



Brig. Gen. Nathaniel Lyon

WILSON'S CREEK

BATTLEFIELD

National Park ● Missouri

*"... Under the sod and the dew,
Waiting the judgment day;
Under the one, the Blue;
Under the other, the Gray."*

—Frances Miles Finch

The Battle of Wilson's Creek (called Oak Hill by the Confederates) was fought 10 miles southwest of Springfield on August 10, 1861. Named for a stream that crosses the site where the battle took place, it was a struggle between the Confederate and Union forces in Missouri for control of the State in the first year of the Civil War.

MISSOURI WAS A SLAVE-HOLDING State. Its government had strong southern sympathies and had plans to cooperate with the other Southern States. To this end, Gov. Claiborne F. Jackson called the State militia to assemble at Camp Jackson in St. Louis early in 1861. Not far from the camp was a large Federal arsenal under the command of Brig. Gen. Nathaniel Lyon. This was the situation in Missouri when President Abraham Lincoln issued a call for 75,000 troops in April 1861. Governor Jackson refused to send any troops and also stated that no Federal troops could be recruited in Missouri or moved out of the State. General Lyon now began his campaign to take over the State government.

Cover: Brig. Gen. Nathaniel Lyon

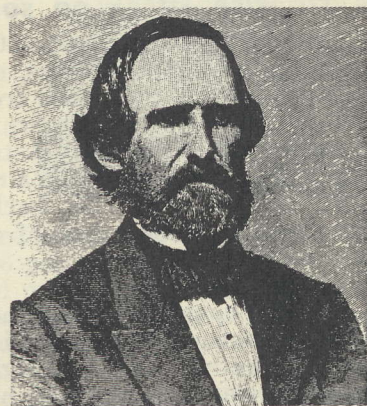
Lyon was born in Ashford, Conn., on July 14, 1818. He was graduated from West Point in 1841, and served in the Army in Florida and in the war with Mexico. He was brevetted captain for gallant conduct at Churubusco and Contreras. From 1841 to 1853 he served in California, winning special mention for his services in frontier warfare. He served afterward in Kansas, and from that State was ordered to St. Louis in January 1861.

Lyon takes over State government

On May 10, 1861, General Lyon captured Camp Jackson and soon thereafter moved up the Missouri River and took possession of the State capitol and established a new State government, loyal to the Union. On June 12, 1861, Governor Jackson and the other State officials, having lost control of the State government, retreated toward the extreme southwest corner of the State. After General Lyon had installed his new government at the State capitol, he pursued the retreating State militia toward southwest Missouri. He was joined at Boonville on the Missouri River by the 1st Iowa Regiment and at Clinton, Mo., by the 1st and 2d Kansas Regiments and by several companies of regular troops from Fort Leavenworth, Kans. By July 20, General Lyon was encamped at Springfield, with 6,000 troops, consisting of the 1st, 2d, 3d, and 5th Missouri Regiments, the 1st Iowa, the 1st and 2d Kansas, several companies of regular troops, and three batteries of 16 guns.



Maj. Gen. Sterling Price.
From a photograph.



Maj. Gen.
Ben McCulloch

In the meantime, ex-Gov. Sterling Price had been given command of all the Missouri militia. This militia was now drilling and recruiting in McDonald County, 75 miles southwest of Springfield. Price had 5,000 troops under his command. On July 28, 1861, Gen. Bart Pearce with 3,000 Arkansas troops and Gen. Ben McCulloch with "Texas Rangers" and Hébert's Louisiana "Pelicans," united with Price at Cassville, Mo., about 60 miles southwest of Springfield. The objective was to capture General Lyon's army and to regain control of the State government. On August 6, the southern forces reached Wilson's Creek and went into camp along its bank, about 10 miles southwest of Springfield.

A surprise attack on southern camp

General Lyon, leaving 1,000 troops in Springfield to guard his supplies, decided to make a surprise attack with 5,400 troops on the southern camp early on the morning of August 10. Minutes before the battle started, a man was said to have galloped by on a mule warning residents of the area, "Git back in yore homes! Thar's goin' to be a hell of a battle here in a few minutes!"

