

Chapter 1

The Confederate Northwest Frontier

May 1861 – August 1861

At THE BEGINNING of the Civil War, the Confederate War Department had no comprehensive plan for territorial organization of the vast Trans-Mississippi West. Clearly the old territorial organization of the United States Army would not, except for the Department of Texas, fit the new circumstances. The western territorial organization of the Confederate Army would have to be improvised to meet new demands.

No need existed in the spring of 1861 for a single territorial command west of the Mississippi, nor did such a need appear likely in the near future. With Confederate states on both banks of the Mississippi River from Tennessee to the Gulf of Mexico, communications and the exchange of supplies between the Confederate states east of the river and those west of it were unimpeded and presented no special problems. Indeed, the nature of the Trans-Mississippi West seemed to demand the creation of a number of area commands, both because distances were immense and communications and transportation facilities poor, and because the region comprised several distinct military frontiers, each with its special problem.

To the north along the Missouri-Arkansas border and the upper edge of the Indian Territory was the military frontier between North and South. On the southwest, in central Texas, an already-existing Indian frontier stretched along the line of abandoned Federal forts from Red River to the Rio Grande. In the extreme south, an international frontier with the neutral but uneasy Republic of Mexico followed the course of the Rio Grande. And in the southeast, finally, the Texas and Louisiana coasts would require defense.

In the first weeks of the war the progress of military organization was alarmingly uneven. Texas and western Louisiana were assigned to two well-defined military depart-

ments, permitting the recruiting, supply, and training of Confederate soldiers to begin there under recognizable patterns of military authority. But in Missouri and Arkansas, the most critical area of contact between North and South in the Trans-Mississippi, where the military demands were immediate, military organization lagged, plagued by political considerations and administrative confusion.¹

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THE STRATEGIC VALUE of the slave state of Missouri was obvious. It flanked the entire tier of Union states on the north side of the Ohio River, and its possession by the Confederates would render successful Federal invasion of Tennessee through Kentucky virtually impossible. Yet President Jefferson Davis and other members of his administration viewed Missouri with doubtful caution, partly because Confederate military policy was defensive, partly because the very existence of the Confederacy rested on the right of each state to determine its own future without military coercion. Military action in Missouri would have to wait until such time as Missouri might formally and voluntarily leave the Union.²

Considerable secession sentiment did indeed exist in Missouri among members of the state government and among the people; but in all likelihood the majority of Missouri's citizens at that time were conditional Unionists, rejecting both secession and Federal coercion of the South. In March of 1861, the Missouri State Convention, called to consider the state's future course, almost unanimously rejected secession.³ In May the governor, Claiborne Fox Jackson, and the commander of the Missouri State Guard, Major General Sterling Price, concluded an agreement with Brigadier William S. Harney, Federal commander of the Department of the West, which provided for neutrality between Federal and state military forces. General Price then declared that the Missouri State Guard would oppose any Confederate advance from Arkansas. Since Price was an ex-governor of the state and had also been president of the Unionist-minded State Convention two months earlier,

1 // For a discussion of the military geographic and economic significance of the region and how the Confederate and Federal War Departments organized the Trans-Mississippi, see Michael J. Forsyth, "The Forgotten Trans-Mississippi Theater and Confederate Strategy," in *Southern Strategies: Why the Confederacy Failed*, Christian B. Keller, ed. (Lawrence, 2021), 217-259.

2 // For a discussion of the secession crisis in Missouri, see Jay Monaghan's older but still solid study *Civil War on the Western Border* (Lincoln, 1954) and Louis Gerteis, *The Civil War in Missouri: A Military History* (Columbia, 2012).

3 William E. Parrish, *Turbulent Partnership: Missouri and the Union, 1861-1865* (Columbia, 1963), 10-13; Albert Castel, *General Sterling Price and the Civil War in the West* (Baton Rouge, LA, 1993), 11.

