

Volume 2

September 2026

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Fry's Lyon Foundation, Inc., is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit foundation with elements focused on educating the public on the role Missouri played in the American Civil War; the first is the *Missouri Civil War Passport Book*, second is the *1861 Missouri Speaks Collection*; and third is a companion website, 1861MissouriSpeaks.com.



A Look Back—September 1861

By September 1861, Missouri was no longer debating whether it could avoid the Civil War—the war had spread across the state. Maj. Gen. John C. Fremont's Union forces were attempting to secure Missouri on several fronts while confronting Sterling Price's Missouri State Guard in the west and central regions, rebel activity in northern Missouri, and Confederate threats along the Mississippi River. Railroads and bridges were attacked, communities changed hands, and Union commanders repeatedly called for additional troops, arms, equipment, and supplies. The month's defining struggle came at Lexington, where Price's forces besieged Col. James A. Mulligan's Union garrison beginning September 13. Despite repeated efforts to send reinforcements, Mulligan surrendered on September 20, handing the Union a major setback in western Missouri. At the same time, violence along the Missouri-Kansas border intensified, culminating in the sacking and burning of Osceola by Gen. James H. Lane's Kansas troops on September 23. Beyond the battlefield, Fremont faced growing pressure from Washington: President Lincoln revoked the portion of his August 30 martial-law proclamation concerning the confiscation of slaves, while administration officials debated removing him from command. By month's end, Missouri was deeply divided and increasingly militarized, with armies, guerrillas, political rivalries, and competing claims of authority, making September 1861 one of the most unsettled months of the war in the state.

Do you know someone who would be interested in receiving this newsletter? Please email requests to 1861MissouriSpeaks@gmail.com.

Watch for future issues, where we will continue to highlight Missouri Civil War Round Tables and Reenactors' Associations. If you would like your group included, please send information to 1861MissouriSpeaks@gmail.com.

Fry's Lyon Foundation Donations

We donated complete sets of Series 1 and Series 2 to the Hulston Library at Wilson's Creek National Battlefield during the 165th anniversary commemoration of the Battle of Wilson's Creek on August 10.



Fry's Lyon Foundation President Jackie Worth hands over the first of 22 volumes to Wilson's Creek National Battlefield Museum Curator Jeffrey Patrick.

A New Direction for the 1861 Missouri Speaks Collection

Fry's Lyon Foundation, Inc. has decided to pause publication of the *1861 Missouri Speaks Collection*. The volumes currently available through Amazon will be withdrawn, and no additional volumes will be released at this time.

During this pause, we will evaluate how artificial intelligence may affect the collection and explore alternatives to traditional book publishing. We will consider new ways to make these primary-source materials accessible while protecting the integrity of the collection and the many years of research, transcription, editing, mapping, and indexing behind it. We will also investigate how AI-assisted tools might help identify errors and inconsistencies throughout the work.

We remain committed to improving this project and finding the best way to make this important historical material available for future research. We are deeply grateful to the libraries, historians, organizations, and readers who have welcomed the collection. Additional information will be shared as plans develop.

Resource Spotlight: CWRT Congress



The CWRT Congress is a nonprofit organization dedicated to strengthening Civil War Round Tables through education, networking, and organizational support. Its website, cwrtingress.org, provides valuable resources for Civil War enthusiasts, researchers, speakers, educators, and Round Table leaders.

Among its most useful features is the **CWRT Locator 2.0**, a searchable directory of Civil War Round Tables with meeting locations, schedules, websites, and social media links.

Resource Spotlight: CWRT Congress, continued

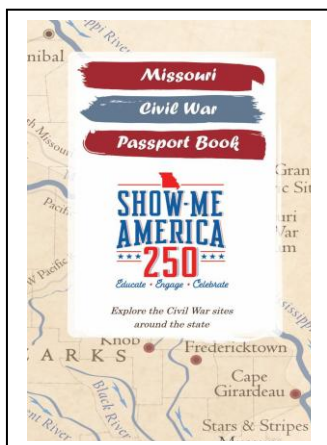
The **Speaker Registry** connects organizations with recommended presenters covering subjects ranging from military campaigns and politics to civilian life and social history.

Visitors can also explore **Civil War Fridays**, an ongoing series of online presentations by historians and authors, and *The Light Post*, the organization's periodical featuring news and information from the Round Table community.

For those who lead—or hope to establish—a Round Table, the website offers an **Online Classroom**, guidance for **Starting a CWRT**, a **Sustainability Challenge**, and an extensive collection of **Proven Practices**. Topics include programming, membership, newsletters, fundraising, preservation, organized tours, hybrid meetings, speaker arrangements, and nonprofit administration. The Congress also sponsors grants and awards supporting historical research, marketing, and fundraising projects.

