOHN WESLEY RUMPEL  
"Veteran Volunteer"  
1844—1910

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