President Davis doubted the depth of the rumored Southern sympathy among the Missouri leadership.⁴

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TO THE SOUTHWEST of Missouri, the unorganized Indian Territory offered a likely Union invasion route from Kansas into seceded Texas and Arkansas. Even before the secession of Arkansas, on May 6 the Confederate government had become concerned about closing this potential back door to the Confederacy. Alarming rumors of an invasion through the Indian Territory had been coming from Texas for months. In January 1861, an Austin newspaper carried two such accounts in the same issue. According to one of them, Kansas guerrilla James Montgomery was readying a force of 2,000 men to raid Texas, depopulate the northern counties, kill all the men and old women, take only the “pretty young things” captive, and give every Negro freed by the expedition a white wife. Reportedly, Montgomery’s guerrillas were heavily armed, each man having two Navy Colt revolvers as well as a Sharps rifle. Among the alleged backers of the raid were Wendell Phillips and Henry Ward Beecher. The other report of the same date was even more alarming. It announced that Montgomery was already on the way to Texas with 500 abolitionists and perhaps 1,000 Indians.⁵ Wild and unfounded as such rumors were, they persisted in Texas newspapers as well as private correspondence during the spring of 1861, and they testify to the alarm over the unsettled conditions in the Indian Territory.

Rumors were rife, too, about the activities of Regular Army United States troops based in Indian Territory. In April, it was reported that Fort Washita, just above Red River a scant twenty-five miles from Sherman, Texas, was being reinforced from all the ‘Federal posts in the Territory as well as from Fort Smith, Arkansas. The object of this reinforcement was said to be the reoccupation of the Texas frontier forts surrendered by the Federal forces in February.⁶ Not until May 3, when several hundred Texas militia crossed the Red River, was it discovered that the Federal garrisons of Forts Washita, Cobb, and Arbuckle, in the southern part of the Territory, had been withdrawn northward.

4 Castel, *Price*, 21. // See Christopher Phillips, *Missouri’s Confederate: Claiborne Fox Jackson and the Creation of Southern Identity in the Border West* (Columbia, 2000) for a discussion of Governor Jackson’s effort to place Missouri within the Confederate States by leveraging the cultural relationship with the state’s southern neighbors.

5 Anonymous letter titled “One of Montgomery’s Confidential Men” to the Postmaster, Austin, Texas, December, 1860, and A. G. Fowler to Major John Marshall, December 10, 1860, *Austin State Gazette*, January 12, 1861.

6 A. B. to Major Marshall, April 28, 1861, *Austin State Gazette*, May 11, 1861.

By this time the Confederate government had taken several steps to control the Indian Territory. On March 5, President Davis appointed Captain Albert Pike of Arkansas as Confederate Commissioner to all the Indian tribes west of Arkansas and south of Kansas. Ten days later Congress had created a Bureau of Indian Affairs within the War Department. Finally, on May 13, former Texas Ranger Ben McCulloch, who was directly commissioned from civilian life as a brigadier general in Confederate service, was assigned to command the Indian Territory—the first Confederate military district created on the northwest frontier.⁷

McCulloch's first report to Richmond from Little Rock, Arkansas, was far from cheerful. Only a small amount of arms and ammunition was available for his command from the captured Federal arsenal at Little Rock, most of the stores having "been scattered over the state in every direction without any method or accountability." All the subsistence stores accumulated at Fort Smith had been turned over to Brigadier General N. Bart Pearce of the state militia, which meant that McCulloch would have to draw on Pearce, then pay him back in kind from future Confederate shipments. Without stating the source of his information, McCulloch reported that Senator James Lane of Kansas, a guerrilla fighter much feared in the South, was preparing an expedition aimed at the Indian Territory, and that Federal soldiers from Fort Washita, whom McCulloch had been ordered to intercept on their way north, had almost reached Fort Leavenworth, Kansas.⁸

McCulloch himself was in no position to stop the retreat of the Federal troops heading for Kansas, or implement his orders to "guard the [Indian] Territory against invasion from Kansas or else-where."⁹ As yet he had no soldiers of his own to utilize. When he proceeded to Fort Smith, Arkansas, on the border of the Indian Territory, to set up his temporary headquarters, only two men accompanied McCulloch: Captain James McIntosh, a young West Pointer recently resigned from the United States Army, and William Meade Montgomery, a former quartermaster clerk who had served under McCulloch's uncle in the old U.S. Army. It would take time before the three regiments initially authorized in McCulloch's orders, one each from Arkansas, Louisiana, and Texas, could join him, and

