



Very truly yours,
Cyrus Bussey

HON. CYRUS BUSSEY.

State Senator, 1860; Colonel 3d Iowa cavalry, 1861; later, promoted to brigadier and
brevet major-general; Assistant Secretary of the Interior, 1889-93.

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3D SERIES.

THE BATTLE OF ATHENS, MISSOURI.

BY GEN. CYRUS BUSSEY.

The repulse of our forces at Bull Run aroused the whole secession element in Missouri, which organized into military companies for service in the Confederate Army. These companies in northeastern Missouri were under the command of Gen. Martin Green. These forces overran the country, driving Union men from their homes and causing terror among all loyal people.

After the close of the extra session of the Iowa legislature (May 15-29, 1861), in which I was a senator, elected as a Democrat, I was on the 11th of June, 1861, appointed by Governor Kirkwood aide-de-camp on his staff, with the rank of Lieutenant-Colonel of Cavalry, and authorized by the Governor to assume control over the militia organization in Southeastern Iowa.

I resided at Bloomfield, in Davis county, about twelve miles from the Missouri line. I went to work at once to prepare for the defence of the towns in the border counties of Iowa, visited Keosauqua, in Van Buren county, and Keokuk, and arranged for the organization of one Company of Mounted Riflemen in Lee, Van Buren and Davis counties. I had information that rebel forces in large numbers occupied every county seat in northeastern Missouri, and had reason to expect they would make a raid into Iowa, to steal horses and other supplies before going south to join the army under Gen. Sterling Price.

I reported to Gov. Kirkwood these facts, and asked that

arms be sent me. The Governor replied that he had not been able to secure any. I then telegraphed to Gen. Fremont, who had just arrived at St. Louis to command the Department of the Missouri, that a large force threatened northeastern Missouri and southeastern Iowa, and that I wanted arms and ammunition to arm Home Guards. He replied promptly that it was impossible to supply them.

About three hundred loyal men, under Col. David Moore, organized as Home Guards and established a camp at Athens, on the Des Moines river, twenty miles west of Keokuk. These forces were without arms, except shot guns and rifles sufficient to arm about one-third of their men. Col. Moore barricaded the streets of the town and adopted other measures of defence.

In connection with other business at Bloomfield I owned a pork house which gave employment to several men. One of these, a foreigner, I was sure I could trust, as he was in every way discreet, and I had abundant evidence of his loyalty. I sent him to Missouri with instructions to visit the various camps of the enemy, and learn if possible if they intended a raid into Iowa. I told him not to return until he could bring me reliable information.

I left Bloomfield for Keokuk, and on the 30th of July arrived in St. Louis. I went to Gen. Fremont's headquarters and after some delay was admitted to the General's room. I found him alone, standing by a large table on which was the U. S. map. I represented to him the presence of Green's forces in northeastern Missouri, near the Iowa line, and expressed my belief that they would make a raid into Iowa before going South, and that to defend ourselves we must have arms. He expressed regret that it was impossible to spare one gun. He said he had organized regiments ready for service but without guns to arm them.

I asked him to give me fifty thousand rounds of ammunition. He asked me what I would do with it without any arms. I told him I would feel safer with the ammunition.

He gave me an order on Capt. Callender in charge of the arsenal, who shipped the ammunition that night to Keokuk, where it was put into storage.

I informed Gen. Fremont that the 5th Iowa Infantry, Col. Worthington, and the 6th Iowa, Col. McDowell, were in rendezvous at Burlington, waiting arms and equipments, and that if moved to Keokuk their presence there would render our position perfectly safe. He at once gave me the following:

HEADQUARTERS WESTERN DEPARTMENT, }
ST. LOUIS, MO., JULY 30th, 1861. }

Col. Cyrus Bussey. SIR: You will order the 5th Iowa Regiment, Col. Worthington, and the 6th Iowa, Col. McDowell, to proceed immediately to Keokuk. Col. Worthington will take command, and immediately on his arrival at Keokuk will report to Brig. Gen. Pope, commanding North Missouri.

Respectfully, your obedient servant,

J. C. FREMONT,

Major General Commanding.

I immediately telegraphed this order to Col. Worthington and left that night for Keokuk, much pleased with the result of my day's work.

Immediately on the arrival of these troops at Keokuk they were ordered to St. Louis owing to the invasion of Missouri by a large force under Gen. Stirling Price.

