

The Siege of Cincinnati (1862):

A Complex Society's Quick Defenses

An Honors Thesis (HONR 499)

by

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January 2023

Expected Date of Graduation

May 2023

Abstract

In 1862 many citizens in Cincinnati feared an oncoming Confederate invasion after their successes in Kentucky. Although the siege never happened, it revealed major fault lines in the city's social and political makeup. The call for forces included both whites with rural roots, the "squirrel hunters," and the city's African American men, the "black brigade." Although the commanding Union General, Lew Wallace, welcomed all 95,000 volunteers who wished to fight for the defense of Cincinnati, Democratic Mayor George Hatch took a dim view of African American participation. The creation of fear propelled Cincinnati into action to build a defense against the Confederate invasion. This article offers an opportunity to look at the intersection of race and politics amid the Union Army's quest to secure one of the North's manufacturing and transportation hubs in the Ohio River Valley.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Dr. Stephan for advising me on this project and his continuous support as well as my peer revision group – Parker, Josh, and Sam – for their insights and critiques through the whole writing process. A special thank you to Mickey DeVise at the Cincinnati Museum Center for all her help and access to the archives for research. I would also like to thank everyone for their support and encouragement through this process.

Process Analysis Statement

My honors thesis was also my history thesis, meaning that my honors thesis was going to be historical and have to deal with the Civil War era. Through my time in college I have studied other peoples lives and how they impacted our lives today. When I was given creative freedom on what to research for my theses, I knew that I wanted it to be part of my story, part of where I come from. My great, great, great (great?) Grandfather was a Squirrel Hunter during the Civil War era, and played an important role in the defense of Cincinnati. Not much is known about the Squirrel Hunters though, my grandma has the discharge papers given to the soldiers but have no other records of his service. These men had such a big impact on the defense of Cincinnati yet there were hardly any records of their service nor remembrance today.

Focusing solely on the Squirrel Hunters proved difficult due to the lack of information and sources out there. As I kept researching these men I found out more information about Cincinnati's society and the people who were leading figures in it as well as how they responded to the Confederates. It was here that I decided I wanted to take a comprehensive view of the siege and look at the main players. My paper was going to be broken into three parts: Fear in Cincinnati (how the media created fear of a Confederate invasion), Division in Cincinnati (General Lew Wallace and Mayor George Hatch's tense relationship while trying to prepare the city for an attack), and The Irregulars (looking at men who are not soldiers who came to Cincinnati to defend the city against the Confederates). Each part of my paper focuses on a major player during the siege of Cincinnati, they all had their own part to play in making sure the city was prepared.

Once I decided on my topic and what I wanted to research I had to come up with some research questions. My papers overall questions were: (1) how prepared was Cincinnati for a

Confederate invasion, (2) how was Cincinnati's society towards the men who came to defend the city, (3) what was the overall feeling during the siege. Each section also had their own research questions that guided my research and writing through these sections. On the section about newspapers in Cincinnati during this time my questions were: (1) how did the media portray the Confederate military, (2) how exaggerated was the idea of a Confederate invasion, (3) how much fear did newspapers truly create. My favorite section to research and come up with questions was about Wallace and Hatch. These questions were: (1) Wallace and Hatch had very opposing ideas, how did this affect their relationship, (2) Who really was in charge during the siege. When looking at the irregulars my questions were: (1) who were these men who answered the call for volunteers, (2) how were these men perceived in society, (3) did they successfully fulfill their jobs. After coming up with my research questions I saw my past come into light, my family and other men finally getting recognition for service previously forgotten.

Many new skills were developed while writing my thesis. As a historian I have always heard of archival work but never fathomed of actually doing it myself, especially as an undergraduate. I was able to do archival research at the Cincinnati Museum Center and use sources that many people have never seen or heard of before and incorporate this into my writing. I had to learn how to work fast and efficiently, only having a day to work in the archives due to scheduling. While there I learned that archival work is something that takes lots of time and precision, if you get something wrong it could lead someone to the wrong source. While archival work is quite a struggle it is rewarding to use sources no one else has used before and shine a new light on a barely known topic.

I learned through writing my thesis that I learn best by connecting what I am learning about to myself. When researching the Squirrel Hunters I imagined my grandfather and how he

felt and what he experienced. I looked at the Black Brigade and how they were treated and how Cincinnati's views on Blacks have not changed much compared to today. I looked at how the past influenced the future and how I can see the effects around me in my everyday life. Understanding where I come from and the past of my family has always been important to me, especially since my family has a limited idea of our past.