7 S. Cooper to Brigadier General McCulloch, May 13, 1861, *War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies*, 128 vols. (Washington, 1880-1901), Series I, volume 3, 575-576, hereafter *OR*. (All references are to Series I unless otherwise noted.); Walter Lee Brown, "Albert Pike, 1807-1891," unpublished PhD dissertation (University of Texas, 1955), 540-544; Jefferson Davis to the Congress of the Confederate States, December 12, 1861, James D. Richardson, ed., *A Compilation of the Messages and Papers of the Confederacy, Including the Diplomatic Correspondence, 1861-1865*, 2 vols. (Nashville, 1905), I, 149-151. // Also, see Thomas W. Cutrer, *Ben McCulloch and the Frontier Military Tradition*, (Chapel Hill, 1993) for a full biography of McCulloch.

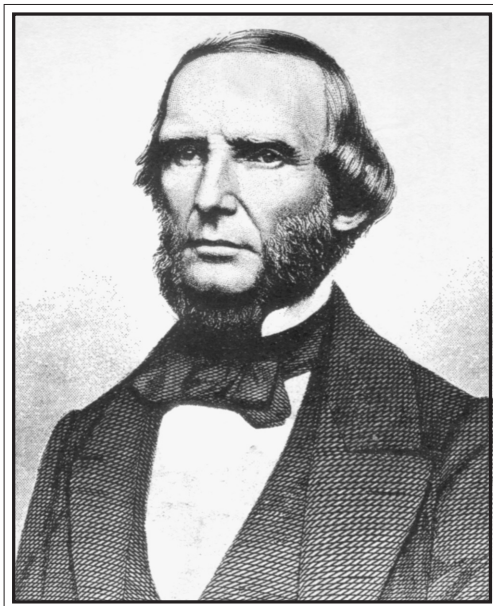
8 Quoted in Victor M. Rose, *The Life and Services of Gen. Ben* (Philadelphia, 1888), 154-155.

9 *Ibid.*, 130.

Ben McCulloch. *NPS*

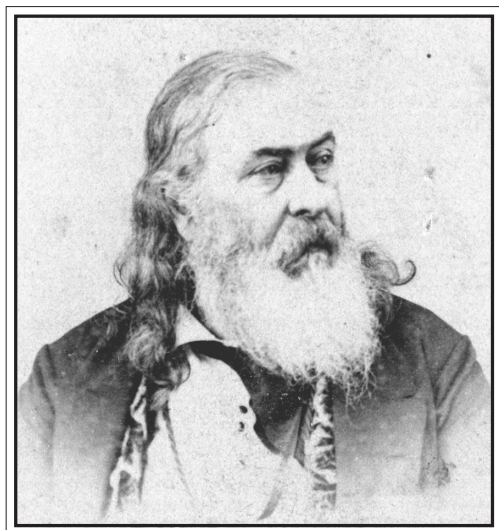
before the pair of Indian regiments recommended by the War Department could be raised, organized, and properly armed.

It was not long before McCulloch encountered yet another obstacle to the accomplishment of his mission. He and Commissioner Albert Pike went to the Indian Territory, Pike to attempt to conclude treaties with all of the Five Civilized Tribes as well as with as many reserve and wild bands as possible, McCulloch hoping to select a military headquarters site and to establish a base of operation in the Cherokee Nation, which was strategically located in the northeastern corner of the Territory. Both Pike and McCulloch,



however, were rebuffed by Principal Chief John Ross of the Cherokees. In an interview on June 5, Ross insisted on strict neutrality for the Cherokees, rejected Pike's offer of a Confederate treaty of friendship, and refused to permit a Confederate headquarters or military operations within the Cherokee Nation.¹⁰

Commissioner Pike went ahead to conclude successfully a series of treaties with most of the other Indians of the

Albert Pike. *NPS*

10 Edward Everett Dale, "The Cherokees in the Confederacy," in *Journal of Southern History*, XIII (May 1947), 162-163. // For more recent scholarship on the role of the Five Civilized Tribes in the Civil War, see Clint Crowe, *Caught in the Maelstrom: The Indian Nations in the Civil War, 1861-1865* (El Dorado Hills, California, 2019).