During my several visits to Keokuk, Col. Moore sent his officers to me for arms and ammunition. I had a lot of powder which belonged to the State, a part of which with some lead I gave him, and promised to supply him with arms if I succeeded in procuring any.

On my arrival at Bloomfield on the 1st day of August, I heard reports that the rebel forces in the northern border counties were very active, and fears were expressed that they would come into our State. My messenger had not returned, causing me to feel that there was no immediate danger. That night, however, about eleven o'clock I was called up, and upon opening the door found the man I had sent to Missouri, who informed me that Gen. Martin Green, with a force of 1500 rebels—then shoeing their horses—would

start within two or three days to make an attack at some place in Iowa. He heard Keokuk talked about and believed that was their objective point. I arranged for a conveyance that night, and left Bloomfield the next morning at four o'clock, and rode thirty miles to Summit, where, at nine o'clock, I took a train for Keokuk, arriving there at noon. After notifying the railroad officials that their road and depots were in danger, I went to the office of Samuel F. Miller, late Justice of the United States Supreme Court, then a prominent lawyer, to confer with him about the defence of the city, and had been there but a short time, when John Givin, late general superintendent of the Iowa Division of the Rock Island railway, then ticket agent at Keokuk, came to me with a bill of lading for one thousand stand of arms and equipments, which had just arrived on a train from Burlington. These guns were shipped by the War Department at Washington, D. C., consigned to Council Bluffs, Iowa, via Hannibal, Missouri, to arm the 4th Iowa Infantry, commanded by Col. G. M. Dodge.

I at once decided to seize these arms, and use them to arm the people for their own protection. I realized the great responsibility I was about to assume. I knew very well that no representations I or any one else could make would bring an order to take them. I gave the railroad company written instructions to deliver the guns to me, and to hold a train in readiness to take me and the arms out on the road as soon as I could arrange to leave. The fifty thousand rounds of ammunition which I had secured from Gen. Fremont were of the same calibre as the guns, so that now I had guns and ammunition, and felt that I could place the people on the border in position to defend themselves.

The legislature at the extra session in May had authorized the organization of a regiment of cavalry for home guard duty in the southern border counties of the State. I had called into the service a company in Lee county under Capt. Hugh J. Sample, one in Van Buren county under

Capt. E. Mayne, and one in Davis county under Capt. H. H. Trimble.

I delivered one hundred guns and ammunition to Capt. Sample, to arm his company, and one hundred to Capt. W. W. Belknap, late secretary of war, then a lawyer at Keokuk. Capt. Belknap had a fine company which he had organized two or three years before. These men offered their services should occasion require. I left Keokuk the same afternoon with eight hundred guns. About two hundred of these went to arm Col. Moore's men at Athens. The parties receiving them were Capt. James S. Best and Lieut. W. F. Harl of Memphis, Missouri, who had a company of one hundred and thirty-five men at Athens. D. K. Turk took forty guns and Joseph Bayless and A. Anderson sixty guns, with ammunition. All these were for use at Athens. At Farmington, four miles beyond Athens, I left one hundred guns with Capt. O. H. P. Scott, and at Summit two hundred guns for Capt. Mayne's company, and for Henry C. Caldwell (now Judge of the United States Circuit Court) who was then a prominent lawyer at Keosauqua, to arm another company.

I arrived at Ottumwa about seven o'clock that night, with the remaining guns; hired wagons with which to haul them to Bloomfield; traveled all night and arrived there at daylight.

Arms were furnished to Capt. Trimble's company, and other companies were organized for temporary service, one of them by Mr. George Duffield.

Feeling that these forces would be able to protect the town, I left Bloomfield the next morning, the 4th of August, at four o'clock, for Summit, to take the train for Keokuk. When about half way to that point I met a messenger riding as fast as his horse could go to bring me the information that the rebels in large force had appeared before Athens. Col. Moore had been notified of the approach of the enemy by refugees, and was prepared to receive them.

He telegraphed to Keokuk for reinforcements, and sent messengers to Farmington and other points for aid.

On my arrival opposite Athens, before ten o'clock, heavy firing between Green's forces and Col. Moore's Home Guards was then going on. The enemy had completely surrounded the town and no doubt expected to compel the surrender without the sacrifice of many of their men.

