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## Daniel Hertle's Narrative of the Camp Jackson Incident in St. Louis, 10 May 1861<sup>1</sup>

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On 10 May 1861, soldiers recently mustered into federal service, commencing from various points near the banks of the Mississippi, shuffled westward through the streets of St. Louis. Their columns converged on a park-like area on the western border of the city where an encampment of the Missouri State Militia had been pitched for several days located at the present crossing of Lindell and Grand Boulevards. After an exchange of messages, the Missouri commander, Brigadier General Daniel Frost, surrendered in the face of overwhelming force to Brigadier General Nathaniel Lyon, until a few days before Brevet Captain of the regular United States Army. After having disarmed the militiamen, Lyon's troops commenced marching their prisoners to the United States Arsenal, but harassment by a hostile crowd provoked the troops to shoot back, leaving dozens dead, mostly civilians. While one regiment remained behind to secure the camp, the rest of the troops returned to the Arsenal with their charges. Most of the prisoners were then released after signing a parole.<sup>2</sup>

The Camp Jackson Affair would not only be the first armed engagement of the Civil War in Missouri, it would usher in a series of events culminating in the overthrow of the Missouri state government and its replacement by an unelected provisional government under federal tutelage. Missouri would be secured as a Union state and organized Confederate forces expelled from its territory for virtually the entire war, although guerrilla action would convulse almost the entire state beyond St. Louis. The action, driven at the first by the political ambitions of Francis P. Blair, Jr., in collusion with the brave, perhaps unbalanced Nathaniel Lyon, grew more painful to recall as time passed, in view of the subsequent death of Lyon at the Battle of Wilson's Creek, but especially due to the growing political isolation of Frank Blair once he separated from those who sought a more radical approach to waging war in a Border State. The radical of May, 1861, was already an outflanked conservative before the end of the year, and even enthusiastic participants in the march to Camp Jackson soon looked back on it as "that rash act."<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Paper presented at the Conference on the American Civil War sponsored by the LEUCOREA Foundation, University of Halle-Wittenberg, Lutherstadt Wittenberg, Saxony-Anhalt, Germany, 30 March 2001.

There are many accounts of Camp Jackson. One that has not been exploited is that published by Daniel Hertle in Chicago in 1865. Daniel Hertle, born in Bergzabern in the Rhenish Palatinate in 1824, was a melancholy radical who had lost his fiancée due to his revolutionary politics, an emotional catastrophe that marked his entire life. He arrived in the United States in 1850, and he soon became a leading figure in German-language American journalism, first at the Albany *Freie Blätter*, then at the *Illinois Staatszeitung* of Chicago, then at St. Louis' *Westliche Post*. He returned to Germany after the Franco-Prussian War and took a position in Mannheim, but apparently the cult of the new Empire disturbed him so badly in the 1870s that he vanished on a hike in the Bavarian Alps and was believed to have drowned himself in Chiemsee in despair.<sup>4</sup> The narrative privately printed by Hertle in Chicago on the press of the *Illinois Staatszeitung* in April, 1865, at the very end of hostilities in the Civil War, is essentially a political pamphlet on behalf of the radical Republicans and directed against Frank Blair. Only 136 pages long, it has generally been overlooked by Anglo-Americans not only because it is written in German, but also because its title would superficially indicate a broader book: *Die Deutschen in Nordamerika und der Freiheitskampf in Missouri* [The Germans in North America and the Struggle for Liberty in Missouri]. In fact, only the first forty pages of the book deal with broader events, culminating in the massive German immigration to the Midwest in the 1830s and 1850s. The center of attention from pages 41 to 113 is occupied by the crucial events at the start of the Civil War, which Hertle portrays throughout in revolutionary terms, as an ethnic and a social-class struggle.<sup>5</sup>

Hertle's description of the political events in Missouri begins on page 44 with the lapidary sentence, "Missouri ist das Schmerzenkind der Union." ["Missouri is the problem child of the Union."] He deals not only with the public events, but with events and factors more hidden, such as the formation of a gang in South St. Louis by the massive brick-mold maker Nikolaus Schüttner that specialized in terrorizing pale-faced scrawny secessionists:

The so-called Black Rangers formed an entirely independent organization, formed in the lower, largely German, parts of the city by Nikolaus Schüttner. They had their own weapons and were mostly people who had learned how to handle weapons in 1848 and '49 in Germany and the Revolution, and in America by hunting. They were good shots, big, bearded figures in their mature years, and they made a rather strange contrast to the clean-shaved faces and the skinny arms and legs of the young people in the ranks of the [pro-secession] Minute Men, when they encountered one another. The imprecise, mostly exaggerated rumors about the Germans' arming soon inspired a healthy fear in the

