

SERIES 2, VOLUME 6

VOLUME OVERVIEW

In the previous volume (Vol. 5, Part 2 of this series), it is mentioned that Col. Frank P. Blair, Jr. transmitted charges and specifications to the commanding general of the U.S. Army, Lt. Gen. Winfield Scott, against Maj. Gen. John C. Fremont. Those charges are found in this volume (Vol. 6), accusing the general of “neglect of duty..., gross extravagance, waste, mismanagement, and misapplication of the public moneys.”¹ Also included are Fremont’s charges and specifications against Blair, whom he accuses of “conduct unbecoming of an officer and a gentleman,”² and whose actions, he contends, have caused President Lincoln to doubt the general and impaired the actions of the military department.

Also in the previous volume, Fremont had informed Lt. Gen. Scott that he had decided to take the field himself. During the first week of October, he begins preparations to move upon the enemy, and asks Sec. of War Simon Cameron for permission to keep Gen. Justus McKinstry for a few days as the head of a division.

The rebels destroy the bridge at Big River, and Asst. Adj. Gen. Capt. Chauncey McKeever sends the 8th Wisconsin to drive them out and repair the bridge. Gen. Ulysses S. Grant instructs Col. Richard J. Oglesby to intercept Rebel (MSG) Gen. M. Jefferson Thompson as he moves on Charleston. In his report regarding this expedition, Oglesby expresses the belief that the enemy has fallen back on New Madrid. Grant then orders Oglesby back to Bird’s Point to take command until further orders. He concentrates forces at both Bird’s Point, Missouri and Fort Holt, Kentucky.

Fremont directs Maj. Gen. David Hunter to move to Little Monica, on the Pacific Railroad, but on the next day, Hunter responds that he received the orders to march too late, and he does not have enough mules to send the wagons requested. He protests that Col. John D. Stevenson is to be attached to Col. James Totten’s brigade, leaving him with only one regiment. A week later, having received orders to move, Hunter explains he could not oblige due to a lack of supplies, clothing, tents, wagons, and ambulances, unshod mules, and the absence of over half the division, which had not yet reported.

Gen. Samuel D. Sturgis questions an order from Fremont and asks Gen. James H. Lane for his opinion on whether he should go to Leavenworth, as ordered, and join with troops there, afterwards joining Gen. John Pope and destroying all the government stores if he is unable to transport them. Lane suggests it would appear as though the army is retreating from an already retreating enemy and asks to see Sturgis before the latter acts on Fremont’s instructions. On further consideration, Lane believes that Fremont was misinformed about the enemy’s movements. He stresses the need of a meeting with Sturgis and contends that Fort Leavenworth and Kansas must be defended at or near Kansas City. Fremont orders Gens. Lane and Sturgis to move towards Warsaw, where they will join him.

Gen. Lane gives President Lincoln an ultimatum, complaining that Kansas Gov. Charles Robinson has thwarted his every move as he was enlisting and organizing the Kansas Brigade. He asks Lincoln to establish a new military department including Kansas, the Indian Territory and parts of Arkansas, and place him in command of the department. If, however, this cannot be done, he will leave the field completely. (A new Department of Kansas is created in November, but Lane is not put in command.)

Gen. Grant informs Fremont that Cape Girardeau is well fortified, but the Home Guard are not reliable, and the town is only in danger from Rebel (MSG) M. Jefferson Thompson and his second in command, Rebel (MSG) Col. Aden B. Lowe. Later, he informs Fremont that Thompson has moved west, and no forces are threatening Cape Girardeau. There is word about an upcoming attack on Paducah, but Grant does not believe it will occur anytime soon. He recommends that huts be built for the winter and that coal barges are purchased for housing troops. Fremont asks Grant to send a large force from Cape Girardeau to cut off Thompson’s retreat into Arkansas. Grant then sends Col. Joseph B. Plummer to take his men and the additional regiments Grant is sending him, to cut off Thompson’s retreat.

¹ See (FLP: Ser 2PS-Oct#4).