Whether you are looking for a local group, a knowledgeable speaker, an educational program, or practical organizational guidance, the CWRT Congress website is an excellent gateway to the broader Civil War community.

Passport Program News



Congratulations to Viola Riggs (age 7) and Josilynn Schwartz (age 4), the 19th and 20th Passport Program finishers! They are also the first to complete the Bonus Sites addition to the program! Viola and Josilynn are pictured here with their MeMaw, Sheila.

Each girl will receive a certificate of completion signed by Lt. Governor Wasinger, plus a large antique-style map of all the passport sites for visiting the bonus sites. The certificate and map are pictured on the next page.



Passport Program News, continued



Featured Article

Each issue of our newsletter going forward will feature an article, historical document, or map selected from the Foundation's websites, books, or Facebook pages.

This month's featured article tells the remarkable story of Robert S. Garnett and Nathaniel Lyon—the first Confederate and Union generals killed in battle during the Civil War. West Point classmates who ultimately chose opposite sides, their lives and deaths shared a surprising number of parallels and coincidences.

The complete article, "The First to Fall," appears at the end of this newsletter, beginning on Page 12.

Calendar of Events in Missouri and Surrounding States: September 19 through December 31, 2026



For event accuracy and registration requirements, click on the link provided for information on each event.

Sept. 19: Reenactment of 1856 Bleeding Kansas fight, John Brown Memorial Park and Museum, US-169, Osawatomie, KS.

<https://mcwra.org/schedule>.

Sept. 19: Civil War, Collector Arms, and Military Show and Sale, Sat. 9 a.m.-4:00 p.m., DuPage County Fairgrounds, 2015 W. Manchester Rd., Wheaton, IL.

<https://chicagocivilwarshow.com/event/>

Sept. 20: Archer Alexander Memorial Commemoration: Day of Freedom service, 1:00 p.m., St. Peter's UCC Cemetery, 2101 Lucas and Hunt Drive, St. Louis.

<https://archeralexander.blog/2026/08/24/archer-alexander-memorial-7/>

Sept. 21: Appomattox: the Last 48 Hours: Living History Presentation Portraying Grant & Lee," by Dr. Curt Fields & Thomas Jessee, 5:30 p.m.-7:00 p.m. social & dinner, 7:00 p.m. presentation, The Signature Club of Lansdowne, 3256 Lansdowne Dr., Lexington, KY. <https://kycivilwarroundable.org>

Sept. 23: "A Thousand May Fall: An Immigrant Regiment's Civil War," by Brian Matthew Jordan, Civil War Round Table, Affton Elks Lodge, 6330 Heege Rd., St. Louis,

<https://civilwarstlmo.org>

Sept. 23: "Orlando Metcalfe Poe, Engineer Extraordinaire," by Steve Guenzel, 7:00 p.m., CWRT of Nebraska, Legacy Estates, 7200 Van Dorn, Lincoln, NE.

www.civilwarneb.net

Sept. 26: Immersive Civil War history and possible skirmish, 1864 Battle of Mine Creek, 10 a.m.-4 p.m., Mine Creek Civil War Battlefield State Historic Site, 20485 K-52, Pleasanton, KS.

<https://www.kansashistory.gov/p/mine-creek-battlefield-programs/18584>.

Sept. 26: "The Williams Grant Canal: Using the River to Conquer Vicksburg," by Bjorn Skaptson, 12:00 p.m., Salt Creek CWRT, Glen Ellyn History Center, 800 N Main St., Glen Ellyn, IL.

<https://saltcreekcwrt.org>

**Calendar of Events in Missouri and Surrounding States:
September 19 through December 31, 2026, continued**

Oct. 2: “General Joseph Shelby and the Battle of Haguewood Prairie,” by Dr. Curtis Varnell, 7:00 p.m. Bella Vista CWRT, Bella Vista Historical Museum, 1885 Bella Vista Way, Bella Vista, AR. <https://residentnewsnetwork.com>

Oct. 3: William Clarke Quantrill Society annual tour, 10 a.m. – 4 p.m. Start and return at Ft. Osage High School (2003 N. Twyman Rd. Independence, MO).
<https://www.civilwarroundtablewesternmo.org/events-meetings/>

Oct. 3-4: 10th Annual Civil War Collector’s Show, Sat. 9 a.m.–4 p.m., Sun. 9 a.m. –2 p.m., Stewart County Visitors Center, 117 Visitors Center Lane, Dover, TN.
<https://www.facebook.com/FortDonelsonRelics/>