After finishing my thesis I hope it brings more awareness to this event that is hardly talked about and give appreciation to these men who served but are forgotten. All around Cincinnati there are small reminders of the brave men who were willing to risk their lives to defend the city, small plaques and a small memorial downtown. I hope this thesis brings awareness to the history that most people ignore even though it surrounds them and inspires people to learn about the history of their families.

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Introduction

Confederate General Edmund Kirby Smith saw Cincinnati, Ohio, as the perfect target because it would make a “demonstration” to Northern civilians and the Union military that the confederacy was unstoppable.¹ If the Confederacy captured Cincinnati, they would seize the sixth largest city in the United States and a “strategic commercial center” that operated as industrial and transportation hub for the nation.² Since Cincinnati was such a valuable city for the Union “considerable effort was placed on securing the area around Cincinnati.”³ With Kirby’s forces in Lexington, Kentucky, and on the move toward Ohio, Cincinnati’s media and the mayor sounded the alarm. At the heart of Cincinnati’s makeshift defenses would be two home militias, the Black Brigade, comprised of free black citizens, and the Squirrel Hunters, comprised of white frontier men.

The relationship between blacks and Cincinnati during the beginning of the Civil War is something that historians have often brushed over. The “black brigade” gets a few lines of recognition in other works of literature, but many do not look at the racial tensions that were prevalent in society. By not paying attention to this we do not see the challenges black men had to overcome in society to volunteer to defend the city. Before the Civil War, many African Americans were coming to Cincinnati from the South to escape slavery. Cincinnati appealed to these groups due to the secure jobs afforded by its manufacturing and factory sectors. White residents often shunned factory work as a “dirty job,” leaving those positions to blacks and other ethnicities that were looked down upon. When Mayor George Hatch took office, he ignored the letters and demands of the black communities, only taking into consideration what the4 white

working class of Cincinnati wanted. When he was informed of an impending act of violence against the city's black community, he simply ignored the information and told the police force that no intervention was needed. Yet, when the city's defense rested on a volunteer militia, Mayor Hatch turned to black Cincinnatians for assistance. Once the immediate threat of the Confederate Army had passed, Hatch's and the police force's blatant racism in the city continued "the government's denial of black liberties," which led to more racial violence.⁴

While hindsight allows scholars to dismiss the episode as an exaggerated fear of an invasion that never occurred, unpacking Cincinnati's frantic preparations reveals the city's racial dynamics and the power of its press. Indeed, much of the fear originated from the city's newspapers. Understanding why Cincinnati responded the way they did is important because at the time no one thought that the city would be invaded by Confederate forces, even Ohio Governor David Tod thought that Cincinnati would never be in danger. It was not until hearing from Union General Lew Wallace that the reality dawned upon him that this was more serious than initially thought. By exploring this moment – and its fallout – we can better appreciate the quick volunteers who came to defend the city and the quick preparations made by Wallace. Historians can understand how a real sense of fear was created for everyday citizens by viewing the Cincinnati newspapers. Just as they had viewed political news through the lens of political affiliations, Cincinnati's newspapers viewed wartime events through their preferred ideological lens: The *Cincinnati Enquirer* was preferred by Copperheads (anti-war Democrats) and *The Gazette* was preferred by Republicans who saw the war as an inconvenience. *The Gazette* was seen as the more radical Cincinnati newspaper at the time. These two newspapers reported the same events in a different light. Looking at the media during this time of fear can allow historians to better understand why so much fear surrounded Cincinnati during this time. The

Cincinnati Enquirer often took the side of Hatch, publishing his proclamations and orders. By publishing everything Hatch did it created more fear of an invasion since Hatch was preparing for an invasion. Historians can better understand the actions taken if they understand the social influences coming together at this time.

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Looking at the Hatch papers in the archives at the Cincinnati Museum Center historians can see how governmental bias and prejudices played a role in the creation of these home militias as well as the racial tensions in Cincinnati. The archive in Cincinnati mostly had letters written to Hatch while in office. While there are records of letters he had written and sent there are only a few of these recorded. The lack of letters written by Hatch could be that they were lost in time or the fact that Hatch did not take a stand during this time and was very passive in his actions. The main sources used throughout this paper are letters from General Lew Wallace to Hatch as they worked closely together even if they did not agree completely. These letters allow historians to understand how the defense of Cincinnati worked better and the two positions both leaders had, Wallace of soldiers and Hatch of the regular working class. By looking at the sources in the archives one can better understand the motivations that played into the creation of fear, Hatch knew about violence in Kentucky and knew that the Confederates could be headed north at any moment. These sources allow historians to view the siege of Cincinnati as not an amusing event but something that was real during this time.

