FORT WYMAN AND ROLLA WERE HIGHLY IMPORTANT IN STRATEGY AND DEFENSE OF MISSOURI DURING THE PRICE RAID OF 1864.

By Dr. Clair V. Mann.

Next Saturday and Sunday (Sept. 26 & 27, 1964) are the days fixed for a highly interesting and significant commemoration of the Civil War Battle of Pilot Knob, adjoining Ironton, in Iron County, Missouri. These two days, and the weeks following, were — AND ARE — of high interest and significance, as well, to Rolla — and should be appropriately remembered.

The program at Pilot Knob is to be "commemorative" — and "non-hate arousing in nature" — honoring and remembering in respect and love the brave boys, both of the "blue" army, and the "gray" — who fought and gave their lives in that battle. The program has been planned, and will be directed, by officers and men of the 307th Civil Affairs Group — a U.S. Army Reserve Unit commanded by Col. Arthur W. Jacobs, a prominent engineer-surveyor of the Rolla-Salem area, living near Salem. He is a personal friend of this writer.

This Reserve Unit has been planning this event for more than a year, and with approval of the U.S. Defense Department in Washington. It has combed private and official records of the Battle in minute detail. It has explored off Fort Davidson, the central focus of the Battle (named for a former Union Commandant at Rolla), and with mine detectors has located the mass grave of the many soldiers who were buried there together, after the Battle.

The Unit has built table models of the battlegrounds, with trenches and embankments of the old Fort — with cannon placed for firing, and with assaulting and defending boys in gray and blue scattered about — many already fallen from gun fire, after the fierce assault by the boys in gray failed. There will also be a tent-sized model of the battlefield, built with sand piles, marking positions of the contending forces. All these exhibits will be under large tent coverage.

The program is designed to have a "religious" or "memorial" savor, and not a re-enactment of the battle. The last resting place of these brave boys is regarded as "hallowed ground". The program will be in accord with that idea. A military band of 100 pieces will provide appropriate music, and buglers will sound "taps". Volleys from rifle and cannon will give proper salutes. The Sunday portion of the program will feature "church services" in several areas of the battlefield, in which communicants of all faiths can participate in the service of their choice.

The issues of the St. Louis Globe-Democrat and the Post-Dispatch (Sat-Sun., Sept. 19-20) have described both the Battle, and this program, in much detail — which we omit here.
The PRICE RAID, led by Gen. Sterling Price (had been Missouri's governor, years 1852-56), had its initial camp at Camden, in extreme southwest Arkansas, where the Confederate Trans-Mississippi District, under Gen. Kirby Smith, had headquarters. Things east of the Mississippi, and in Virginia, were going very badly for the Confederates. The fall of Richmond was imminent. Smith and Price felt that if a powerful Southern force were to invade Missouri, capture St. Louis and Jefferson City, and reinstate a Confederate state government — then perhaps the South-sympathizing people of Missouri would arise, join the South actively — and perhaps thus win the war for the South. ... And that might very well have happened, but for the Battle of Pilot Knob, and the events of the ensuing month — in which FORT WYMAN, the impressive fortress at Rolla, played an important part.

As early as April, of 1864, there had been rumors of a Price raid into Missouri. In fact, the first surge of it appeared in Platte county in northwest Missouri on July 7th. This surge of guerilla tactics spread down the north side of the Missouri river during the next two months. Then, on September 3rd, positive news came through spies that Confederate forces under Generals Sterling Price and Joe Shelby were concentrating at or near Batesville, Arkansas, preparing for an active raid. Union forces under Gen. A.J. Smith, which had been ordered to go east, and had proceeded as far as Cairo, were halted and sent back to St. Louis, both to watch for Price's further moves, and to defend St. Louis.

This interesting item, for Rolla, comes from Gen. Wm. S. Rosecrans report of the Battle of Pilot Knob. Surmising how Price would come into Missouri, he said: "There are three practicable routes of invasion. One is by way of Pocahontas, Ark., into southeast Missouri. Another is by way of West Plains and Rolla or vicinity, on north toward Jefferson City. The third is by way of Cassville, Mo., and on north either through Springfield, or by way of the Kansas border and to the Missouri river." He said that STRONG MILITARY REASONS FAVORED MOVEMENT OF THE MAIN SOUTHERN FORCE BY THE CENTRAL ROUTE — THROUGH ROLLA! The other two routes could then be taken by smaller units or detachments.