Oct. 6: “The Prairie Grove Campaign,” presented by Doug Gifford, 6:00 p.m., CWRT of St. Charles, MO, Kathryn Linnemann Library, 2323 Elm St., St. Charles, MO.
<https://cwrtsc.org>

Oct. 7: “Iowa’s Civil War Generals,” by Dubuque native and social studies educator Frank McCaw, 5:30 p.m. – 7:15 p.m. social & dinner, 7:15 p.m. -8:00 p.m. program. Des Moines CWRT, The Iowa Machine Shed Restaurant, 1151 Hickman Rod., Urbandale, IA.
<https://dmcivilwar.org>

Oct. 10-11: Civil War Living History & Skirmishes, Old Time Autumn Festival, Brownville, NE. <https://nebraskapassport.com/brownville/events/brownville-old-time-autumn-2026>.

Oct. 17: Outing – Tour of Jefferson Barracks and the MO Civil War Museum, CWRT of St. Charles, MO, Kathryn Linnemann Library, 2323 Elm St., St. Charles, MO.
<https://cwrtsc.org>

Oct. 21: “Lockdown: Outlaws, Lawmen & Frontier Justice in Jackson County, MO” Civil War Round Table of Kansas City, Milburn Country Club, 7501 W 69th St, Overland Park, Kansas, <https://cwrtkc.org>

Oct. 28: “How Should Americans Understand Gettysburg in 2026,” presented by Gary Gallagher, Civil War Round Table, Affton Elks Lodge, 6330 Heege Rd., St. Louis.
<https://civilwarstlmo.org>

Calendar of Events in Missouri and Surrounding States: September 19 through December 31, 2026, continued

Nov. 3: “The Battle of Perryville,” presented by Greg Waters, CWRT of St. Charles, MO, Kathryn Linnemann Library, 2323 Elm St., St. Charles, MO. <https://cwrtsc.org>

Nov. 4: “Battle of Westport: Largest Civil War battle west of the Mississippi,” by Daniel Smith, 5:30 p.m. – 7:15 p.m. social & dinner, 7:15 p.m. -8:00 p.m. program. Des Moines CWRT, The Iowa Machine Shed Restaurant, 1151 Hickman Rod., Urbandale, IA. <https://dmcivilwar.org>

Nov. 18: “U. S. Colored Troops at the Battle of New Market,” presented by Jeff Kluever, Civil War Round Table of Kansas City, 5:00 p.m., Milburn Country Club, 7501 W 69th St., Overland Park, KS. <https://cwrtkc.org>

Dec. 1: “Cookies, Cocoa, and a Documentary–Shiloh Firey Trial,” CWRT of St. Charles, MO, Kathryn Linnemann Library, 2323 Elm St., St. Charles, MO. <https://cwrtsc.org>

Dec. 2: “At War with King Alcohol: Debating masculinity and Drinking in the Civil War,” presented by Megal L. Bever, 5:30 p.m.–8:30 p.m., Civil War Round Table, Affton Elks Lodge, 6330 Heege Rd., St. Louis, MO. <https://civilwarstlmo.org>

Dec. 5-6: Battle of Prairie Grove Reenactment, Prairie Grove Battlefield State Park, 506 E. Douglas St, Prairie Grove, AR. <https://www.arkansas.com/state-parks/explore/parks/prairie-grove-battlefield-state-park>.

Dec. 5-6: Middle TN (Franklin) Civil War Show and Sale, Sat. 9 a.m.–5 p.m., Sunday 9 a.m.–3 p.m., Williamson County Ag Expo Park, 4215 Long Land, Franklin, TN. <https://www.facebook.com/events/williamson-county-ag-expo-park/middle-tennessee-franklin-civil-war-show-and-sale/842916595572799>.

Dec.16: “Civil War Photography,” presented by Civil War historian, author, and editor Ron Coddington. Civil War Round Table of Kansas City, 5:00 p.m., Milburn Country Club, 7501 W 69th St., Overland Park, KS. <https://cwrtkc.org>

If you have an upcoming event in Missouri and neighboring states that you would like to include in our quarterly newsletters, please send the information to 1861MissouriSpeaks@gmail.com

Civil War Round Table Directory Missouri and Surrounding States

Below is a listing of the active Civil War Round Tables in Missouri and surrounding states. This information is subject to change, so please contact the organization to confirm information before planning to attend. If you know of other round tables or have any updates to this list, feel free to let us know at 1861MissouriSpeaks@gmail.com.

MISSOURI

Civil War Round Table of Western Missouri

When: Usually on the second Wed. of the month, 7 p.m.