During the siege Wallace took command of Cincinnati and developed a close working relationship with Hatch. Despite the two having conflicting viewpoints and different ideas on the war they managed to work together to defend Cincinnati. While Wallace took control and

ordered Hatch around it seems that if it were not for Wallace, Cincinnati would have been unprepared for an invasion. Hatch abused his power in controlling the police force to advance his racism. He often arrested black men with little to no cause. Hatch and the police force often refused to allow black men to enlist into the militias and when they did accept them treated them horribly, the police forcing “blacks at bayonet point to cross the river and dig trenches.”⁵ While Hatch refused black soldiers Wallace welcomed them with open arms, needing all the volunteers possible. These black men were used as physical laborers, building fortifications and trenches. These men, the “black brigade,” were the “first group of African-Americans that were employed by military purposes by the Union Army.”⁶ After the siege, Wallace was commended for his fast thinking and decision making to keep Cincinnati safe. He was given the honor of “Savior of Cincinnati” both by the newspapers and by the military.

Fear in Cincinnati

In 1862, Lieutenant General Edmund Kirby Smith’s Confederate forces entered Kentucky and quickly secured Lexington, while General Braxton Bragg led his Confederate troops through the heart of Kentucky with two aims: threatening Don Carlos Buell’s army and securing more recruits for the Confederate military. On August 30, Smith captured Richmond, Kentucky, by defeating a small number of Union forces. By September 3, he had captured Lexington and Frankfort.⁷ Smith was planning on targeting Cincinnati due to its population of being the sixth largest city in America and their critical role in transportation from being located right along the Ohio River. The city’s location allowed it to become a major source of supplies for the Union’s Department of Ohio, the administrative district. Smith had clear intentions of laying siege to

Cincinnati to demonstrate the power of the Confederacy and capture an important city from the Union.

Due to the possibility of an invasion by Smith and his subordinate commander Henry Heth the media created a persistent sense of fear. Not every newspaper in Cincinnati was tracking the ongoing war and some tried to make it more lighthearted such as the *Cincinnati Daily Press*. The more popular newspapers, *The Gazette* and *The Enquirer*, had whole pages in their papers about the war as well as precautions about impending attacks. These newspapers did not just deal with local war news but also news from around the country. In *The Gazette* there were whole news columns from different areas impacted by the war as well as notes from the correspondents stationed there. These papers gave information on what was happening during these battles but also created a sense of urgency and fear when the battles were closer to home. When Smith was invading Kentucky and headed North the news started speculating that an attack on Cincinnati would be next. Due to this speculation, the papers were able to effectively create an atmosphere of fear as well as create a call for preparations to be made.

The most outspoken newspaper on the war was *The Gazette*, which had almost two pages of their daily paper dedicated to news about the war as well as information from their correspondents placed throughout the country in what were seen as 'hot spots,' including Tennessee, New York, and Virginia. When Smith first invaded Kentucky it was initially discarded as regular wartime news, just another Confederate attack being reported that has nothing to do with the surrounding areas of Cincinnati. In fact, *The Gazette* portrayed Cincinnati as a hero during this time for the volunteers who rushed to Richmond, Kentucky, to lend a hand on defending the state.⁸ It was not until the three-day siege on Lexington and Paris, Kentucky, that the newspapers began to circulate fear to the citizens of Cincinnati that the Confederate

troops were headed towards them next. When Union troops began to fall back to Cincinnati after the successes of the Confederate troops and Major General Wallace returned from Kentucky to declare martial law that fear of invasion became real to those everyday citizens of Cincinnati.

On September 2, 1862, with Confederate troops being only one hundred miles away from Cincinnati, the Union started to mobilize troops to defend the city.⁹ The news used phrases such as “Calls to Arms” and “danger is upon us now” in their articles to warn about threat posed by the Confederate troops. *The Gazette* also reported that with Smith being only one hundred miles away from the city any man with a gun should be ready to defend the city. In Covington and Newport, cities located right across the river from Cincinnati in Kentucky, fortifications were being built and men recruited. The fear in Cincinnati was at an all-time high as more information on the war kept getting received from telegraph and correspondents. Telegraphs about Smith’s troops headed North and writings from correspondents about the successes of other Confederate troops were received and reported in the papers, adding to the public’s fear. To the public receiving this information the Confederate military now seemed invincible, meaning that they were in danger of being captured and overtaken by the Confederacy.