For these reasons, Gen. John E. Sanborn, commanding at Springfield, and Gen. John McNiel, at Rolla, were ordered to place their forts and fortifications in the best possible condition to resist the projected raid. THESE POINTS MUST BE HELD AT ALL COSTS! Gen. Egbert B. Brown, with troops in the Sedalia area, was to cooperate with Sanborn and McNiel. ···· ALL OF WHICH SHOWS, as Dr. Richard Brownlee of the State Historical Society at Columbia said in his speech at Rolla in January of 1961 (100th anniversary of Rolla's incorporation) THAT ROLLA AND ITS FORT WYMAN WERE IMMENSELY IMPORTANT AND VITAL IN UNION STRATEGY, CONTROL AND DEFENSE OF MISSOURI throughout the Civil War. ···· The Union generals, in this wise, anticipated that Price's MAIN ATTACK would be through the Rolla area.

But — throughout the war — Old FORT WYMAN at Rolla, with its four naval guns of 6 inch bore, flinging 32 pound cannon balls — plus the many cannon stationed at "STAR FORT" (Fort Dette) on the site of Norwood Hall, School of Mines campus — these...
Price Raid.

fortifications were viewed with tremendous respect by Confederate generals. Fort Wyman, together with Rolla Post and its huge store of small arms and supplies and its formidable garrison, were plans and things to be avoided ... And so, it turned out that way this time. Price and his forces just wouldn't come in by the Rolla way.

By Sept. 24th (Saturday), Gen. Shelby's wing of the Price army appeared near Farmington, headed for Flat River and Potosi, cutting in north of Pilot Knob and between it and St. Louis. Price, with Genns. Fagan and Marmaduke, came northward up the Arcadia Valley, facing Fort Davidson. In all, Price's army contained some 10,000 men.

It was high time for the Unionists to do something at Fort Davidson, so Gen. Thomas Ewing came out from St. Louis with some 800 men of the veteran 14th Iowa Infantry. Gen. A.R. Smith marched a formidable force from St. Louis out as far toward Iron Mountain as De Soto. The garrison at Fort Davidson now numbered some 1,000 men, - and they were to fight 10,000 of Price's men!

First skirmishes occurred on Monday, Sept. 26th, during which Ewing's men on picket lines were driven in. Other indecisive encounters occurred the morning of Tuesday the 27th. Then, at 2 o'clock on Tuesday the 27th, Price ordered a terrific direct assault on the Fort. His men were driven back three times, and finally, with a loss of some 1,000 men killed and wounded in 20 minutes. THAT WAS ENOUGH FOR ONE BAD DAY. A plan - and an unfailing one - would be used the next day - with artillery mounted on the hillsides to pour gunfire direct into the Fort and demolish it.

Ewing, realizing what Price would do next (shoot from the hills), knew he could not possibly hold the Fort. It would be demolished. Therefore, during the early night of Tuesday the 27th, he wrapped his gun wheels in sacks and blankets to eliminate travel noise, and with the 800 or so men remaining with him, took the road for ROLLA. At Caledonia, some 15 miles north of Pilot Knob, his advance guard encountered advance units of Shelby's troops, coming southward from Potosi to trap Ewing at the Fort. Ewing then knew he could not possibly join Gen Smith, so took the most defensible and direct road to Leasburg, on the present-day Frisco Railroad. This led over the sharp ridge between the Huzzah and Courtois Creeks. Col. Thomas C. Fletcher, left behind to blow up the Fort's magazine, was able to rejoin Ewing on the way. Price did not know until the next morning (28th) that his "prey" had so escaped.

Arrived at Leasburg, Ewing met the train going from St. Louis to Rolla - and started loading his men on board to go back to St. Louis. Just then, the Southerners arrived and began a siege of Ewing in a hastily fashioned barricade of railroad ties and the bank of a railroad cut. There would be no trip to St. Louis - ONLY to Rolla.

It was at this juncture (Sat., Oct. 1) that 500 soldiers from Rolla - the 17th Illinois Cavalry led by Col. John L. Beveridge - arrived to escort Ewing and his troops to Rolla. ..... A fact that gives this story an added SPICE for Rolla is that this Col. Beveridge was an UNCLE of our lately resigned Missouri
State Geologist - Dr. Thomas R. Beveridge - who is, among other things, a Director of Phelps County Historical Society. ... This uncle, Col. John L. Beveridge, was destined to have quite an important part in the next month's fight with Gen. Price. ... On his way from Rolla to Leasburg, Col. Beveridge had attacked and dispersed a number of scattered bands of Price's men, who were out foraging for cattle and hay.

One such foraging party, led by young Tom Lenox, went to his former home 8 miles south of Rolla - on Elk Prairie. Tom was the son of Hamilton Lenox and his wife, the former Pamela Harrison of Arlington. They were strong South sympathizers, so had fled the country. Their farm had been sold for debt and taxes. Leaving his comrades in the orchard at dusk - to "eat the sweetest apples they would ever taste" - Tom approached the house and shot the man who had bought in the home for back taxes. Young Tom never again appeared in Rolla - where to this day, at the Court House, there is a warrant for his arrest for murder. But his grandchildren - fine, worthy people - paid the writer a visit some months ago.