Where: Village Heights Community of Christ Fellowship Hall,
1009 Farview Drive, Independence, MO.

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/CWRTWM>

The Civil War Round Table of St. Charles, Missouri

When: First Tuesday of the month, 6 p.m.

Where: Kathryn Linnemann Library, 2323 Elm Street, St. Charles, MO.

Website: <https://cwrtsc.org/>

YouTube channel: <https://www.youtube.com/@CWRTSCC>

Blog: <https://historynutt.net/blog>

Mid-Missouri Civil War Round Table – Columbia

When: Third Monday of the month, September through May, 7 p.m.

(No meeting in December, June, July, or August)

Where: Boone County History and Culture Center,
3801 Ponderosa Street, Columbia, MO.

Website: <https://www.kopn.org/mid-mo-civil-war-roundtable/>

Contact: Harold Miederhoff, 5108 S. Brock Rodgers Rd., Columbia, MO 65201. Phone: (573) 442-7235.

Civil War Round Table of the Ozarks

When: Second Wednesdays at 6:30 p.m.

The Library Center, 4653 S. Campbell Avenue, Springfield, MO.

Website: <https://cwrtozarks.tripod.com/>

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/CWRTTO/>

Cass County Civil War Roundtable

When: 2nd Tuesday of the month at 7 p.m.

(September – December; March – June.)

Where: Chamber of Commerce, Harrisonville, MO.
(June's meeting is at a city park)

Cape Girardeau Civil War Round Table

When: 3rd Sunday each month at 2 p.m.

Where: Hanover Lutheran Church,
2949 Perryville Road, Cape Girardeau, MO.

John Knox Village Civil War Round Table (Lee Summit)

When: 3rd Tuesday at 6 p.m. (Mar & Dec: 2nd Tues)

Where: Meadows Community Room, 1800 NW O'Brien Rd., Lee Summit, MO.

More info: <https://ltribune.net/civil-war-group-offers-limited-openings/>

Civil War Round Table Directory Missouri and Surrounding States, continued

ARKANSAS

Civil War Roundtable of Arkansas (CWRTA)

When: Fourth Tuesday of each month, Jan- Nov, 7 p.m.

Where: Second Presbyterian Church,
600 Pleasant Valley Dr., Little Rock, AR.

Facebook Page: <https://www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=100063561033405>

Civil War Roundtable of NW Arkansas

When: 7 p.m. on the 4th Thursday of each month

Where: Old General Store behind the Shiloh Museum,
118 W Johnson Ave, in Springdale, AR.

Website: [Civil War Roundtable of NW Arkansas](#)

Bella Vista Civil War Round Table

When: 7 p.m. on the First Thursday of each month (except holidays)

Where: Bella Vista Historical Museum,
1885 Bella Vista Way, Bella Vista, AR

Facebook Page: <https://www.facebook.com/BVRTCW>

KANSAS

Civil War Round Table of Kansas City

When: Third Wednesday of each month at 6:30 p.m.

Where: Milburn Golf and Country Club
7501 West 69th Street, Overland Park, KS.

Website: <https://cwrtkc.org/home>

Facebook Page: <https://www.facebook.com/cwrtkc/>

Civil War Round Table of Eastern Kansas

When: Fourth Thursdays at 6:30 p.m.

Where: Hale-Ritchie House, 1118 SE Madison, Topeka, KS.

Facebook Page: <https://www.facebook.com/CivilWarRoundtableofEasternKansas/>

ILLINOIS

Illinois Civil War Round Tables Facebook page

Facebook Page: <https://www.facebook.com/IllinoisCivilWarRoundTables>

Chicago Civil War Round Table

When: Second Friday of each month, 7:15 p.m.

(Presentation only is \$10, Dinner is \$40. Dinner at 6:30)

Where: Holiday Inn Oak Brook
17 W 350 22nd St., Oakbrook Terrace, IL.

Website: <https://www.chicagocwrt.org/home.html>

Facebook page: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/112895092115433/>

Civil War Round Table Directory Missouri and Surrounding States, continued

Kankakee Valley Civil War Round Table

When: Meets the First Wednesday of the month, 6 p.m.

(September through June)

Where: Bradley Public Library, 296 N Fulton Ave., Bradley, IL.

Facebook Page: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/455060656495119/>

Lincoln-Davis Round Table

When: Third Tuesday of each month @ 6:45

(Presentation is \$5, Dinner and presentation is \$22. Dinner at 6 p.m.

Where: Country House Restaurant, 5400 W 127th St, Alsip, IL.