As the Confederate troops pushed forward another day, the “excitement” of the impending war kept creeping closer to the border. As reported in *The Gazette* there was an article about the excitement, or anxiety as it would be called today, surrounding the new militias and the people of Covington. This fear is what caused a 30-day regiment to be raised by the people of Covington to defend against Smith. In Ohio, Governor David Tod issued a proclamation that was published in *The Enquirer* that stated any able-bodied man should report to General Lew Wallace in Cincinnati.¹⁰ Wallace also declared martial law in the city, citing the welfare of the citizenry. This premise of the proclamation, with Wallace warning that it was

“only fair to inform the citizens that an active, daring, and powerful enemy threatens them,” surely added to the concern.”¹¹ Wallace’s proclamation ordered all businesses to be closed after 9 pm and that all male citizens of Covington should report to the armory for drilling. In the defense of Covington loyal men in Cincinnati began to form companies, expecting to be gone for a few days at most. *The Gazette* also highlighted what was happening in Columbus and their fear of Cincinnati being invaded. Columbus’ “excitement” was so high that business was suspended, and the city sent their own regiments to Cincinnati to help defend the border. If Cincinnati were to be invaded, then Columbus would be next which would effectively allow Ohio to fall to the Confederacy. Cincinnati and Columbus were both big manufacturing cities that helped supply Union troops with resources that would be lost if invaded, therefore it was imperative that Cincinnati did not get held hostage.

September 4, 1862, brought more hope than fear to the people of Cincinnati. The people of Cincinnati started to band together to defend the city, specifically groups of people that had negative connotations. The news reported of a “colored brigade” that had been formed to defend Cincinnati even though the citizens did not agree to this action. Many citizens in Cincinnati held the belief that this was a “white man’s war” that had no place for blacks. In the time of fear the people of Cincinnati’s feeling towards black men had changed they were willing to let these men defend the city even though they still had strong negative feelings towards them.¹² The newspapers also reported a “gratifying feeling” seeing both Ohioans and Kentuckians come together during this time of fear to defend the city. Besides the colored brigade it was also recorded that two hundred white men with their own guns came to the defense of Cincinnati. These men, sharpshooters, were quoted saying “let the rebels come.”¹³ There were also fifty-six white men who were sent from a rehabilitation center in Covington to Camp Dennison,

Cincinnati's military camp, for orders on defending the city. While the news in Cincinnati seemed to be more hopeful and prepared for Smith's troops the news in Kentucky was less so. A railroad that led from Lexington to Cincinnati was destroyed in Florence, sixteen miles away from Covington. Kentucky correspondents also reported that there were still Confederate skirmishes in Lexington and Richmond that Union troops unsuccessfully fought.

Cincinnati's newspapers declared the city safe on September 5. Some papers boasted that Cincinnatians would feel disappointed if Smith and his men did not test the strength of their preparations. Word got around about Cincinnati's fear of attack and quick defense planning, calling the actions taken a "big scare" to the citizens.¹⁴ Most notably, *The Times* went on to criticize the foolishness and miscommunications between generals (and even correspondents who reported on Smith's movements) for the city's district of the time, martial law being employed when not truly needed. General Wallace, who was still in command and oversaw the whole defense of Cincinnati, ordered for *The Times* to be suppressed due to their claims and went as far as questioning the papers loyalty in the war.

In the week prior to September 5, the fear of Smith's invasion kept Cincinnati on edge. The news made it seem that Cincinnati was the Confederates next place of attack and that the citizens better prepare quickly. The relationship of the media and citizens of Cincinnati allowed for fear to be so quickly built, this is how the public got their news and knew anything about the war. If the media said Cincinnati was under attack next then it must be, as the citizens had no way of knowing if this was factual or not. Cincinnati was never attacked nor invaded by Smith and his troops, but the fear of invasion was implanted into the minds of those who lived in Cincinnati by the media.

Division in Cincinnati

Mayor George Hatch remains one of Cincinnati's most enigmatic mayors. He only served from 1861-1863, being replaced in March of 1863 by Colonel Leonard A. Harris. Hatch is the only Cincinnati mayor without a portrait of himself to commemorate his term in office. Information on Hatch remains sparse. However, much can be surmised from Hatch's actions while he was in office. Shortly after taking office Hatch's true fraudulent character was exposed leading "city leaders to cease mayoral consultation."¹⁵ The autumn after he was elected twenty police members were fired from the force because they voted for Union politicians in the election.¹⁶ Hatch ran as a Democrat, proclaiming his hostility to blacks and the Union even though he held antiblack and anti-Union views. Democrats used their antiracism to promote their candidates so Hatch having these views is not entirely surprising. While Hatch sided with Democrats he held deep Confederate sympathy, believing in their beliefs on blacks and slavery.