There was.

For the next five hours the hills shook with what turned out to be one of the bloodiest battles of the Civil War. The fighting was at close range, frequently hand to hand. Though this was one of the first battles of the war and many of the troops had little training, on no battlefield of the War Between the States was there a greater display of courage and bravery. Officers, many of them West Point graduates and veterans of the Mexican and Indian wars, led their men in person.

At times, the Federals would gain a few yards, only to see their gains erased by a counterthrust. The process would then be reversed. It was later reported in the official records of the Union and Confederate Armies that, during the great fury of the battle, "some of the best blood in the land was being spilled as recklessly as if it were ditch water."

Though already wounded twice, General Lyon was struck by a rifle ball in the chest as he was trying to lead another charge. He fell from his horse into the arms of his orderly and gasped, "Lehman, I am killed." Later his body was carried by the Confederates to Ray's farmhouse, a mellowed and weather-beaten frame structure which still stands.

Maj. Gen.

Franz Sigel

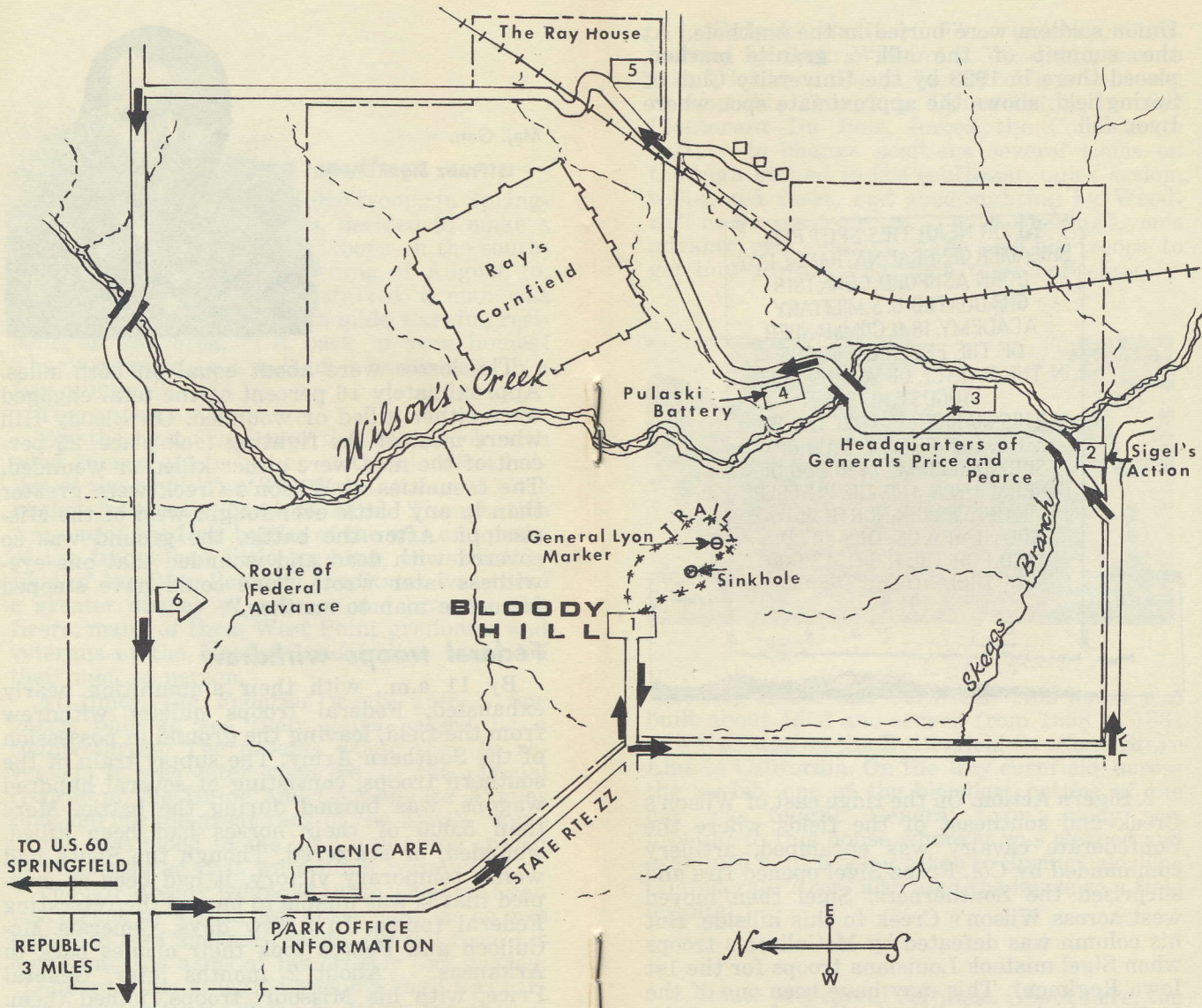


The losses were about equal on both sides. Approximately 16 percent of the total engaged were either killed or wounded. On Bloody Hill where most of the fighting took place, 25 percent of the men were either killed or wounded. The casualties at Wilson's Creek were greater than in any battle ever fought west of the Mississippi. After the battle, the ground was so covered with dead and wounded that one eyewitness later wrote, "one could have stepped from one man to another."

Federal troops withdraw

By 11 a.m., with their ammunition nearly exhausted, Federal troops quietly withdrew from the field, leaving the ground in possession of the Southern Army. The supply train of the southern troops, consisting of several hundred wagons, was burned during the battle. More than 5,000 of their horses had been killed, wounded, or scattered. Though the South had won a temporary victory, it had been so crippled that it was unable to pursue the retreating Federal forces. In a few days, Generals McCulloch and Pearce took their armies back to Arkansas. About 2 months later, General Price, with his Missouri troops, joined them. During the remainder of the war, except for a few minor raids, Missouri was not entered by a Southern Army.