Territory, and eventually, in August 1861, Ross and his faction would be obliged to capitulate to the Confederate cause.¹¹

McCulloch, meanwhile, could only report Ross's refusal to Confederate Secretary of War Leroy Pope Walker and suggest that his district be expanded to include military control of northwest Arkansas, where Ross's attitude would compel him to operate anyway. The same day, McCulloch also wrote Chief Ross that he would respect Cherokee neutrality, but if he heard of any Northern advance through the Cherokee Nation, he would "at once advance into that Nation."¹² The old Chief understood the threat and expressed his wish to live in peace and friendship, but he reiterated his determination to remain neutral and to repel invasion by either side.¹³

By the time he wrote Ross on June 12, McCulloch had acquired sufficient military strength to carry out his threat to invade the Cherokee Nation, if necessary. On that date Colonel Thomas J. Churchill's First Arkansas Mounted Rifles, a Confederate regiment of some 700 men, reported for duty with McCulloch's command at Fort Smith. Approximately one week earlier, the Third Louisiana Infantry, commanded by a West Point colonel named Louis Hebert, had arrived 1,060 strong. Already much admired for its appearance, the regiment would prove equally admirable under fire. The third Confederate regiment destined for McCulloch's command, the Third Texas Cavalry under Colonel Elkanah Greer, was assembling at its rendezvous point in Dallas, Texas.¹⁴ Almost two months would pass before these eager Texas volunteers, sometimes also called the South Kansas-Texas Regiment, would join McCulloch in the field. Even without them, he had a substantial and reliable force, and in an emergency he could presumably call on the military forces of Arkansas.

To establish the state troops, known as the "Army of Arkansas," the State Convention had divided Arkansas into an eastern and a western military district, each to furnish one division for its own defense and to be commanded by a brigadier general. The Convention's appointee as brigadier general of the second (or western) division was Nicholas Bartlett Pearce, a West Pointer of the class of 1850. N. Bart Pearce, as he was usually known, was directed by the Convention to begin raising state troops, to procure 2,500 stand of small arms and a battery of field artillery from the Little Rock Arsenal, and to establish his

11 Ibid., 165.

12 McCulloch to L.P. Walker and to John Ross, both June 12, 1861, *OR* vol. 3, 590-592.

13 John Ross to McCulloch, June 17, 1861, *Ibid.*, 596-597.

14 Stephen B. Oates, *Confederate Cavalry West of the River* (Austin, 1961), 15.

headquarters at Fort Smith. Pearce was to cooperate with General McCulloch in defense of the state.¹⁵

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ON JUNE 14, McCulloch reported to Secretary Walker that an urgent plea for military aid had just been received from Governor Jackson of Missouri. The new Federal commander at St. Louis, Brigadier General Nathaniel Lyon, was bringing pressure to bear on Governor Jackson to yield completely to Federal authority. On June 11 Lyon had repudiated Harney's neutrality agreement with the state authorities. Jackson had mobilized the State Guard, called for volunteers, and dispatched a courier to McCulloch to ask for help. Considering Jackson's situation, Chief John Ross's intransigence, and Lyon's increasing strength, McCulloch proposed that he occupy Fort Scott, Kansas, on the Missouri border. This did not mean that he intended to invade Missouri. At Fort Scott he could, as he explained to Secretary Walker, give "heart and confidence" to the Missouri rebels and also "accomplish the very purpose for which I was sent here, preventing a force from the North invading the Indian Territory." By drawing supplies from the pro-Confederate western counties of Missouri, McCulloch would soon be enabled to take any position on the Arkansas River in Kansas he chose. He again asked for command in northwest Arkansas so that he might recruit Confederate troops, but urged that Indian troops not be used outside of the Indian Territory because to do so might bring censure on the Confederacy.¹⁶

By June 26 Secretary Walker had received McCulloch's Fort Scott plan and forwarded his tentative approval.¹⁷ Shortly afterward he cautioned,

Missouri as a Southern State still in the Union requires, as you will readily perceive, much prudence and circumspection, and it should only be when necessity and propriety unite that active and direct assistance should be afforded by crossing the boundary and entering the State before communicating with this Department.¹⁸

McCulloch would surely have agreed with the spirit and intent of this letter had he received it earlier, but events had in the meantime persuaded him that he must, instead of

15 David Y. Thomas, *Arkansas in War and Reconstruction, 1861-1874* (Little Rock, 1926), 85-86; Leo E. Huff, "The Military Board in Confederate Arkansas," *Arkansas Historical Quarterly*, XXVI (Spring, 1967), 76-77.