When Hatch first came into office, he was taking control of a community on edge about military invasion that also had a conflicted past on race. On one hand, Cincinnati was home to one of the largest black populations in the United States. On the other hand, the city had many Confederate sympathizers. As someone who sided with the Confederacy, Hatch usually sided with the white working men of Cincinnati over any other ethnicities or races. Cincinnati was becoming "home to the largest black community in the Northwest Territory," partly due to being just on the other side of the Ohio River, land that was free for enslaved people.¹⁷ With the influx of blacks came many concerns from white workers who felt their jobs were being threatened. With people feeling that their jobs were threatened, more violence against the black communities started to arise. Riots and mobs started to form to protest the jobs being taken away from the black community to be given to the whites. The black community believes that their rights and liberties were being taken away, while the government did nothing about it. In the early 1800s

free blacks had to carry certificates proving their freedom. These certificates, while providing them their freedom, also banned them from serving on juries or militias.¹⁸ This policy was still standing when Hatch took office and when he left. Hatch did not listen to the black communities' grievances and instead promoted the segregation in society, showing his racism and neglect for the black communities throughout his time in office.¹⁹

There was no racial violence in Cincinnati until May of 1861, a month after Hatch took office. George Plausin, a free black man, tried to board a steamboat when he was stabbed by a white man named Frank Quinn.²⁰ This was only the first of many acts of violence against the black communities in Cincinnati. By 1862 altercations between white and black communities became more frequent and violent in nature. On March 24, 1862, abolitionist Wendell Phillips was the guest speaker at Pike's Opera House to promote immediate emancipation. The speech ended with Confederate sympathizers forming a mob to silence Phillips by throwing eggs and stones. When hearing about the uproar at the Opera House, Hatch arrived with seventy-five police members after the mob had dispersed.²¹ These were the same members who Hatch had employed when he took office, men who shared the same antiblack views as he did. During the Opera House investigation, Hatch and the chief of police asked the Opera House manager if police were needed but were assured that the only thing that occurred was egg throwing.²² Interestingly, Hatch received a letter from Enoch T. Wharves that explained a mob was being planned that afternoon at the Opera House. To which Hatch "claimed that he 'gave [the] suggestion as much attention as [he] thought they were entitled to.'"²³ Hatch knew the Opera House was going to be attacked and yet still did not do anything to stop it, he even removed police forces from the surrounding areas at this time. Due to Hatch's response to the Opera

House incident “forty-six women wrote to the Ohio House of Representatives requesting the ‘impeachment and removal’ of Hatch.”²⁴

When anxiety in Cincinnati was high due to the fear of attack by Confederates, Hatch deployed three quarters of his one hundred sixty men of the police force to help aid Lexington, Kentucky, against the Confederate raid. Hatch had received a letter requesting assistance due to the success the Confederate Generals were receiving. Cincinnati did not have a regiment or militia ready to be sent, so instead he sent the police force. While the racial tensions and mobs were growing more frequent and violent every day, Hatch was more concerned about helping those around Cincinnati. During this week, when there were only forty police members, the number of violent attacks on the black community increased significantly. That “Sunday night alone, newspapers reported three separate attacks” on the black communities.²⁵ While the black community kept getting attacked Hatch made no effort to protect them but instead focused on helping other white civilians.

On September 2, 1861, Hatch received a letter from Major William Dorsheimer thanking “the municipal authorities and citizens of Cincinnati” for their help in aiding the 19th regiment of Illinois after a railroad was blown up by Confederate troops.²⁶ Besides sending troops to help aid other cities at the beginning of the war Hatch did little else. Based on surviving correspondence at the Cincinnati Museum Center, Hatch received many more letters than he authored. Indeed, authors such as Lew Wallace sent multiple letters with similar requests because their initial letters went unanswered.

During the siege of Cincinnati, Major General Lew Wallace was the Union commander who retreated from Lexington to Cincinnati to shore up Union defenses. From here Wallace ordered martial law in Cincinnati to begin preparing defenses against a Confederate attack.

Wallace took control of Cincinnati, something that Hatch never did effectively. Hatch and Wallace corresponded often, with Wallace updating Hatch on what was being implemented or happening. While Wallace possessed military power and authority, Hatch was needed for political legitimacy. Conversely, Wallace needed Hatch's authority behind him to help influence his demands onto the citizens of Cincinnati.