Thus, at the Battle of Wilson's Creek, the State of Missouri—rich in food supplies, in minerals, and in industry, and in all the resources so sorely needed by the South—was lost to the Confederacy. This was the first great defeat of the southern cause and, in the end, proved fatal. Though he lost the battle and his life, General Lyon achieved his purpose—holding Missouri in the Union.



A GUIDE TO WILSON'S CREEK BATTLEFIELD

To get the most out of your visit to Wilson's Creek Battlefield, we suggest that you follow the auto tour route. As you leave the contact station, turn right on State Route ZZ and head south for .8 of a mile. This will bring you to the road leading to the **Bloody Hill Parking Area (1)**.

1. Bloody Hill. The highest point in the park, it was here that the climactic action of the battle occurred and that General Lyon was killed. At the **sinkhole**, the action was the fiercest and most intense. After the battle, the Confederate Army had the task of burying the dead Union and Confederate troops. The bodies of 43

Union soldiers were buried in the sinkhole. At the summit of the hill, a **granite marker**, placed there in 1928 by the University Club of Springfield, shows the approximate spot where Lyon fell.

AT OR NEAR THIS SPOT FELL
BRIGADIER GENERAL NATHANIEL LYON
BORN ASHFORD, CONN. 1818
GRADUATED U. S. MILITARY
ACADEMY, 1841. COMMANDER
OF THE FEDERAL FORCES
IN THE BATTLE OF WILSON CREEK
AUGUST 10, 1861.
THIS MARKER IS ERECTED BY
THE UNIVERSITY CLUB OF
SPRINGFIELD, MO. IN HONOR OF
GENERAL LYON AND THE HUNDREDS
OF BRAVE MEN, NORTH AND
SOUTH, WHO, ON THIS FIELD,
DIED FOR THE RIGHT AS GOD
GAVE THEM TO SEE THE RIGHT.
1928

2. Sigel's Action. On the ridge east of Wilson's Creek and southeast of the fields where the Confederate cavalry was encamped, artillery commanded by Col. Franz Sigel opened fire and surprised the Southerners. Sigel then moved west across Wilson's Creek to this hillside. But his column was defeated by McCulloch's troops when Sigel mistook Louisiana troops for the 1st Iowa Regiment. This may have been one of the factors which decided the battle in favor of the Confederate Army.