16 Rose, *McCulloch*, 157.

17 S. Cooper to McCulloch, June 26, 1861, *OR* 3, 599-600.

18 L. P. Walker to McCulloch, July 4, 1861, *OR* vol. 3, 603; Castel, *Price*, 32.

merely occupying Fort Scott on the Missouri border, actually move into Missouri with all the force that he could muster. On the same day that Walker wrote his letter to McCulloch (July 4, 1861), McCulloch crossed over the Missouri border with Colonel Churchill's First Arkansas Mounted Rifles and 1, 200 men of General N. Bart Pearce's Division of the Army of Arkansas. Not far behind the main body was Colonel Louis Hebert's Third Louisiana Infantry. Just above the Missouri line, they rendezvoused with Sterling Price and 1, 700 mounted Missouri State Guardsmen.

For the first time in the war a Confederate army had invaded a state that in every legal sense was still in the Union. McCulloch, without authority from Richmond, had taken a bold step indeed. He had been urged on by General Price, who informed him that General Lyon had taken Missouri's capital at Jefferson City and driven Governor Jackson's and Price's forces from strategic positions on the Missouri River. Governor Jackson's forces were rumored to be trapped between General Lyon on the north and Union Brigadier General Franz Sigel on the south. Price's reports, which exaggerated Lyon's strength, had persuaded McCulloch that he must move on Missouri, not merely to extricate Jackson and his State Guard but to halt a blue avalanche before it reached Arkansas.¹⁹

"Citizens of Arkansas, rally to the defense of your frontier," announced McCulloch's proclamation to the citizens of Arkansas, which rhetorically demonstrated his concern over Lyon's momentum. He continued:

The troops of Missouri are falling back upon you, if they are not now sustained, your state will be invaded and your homes desolated.

All who can arm themselves will at once rendezvous at Fayetteville, where they will await further orders. All those who have arms belonging to the state, will march to the scene of action, or give their arms to those who will not desert their country in this hour of danger. . . . Rally promptly, then citizens of Arkansas, and let us send this Northern Horde back from whence it came!!

Ben McCulloch
Brig. Gen'l. Cm'dg,²⁰

19 McCulloch to L.P. Walker, June 29, 1861, *Official Records*, Ser. I, Vol. III, 600; Ben E. McCulloch to Henry E. McCulloch, July 24, 1861, photostat in McCulloch Papers, Archives Collection, University of Texas Library.

20 *Fort Smith Times and Herald*, June 27, 1861. A separate report in the same issue said that Missouri was overrun, that Arkansas was to be invaded, that Lane and Montgomery were marching on the Indian Territory, and that Springfield, Missouri was filled with Federal troops poised to move on Fayetteville.

In his haste McCulloch ignored both protocol and the proper distinction between military and civilian authority. It was, as critics would point out, the prerogative of the governor of Arkansas, not that of the Confederate military commander of the Indian Territory, to issue proclamations to the citizens of Arkansas. To the Texas authorities McCulloch wrote of the approaching danger in such terms that on July 20, Governor Edward Clark proclaimed to the citizens of Texas that although he had already offered ten regiments of Texas volunteers to President Davis for service in Missouri or Arkansas, he nevertheless urged that all Texans take the extra precaution of arming themselves.²¹