Wallace was aiding in troops in Ohio troops in Lexington during the Confederate troops. While in Lexington he understood that the "defeat or capture of my force, small as it was, would have been equivalent to a surrender in Cincinnati."²⁷ Wallace received orders from General Don Carlos Buell to relinquish command of troops in Lexington to General Nelson. Wallace then returned to Cincinnati with his officer intending to help General H. G. Wright in commanding Ohio as a military department. When he could not find Wright in Cincinnati Wallace began to lose hope until receiving a telegraph requesting his presence urgently. It was here that Wallace was given the task of defending Cincinnati against a Confederate attack.

The task given by Wright to defend Cincinnati was challenging. As Wallace recalls in his autobiography, one of his staff members tried to talk him out of accepting this command as "there is nothing at Cincinnati with which to make a defense – not a soldier, not a gun, not a fort. To try must end in failure."²⁸ What Wallace's staff member did not account for was the Ohio River nor the hills that Cincinnati is known for, useful geography for a war. If the Confederate military were to move in on the city there was little to defend the city with. Wallace had a risky command, yet he stayed optimistic in his abilities to prepare Cincinnati stating that "if General Kirby Smith will give me one week in which to get ready, I believe we can all lie back and laugh at him."²⁹

Wallace and Hatch did not meet until after Wallace took control of the city and invited Hatch to the Burnet House, where Wallace's headquarters was at the time, for a meeting. At the meeting Wallace persuaded Hatch to issue a proclamation for men to defend the city. During the meeting it emerged that Hatch had not heard of the battle in Paris, Kentucky, and the Confederate successes. Hatch was also not aware that Smith and his troops were headed North towards Ohio either. Wallace wrote the proclamation that concerned Cincinnati, Newport, and Covington, but needed Hatch to agree to it before allowed to be published in the papers. Wallace's idea was the proclamation and he just needed Hatch's support for it to succeed. Hatch believed that Wallace's proclamation would work, and Indiana might send troops to help defend the city due to Wallace's connections. Wallace was born and raised in Brookville, Indiana. The only thing Wallace asked Hatch for was his police force to enforce the proclamation, to which Hatch agreed. The one catch was that Wallace wanted Hatch to control and direct the police. This could be that these were men that Hatch employed and had good connections with, or it could be the fact that Wallace was too busy overseeing the military.

Wallace's proclamation stated that all business was suspended and that "no male citizen is allowed to leave the city."³⁰ Wallace said that within the hour that business is suspended citizens must "assemble in convenient public places ready for orders" and that this act should be carried out by "love."³¹ Men who evade the orders as stated by Wallace's proclamation will be visited by both Hatch and him. Hatch's proclamation spoke to the police stating that they will function as a Provost Guard until further notice and that all citizens are to respect and obey them.³²

From here on out Hatch and Wallace worked closely together. Wallace's autobiography and letters to Hatch show that the two men disagreed frequently, but Wallace insisted that they

must work together if they were to defend the city. On September 3, 1862, Wallace had written a letter to Hatch stating that the working parties were exclusively under control of the mayor. Wallace believed that there should be “a distinction made between the working parties and those enrolled for duty in the field” as well as a distinction in command for those troops.³³ Wallace oversaw those who in the military, preparing for invasion, while Hatch oversaw the working class and the regular everyday citizens. The working parties Hatch oversaw usually had no fighting experience and were used for physical labor, such as building forts.

Thank to Hatch and the police forces, Wallace was able to get fifteen-thousand men across the river into Covington to begin construction on the pontoon bridges and fortify the city itself. While getting the city ready for defense Wallace sent appeals to Governor Tod of Ohio and Governor Morton of Indiana. Wallace says that he believed that Tod never thought Ohio would be endangered by Confederate forces. None-the-less Tod was able to bring in volunteers from throughout the state, as well as their weapons, to Cincinnati. Morton, on the other hand, had already established an arsenal in Indianapolis and was able to send all the people he was able to spare, which came by the thousands.³⁴

Working alongside Major Malcom McDowell, the army paymaster for Cincinnati, Wallace began to distribute the newcomers and give them their orders. While sorting the men, these volunteers were welcomed by patriotic women who had baskets for them filled with sandwiches and coffee. Wallace was overwhelmed with the amount of support he received from both Ohio and Indiana, and he was not sure what to do with all the volunteers. “Fifty-five thousand of the best-armed, including the Cincinnati regiments, were posted behind the breast works and riddle pits ... fifteen thousand were stationed as guards at fordable places above and below Cincinnati ... and river captain John Duple had about two thousand or twenty-five

hundred in number.”³⁵ All these men played a key role in the defense of Cincinnati distributed by Wallace.