Minute Men, and it kept them from carrying out their plans.  
[59-60]

A distinct group of three companies drilled in the Turner Hall, but much of this enthusiasm would eventually be expended for naught. *“Die drei Turner-Compagnien liessen sich in das Regiment Blair’s einreihen, was sie später bitter bereuten.”* [The three Turner companies had themselves mustered into Blair’s regiment, which they later bitterly regretted.] [p. 67]

The State Convention, which unexpectedly stymied the advancement of secession by declaring itself conditionally for the Union, was dominated by such *“verkappte Secessionisten”* [“covert secessionists”] as Hamilton Gamble (soon governor of Missouri for the pro-Union provisional government), Sterling Price and Uriel Wright. To Hertle, *“Gamble war ganz dieser Convention würdig, ein neues Abbild der Halbheit, ihrer Armut an Liebe zur Freiheit und am Hass gegen Sklaverei.”* [p. 71] [“Gamble was entirely worthy of this convention, a new image of halfwayness, of its poverty of love for freedom and of hatred of slavery.”] The struggle for Missouri was not simply about the state itself, but in fact about holding the Ohio-River line against possible incursion into the pro-rebel regions of Southern Illinois and Indiana, territories later rife with “copperhead” sentiment. [pp. 72-73]

Hertle’s narrative reflected the fact that Forty-Eighters saw the events of 1861 as a continuation of their own German struggle against aristocracy, which went along with his almost pathological dislike of Southern ladies:

The Minute Men proudly paraded through the streets on that lovely May morning before they entered the camp. They were, as already noted, the crème of the aristocracy, or rather those who wanted to ape it. The blue cockade, the sign of rebellion, shone on their uniforms, which had been cut by the finest tailors of the city and tightly fitted, marching to ringing music to the place of their deeds that would soon be called Camp Jackson. The lovely, shadowy meadow of Lindell’s Grove was laid out in streets, of which Jefferson Davis and Beauregard Avenues were the widest. Very nice, little-used U.S. tents were raised and their interiors decorated with carpets and luxurious furniture; in short, everything was made comfortable enough that one could presume these fresh-baked warriors were there for a long stay. The ladies of good society made a daily pilgrimage to the camp and lent a higher charm to the military goings-on through their frequent presence. Following the example of their Germanic ancestors, who followed the army into battle, they incited their devotees to

deeds of glory, and General Frost led all the others by collecting around him in his tent a numerous female entourage. It was the honeymoon days of the rebellion that were being celebrated in Camp Jackson, to the pop of champagne corks, the introduction to the bloody drama that would torment the state for four years. The contrast of the two camps in the Arsenal and Camp Jackson could not have been more striking. On the one side were the coddled blossoms of a rising aristocracy, with all the failings and none of the advantages of an aristocracy of birth, the best customers of the casino and brothel, uniting in themselves the arrogance of a European squire with the ignorance of the mob, fine on the outside and raw and common at heart. In their splendid carriages in the streets of this camp, clothed in rustling silk, the prudish ladies received the devotions of these new knights of the nineteenth century, distributing cockades and sashes, spreading scorn on the cause of freedom, the cause of the common man, on their light tongues. [p. 74]

The denizens of the Arsenal, meanwhile, appeared almost to be the residents of another planet:

While over in the Arsenal was the man with worn hands, who has brought his earnest acquaintance with toil with him into the camp; he has little facility with his tongue, but he has an honest heart and healthy, solid bones. Although he grasped the weapons willingly, there is still on his face an expression of quiet resignation, the first pain of renouncing the enjoyment of family life. Their wives came on foot, bearing their children by their hands, to the Arsenal, asking for entrance at the barred gate and bitterly weeping when strict military discipline forbade this. They were earnest in their hearts; they were seized by no frivolous passion; they foresaw with fear and concern a future they would experience as widows and orphans, but they still repressed their pain. Even without silk or velvet too proud to see their husbands as cowards, and they said, "Go and fight for your people." It was the modest courage of quiet, genuinely feminine commitment to destiny, in contrast to those Southern hotspurs of their sex, who appeared to cast off every ornament of their femininity in their crazy mania in order to satisfy their blind passion. Why, many asked, was

there this striking contrast in female passions in the two parties, not just in St. Louis or in Missouri, but in the entire South, and none of the sort in the North? Look at the histories of collapsing aristocracies and you will have the answer to the puzzle. [pp. 74-75]

It is striking how much Hertle's account of the soldiers reinforces from within the description later given by Francis Grierson as an external observer. The dutiful, dogged appearance of these freshly-baked federal soldiers bespoke their nature as hitherto-invisible working men.