We must greatly shorten this story - and cover only the high spots. ... Ewing's detachment safely reached Rolla, and with Generals Sanborn and McNeil, Ewing sat in council of war. What was Price's plan? He had been turned away from St. Louis by Gen. A.J. Smith's army. Was he after Jefferson City? That must be it! AND HE SHOULD BE PREVENTED FROM DOING THAT, if at all possible. How prevent it?

Gen. John Sanborn had arrived in Rolla on Sept. 30th (Friday) with some 1600 mounted men. On October 3rd he and his men were at Cuba. It was then that McNeil, the Rolla commandant, decided to rush to Jefferson City. He couldn't ask for orders from superiors - they were in St. Louis. So he asked Sanborn to meet him in Vienna, Maries county, meanwhile taking every man and gun that could safely be spared from the defense of Rolla. From Vienna, the joined forces rushed to Jefferson City - arriving before Price did - though they had field skirmishes at the Osage river crossing. In Jefferson City, they, with the city's garrison, hastily mounted their cannon and dug rifle pits. THEY WERE READY FOR ANYTHING PRICE COULD DO.

Camped before the city, Price and his engineers held counsel. Spies sent into the Union lines returned to tell Price that he had better leave this place alone! He would get a repetition of what had befallen him and his men at Fort Davidson! The engineers agreed - and so, finally, did Price and his generals. In so deciding, they had completely abandoned the principal goals they had come to Missouri to reach - capture of St. Louis - capture of Jefferson City - and reinstatement of Confederate government.

NOW - they had a problem of a much more crucial brand. Behind them, coming from St. Louis, was the Union army of A.J. Smith, and the Rolla contingent, all now under Gen. A. Pleasanton, a highly competent cavalry officer. Ahead of them were Kansas troops under Generals Samuel Curtis and James Blunt. The dream of a Missouri uprising was fast fading. The most important thing to do now was to get back where they had come from - and to do that, they had to fight both the army in front, and the one behind. The climax came at Westport, where Price's men were decisively
defeated on October 23rd. From then until October 28th, Price was rapidly retreating from Westport to Fort Scott and to Newtonia, near the south Missouri line, on his way to Cassville and from there home. He led but a shattered remnant of his invading army.

Through most of this fight, and during this entire retreat, the 17th Illinois Cavalry, led by the intrepid John L. Beveridge, were at or near the front lines. As Col. Beveridge says, "My regiment, with the brigade, followed in pursuit of the enemy to Newtonia and Cassville, then returned to camp at Rolla, arriving here Nov. 15, 1864, having been out of Rolla forty-three days, and having marched from 1,000 to 12,000 miles, much of the time on short rations and frequently without forage." His regiment had participated in the very thick of the campaign, beginning and ending at Rolla. ... On the way from Springfield to Rolla, many of his cavalrymen had to march on foot - because the hoofs of their horses had so worn off that many had to be shot.

On his return to the old Camden, Arkansas camp, Gen. Price had a reckoning with Gen. Kirby Smith. Because he had totally failed in his great objectives, he was court martialed and suffered deep disgrace. Nevertheless, he was ever afterward deeply loved by the soldiers he had led and commanded.

This story, plus the pronouncements made by Dr. Brownlee of the State Historical Society, clearly emphasize the importance that Forts Wyman and Dette, at Rolla, had in laying down Union strategy for the defense of Missouri - and for conducting the several important campaigns that originated in Rolla - such as the Battle of Pea Ridge, in northwest Missouri, which struck down the power of the South in southwest Missouri for the duration of the War.

Friends and officers of the Phelps County Historical Society - aided by Dr. Brownlee - have for several years endeavored to make and carry out plans for the permanent restoration and preservation of Fort Wyman - which, as has been shown, was so highly important to the Union cause in Missouri. Our pleas, and those of Dr. Brownlee, to the State Park Board have thus far been turned down. Just this week, however, over signature of Governor Dalton and that of the new Parks Director, Clarence E. Wyatt, our Historical Society has received a proclamation urging all communities to "trot out" and list their historic sites, plan or open museums, promulgate publicity programs and assemblies emphasizing the need for knowing all about these things in the interest of world-wide appreciation of our heritage from the past. This, on a national basis, is being sponsored by the U.N.E.S.C.O. - even a world-wide basis.

Our State Department of Business & Administration has forcefully told some of us that Fort Wyman is the very top item of potential interest to tourists visiting Rolla. "Get busy and restore and feature it", they say. The Fort is the only such historic site in all south central Missouri - on an equal historic interest with the Wilson Creek battlefield, and thus Fort Davidson relic. It is entitled to our deep interest and regard, and to appropriate preservation. Rolla's every agency and resource should be marshaled now to preserve the Fort while it is still possible.

Let's do it! 

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