While commanding Cincinnati, Wallace recalls that on about September 4, General Wright returned to Cincinnati, transferring Wallace’s headquarters to Cincinnati. This led to Wallace being right next to his men in Covington, where they were conducting his orders instead of being located across the river. It was here that Wallace received the news that Smith divided his forces into two; Smith was going after Frankfort, Kentucky, and General Heth advanced on Cincinnati. When Wright returned to Cincinnati the working class sent him letters of their grievances against Wallace’s proclamation. Wallace’s proclamation left them without a job, meaning there was no way for men to support their families. These men badgered Wright until he revised the proclamation to allow for businesses to open, overruling Wallace.

During the siege Wallace and Hatch still had close communication. Wallace, wanting all the help he could get, wanted Hatch to arrest all evaders of military laws in Covington and Newport. These were able-bodied white men who were called on to help defend the city but did not answer the call. Wallace believed that escaping one’s duty to volunteer was unlawful and should be punished. It was here that Wallace suspended the government of Cincinnati but wrote to Hatch to keep the police “in a convenient place ready to lend me aid if emergency should arise.”³⁶

It is no surprise that Wallace and Hatch had a close relationship during the siege of Cincinnati. Despite the two having conflicting viewpoints and different ideas on the war they managed to work together to defend Cincinnati. While Wallace took control and ordered Hatch around it seems that if it were not for Wallace, Cincinnati would have been unprepared for an invasion. After the siege, Wallace was commended for his fast thinking and decision making to

keep Cincinnati safe. He was given the honor of “Savior of Cincinnati” by both the newspapers and the military.

The Irregulars

Sixty thousand ‘irregulars’ or men with no combat experience arrived at Cincinnati, including men from Indiana and Kentucky, to defend Cincinnati. Two groups of irregulars, the Colored Brigade (later called the “black brigade”) and the Squirrel Hunters, answered the call for volunteers. These men had no combat training or war experience. They arrived in small groups, sometimes with a home-guard company, all at their own expense. Wallace acknowledged that Cincinnati during this time was made up of “many gentlemen of distinction in life – actors, poets, artists, writers, journalists, lawyers, preachers, [and] doctors.”³⁷

These volunteers came in so many numbers that they were “to make the Kentucky hills swarm.”³⁸ The city was overwhelmed by the amount of support received that it had to scramble to host them. Volunteers “were lodged in public halls, churches, even on the decks of river boats. They were fed at the marketplace or from tables erected on the street corners by grateful citizens.”³⁹ No one could have guessed the number of volunteers who would come to defend Cincinnati. Wallace thought that he would only receive a few men, hence the appeals to Governor Morton and Tod. With the number of volunteers flooding Cincinnati Governor Tod reported that no more volunteers were needed and that those on their way to the city should return home at the state’s expense.⁴⁰

Wallace’s plan was to stuff the trenches with so many men that Smith and Heth would not dare to attack the city, but Wallace did worry about a panic should they ever face fire. These men were volunteers who Wallace used as a show of force, they were not soldiers who knew

how to fight. Most volunteers had been drilled for a day before given their orders. While the irregulars were of “limited military importance they contributed in a symbolic way to Cincinnati’s defense.”⁴¹ The irregulars were able to unite the city and “deflected attention from its own bitter differences.”⁴² These men showed that the city could come together for a common goal despite tensions. One group of irregulars had more risk than any other group of volunteers.

While many men volunteered to help defend the city none of them were risking as much as the black community. The black community of Cincinnati already had a tense racial relationship with the city. When Mayor Hatch ordered his proclamation, he worded it as “all people,” but, he did not mean all people. Women and blacks were barred from volunteering and serving in the militias. When a black man went up to one of Hatch’s officers to ask about enlisting, he was told that the war had no place for him as “this is a white man’s war.”⁴³ This created disagreement and resentment in the black communities of Cincinnati towards the government. Black men who wanted to volunteer believed they should be given the same treatment as other volunteers, including being allowed to enlist.

Report of mishandling by the police force and mistreatment in the military created concerns for black men who were wanting to enlist, leading them to escape into the country or hide from the control of Hatch’s police force.⁴⁴ The police were relieved of their duty of controlling the “black brigade” and made to promise not to abuse their power to arrest more black men, except when needed due to criminal activity. These men’s work included digging rifle pits, clearing forests, and building roads for the Union military. There was only one fatality in this troop, Joseph Johns, who was killed by a falling tree during the deforestation efforts.⁴⁵ Due to the mistreatment of black members during this siege Wallace put a judge and abolitionist in charge.