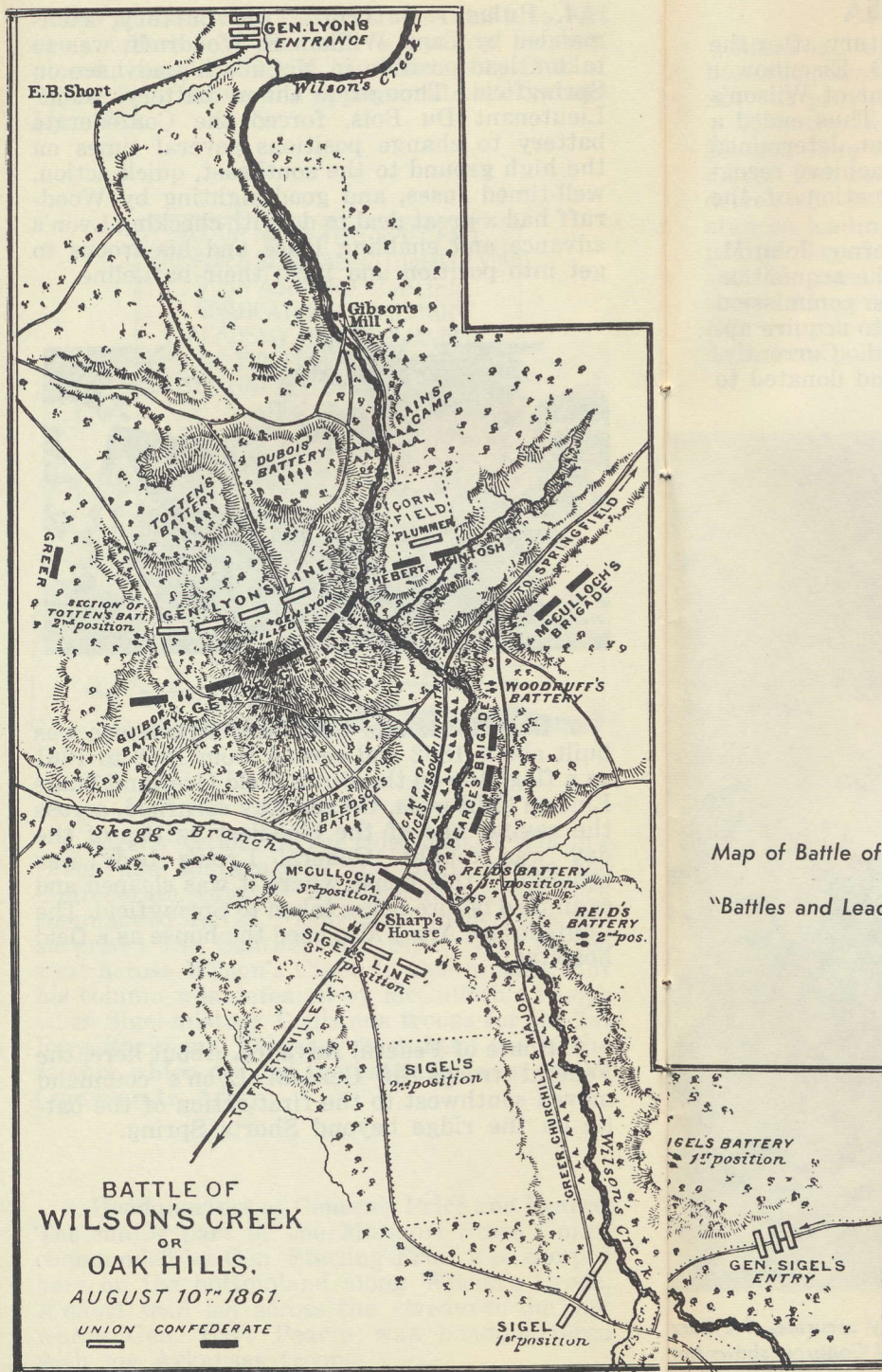
3. Headquarters of Generals Price and Pearce. The major part of the Missouri State Guard commanded by Gen. Sterling Price was camped here on the bottomland along Wilson's Creek. A short trail led across the stream to the east where Gen. Bart Pearce was headquartered with his Arkansas troops.

