

British Neutrality and Presidential Order 252

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Tuesday July 28th, 1863, President Davis wrote Gen. Lee at Culpeper “that efforts were being made to send him reinforcements and that the Administration was trying to eradicate other such problems as lack of horseshoes.” In making a note of the difficulties faced on the different fronts the President states “I have felt more than ever before the want of your advice during the recent period of disaster.”

The following day Wednesday July 29th, 1863, saw several major military moves with heavy skirmishes at Bridgeport Alabama, which was occupied by Federals at Fort Donelson in Tennessee, and at Paris, Kentucky. At the same time Queen Victoria went before Parliament and said “she saw no reason to depart from the strict neutrality which Her Majesty has observed from the beginning of this contest.” The queen held fast to the policy of nonrecognition of the Confederacy and The British would remain strictly neutral throughout the war.

The following day Thursday July 30th, 1863, Lincoln issued President’s Order No. 252. “The Government of the United States will give the same protection to all its soldiers, and if the enemy shall sell or enslave any one because of his color, the offense shall be punished by retaliation upon the enemy’s prisoners in our possession. It is therefore ordered, that for every soldier of the United States killed in violation of the law, a Rebel soldier shall be executed, and for every one enslaved by the enemy or sold into slavery, a Rebel soldier shall be placed at hard labor on the public works, and continued at such labor until the other shall be released and receive the treatment due to a prisoner of war.” This order was his response to the maltreatment of captured soldiers and the Confederate practice of “treating captured black Union servicemen

more harshly than their white comrades, even to the extent of enslaving them.” Because of the Confederacy’s refusal to acknowledge captured black soldiers as legitimate prisoners of war, prisoner-of-war exchanges between the Union and Confederate forces were halted in the summer of 1863.

The beginning of August was a time for assessing damage and regrouping and was welcomed by both sides. The North seemed very optimistic now that they had control of the Mississippi Valley and Lee resting and refitting his battered army somewhere deep in Virginia. Both sides, Union and Confederate wondered if their armies could mount an offensive in Virginia after the Union victory at the Battle of Gettysburg and, if so, where would it be.

Saturday August 2nd, 1863, President Davis declared “that all soldiers absent without leave and those who had not reported for service would be granted pardon and amnesty if they reported within twenty days.” He called on the soldiers by saying their only alternatives to victory were subjugation, slavery and utter ruin if they did not fight. The Confederate Army was being forced to stretch thinner and thinner. The week of July 28 to August 3, 1863, saw Southern forces skirmishing at far flung points: Marshall and High Grove in Missouri; Stony Lake in Dakota Territory; Richmond, Kentucky; Fayetteville, West Virginia; Fairfax Court House and Aldie, Virginia; and Bridgeport, Alabama. Such a wide front could not be long maintained by the South.