Facebook Page: <https://www.facebook.com/people/Lincoln-Davis-Civil-War-Round-Table>

Salt Creek Civil War Round Table

When: Third Saturday at 11 a.m.

Where: Glen Ellyn History Center, 800 N. Main St., Glen Ellyn, IL.

Website: <https://saltcreekcwrt.org/>

Facebook page: <https://www.facebook.com/saltcreekcivilwarroundtable>

Starved Rock Civil War Round Table

When: Third Wednesday of each month, 7 p.m.

Where: Ottawa High School, Ottawa, IL

South Suburban Civil War Round Table

When: Fourth Thursday of the month at 7 p.m. (Dinner at 6)

Where: Trail's Edge Brewery, 20 Kansas Street, Frankfort, IL

Facebook Page: <https://www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=100064000360132>

The Northern Illinois Civil War Round Table

When: First Fridays at 7:30 p.m.

Where: Arlington Heights Memorial Library,

500 N Dunton Ave., Arlington Heights, IL.

Website: <http://www.northernilcwrt.org/>

Decatur Civil War Round Table

When: Second Thursday of the month at 6 p.m.

Where: Doherty's Pub & Pins, 242 E William St., Decatur, IL.

KENTUCKY

Kentucky Civil War Round Table

When: Third Mondays, Sept, Nov, Mar, Apr and May

Where: Embassy Suites Hotel,

1801 Newtown Pike, Lexington, KY.

Website: <https://kycivilwarroundtable.org/>

Facebook Page: <https://www.facebook.com/people/Kentucky-Civil-War-Round-Table>

Civil War Round Table Directory Missouri and Surrounding States, continued

Louisville Civil War Roundtable

When: Once a month on a Fri., Sat., or a Sun.,
September through May. (See website for details)

Where: Big Spring Country Club, 5901 Dutchmans Lane, Louisville, KY.

Website: <https://louisvillecwrt.yolasite.com/>

Madison County Civil War Roundtable

Facebook Page: <https://www.facebook.com/madisoncocivilwarroundtable>

TENNESSEE

Nashville Civil War Round Table

When: Third Tuesday of each month, 7 p.m.

Where: 1100 Fort Negley Blvd, Nashville, TN.

Facebook Page: <https://www.facebook.com/NCWRT/>

Website: <https://nashvillecivilwarroundtable.wordpress.com/>

Knoxville Civil War Round Table

When: second Tuesday of every month, 7:15 p.m. (Dinner @ 6:30)

Where: Bearden Banquet Hall, 5806 Kingston Pike, Knoxville, TN.

Website: <https://kcwrtorg.wordpress.com/>

Facebook Page: <https://www.facebook.com/profile>

IOWA

Des Moines Civil War Roundtable

When: Third Wednesday of the month at 7 p.m. (Dinner 6:30)

Where: The Iowa Machine Shed Restaurant

11151 Hickman Road, Urbandale, IA

Website: <https://www.dmcivilwar.com/index.htm>

Cedar Valley Civil War Round Table

When: Third Thursday of the month at 7 p.m., Sept-June

Where: Community Foundation of NE Iowa,
3117 Greenhill Cir, Cedar Falls, IA.

Website: <https://sites.google.com/site/cvcwrt2011dec/home?authuser=0>

NEBRASKA

Civil War Round Table of Nebraska

When: Fourth Wednesday of the month, 7 p.m.

Where: Legacy Estates 7200 Van Dorn, Lincoln, NE.

Website: <http://civilwarneb.net/index.html>

Facebook Page: <https://www.facebook.com/CWRTNebraska>

The First to Fall

By Col. Jerry R. Fry (USA Ret.)

General Nathaniel Lyon was the first Union general killed in battle during the Civil War. General Robert S. Garnett was the first Confederate general to meet the same fate.

That distinction alone would link their names in history. But it is only the beginning of their story.

They were West Point classmates. Both came from families with military traditions. Both served in Florida, Mexico, and California. Both became career officers in the old United States Army. Twenty years after graduating together, they found themselves commanding forces on opposite sides of a divided nation. Both were badly outnumbered, both became involved in operations associated with retreats through mountainous country, and both died while personally attending to their troops.

Even their bodies fell into enemy hands and were treated with respect before being returned.

The lives—and deaths—of Robert Garnett and Nathaniel Lyon contain a remarkable series of parallels.

Parallel Beginnings

Both men came from families with distinguished military backgrounds.

Lyon's grandfather, Ephraim Lyon, served as an officer in the Connecticut militia during the American Revolution. His great-uncle, Colonel Thomas Knowlton, fought in the French and Indian War and the Revolution before being killed at the Battle of Harlem Heights in 1776. George Washington honored Knowlton the following day as "the gallant and brave Colonel Knowlton, who would have been an honor to any country."

