

Generals in the West, Confederate Congress Meets **<http://civilwar150.longwood.edu>**

While no major military engagements occurred during mid-November 1861, several significant diplomatic, political, and military-related events did take place. The saga of Confederate diplomats John Slidell and James Mason continued. Captured aboard the British ship *Trent* while enroute to Europe, the two diplomats stopped briefly at Union-occupied Fort Monroe in Virginia, before being taken on to Fort Warren in Boston harbor. Their capture infuriated the British, and might have led to war with the United States, until President Lincoln ordered their release in late December.

In the war's western theater, Union general Don Carlos Buell took command of the Department of the Ohio. An 1841 graduate of West Point, Buell had fought in the Second Seminole and Mexican Wars and in 1860 he was sent on a secret mission to determine secessionist sentiment in Charleston, South Carolina. When the war began Buell was stationed in California, though by the summer of 1861 he received a promotion to brigadier general and returned to the east. He served in George McClellan's Army of the Potomac in the fall of 1861, but in November McClellan selected Buell to replace William Sherman in the old Department of the Cumberland, now renamed the Department of the Ohio. Early the next year, in the aftermath of Ulysses S. Grant's victories at Forts Henry and Donelson, Buell would occupy Nashville, Tennessee and then play a prominent role in the battle of Shiloh. After an unsuccessful movement against Chattanooga, Buell's army raced northward to repel a Confederate invasion of Kentucky. Though the southern advance was stopped at the battle of Perryville, Buell was criticized for his slow pursuit and an overall lack of an aggressive outlook and was relieved from

command. The general once referred to as “the most promising of all,” would play no further role in the war.

Another prominent appointment in the western theater was General Henry Halleck’s promotion to command the Department of the Missouri, replacing the outgoing John C. Fremont. Like most high level Union officers, the New York-born Halleck had graduated from West Point. He saw some action in the Mexican War, but developed a reputation primarily for his administrative abilities. Halleck resigned his commission in 1854 and became a wealthy lawyer and railroad president. He rejoined the army when the war began, and because of his prewar reputation and the support of Winfield Scott, became a major general. Halleck served for a time in Washington before being selected for the difficult assignment in Missouri. Once again showing his superb administrative abilities, Halleck competently organized Union forces in the state, and helped secure Missouri for the north. His command was subsequently enlarged and renamed the Department of the Mississippi, and he directed offensive operations in Tennessee and Mississippi during the first half of 1862. Halleck eventually was appointed general-in-chief of all Union armies, but proved passive and uninspiring in that role. When replaced by Grant in early 1864, Halleck happily reverted to the administrative position of chief of staff.

The meeting of the Confederate Congress in Richmond represented the other major event of the week. The body that met there was still known as the Provisional Confederate Congress. Established in Montgomery in early 1861, its members had been chosen by the state governments and not by popular vote. They spent the early months of their existence drafting a permanent constitution, adopting a legal code, and organizing a governmental bureaucracy. The provisional congress moved to Richmond following Virginia’s secession, holding its first session there in July 1861. It met again in November, the same month that elections were held for the

permanent congress, which officially replaced the provisional congress in February 1862. While no formal political parties existed in the Confederacy, there were pro- and anti-administration factions, with issues such as conscription, impressment, taxation, and suspension of the writ of habeas corpus remaining divisive.