The encampment on the western border of the city did not grow appreciably over its first few days, although a cannon pilfered from federal arsenals in the South was smuggled into the camp disguised as a shipment of stone. The delays in getting approval from Washington for arming home guard regiments to protect German neighborhoods was put down to Blair's posturing: "*Blair spielte immer den Zurückhaltenden, den Bedenklichen, obgleich er es offenbar nicht war. Er that blos so, damit seine Verwendung in Washington in den Augen des Volkes um so hervorstechender erscheine und um so höher geschätzt werde.*" [p. 76 — Blair always presented himself as the restrained one, the thoughtful one, although he was obviously not. He did it only to make his intervention in Washington appear all the more outstanding and to be thought all the higher.] By Thursday the ranks of the Home Guard were filled, and "*Lyon beabsichtigte, das Lager in der Nacht von Donnerstag auf Freitag zu umzingeln, so dass ein grosses Zusammenströmen der Menschenmassen vermieden worden wäre. Allein ein dröhnendes Donnerwetter und ein strömender Regen vereitelten diesen ursprünglichen Plan.*" [p. 77 — Lyon intended to encircle the camp during the night from Thursday to Friday, so as to prevent the streaming in of great crowds of people. Only a horrendous thunderstorm and pouring rain upset this original plan.] After the three Turner companies arrived in the Arsenal after marching from Jefferson Barracks south of the city at noon on Friday the 10th, Lyon signaled movement. The columns were only underway down Carondelet Avenue at 2 PM.

[Nathaniel] Lyon and [Franz] Sigel had studied the area of the camp precisely several days before. It was in no way suited for defense. Between the extension of Market and Olive Street, west of the city, starting about at Park Avenue, where only a few houses restricted the view to the west, the rather high hill on whose spine this street passes from north to south, declines into a flat valley that slopes from Olive to the south all the way to Manchester Road. In this hollow, completely commanded westward from the city and from Olive southward, the small — but until recently so hopeful

– army of General Frost and the incipient rebellion in Missouri was encamped. Lyon had his four regiments of Volunteers deploy via Market and Olive in such a way that they soon surrounded the camp from three sides, leaving only the south side open, where an open, flat field happened to make every movement visible. On the east side of the camp, on the green hill that gently inclined toward the camp, Sigel's and Schüttner's regiments stood with a few cannon; on the north and west sides were Blair's and Börnstein's people; about twelve cannon were planted on the hill to the right of Olive Street, so that the decision of General Frost and his faithful to surrender in all their bravery was made very pressing and easy to grasp. When the Volunteers had been stationed, the Third Regiment of Homeguards defiled down the hill from Market Street on the double, greeted with their comrades' cheers, and covered the south side of the camp. [pp. 78-79]

Once surrender had been agreed upon, disarming of the militia proceeded "*in bester Ordnung und sogar mit einiger Humor*" [ p. 79 – "in the best order and even with some humor"].

Here and there a refugee from the camp could be seen, with or without musket, seeking the wide open spaces, accompanied by the laughter of our people, who would wish him luck on his way. The worst situation was with the market women, whose business was just getting underway now that they had lined up their connections in the camp. One after another they made their retreat on the most obvious southern side across a large, fresh-plowed field that had been grown so muddy in the rains of the previous night that offered a genuine hindrance to these troops, weighed down as they were with heavy baggage. But they still ran and waded with energy and haste through thick and thin as if Lyon and his abolitionists had special designs on their bedrolls and chafer. [pp. 79-80]

Once more it is the womenfolk of St. Louis that draws Hertle's ire, since they acted as if the soldiers had mysteriously been stomped out of the earth. This reflected the fact that these troops did come figuratively from nowhere, since they had evolved from the "invisible" immigrants.