Today, a statue of Knowlton stands beside the Connecticut State Capitol in Hartford.

Military service was therefore part of the world Nathaniel Lyon grew up in. As a boy, he had already decided that he wanted to become a soldier and attend West Point.

Garnett also descended from a family with a notable military tradition. Among his ancestors was the French officer General Pierre Aubry de Gouges, who had served

in the royal guard of Louis XVI and later held senior military positions in French service.

For both young men, the profession of arms had deep family roots.

West Point and the Making of Two Soldiers

Garnett and Lyon graduated together from the United States Military Academy in the Class of 1841.

Lyon finished 11th in a class of 52. That standing was significant. In those days, the graduates at the top of a West Point class generally had the first opportunity to choose the more desirable branches of service. Infantry duty was hard, uncomfortable, and often dangerous. Many cadets worked hard for a high class standing precisely so they could avoid it.

Lyon had earned the right to select almost any branch, but he chose infantry anyway.

More than that, he selected the 2nd Infantry Regiment, knowing it was serving in Florida during the Second Seminole War. His decision virtually guaranteed that, instead of beginning his career at a comfortable post, he would go directly into active field service.

Once in Florida, the newly commissioned second lieutenant was given command of an infantry company in January 1842—only about six months after graduating from West Point. It was extraordinary responsibility for such a junior officer.

For perspective, Ulysses S. Grant, who graduated from West Point two years after Lyon, did not receive command of a company until August 1853, when he was promoted to captain—ten years after his own graduation.

Lyon had deliberately chosen the infantry and almost immediately found himself doing the work normally entrusted to a considerably more experienced officer.

It was an early indication of both the responsibility the Army was willing to place upon him and the kind of soldier Nathaniel Lyon intended to become.

Garnett graduated 27th and selected artillery. His first assignment took him to upper New York near the Canadian border. He would eventually serve in Florida as well, several years after Lyon, as a staff officer with the 7th Infantry.

The two classmates were beginning careers that would repeatedly place them in some of the same parts of a rapidly expanding nation.

Mexico and the Frontier

Both men served in the Mexican War, but their experiences again reflected different paths.

Garnett served primarily as an aide-de-camp to Major General Zachary Taylor.

Lyon remained with troops in the field. On the day he was promoted to first lieutenant, he was given command of a company, an assignment normally held by a captain. He subsequently led his men through some of the hardest fighting on the road to Mexico City and received a brevet promotion for his conduct in battle. He was wounded during the final assault on Mexico City.

After the war, both officers served in California during the turbulent years of America's western expansion. Their duties included protecting settlements and maintaining order on a distant and often violent frontier.

Lyon later served in Kansas during the bitter struggle that became known as "Bleeding Kansas." There he developed increasingly strong views about the proslavery forces operating along the Kansas-Missouri border. His overriding concern, however, was the preservation of the United States and the Union he had sworn to defend.

By 1861, that devotion would determine the course of the rest of his life.

Robert S. Garnett Goes South

When Virginia left the Union, Garnett resigned his commission in the United States Army and entered Confederate service.

He brought with him twenty years of professional military experience and was soon given command in northwestern Virginia, a rugged region whose divided loyalties made it particularly difficult to defend. Much of that region would eventually separate from Virginia and become the new state of West Virginia.

Garnett faced Union forces under Major General George B. McClellan during the Rich Mountain campaign. Outmaneuvered and facing a much larger force, he ordered approximately 5,000 men to withdraw through the Laurel Mountains.

McClellan's forces, reported to number as many as 20,000, pursued.

On July 13, 1861, at Corrick's Ford, Garnett remained with his rear guard, personally supervising the withdrawal as Union troops pressed forward.

There he was shot and killed.

Robert S. Garnett, West Point Class of 1841, became the first Confederate general killed in battle during the Civil War.

Union soldiers recovered his body and treated it respectfully. It was returned under a flag of truce. Garnett was initially buried in Maryland and later reinterred at Green-Wood Cemetery in Brooklyn, New York.

His death carried an especially tragic quality because Garnett apparently understood the desperate nature of his situation before the retreat began.

Southern diarist Mary Boykin Chesnut later recalled Garnett saying before leaving Virginia:

“They have not given me an adequate force. I can do nothing. They have sent me to my death.”

Another Confederate officer remembered him not as a doomed commander, but as a soldier of extraordinary potential.

