

Missouri Heats Up

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Following the St. Louis riots of May 1861, Missouri's Governor Claiborne Jackson, a strong Confederate supporter, appointed Sterling Price to head the Missouri State Guard and resist Federal efforts to control the state. Price, a native of Prince Edward County, Virginia, was an experienced Mexican War veteran and former governor of Missouri. While Price was initially not in favor of secession, he was furious with Nathaniel Lyon's treatment of the state Militia and pledged his loyalty to Jackson and the Confederates.

On May 12, Price had met with Major General William Harney of the U.S. Army to sign what was called the Price-Harney Truce. Harney had been away during the time of the St. Louis riots and resumed his command from Lyon upon his return. The Price-Harney truce essentially called for U.S. troops to control St. Louis and for state militia to control the rest of the state.

The truce was met with derision in the North and a number of influential politicians and citizens called for Lincoln to replace Harney with the more ardent abolitionist Lyon. Under this pressure and upon hearing news of Governor Jackson continuing to work with the Confederate government, Lincoln replaced Harney with Lyon on May 30 and promoted Lyon to Brigadier General and Commander of the U.S. Western District.

Two weeks later, Jackson and Price met with Lyon to negotiate a continued stalemate across the state, but Lyon would have none of it. He refused to agree to any restrictions on the domain or actions of his forces and angrily ended the meeting. Jackson and Price then moved their base of operations from Jefferson City to the southwest corner of the state. Lyon slowly

followed and pestered the retreating militiamen, with a significant skirmish at Boonville on June 17.

As they retreated toward the Southwest, Jackson and Price picked up volunteers and by early July their force had grown to about 6,000 men. Mainly concerned about Lyon's Union forces behind them, Jackson soon realized that another smaller Union force under Colonel Franz Sigel was in front of him in the vicinity of Carthage. Jackson and Price organized their men in line of battle to await Sigel's attack. Although relatively large in number, this pro-Confederate army was inexperienced and ill equipped. Most of the men were in civilian clothes and armed with hunting rifles, shotguns, pistols and knives. Some of the men had no weapons at all.

Sigel began the battle about 10 miles south of Carthage with an artillery barrage. This forced Jackson's men back a bit, but they held fast. A large group of Jackson's men, many without weapons, began swarming in the woods near Sigel's left flank. Sigel, an experienced soldier, did not realize that he was facing such a rag tag force, and feared that these men were preparing to turn his flank. Sigel called for retreat and his men marched back to Carthage. Jackson's men kept up the pursuit until nightfall, but Sigel kept up a disciplined protective rearguard action and the action ended. Reported losses during the battle were 13 killed and 31 wounded for the Union and between 40 to 50 killed and 120 wounded for the Confederates. The battle marked the first and only time a sitting governor led his troops in battle.

After the battle, Sigel moved his forces to Springfield to join up with Lyon's men and Price and Jackson regrouped south of Carthage to await further events. Although of little military significance, the Battle of Carthage raised the spirits of pro-Southern supporters in Missouri.

