

THE BLOODY REALITY OF WAR - WILSON'S CREEK IMAGE ANALYSIS - PRIMARY SOURCE ACTIVITY

MAIN IDEA

Students will use an image of the Battle of Wilson's Creek to understand more fully the events of the battle, their horrific consequences, and the way that war images were created.

LENGTH

25–35 minutes

GRADE LEVEL

4th grade

BACKGROUND

The Battle of Wilson's Creek, which occurred on August 10, 1861, was one of the earliest battles of the Civil War and one of the largest in the state of Missouri. It pitted the forces of the Missouri State Guard and the Confederate forces of Gen. Benjamin McCulloch against Federal troops led by Gen. Nathaniel Lyon. The battle, which resulted in a Confederate victory, demonstrated the catastrophic damage that could be caused by modern infantry and artillery. The number of combatants totaled more than 15,000; of those 12 percent of the Southern forces and a startling 25 percent of the Northern were missing, dead, or wounded following the battle. The events of Wilson's Creek were recorded by many

and were described on the national stage in *Harper's* and *Frank Leslie's Weekly* newspapers. It also demonstrated starkly both sides' inability to deal with the massive casualties that the Civil War was creating. This led to the creation of the Western Sanitary Commission and the Ladies' Union Aid Society, which would provide medical care, build hospitals, and fill a variety of other roles.

OBJECTIVES

Students will...

1. Increase their familiarity with primary documents and how they are used.
2. Explore images of war and how they were used and created.
3. Learn about the pivotal Battle of Wilson's Creek.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- Bearss, Edwin C. *The Battle of Wilson's Creek*. Fourth edition. Springfield, MO: Wilson's Creek National Battlefield Foundation, 1992.
- Piston, William Garrett, and Richard W. Hatcher III. *Wilson's Creek: The Second Battle of the Civil War and the Men Who Fought It*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000.

MATERIALS

General Lyon's March of 1861 info sheet
Blank paper (enough for whole class)
Pencils/pens
Markers/colored pencils
Era drawings of Wilson's Creek

GRADE LEVEL EXPECTATIONS

GLE	Content
SOCIAL STUDIES	
SS7.A Identify, select, use, and create appropriate resources for social science inquiry	Students will use and interpret primary documents.
SS2a.H Understanding the causes and consequences of the Civil War	Students will learn how the Civil War helped to foster the creation of a new industrial Missouri without slave labor.
SS7.A Using primary and secondary sources	Students will analyze three primary documents and contextualize them.
COMMUNICATION ARTS	
Listening and Speaking 2A	Students will present their findings in a clear, concise manner.
Information Literacy 1B	Students will use primary sources to acquire relevant information.

PROCEDURE

Phase	Description
Introduction	Step 1: Read with students the Lyon's March info sheet.
Main	<p>Step 2: Once students learn some background on Wilson's Creek, ask them to draw a picture of the battle as if they were there taking a photograph or drawing a sketch.</p> <p>Step 3: Ask several students to volunteer to present their drawings.</p> <p>Step 4: Show the four images of Wilson's Creek. Ask students to place themselves in one of the images. Ask them what they see, smell, hear, etc. You can have them write this and share in groups or with the whole class.</p>

General Lyon's March of 1861

Background

- On May 31, 1861, General William S. Harney was replaced by the newly promoted Brigadier General Nathaniel Lyon.
- Governor Claiborne Fox Jackson and General Sterling Price planned a face-to-face meeting with General Lyon at Planter's House Hotel in St. Louis.
- The meeting took place on June 10, 1861. After four or five hours of discussion, Lyon decided that no agreement could be made. One version of events describes him rising from his chair and saying:

“Rather than concede to the state of Missouri...the right to dictate to my government in any matter however unimportant, I would see you, and you, and you, and you, and you, and every man, woman, and child in the state dead and buried. This means war.

The March

- Gen. Lyon, assisted by Col. Frank Blair Jr., gathered a force to drive the secessionist government from the capital, Jefferson City.
- Lyon arrived with his force in Jefferson City on June 15 to find the city abandoned. Governor Jackson had determined that Boonville with its pro-Southern views was a better location to face Lyon.
- At Boonville, Lyon easily faced down a small force under the command of Jackson, but a larger force under General Price had already moved south to join with the Confederates.
- A second Union force under Col. Franz Sigel made its way toward Springfield to trap Jackson between Sigel's force and Lyon's.
- Col. Sigel decided to leave a small force at Neosho and marched with his main force to meet Jackson at Carthage. Outnumbered 4 to 1, Sigel's force was defeated. This allowed Jackson to unite his forces with those of General Price and Confederate general Benjamin McCulloch.
- Faced with a much larger Southern army, Lyon had to choose between retreating to the railhead at Rolla or facing Jackson, Price, and McCulloch.
- He chose the latter and marched to Springfield, where he attacked the enemy in what

became known as the Battle of Wilson's Creek. This battle resulted in large losses for the North, including the death of Gen. Lyon. The Union forces retreated to Rolla, and the Southern force claimed victory.

Aftermath

- Following Wilson's Creek, Gen. Price wanted to pursue the Union forces. Gen. McCulloch chose instead to head back to Arkansas. He was concerned about his supply train and had a deteriorating relationship with Price.
- This left Price with a much smaller force, but with control over the southwestern part of the state.
- Gen. Price continued to control southwest Missouri until the Confederate defeat at Pea Ridge, Arkansas, in March 1862.

Vocabulary

Secessionist – being in support of the withdrawal from the Union of 11 Southern states in the period 1860–1861, which brought on the Civil War.