Brigadier General Edward Porter Alexander wrote that in Garnett “every trait was purely military,” adding:

“Had he lived, I am sure he would have been one of our great generals.”

He would never have the opportunity to prove it.

Nine Hundred Miles Away

On the very day Garnett was killed, another member of the West Point Class of 1841 was nine hundred miles to the west.

Nathaniel Lyon arrived at Springfield, Missouri.

Less than a month later, he too would be dead.

Like Garnett, he would die while commanding about 5,000 men against an enemy reported to be as large as 20,000.

The similarities between their stories were about to become extraordinary.

Nathaniel Lyon’s Problem

Lyon had a very different personality from Garnett. Intense, energetic, and fiercely devoted to the Union, he had spent much of his career close to the troops he commanded.

Missouri presented him with an enormous problem.

The state was deeply divided, and Lyon believed control of Missouri was strategically vital to the Union. By August 1861, however, his small army at

Springfield was threatened by a much larger Confederate and Missouri State Guard force gathering near Wilson's Creek.

Lyon knew he could not remain at Springfield indefinitely. His supply base was 120 miles away at Rolla, and preparations were already being made for withdrawal.

But simply turning his army around and marching away created another danger.

Much of the opposing force was mounted. Lyon's army consisted largely of infantry, including inexperienced volunteers. If the enemy pursued aggressively, its cavalry could harass his column, strike his flanks, attack his wagon train, and force him to fight repeatedly on ground his pursuers selected.

Lyon therefore faced a problem soldiers had confronted for centuries: sometimes the safest way to retreat is to attack first.

Napoleon had expressed the principle years earlier in one of his military maxims. A retreat, he warned, transfers the initiative to the enemy and can cost an army more than battle itself.

Lyon did not need Napoleon to tell him what twenty years of soldiering had already taught him.

Before withdrawing, he would strike.

Wilson's Creek

During the night of August 9–10, Lyon moved his army toward the enemy encampment near Wilson's Creek.

His purpose was not simply to fight for possession of a battlefield. His army still had to reach Rolla. His immediate problem was to damage and disrupt the much larger force facing him sufficiently to prevent it from interfering with that withdrawal.

Lyon chose a surprise attack.

At first light, Union troops struck an enemy in its encampment that had not expected them.

What followed has gone into history as the Battle of Wilson's Creek. But viewed as part of Lyon's larger problem, the action was also a spoiling attack conducted before an intended withdrawal.

And it nearly achieved more than that.

The surprise assault threw portions of the opposing force into confusion, and for hours Lyon's outnumbered troops fought fiercely. What had begun as an effort to strike the enemy before withdrawing came surprisingly close to producing a larger battlefield success.

Eventually, however, Lyon's men were exhausting their ammunition, casualties were mounting, and their commander was dead.

A General at the Front

Lyon had already been wounded during the fighting. He remained with his troops.

To a modern reader, a general placing himself near the front of a battle may appear unnecessarily dangerous. But Wilson's Creek was fought in 1861, not in an age of radios and instantaneous battlefield communications.

Many of Lyon's soldiers were raw volunteers who had been in uniform only a short time. Officers of that era believed inexperienced troops drew confidence from seeing their commanders sharing the danger. Men who might otherwise break and run could often be steadied by the presence of experienced officers they trusted.

There was also a practical command problem. Without modern communications, a commander needed to be where he could see what was happening, to determine where troops were wavering, where reserves were required, where an attack was succeeding, and where it was failing.

For Lyon, personal leadership from the front was not a sudden impulse at Wilson's Creek. It was consistent with the way he had soldiered throughout his career.

The West Point graduate who had voluntarily chosen infantry, the young second lieutenant who had commanded a company in Florida, the company commander who had led troops in Mexico, and the officer who had spent twenty years serving with soldiers in the field was still doing what he had always done.

He was with his men.

While personally at the front with his troops, Nathaniel Lyon was shot and killed.

He became the first Union general killed in battle during the Civil War.

What Happened Afterward

Lyon's death did not destroy his army.

After hours of fighting and with ammunition running low, Union troops disengaged and returned to the vicinity of Springfield, the place from which the operation had begun.

The larger enemy force remained behind.

The Union wagon trains and other preparations for the movement to Rolla were already in place. The following morning, Lyon's army began the 120-mile journey through the Ozark Mountains to its supply base.

The feared pursuit never developed.

The army reached Rolla unmolested.

Whatever label later generations attach to Wilson's Creek, that sequence is important to understanding Lyon's decision. His army faced the danger of retreat before the attack. It struck first, returned to Springfield, and then completed its withdrawal to Rolla without the enemy forcing another battle.

Lyon did not live to see it.

