

## **Missouri Erupts in Violence**

**<http://civilwar150.longwood.edu>**

In late April 1861, a group of about 200 Confederate sympathizers broke into the US Arsenal at Liberty, Missouri and captured over 1,000 muskets and rifles, several field artillery pieces and ammunition. Union supporters feared that Confederates would move next to take over the much larger St. Louis Arsenal. Nathaniel Lyon, in command of Company D of the U.S. 2<sup>nd</sup> Infantry in St. Louis, was determined to prevent such a capture from happening. Lyon was well experienced with violent suppression of insurrection, having been involved in a well known massacre of Native Americans and in the events of Bloody Kansas in the 1850s. In January 1861, Lyon had stated that regarding secession “It is no longer useful to appeal to reason, but to the sword.”

Lyon was an ardent Republican and had been involved with the Wide Awakes, a paramilitary organization associated with the party. Lyon assumed command of the St. Louis Arsenal, armed the Wide Awakes with some of the weapons therein and moved most of the rest to a safer location in Illinois.

The Governor of Missouri, Claiborne Jackson, was a secessionist supporter and like Governor Magoffin of Kentucky refused to supply Lincoln any troops for what he called Lincoln’s “unholy crusade.” Instead, in early May he ordered the state militia to assemble outside of St. Louis for training. The site of the training was informally dubbed Camp Jackson by the militiamen. Jackson appointed pro-Secessionists to command the militia units and on May 9 a steamer delivered to the camp five hundred muskets and four pieces of artillery. The

arms had been captured at the U.S. Arsenal at Baton Rouge, Louisiana and delivered by Confederate President Jefferson Davis at Jackson's request.

When Lyon became aware of the militia being armed by the Confederates, he marched his own militia, consisting largely of Wide Awakes and German immigrants to Fort Jackson. Lyon's 6,000 men surrounded the camp on May 10 and forced the surrender of the 669 Missouri militia men there. When the captured men refused to take an oath of allegiance to the U.S. government, Lyon decided the next day to march them through the streets of St. Louis before providing them with paroles and ordering their dispersal.

As they entered the city, the prisoners marched between two rows of German immigrants guarding them. The humiliation of the captured men combined with hatred by many residents of the city toward the Germans led to vicious taunting of Lyon's men as the march continued. At some point, the altercation led to violence, possibly triggered by a shot from the crowd. The Germans fired into the crowd, killing 28 civilians and wounding more than 50 others. Seven of Lyon's men died in the incident. Rioting and anti-German sentiment continued in St. Louis continued for several days until the addition of more Federal troops and the installation of martial law brought things to a tense pause. The events brought the division of Missouri starkly into the national spotlight.

Two days later, Union forces under Ben Butler entered Baltimore and put that city under Union control. The riots there on April 19 had left Lincoln quite worried and he certainly did not want anything on the scale of what had happened in St. Louis to happen in Baltimore. So, by mid-May the border states of Missouri and Maryland had reached a state of uneasy truce between Southern sympathizers and Union troops occupying key cities.