A few minutes before my arrival, a special train arrived from Keokuk bringing several hundred men, including the companies of Cpts. Sample and Belknap, and companies of the 6th Iowa Infantry, who had not yet been able to get transportation to St. Louis.

These forces were forming in line when I made my appearance. Some of the men raised the question as to whether or not the Iowa militia had a right to cross the river into Missouri. Having the necessary authority from both the Governor of Iowa and Major General Fremont I ordered these forces and a detachment from Farmington to cross the river, then very low and fordable, and attack the enemy's right flank.

Without a moment's hesitation these companies moved forward, into the river and up the bank on the other side, sending a heavy fire into the ranks of the enemy. These reinforcements were evidently wholly unexpected. The effect was to completely demoralize the rebels, who rapidly retreated, leaving thirty-five or forty men killed and wounded.

Among those who came up from Keokuk to take part in the fight, was John W. Noble, a young lawyer of Keokuk, who shouldered a musket and was one of the first to cross the river, firing on the enemy as he went. He was slightly wounded in the engagement, but not disabled. He afterwards rendered distinguished service in my regiment, the 3d Iowa Cavalry, succeeding to the Colonelcy, and later became distinguished as Secretary of the Interior under the Harrison administration.

The rebels had artillery and fired several shots across the river, but none of their troops reached Iowa soil.

Colonel David Moore who commanded the Home Guards at Athens, proved himself a hero. With 300 men who had never been under fire, he held his position behind barricades in the streets of Athens, until reinforcements arrived.

I had spread the information at Keosauqua, Summit and other points, as I came through, that the enemy were at Athens, and in a few hours Captain Mayne with a large force from Keosauqua, Capt. O. H. P. Scott and others, with two or three hundred men from Farmington, arrived.

Colonel Moore was anxious to follow the enemy and proposed that if the Iowa companies would join his forces he would start next morning. I called our Iowa men together and found them willing and anxious to go. About 600 Iowa men with Colonel Moore's 300, left Athens early the next morning and drove the enemy under General Green across the Missouri river.

But for my action in providing ammunition, and seizing government arms, two-thirds of Colonel Moore's men would have been without arms. The 6th Iowa Infantry would not have been at Keokuk but for the fact that I had it sent there. The Keokuk companies would not have been armed, and there would have been no forces to go to Moore's relief. Under these circumstances Moore would have been compelled to retreat into Iowa or surrender. The enemy would have crossed the river, destroyed the railroad, and marched to Keokuk, where they could have robbed the banks, pillaged the town, and made their escape to Alexandria, five miles distant, where they would have been among friends.

I think I have shown that without my active co-operation as above stated there would have been no victory at Athens.

I had taken Colonel Dodge's guns and must make that fact known to the war department. Governor Kirkwood learned I had taken them before he learned the cause. He wrote me a letter disapproving of my action and directing me to send the guns forward to Council Bluffs. Judge Caleb Baldwin, aide-de-camp to the Governor, also heard of my theft

of the guns, and wrote me a sharp letter, in which he said that after the Governor and our Senators and Representatives in Congress had failed to get arms, he had advanced the money to pay Colonel Dodge's expenses to Washington, believing he would succeed in getting arms, which he did, and could not understand why I should seize them. Before I had time to answer this letter, I received another from Judge Baldwin, saying he had just seen Joseph Shepard, Supt. of the U. S. Express, who had informed him of the circumstances under which I had taken the guns, and that they had secured a Union victory at Athens, and that I had done what was right in the matter. Governor Kirkwood also wrote me approving my action.

I visited St. Louis on the 9th of August to report to General Fremont. On reaching his headquarters I was immediately admitted. I gave the General a full report of my movements and action since I had seen him ten days before, and my action in taking the arms, and the use made of them in the battle of Athens. I explained that the guns were widely scattered, and that it would be impossible to get them together until the country was more peaceful. I asked him to request the war department to duplicate Col. Dodge's requisition. General Fremont expressed himself greatly pleased with my action in everything I had done. He said he did not believe one man in a million, not in United States service, would have assumed the responsibility of taking government arms in transit on a railway train.

He said I ought to be in the United States service, that I had shown my fitness to command. He stated that he would communicate with the war department and requested me to return the next day, which I did, when he handed me an appointment as colonel, with authority to raise a regiment of cavalry.