² See (FLP: Ser 2PS-Oct#3).

A common theme in this volume is the discussion over whether Fremont is to be retained as commander of the Western Department or relieved of his duties. President Lincoln writes to Gen. Samuel R. Curtis, asking him to inform the secretary of war of his views on this very subject, and Curtis responds that Fremont lacks the experience necessary to his command, but also notes that public opinion matters, and there are those who believe the controversy is a personal one between Col. Blair and the general. In a later correspondence, he complains that Fremont's orders are draining the forces in the northern and eastern parts of Missouri, being sent where they are not needed and divided into smaller forces which are scattered with no support. He notes that he cannot pursue Rebel (MSG) Gen. Thompson, who is just fifty miles south of him, due to a lack of cavalry to spare. Another officer under Fremont's command, Maj. Gen. Hunter, sent to Missouri allegedly to assist the commanding general, described Fremont as unfit for his position. Some prominent men, such as John How, the former St. Louis mayor (and a friend of Frank Blair, Jr.), advise in favor of relieving Fremont. On the other hand, the influential lawyer and former lieutenant governor of Illinois, Col. Gustave Koerner, advises the president that to remove Fremont would be suicidal, and likewise, Iowa Gov. Samuel J. Kirkwood advises Lincoln that to remove Fremont now would be disastrous. U.S. Sen. Timothy O. Howe warns Sec. of State William H. Seward that if Fremont is removed from command, the public should be given "substantial reasons" for the decision.³ The *Missouri Republican* blames political differences and the Blair family's political influence as the cause of Fremont's "annoyances." Provisional Gov. Hamilton R. Gamble interviews Fremont, providing the details in a letter to Charles Gibson, the solicitor of the court of claims, representing the state government of Missouri in Washington.⁴ Adjutant Gen. Lorenzo Thomas submits a full report⁵ on the Western Department, attempting to prove mismanagement under Fremont. Lt. Gen. Scott orders the general to Washington and Hunter to temporarily relieve him of his command.

Sec. of War Cameron meets with Fremont at Tipton to relieve him of duty. However, he agrees to Fremont's request to allow him time to obtain his goal to reach and pursue the enemy but only such time until his return to Washington. Cameron informs Fremont that the Department's debts will remain unpaid until properly examined and settled by the president, and no payments will be made to officers whose appointments were not approved by the president. He also halts all construction of fieldworks in St. Louis and Jefferson City. In a letter from Fremont to his wife, he asserts that these bureaucratic decisions are to discredit him. Also notable is the fact that during this time, as presented in this volume, President Lincoln did not respond to any of Fremont's letters, nor to those from Jessie Fremont, who attempted to help her husband out.

Two communications from President Lincoln, to be delivered separately to Fremont and Hunter are entrusted with Gen. Curtis, who hands them over to messengers, with a stipulation that the letters not be delivered if Fremont has won a battle, is fighting a battle, or is in the presence of the enemy in expectation of a battle. Meanwhile, Fremont sends orders to Maj. Gen. Hunter and Gens. Pope, McKinstry, Sturgis, and Lane to hasten their march to meet him, as he has learned the enemy is only a day's march away. (Fremont would receive his final orders on November 2, at which time he would relinquish command of the Western Department to Hunter.)

The Quartermaster's Department is also under investigation, and since Gen. Justus McKinstry is out in the field, Chief Clark Clements deals with the Investigation Committee and protests any secret investigations against McKinstry, demanding the former chief quartermaster be treated fairly and openly.

This volume covers the Action at Wet Glaze, the Skirmish at Underwood's Farm, the Affair at Linn Creek, the Battle of Fredericktown, and Zagonyi's Charge at Springfield (a.k.a. the First Battle of Springfield). Each of these battles have their own special section, which summarizes the event and provides a list of pertinent documents.

³ See (FLP: Ser 2PS-Oct#27).

⁴ See (FLP: Ser 2PS-Oct-Annex-2).

⁵ See (FLP: Ser 2PS-Oct-Annex-10).