As soon as the troops had begun marching through the city toward the camp, it could be seen that the excitement of the women, who alone had remained home, had greatly grown. Many threatened the volunteers with their fists, others clapped their hands over their heads and shouted the horrified question, "My God, where did they all come from?" The good ladies had obviously never seen such a forest of bayonets. In front of the camp the curiosity of the onlookers and the rage of the rebels was so great that they seemed to forget that what was happening was more than a mere show. [p. 80]

This comic relief was soon followed by tragedy, as a mob formed around the troops preparing to escort the prisoners off the field. Potshots fired at the troops soon elicited fire in response, and the result was the famous "massacre" of Camp Jackson, in which a large number of civilians as well as partisans were killed or injured. What followed was a revolutionary experience in which parties formed that would persist for decades. Many persons regarded as "moderate Unionists" became virulent secessionists, and would remain so, but attempts to stymie the deployment of troops in the city through rioting on Saturday, 11 May, failed miserably, so that many Southern sympathizers fled in fear of just revenge. They would never have the same control again.

Hertle's narrative goes on to describe the events of 1861, stressing the heroism of Nathaniel Lyon and the ultimate perfidy of Frank Blair in undermining the authority of the new regional commander, General John C. Frémont. Blair would lose his footing in St. Louis in the congressional elections of 1862, when Radicals openly attacked him for his "treason" against the cause.

Hertle's little book is evidence of one of the first steps on the way to the making of one of several distinct Camp Jackson myths, worthy to be placed alongside the accounts of Snead, Robert Rombauer, Börnstein<sup>6</sup> and others, since the episode would become a touchstone of party identity for decades to come. The scar was still being fingered painfully around the start of the twentieth century by the St. Louis novelist Winston Churchill (from a pro-Southern family),<sup>7</sup> besides the reveries of Francis Grierson. In a moment a fortuitous association of the marginal and the despised had seized power and delivered a permanent, painful insult to the traditional leadership of the city and state. But to the Forty-Eighters who had finally got their hands around the necks of kings in 1861 (to adapt Walt Whitman's phrase from 1848 to 1861), Camp Jackson was a psychic event more meaningful than any Anglo-American onlooker could ever understand. On the streets of St. Louis they achieved a *Putsch* denied them over a decade earlier and thousands of miles away.

One of the lessons to be learned from these many narratives of Camp Jackson is that there is no difference in principle between the "fictional"



narrations and the “historical” or “journalistic” accounts. They all recapitulate the same basic events, seeking to recreate the thoughts and impressions of the time, which were rapidly rendered ironic by sudden shifts of party in the few following months.

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<sup>1</sup> Paper presented at the Conference on the American Civil War sponsored by the LEUCOREA Foundation, University of Halle-Wittenberg, Lutherstadt Wittenberg, Saxony-Anhalt, Germany, 30 March 2001.

<sup>2</sup> Summary of English information on the Camp Jackson Incident in William C. Winter, *The Civil War in St. Louis: A Guided Tour* (St. Louis: Missouri Historical Society, 1994), 34-55.

<sup>3</sup> St. Louis, Missouri Historical Society Civil War Papers, 8/7/1865, F. A. Dick to B. J. Lossing, describing the incident: “We were not authorized to do that rash act ... but we assumed an organization analogous to a legal one.”

<sup>4</sup> Adolph Zucker, ed., *The Forty-Eighters: Political Refugees of the German Revolution of 1848* (New York, 1950), 303; Carl Wittke, *Refugees of Revolution: The German Forty-Eighters in America* (Philadelphia, 1952), 251-52, mentions a letter written by him from the Palatinate in 1872. The Hertle family believes he died in 1875, and the press reported he had drowned himself in the Chiemsee in Bavaria.

<sup>5</sup> The last part of the pamphlet, pp. 115-36, is an “Anhang” entitled, “Die Neugestaltung Missouris durch Einwanderung” [“The Transformation of Missouri through immigration”].

<sup>6</sup> Henry Boernstein [Heinrich Börnstein]. *Memoirs of a Nobody: The Missouri Years of an Austrian Radical, 1849-1866* (St. Louis: Missouri Historical Society Press, 1997), 292-311. Other contemporary German reports in Steven Rowan, James Neal Primm, *Germans for a Free Missouri: Translations from the St. Louis Radical Press, 1857-1862* (Columbia, MO: University of Missouri Press, 1983), 205-12; Thomas L. Snead, *The Fight for Missouri from the Election of Lincoln to the Death of Lyon* (New York: Scribners, 1888), 158-72; Robert Julius Rombauer, *The Union Cause in St. Louis in 1861: An Historical Sketch* (St. Louis, 1909), 226-38.

<sup>7</sup> The St. Louis best-selling novelist Winston Churchill, from a pro-Southern St. Louis family, published *The Crisis* in 1901; a special edition was issued in December, 1916 by Grosset & Dunlap in New York, to promote a silent motion picture of the same name. The passage on the Camp Jackson incident is pp. 283-93.