On Colonel Moore's return to Athens, after his march after General Green's forces, he brought in about thirty prisoners, some of whom were prominent citizens of Alexan-

dria. Few, if any, of them were captured in arms. Some of these men appealed to General Fremont who referred the appeal to Brigadier General Pope, commanding North Missouri, who telegraphed me to go to Athens, investigate the charges against the prisoners, and send to St. Louis under guard any I might find against whom charges of treason could be sustained. I performed this duty, sending four of the prisoners to St. Louis in charge of Captain Charles C. Smith, 13th U. S. Infantry, who had just completed the muster in of my regiment, the 3d Iowa Cavalry. The other prisoners I discharged.

The following letters are a portion of those referred to by Gen. Bussey, in the foregoing article. One by Gov. Kirkwood has been lost. These, however, abundantly confirm the statements of Gen. Bussey in regard to what he calls "the theft" of Gen. Dodge's muskets, and his own action in the series of events which culminated in the battle of Athens.—EDITOR OF THE ANNALS.

FROM ADJUTANT GENERAL N. B. BAKER.

ADJUTANT GENERAL'S OFFICE, DAVENPORT, Aug. 19, 1861.

Col. Cyrus Bussey, Keokuk:

SIR: Your report of — inst. is received and I am obliged to you for so detailed a statement of events that have transpired in your vicinity. Your condition has been more critical than I supposed, and evidently required prompt and organized efforts to sustain the Union cause among your neighbors across the river.

I wish you would write to Col. Edwards and make everything satisfactory with him.

Truly yours,

N. B. BAKER, *Adj. General.*

FROM GOVERNOR S. J. KIRKWOOD.

EXECUTIVE OFFICE, IOWA, July 18, 1861.

Colonel Cyrus Bussey:

DEAR SIR: I have thus far failed to get money with which to purchase arms to arm the regiment of mounted riflemen authorized to be raised in the southern border counties of the State. Efforts are being made to procure arms which will be sent you for the regiment as soon as it is possible to get them, when the companies in your district will be ordered into camp for a short time for service or drill, unless the condition of affairs in your portion of the State is such as to obviate the necessity of incurring that

expense. Until arms can be had let your companies preserve their organization and hold themselves ready for service as soon as arms can be had.

Respectfully,

SAMUEL J. KIRKWOOD.

EXECUTIVE OFFICE, IOWA, July 27, 1861.

Col. Cyrus Bussey, Keokuk, Iowa:

SIR: I have just received and considered your communication of this date, setting forth the condition of affairs in the north-eastern counties of Missouri bordering on this State. You are authorized, for the protection of our citizens, and of loyal citizens of Missouri, to call into the service of the State three companies of the regiment of mounted men provided for by the laws of the extra session of the current year. You will arm them with such arms as you have and furnish them with ammunition. You will post them at such places as in your judgment are best adapted to secure the objects above indicated, and make such provision as you can for their subsistence. You will use these companies, or any of them, at your discretion to secure the above objects, not crossing the Missouri line unless absolutely necessary, but doing so without hesitation should such necessity exist. Report to me your action weekly and as much oftener as matters of importance occur.

Very respectfully,

SAMUEL J. KIRKWOOD.

EXECUTIVE OFFICE, IOWA, Aug. 2, 1861.

Col. Cyrus Bussey, Keokuk, Iowa:

DEAR SIR: I am compelled to be absent some two weeks at Washington City, looking after the clothing and equipment of the new regiments raised and being raised in this State for U. S. service, and also to procure, if possible, a further supply of arms for the use of the State. In the meantime you must exercise your discretion as to the means necessary for the safety of the frontier under your care. The first object, and one that *must* be attained at all hazards, and at every sacrifice, is to secure the lives and property of our people. You have my full authority to adopt such measures as you may deem essential to that end. Report promptly to the Adjutant General what you may find it necessary to do. If I succeed in procuring arms and ammunition I hope to place the border in a more efficient state of defense.

Very respectfully,

SAMUEL J. KIRKWOOD.

EXECUTIVE OFFICE, IOWA, IOWA CITY, August 3d, 1861.