Learn More Sections

Background

Following the capture of Camp Jackson a tentative peace was settled between the Union troops in Missouri under General William S. Harney and the rebellious Missouri State Guard under General Sterling Price and Governor Claiborne Fox Jackson. This agreement, known as the Harney-Price Agreement, was furiously opposed by unconditional Unionists such as Colonel Frank Blair Jr. and Captain Nathaniel Lyon. They believed that this agreement would never last, and provided the secessionists in control of the state government time to prepare defenses. Abraham Lincoln agreed when Blair took his concerns to the White House, and on May 31, 1861, General Harney was replaced by the newly promoted Brigadier General Nathaniel Lyon.

Lyon and Blair were right to be concerned, as Jackson had already requested Confederate troops be sent to Missouri. With Lyon in command, the Harney-Price Agreement was no more. Jackson and Price would try one last time to delay Union action. They planned a face-to-face meeting with Gen. Lyon at Planter's House Hotel in St. Louis. The meeting took place on June 10 and after four or five hours of discussion Lyon decided that no agreement could be made. He rose from his seat and said, "Rather than concede to the state of Missouri the right to demand that my government shall not enlist troops within her limits, or bring troops into the state whenever it pleases, or move its troops at its own will into, or out of, or through the state; rather than to concede to the state of Missouri for one single instant the right to dictate to my government in any matter however unimportant, I would see you, and you, and you, and you, and you, and

every man, woman, and child in the state dead and buried. This means war.”

Lyon's March

Gen. Lyon, assisted by Col. Frank Blair Jr., gathered a force to drive the secessionist government from the capital, Jefferson City. He sent a second force under the command of Col. Franz Sigel, a veteran of the German Revolution of 1848. This force would take the railhead at Rolla and then proceed to set up a Union force at Springfield. Lyon believed that when he drove the secessionist government and Missouri State Guard from the capital they would flee down the western side of Missouri and try to join the Confederate Army of Gen. Benjamin McCulloch in northern Arkansas. With Col. Sigel in Springfield and Gen. Lyon pursuing them from behind, the combined Union forces would be able to trap the secessionists before they could join the Confederates.

Lyon arrived with his force in Jefferson City on June 15 to find the city abandoned. Governor Jackson had determined that Boonville with its pro-South views was a better location to face Lyon. At Boonville, Lyon easily faced down a small force under the command of Jackson, but a larger force under General Price had already moved south to join with the Confederates. The easy victory encouraged Lyon, but he was hampered by heavy rains and muddy roads.

In the meantime, Jackson made his way south as quickly as possible. On the way he gained reinforcements, including 3,000 troops led by General James S. Rains. The Union forces under Col. Sigel made their way toward Springfield to trap Jackson between Sigel's force and Lyon's. Unfortunately, with Jackson in front of him and Price and McCulloch behind him the possibility existed that he himself would be trapped. Col. Sigel decided to leave a small force at Neosho and marched with his main force to meet Jackson at Carthage. Outnumbered 4 to 1, Sigel's force was defeated, and his remaining force at Neosho was defeated by Price and McCulloch shortly after.

Lyon's force was greatly in need of reinforcements in order to face the combined Southern force. The new commander of the Department of the West, John C. Frémont, decided to send what troops he had to defend the mouth of the Ohio at Cairo, Illinois, leaving Lyon on his own. Faced with a much larger Southern army, Lyon had to choose between retreating to the railhead at Rolla or facing Jackson, Price, and McCulloch. He chose the latter and marched to Springfield, where he surprise attacked the enemy in what became known as the Battle of Wilson's Creek. This battle resulted in large losses for the North, including the death of Gen. Lyon. The Union forces retreated to Rolla, and the Southern force claimed victory.

Aftermath

Following Wilson's Creek, Gen. Price wanted to pursue the Union forces. Gen. McCulloch chose instead to head back to Arkansas. He was concerned about his supply train and had a deteriorating relationship with Price. This left Price with a much smaller force, but with control over the southwestern part of the state.

In October 1861, General Frémont would attempt to drive Price from the state,

but after a defeat at Lexington and his refusal to rescind an order he had sent emancipating the slaves of rebellious Missourians, Frémont was removed from office by Lincoln. The Union wouldn't succeed in fully gaining control of southwest Missouri until after the Confederate defeat at Pea Ridge, Arkansas, in March 1862.

Images of Wilson's Creek



"Battle of Wilson's Creek.- Fall of Genl. Lyon." Steel Engraving by F.O.C. Darley and George E. Perine, New York, 1861-1865. Missouri History Museum Photograph and Prints collection. Civil War. P0084-0611.



"Battle At Wilson's Creek, MO. Death of General Lyon." Hand colored steel engraving by F.O.C. Darley, 1862. Missouri History Museum Photograph and Prints collection. Civil War. P0084-1174.



BATTLE OF WILSON'S CREEK.

Battle of Wilson's Creek. Chromolithograph by Kurz and Allison, 1893. Missouri History Museum Photograph and Prints collection. Civil War. P0084-2409.



Fall of Gen. Lyon. Oil on canvas by unknown artist, signed "Huts". Date unknown, but copied from an engraving entitled "Battle of Wilson's Creek. - Fall of Genl. Lyon." by George E. Perine, published in 1864, which in turn is based on a painting by F.O.C. Darling. (Acc.# 1961.053.0002) Photograph by Cary Horton, 2010. Photograph and scan (c) 2010, Missouri History Museum.