The Enemy Finds Lyon

There would now be another remarkable parallel with Garnett.

During the withdrawal from Wilson's Creek, Lyon's body, wrapped in a blanket, was inadvertently left behind. When enemy forces later discovered his remains, they treated them respectfully and returned them to the Union forces under a flag of truce.

A decision was subsequently made to temporarily inter Lyon's remains at Springfield. When Confederate forces entered the town, their officers extended every courtesy to those arranging his burial.

Only weeks earlier, Union soldiers had recovered Garnett's body and treated the fallen Confederate general with the same respect.

Now the other side had done the same for Lyon.

The two men had worn the same nation's uniform for most of their adult lives. They had attended the same military academy and belonged to the same professional officer corps before civil war placed them on opposite sides.

Even in death, the parallels continued.

What His Contemporaries Saw in Lyon

William Tecumseh Sherman had known Lyon long before Wilson's Creek. Their paths had crossed at West Point and again during service in Florida and California.

After the war, Sherman remembered that beneath Lyon's intense exterior was a side many people never saw. He described him not only as courageous, but as

gentle and kind, and believed that the crisis of war had brought out the strongest qualities in his character.

Sherman went much further. He believed Lyon's early death had imposed an enormous cost upon the country because the Union had lost an officer possessing qualities desperately needed during the first years of the war.

Ulysses S. Grant reportedly expressed a similar judgment, saying that had Lyon lived, he believed he would have risen to the top of the military hierarchy.

Congress formally honored Lyon as well, declaring it "just and proper" to record its recognition of his "eminent and patriotic services."

For a time, Nathaniel Lyon became one of the North's earliest war heroes.

Shared Fate, Different Memory

Consider the parallels.

- ❖ Both Robert S. Garnett and Nathaniel Lyon graduated from West Point in the Class of 1841.
- ❖ Both came from families with military traditions.
- ❖ Both served in Florida.
- ❖ Both served in the Mexican War.
- ❖ Both served on the western frontier in California.
- ❖ Twenty years after leaving West Point, both commanded forces of approximately 5,000 men while facing enemies reported to number as high as 20,000.
- ❖ Both found themselves confronting the problems associated with withdrawing an outnumbered force.
- ❖ Both died in operations associated with mountainous terrain, Garnett in the Laurel Mountains of western Virginia and Lyon near the Missouri Ozarks.
- ❖ Both were personally attending to their troops when they were killed.
- ❖ Both became the first general officers killed in battle on their respective sides.
- ❖ Both men's bodies fell into enemy hands.
- ❖ Both were treated with respect by those enemies and returned under flags of truce.
- ❖ Both were initially buried and later reinterred elsewhere.
- ❖ And they died only twenty-eight days apart.

Yet history remembered them differently.

Lyon's actions in Missouri gave him a stronger regional legacy, particularly in a state whose political and military future remained uncertain during the opening months of the war. Garnett died during an unsuccessful campaign before he had

time to recover from his early setbacks and demonstrate what kind of Civil War commander he might have become.

Alexander believed Garnett could have become one of the Confederacy's great generals.

Sherman and Grant believed Lyon might have risen to the highest levels of Union command.

Neither man lived long enough for history to find out.

The First to Fall

War distributes fame unevenly.

Some officers fight for years, command great armies, win famous battles, and become names known generations later. Others disappear from the story before history has had time to decide what they might have become.

Robert S. Garnett and Nathaniel Lyon belonged to the second group.

They began together as members of the West Point Class of 1841. For twenty years their careers followed remarkably similar paths through the Regular Army, Florida, Mexico, the western frontier, and finally civil war.

They had spent most of their adult lives wearing the same uniform and serving the same country.

Then that country divided, and the two classmates chose opposite sides.

Within the first months of the war, each found himself commanding an outnumbered force in difficult country. Each remained close to his soldiers at the moment of greatest danger. Each was killed. And each became the first general officer on his side to fall in battle.

Perhaps one of the most revealing parallels came afterward.

Union soldiers recovered the Confederate Garnett and treated his body with dignity. Weeks later, Confederate soldiers did the same for the Union's Lyon.

For a brief moment, the division that had made them enemies gave way to something both sides still understood: respect for a fallen soldier.

More than a century and a half later, neither Garnett nor Lyon occupies the place in popular memory that his contemporaries might have expected.

But their intertwined stories remain one of the remarkable human coincidences of the Civil War: two West Point classmates, two professional soldiers, two opposing causes—and the first general to fall on either side.

In death, Robert S. Garnett and Nathaniel Lyon became linked forever.

Perhaps they deserve to be remembered together.

