

Action in the West and the Confederate Congress Meets

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In the first full week of 1863, military operations took place in both Missouri and Arkansas, while the Confederate Congress met again in Richmond. In late December 1862, Union General James G. Blunt was advancing against Confederate forces in northwest Arkansas. To reduce the pressure on Confederate troops and push back the Union forces, Confederate Brigadier General John Marmaduke received orders to mount a raid into southern Missouri. Marmaduke split his forces into two columns. One under his command would capture Springfield and the other under Colonel Joseph C. Porter would occupy Hartville.

On January 7, Marmaduke's troops captured Ozark, Missouri and headed toward Springfield. The Confederate assault began around 1:00 p.m. on January 8. They probed along the Union line with little success, and Marmaduke withdrew the following day. Colonel Porter's forces, meanwhile, had captured Hartville on January 9. A Federal relief expedition reached the town the following day, and on January 11 there was additional fighting there, with the Confederates attacking the Federals and forcing a portion to retreat. The Twenty-first Iowa held its position, however, inflicting heavy casualties on the rebels, including a mortal wound to Colonel Porter. In the aftermath of the fighting, Marmaduke withdrew back into Arkansas. His raid had forced the Federals to abandon several positions, but he had failed to capture his main objective of Springfield.

In late 1862, Confederate forces had established Arkansas Post, or Fort Hindman on the Arkansas River about 100 miles north of Vicksburg, Mississippi. The fort disrupted Federal river commerce, and in early January 1863 a combined Union army-navy expedition was sent to capture the position. Admiral David Dixon Porter's Federal gunboats began to bombard Fort Hindman on January 11, 1863, while army forces under Major General John A. McClernand

attacked the post by land. The Confederates under General Thomas Churchill, though heavily outnumbered and cut off from escape, inflicted heavy casualties on the Federals before being forced to surrender. Union losses totaled more than 1,000 killed, wounded, and missing, but nearly 5,000 Confederates had surrendered, along with large amounts of weapons and equipment. The fort's capture allowed Union forces to focus their attention next on the Confederate position at Vicksburg.

While these operations took place in the west, far to the east the First Confederate Congress met for its third session in Richmond on January 12. President Jefferson Davis delivered an optimistic message on the Confederacy's military situation. He noted the Confederate successes in stopping Federal forces at Vicksburg and in Virginia and Tennessee. Davis expressed as well continued hope in gaining foreign recognition from France and England. The message also included a discussion of financial legislation, the revision of draft laws in regards to exemptions, and a proposal to assist Southern civilians with claims for property damage resulting from the war. As might be expected, Davis also discussed the recent Emancipation Proclamation issued by President Lincoln. He stated that as a result of the measure "several millions of human beings of an inferior race, peaceful, and contented laborers in their sphere, are doomed to extinction, while at the same time they are encouraged to a general assassination of their masters." He called the document "the most execrable measure recorded in the history of guilty man" and warned ominously that United States officers captured in southern states while attempting to enforce the proclamation would be "dealt with in accordance with the laws of those States providing for the punishment of criminals engaged in exciting servile insurrection."