4. Pulaski Battery. This battery, commanded by Capt. William E. Woodruff, was to take a lead position in McCulloch's advance on Springfield. Though a Union battery, under Lieutenant Du Bois, forced the Confederate battery to change positions several times on the high ground to the southeast, quick action, well-timed fuses, and good sighting by Woodruff had a great deal to do with checking Lyon's advance and enabling Price and his troops to get into position and form their battleline.



5. Ray House and Cornfield. This house was built about 1852 and served from 1858 to 1861 as a flag stop on the Butterfield Overland Stage Line to California. On the Ray cornfield, across the ravine, one of the bloodiest battles of the day was fought. General Lyon's body was brought to this house where it was cleaned and examined before being taken to Springfield. The Confederate Army also used the house as a field hospital.

6. Route of Federal Advance. About here, the Federal troops of General Lyon's command moved southwest to the first action of the battle on the ridge beyond Shorts Spring.



Map of Battle of Wilson's Creek from
 "Battles and Leaders of the Civil War."

A PARK EMERGES

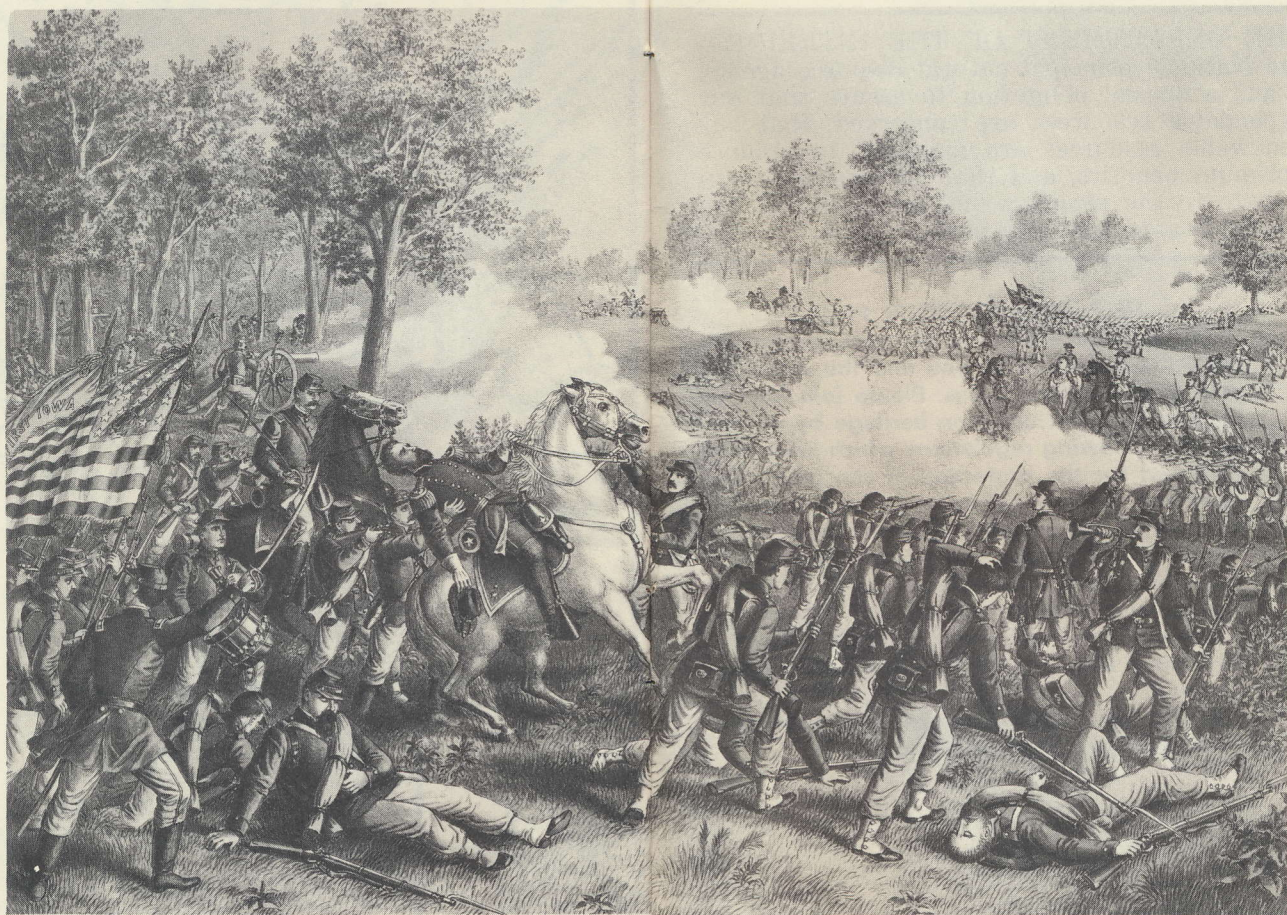
On April 22, 1960, almost a century after the battle itself, President Dwight D. Eisenhower signed a bill for the establishment of Wilson's Creek Battlefield National Park. Thus ended a campaign, conducted by small but determined groups over a 75-year period, to achieve recognition of the battle and preservation of the battlefield.

