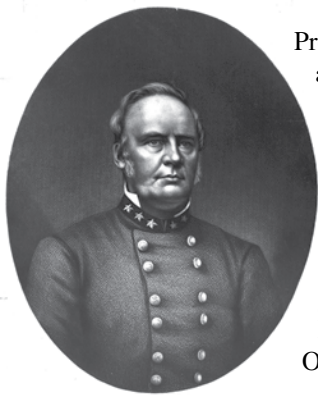




Experience of the Civil War

BY THE SCHOOL SISTERS OF NOTRE DAME
IN WASHINGTON, MISSOURI

BY CAROL MARIE WILDT, SSND



Pro-Union residents in Washington heard of the coming Confederates in early October 1864, and many had fled the town by the time the Confederates arrived October 2. Col. Daniel Gale moved his Federal Enrolled Missouri Militia across the Missouri River, which spared the town of a battle that would have resulted in far more damage. Confederate soldiers attacked the town, but there were only two deaths. It is often called "Price's Raid," even though it appears that Confederate General Sterling Price was never there himself, but rather near Union, Missouri.

The following excerpts are taken from the eyewitness chronicle of the School Sisters of Notre Dame at St. Francis Borgia, written at the time of the battle at Washington, Missouri. The chronicle entry describes the Confederate soldiers attacking the town in October 1864, and the responses of Confederates to the Sisters.

Top: Washington, Missouri, as it appeared just after the Civil War. Sterling Price's men came through here as part of "Price's Raid" in his Missouri Campaign in 1864. Price was eventually defeated in this campaign at the Battle of Westport near present-day Kansas City; his defeat helped win Lincoln reelection later in 1864. (Image: State Historical Society of Missouri Photo Collection)

Before becoming a major general in the Confederate Army, Sterling Price (1809-1867) had served as both Missouri governor (1853-1857) and in the Mexican War. As presiding officer of the Missouri State Convention in early 1861, Price opposed secession and voted against it, but changed his mind after Gen. Nathaniel Lyon took over the pro-Confederate Camp Jackson encampment in June. After his defeat at Westport, Price retreated to Texas, where he remained until the war's end. (Image: State Historical Society of Missouri Photo Collection)



Scenes of guerrilla warfare such as this were widely published both in and beyond Missouri. In towns like Washington, these engravings fueled fears that Confederate guerrillas would pillage and plunder their communities in a torrent of violence like this; small wonder that so many residents fled the town when they heard that Price's men were coming. (Image: State Historical Society of Missouri Photo Collection)

We were not a little surprised when on Saturday, October 1, our neighbor, Mrs. Henry Bleckmann, evidently in great haste, rang our bell and pale with fear, informed us of the burning down of Franklin and Union by the rebels. They were now already at South Point, two and one half miles from Washington and destroying everything. They would probably be in Washington by nightfall; all the people were packing and getting ready for flight. The lady advised us to do likewise.

As we had neither money nor valuables, packing up and secreting them did not disturb us. What caused us the most agonizing concern were the boarders who were terrified to tears. There was general panic in the town. The men grabbed their weapons; the women and the children were being rowed across the river. We left our girls free to go with them. Without the Sisters, however, they refused to leave. . . In agony we saw night approach during which our beautiful town was to become a victim of fire and flame or the scene of blood and death. All the Sisters and the girls, dressed in warm clothing (in case we had to sleep outside), anxiously awaited the things to come. . . At midnight, we were startled at a noise which made us think the attack was beginning. The town militia who had armed themselves for resistance against the attack, came storming along towards the river where they manned two steamboats for flight across the Missouri, taking with them all available boats. . . The enemy, expecting strong resistance, remained quiet about one and one half miles from the city for some rest. At dawn several of the citizens approached them with a white flag and surrendered the city. . . Between 6000 to 10,000 strong, they were led by Generals Marmaduke and Cabell. The plundering began. Everything fit for their use was taken. Stores and shops were emptied. The most destruction and theft took place in the homes of those who had fled; they considered these enemies. Those who stayed

were looked upon as friends, although they, too, were not treated in too friendly a manner. Strangely, however, when they saw us, they overwhelmed us with compliments and assured us of their general's protection. They called to the girls who stood at the windows, "Don't be afraid, ladies. Our general will protect you."

. . . When the men had finally plundered practically everything, they left towards evening. A Catholic commander in all haste brought us from six to eight hundred dollars worth of materials of all sorts as a gift. He declared almost under oath that he had paid \$300 from his own purse for the goods; he had been an orphan boy, Joseph Moore by name, educated by Sisters, and had long wished to repay them to some extent. He begged us to pray for him; he had not been to confession for three and one half years, and had not seen a priest since then. Tears trickled down his cheeks as he looked towards heaven saying, 'There is not a heart on earth that beats for me. I am an orphan!' The gifts were later returned to their rightful owners.

One company of soldiers remained in town far into the night. Before they left, they burned down the depot. . . Had the wind turned ever so little, the fire would undoubtedly have burned the next house. In that case, we too, would have been lost. . . the captain commanded his men, who were leisurely observing the progress of the flames, which were burning still more furiously by the ignition of a number of barrels of petroleum, to get the fire apparatus and to prevent at any cost the destruction of the convent. They dropped their weapons. Some held the horses while others sped to the firehouse to set limits to the fire damage. When at last the raging flames had been checked, this last company of soldiers also left. We continued our watch all through the night, even during the following eight days not venturing to change our clothing.