In spite of the excitement surrounding its beginning, McCulloch's first excursion into Missouri proved to be little more than a forced march of some five days' duration. From their rendezvous point the combined Confederate, Arkansas, and Missouri forces of McCulloch, Pearce, and Price marched north toward Neosho, a small southwestern Missouri town, where General Sigel had been reported menacing Governor Jackson's line of retreat. Having arrived there and captured a Union detachment of about 100 men without a fight, General McCulloch learned that Sigel's men, mostly Union Home Guards, had been defeated by Jackson's troops on July 5 at Carthage twenty miles north of Neosho. Sigel had retreated in the direction of Springfield, opening the way for Jackson's withdrawal to the south. Soon thereafter Jackson and his men were met upon the road, and the temporary crisis appeared to be over. Governor Jackson was safe, and General Lyon was still many miles to the north of Springfield. General McCulloch withdrew to Camp Jackson, near Maysville, Arkansas, not far from the Missouri border. He explained to Secretary Walker on July 9: "Having made the movement [into Missouri] without authority, and having accomplished my mission, I determined to fall back to this position and organize a force with a view of future operations."²²

McCulloch's prudent decision took into account the situation of his own and the Missouri forces. His inexperienced troops required extensive training, were short of arms and ammunition, and until Colonel Greer's Third Texas Cavalry should arrive, were below authorized strength. As for the condition of the Missourians, McCulloch had been appalled by their unsoldierly appearance and conduct on the march to Neosho. Most of them had not yet even been assigned to companies and regiments and were poorly armed with shotguns and squirrel rifles. Furthermore, McCulloch distrusted the military abilities of their largely

21 *Austin Texas State Gazette*, July 29, 1861. Separately in the same issue, Texans were advised that their old Kentucky rifles bored out to the caliber of the Minie ball would have a range of 400 yards and be useful in repelling invaders.

22 McCulloch to L. P. Walker, July 9, 1861, *OR* 3, 606. // For an excellent tactical study of this small but fascinating and important battle, see David C. Hinze and Karen Farnham, *The Battle of Carthage: Border War in Southwest Missouri, July 5, 1861* (Savas Publishing, 1997).

political leaders. A brief respite from active operations would give the Missourians time to organize military units. Should they again require support, McCulloch's camp was within two days' marching distance of their encampment at Cowskin Prairie in the extreme northeast corner of the Indian Territory.

After McCulloch's withdrawal to Arkansas, General Lyon's Union forces of some 5,000, (believed by McCulloch to be 10,000), had gone into camp seventy miles north of Maysville at Springfield, where wagon roads led north to the railheads at Rolla and Sedalia. Although McCulloch credited Lyon's army with superior strength, it was actually on the verge of dissolution because the short-term enlistments of the volunteers ran out. Ignorant of Lyon's true situation, McCulloch was keenly aware of what he considered the continuing threat to both Arkansas and the Indian Territory posed by the Federal army. Provided he did not receive orders to the contrary, McCulloch was determined to blunt that threat by attacking as soon as the troops of Price and Pearce were sufficiently well organized.²³ He was less than aggressive when it came to the capture of Missouri for the Confederacy, but was aggressive indeed in his designs for the defense of Confederate territory. On July 18, he expressed to the war secretary his determination to march against Lyon in the next few days. He was doubtful of the reliability of his supporting troops, particularly the Missourians, but the time was propitious since he had "reliable information" that no hostile force threatened the Indian country.²⁴

While there is no hint in McCulloch's correspondence that he had any objective in Missouri beyond a limited offensive operation to destroy General Lyon's threatening army, General Price, as commander of the Missouri State Guard, had much more extensive designs. Unlike McCulloch, Price was eager for the recovery of his home state from Federal control, a goal to which he would cling throughout the war. In the last two weeks of July 1861, as McCulloch made up his mind to resume operations in Missouri, Price had special reasons for desiring action. At Cowskin Prairie, where he was camped, his army would soon disintegrate from scarcity of supplies. Moreover, the Missouri State Convention was preparing to reassemble under a new president, and Price, who had presided over the Convention in March, hoped to disrupt or at least discredit their proceedings.²⁵

On July 29, McCulloch's Confederates, Pearce's Arkansas militia, and Price's Missouri State Guard assembled at Cassville with a total of some 12,000 men. On August 1, they marched north with the intent of destroying Lyon's army. McCulloch's doubts about the reliability of the Missouri troops were quickly confirmed. Before leaving Cassville

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ McCulloch to L. P. Walker, July 18, 1861, Ibid., 610-612.