On July 19, 1861, Missouri Governor John M. Dalton signed a bill authorizing the acquisition of land for the park. A five-member commission was established by this same bill to acquire approximately 1,730 acres of land. Currently, 1,008 acres have been acquired and donated to the Federal Government.

ABOUT YOUR VISIT

Since all of the authorized area has not been acquired, the National Park Service is not yet providing full visitor facilities.

Visit the information trailer on State Route ZZ and take the interpretive self-guiding loop drive. Exhibits in the trailer and along the drive will help you understand the circumstances leading to the battle, its violence, the part it played in keeping Missouri in the Union, and its consequence in the total Civil War story. Along the drive are parking pullouts at the wayside signs and exhibits and foot trail departure points.



Although not entirely accurate, this Kurz and Allison print from the files of the Library of Congress shows the fierce hand-to-hand struggle.

HOW TO REACH THE PARK

There is no public transportation serving Wilson's Creek Battlefield National Park. U. S. 60 and State Route 13 pass 2 miles north of the park; Interstate 44 is 5 miles north of the park which can be reached by State Routes M and ZZ.

ADMINISTRATION

Wilson's Creek Battlefield National Park is administered by the National Park Service, U. S. Department of the Interior.

The superintendent of George Washington Carver National Monument, whose address is Box 38, Diamond, Mo., 64840, is in immediate charge of the park.

THE DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR—the Nation's principal natural resource agency—has a special obligation to assure that our expendable resources are conserved, that our renewable resources are managed to produce optimum benefits, and that all resources contribute to the progress and prosperity of the United States, now and in the future.

HELP PROTECT YOUR PARK

The National Parks and Monuments like Wilson's Creek belong to you and the other citizens of the United States. Please join with us in protecting our common heritage by observing the following regulations which have been designed for the protection of the park's features and for your safety and convenience:

- Please do not disturb any natural or historical feature. All objects in the park—rocks, wildflowers, trees, and animals—must be left in place and undisturbed so that others, too, may enjoy and gain inspiration from them.
- Hunting and use of firearms are not permitted.
- Report all accidents, suggestions, and complaints to park headquarters.

U.S. Department of the Interior
National Park Service