Col. Cyrus Bussey, Keokuk, Iowa:

DEAR SIR: Dr. Bowen* has just returned and to my surprise I learn that you understood me as giving over to you the 1000 stand of arms in Keokuk for Council Bluffs, to arm the three mounted companies you are authorized to call out, and to distribute otherwise as in your judgment

*Dr. Jesse Bowen, of Johnson county, Adjutant General of Iowa, from January 18, 1858, to July 25, 1861, when he was succeeded by Nathaniel B. Baker.

might be proper. This is an entire misapprehension. I have not any control over these muskets. They were and are needed at Council Bluffs. Col. Dodge is, as I learn, on the border with 200 men and needs more arms. I supposed you would arm the three companies with the arms before given you and had no expectation you would interfere with the 1000. There must be enough arms sent to Council Bluffs to arm Dodge's regiment. He has 200 now and 800 more will do, and these must be sent, as I cannot answer to the General Government for taking the arms ordered by them for their own troops and using them for the State troops. Send on to Eddyville and thence by Western Stage Co. to Council Bluffs, 800 guns and accoutrements. Since above was written I find the expense across the State enormous. Send by Hannibal and St. Jo. R. R.

Respectfully yours,

SAMUEL J. KIRKWOOD.

FROM HON. CALEB BALDWIN,* AIDE TO GOV. KIRKWOOD.

COUNCIL BLUFFS, IOWA, Aug. 10th, 1861.

Col. C. Bussey:

DEAR SIR: Colonel Dodge left today with eight companies of his command for St. Louis under orders from General Fremont. He requested me to answer his letters.

The arms shipped to Col. Dodge were obtained by him from the War Department with the express understanding that his regiment should have 1000 for drill purposes, and after he was ordered away to be distributed on the western border of the State. This was also the understanding of Governor Kirkwood, and of the Adjt. General of the State as signified by the letters to me. During the session of the Legislature I felt the necessity for arms for this side of the State, and Senator Grimes and Col. Curtis both having failed to obtain any, I knew that Col. Dodge would never give it up until he got them. I therefore obtained the order of the Governor to send him to Washington for this purpose. I had, however, to send him there upon means advanced by me for this purpose. I think the arms were needed here. Our own citizens are almost daily being shot down while at work in their fields by the Indians in the northwest, and the troubles are daily increasing, so much so that by fall all the northwest settlements will be abandoned. If the people were well armed they could defend themselves. All of the troops from the forts are being called away and our whole frontier left exposed. South of Fremont, Taylor and Page counties, the rebels are in numbers, assembling in as large bodies as you speak of south of you, and not only driving out union men from Mo., but intimidating the people of Iowa. All these counties are destitute of arms, and these arms you have detained for the protection of the loyal people of Missouri were designed for the protection of the loyal people of Iowa, and

*Judge of the Supreme Court of Iowa, Jan., 1860, to Jan. 1, 1864.

should have come through as directed. These arms were obtained for the State, and I do not suppose that General Fremont would have interfered with them had he known the facts as they exist.

Respectfully,

C. BALDWIN.

COUNCIL BLUFFS, IOWA, Aug. 12, 1861.

Col. C. Bussey:

DEAR SIR: I have today through Mr. Shepard, the Express agent, learned the circumstances under which the guns to Colonel Dodge were taken.

This fully explains your course and under the circumstances I think you did just what you should have done. We have just such troubles both north and south of us and you certainly must know my anxiety to see our people have some arms. Not being acquainted with all the circumstances under which you acted caused me to write as I did. We need arms very much and if you can be instrumental in having those replaced that were intended for us we will feel very grateful for such a favor.

Respectfully,

C. BALDWIN.

THE GOVERNOR.—His Excellency, Governor Lucas, arrived in this place on Saturday evening last, accompanied by two respectable and intelligent young gentlemen from Cincinnati. His Excellency was on his way from Du Buque to the lower part of the Territory. While here, he received the polite attention of the citizens generally, and during his stay, made a visit to Stephenson and Rock Island. We are not aware that his Excellency made any remarks, indicating his intention, as to the place at which the legislature would be convened, nor do we know that he was pestered with any vexatious enquiries on that subject. For our own part we still believe he will assemble the representatives of the people at this place, and this belief is founded on the manifest justice and propriety of the measure itself. His Excellency departed on Tuesday morning, taking in his route, Rockingham, Buffalo, Bloomington, &c.—*The Iowa (Davenport) Sun, Sept. 1, 1838.*

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