²⁵ Castel, *Price*, 33.

McCulloch discovered that Price had brought with him some 2,000 unarmed men he had promised to leave behind at Cowskin Prairie. When McCulloch ordered that all unarmed men stay at least one day's march behind the main body, Price, as an independent commander, boldly rescinded the order. Even worse, on the second day's march from Cassville, near Dug Springs, the advance guard of the combined army, a ragged mob of Missourians euphemistically known as Brigadier General James S. Rains's Division, fell back in great panic on the main body after receiving a single Union cannon shot in their vicinity. The incident disgusted McCulloch. "It was at this point I saw the total inefficiency of the Missouri mounted men under Brigadier General Rains," he later wrote in exasperation to Secretary Walker.²⁶

The next day, August 3, discouraged by the misconduct of Rains' troops and worried about the shortage of subsistence stores, which was particularly severe among the Missouri troops, McCulloch was ready to abandon the campaign. At this juncture, realizing the gravity of the situation and anxious to continue the campaign to recover at least a part of their state, the Missouri generals, led by Price, offered McCulloch overall command of the combined armies. At first he refused, little desiring the sole responsibility for the retreat that seemed inevitable. On August 4, however, a message arrived from Major General Leonidas Polk, commanding Department Number Two east of the Mississippi River, that Polk had ordered Brigadier General Gideon J. Pillow with 12,000 troops to invade Missouri by way of New Madrid. Heartened by this news, McCulloch agree to take command of the combined Missouri, Arkansas, and Confederate forces and continue the march on Springfield.²⁷

²⁶ Ibid., 36; Rose, *McCulloch*, 169.

²⁷ Castel, *Price*, 37-38; Rose, *McCulloch*, 170. // The events described in this chapter led to the battle of Wilson's Creek. Two additional sources for more on the battle include Ed Bearss, *The Battle of Wilson's Creek* (Springfield, 1992), and William Riley Brooksher, *Bloody Hill: The Civil War Battle of Wilson's Creek* (Gaithersburg, 1999). Ed Bearss was the former Chief Historian of the National Park Service and his work was considered the benchmark for the event for many years. See also a recent study by Thomas W. Cutrer entitled *Theater of a Separate War: The Civil War West of the Mississippi River, 1861-1865*, (Chapel Hill, 2017). In Chapter 2, Cutrer describes the 1861 Confederate effort to coordinate the simultaneous offensive moves into southwest and southeast Missouri by McCulloch and Pillow. This book is an excellent source for gaining an overarching understanding of how the war unfolded in the Trans-Mississippi across the duration of the war. However, reviews point out that while well written, the book contains a bevy of errors including dates. (For a representative critical review, see Donald S. Frazier, June 20, 2018, *The Civil War Monitor*, posted online at www.civilwarmonitor.com/book-shelf/cutrer-theater-of-a-separate-war

The almost simultaneous forward movements of McCulloch and Pillow into Missouri resulted from coincidence rather than conscious design. Each was a local response to northern pressure, initiated by the separate decision of an independent commander, uncontrolled by any central system of command. Prior to August, apparently few if any communications had passed between General McCulloch in northwestern Arkansas and General Polk in Memphis, Tennessee. As commander of Department Number Two, the sprawling central territorial command on the northern frontier of the Confederacy, General Polk was charged primarily with the defense of Tennessee and the Mississippi River. It was for this purpose and not from concern over McCulloch's situation that Polk sent Pillow's men across the Mississippi River into Missouri.

Unplanned though it was in origin, a coordinated Confederate invasion of Missouri from both its southwestern and southeastern quarters appeared to be underway by August 4, 1861. In each of those regions some 12,000 rebel soldiers were advancing with an unparalleled opportunity to take this pivotal state and turn the right flank of the Union-line along the Ohio River. Success would require the utmost cooperation between separate commanders and commands. As the first week of August 1861 ended, it remained to be seen whether the Confederates would, despite the glaring defects in their military organization on the northwestern frontier, prove equal to the opportunity.