The black brigade was led by sympathetic Judge William Dickson, a white abolitionist, who was more than welcoming to the seven hundred black men. Dickson was one of the founders of the Republican Party as well as helping frame the Emancipation Proclamation due to his close relationship with President Abraham Lincoln.⁴⁶ Dickson's wife was cousins with Lincoln's wife, Mary Todd, and when Lincoln came to Cincinnati he stayed with the Dickson's. Dickson was very outspoken on abolition and desegregation in Cincinnati, using his law degree to help support slaves in fugitive slave cases as well as desegregating the city's street cars.⁴⁷ Adversely, Dickson was an advocate for the fugitive slave law, a law that said slaves should be returned back to their owners even if living in a free state.⁴⁸ While commanding the "black brigade" he received orders from Wallace on September 4, 1862, to build fortifications in Newport and Covington.

At the peak of panic, the "black brigade" had one thousand members. Seven hundred built fortifications while the other three hundred were assigned other tasks for the military.⁴⁹ As commander and someone who cared so deeply for racial equal rights, he made sure that his troops got the same respect and treatment as white soldiers. After the war, the "black brigade" presented Dickson with a sword for his kindness and leadership towards them.

Wallace recalled other men volunteered with "pistols, shot-guns, sporting-rifles, in short, all the arms usual to the unwarlike citizen – we called them "Squirrel Hunters.""⁵⁰ These men, referred to as either Squirrel Hunters or occasionally as just Sharpshooters, were known for their precise shots. Besides being hunters, these were farmers who deserted their plows to help the city. Although cloaked in nostalgia after the war, we know that many of these men came from the rural Ohio areas. It is said that Governor Tod knew the power of the Squirrel Hunters and told them to come quickly when fear of invasion was at its highest. Thousands of Squirrel

Hunters reached Cincinnati and there were more enroute before Tod called them off saying they had enough volunteers.⁵¹ Tod telegraphed the Secretary of War “that a large rebel force was moving against Cincinnati, but it would be “successfully met.””⁵² It is believed that Tod knew the Squirrel Hunters would be able to hold their own as they have “never [been] known to turn their backs to the enemy with the trust rifle in hand.”⁵³

When the Squirrel Hunters arrived in Cincinnati the market on Fifth Street was converted to a free eating saloon and the halls and warehouses were used as barracks. As the Rebels gradually moved towards Cincinnati the “Squirrel Hunters were drilled during the day and manned the trenches every night.”⁵⁴ While they never saw any battle, military leaders believed that if a skirmish were to occur the Squirrel hunters would have been prepared. The city was declared officially safe and even before the siege had ended many Squirrel Hunters had started their return home. In 1866 Governor Tod issued discharges to the Squirrel Hunters, granting them monthly pay for their service. Approximately 15,767 men were granted discharges, not even one-third of the number of Squirrel Hunters who answered the call for volunteers.⁵⁵ These Squirrel Hunters believed that it was their duty to serve and protect the city, much like their ancestors did during the American Revolution. The ‘Spirit of ‘76’ lived on through these pioneer men.

Conclusion

After the siege, fear of additional Confederate raids recurred in Cincinnati. In 1862, Confederate Brigadier Albert Jenkins carried the Confederate flag into Ohio by crossing the Virginia border. The in 1863, Confederate Brigadier John Hunt Morgan launched a raid that took hundreds of prisoners across Indiana and Ohio. While fear still lingered in Cincinnati, Ohio, Governor David Tod had the Ohio 6th, 8th, and 11th regiments at his disposal, if needed to defend the city.

Many of the men who helped defend Cincinnati went on to have successful military careers. Soldiers from the colored brigade joined the Corps d’Afrique, the 74th Infantry Colored Troops in Mississippi, and the 54th Massachusetts, a freedmen regiment that fought alongside whites in the war. The Squirrel Hunters joined other regiments too, such as the 11th Cincinnati regiment. These regiments were used for impending Confederate attacks or during spikes of fear to help calm the hysteria surrounding the city. Those who did not continue to serve in the military went back to their homes and families. Many stayed in Cincinnati where they sought stable jobs and security. Some men went West looking for more opportunities and land. Some Squirrel Hunters went West to Iowa after the war to keep the “Squirrel Hunter” spirit alive.⁵⁶ These men stayed true to their pioneer lives and continued West where they could continue this lifestyle without worry of the expansion of cities. These men were not recognized for their service until 1908 where they were given their recognition and pay for one month of service, \$13.⁵⁷ Only twenty-one men who went to Iowa got their pay due to poor management of these men during the siege.⁵⁸

Lew Wallace effectively managed Union troops and after the siege of Cincinnati he traveled to Camp Chase in Columbus, Ohio. Here Wallace was tasked with drilling Confederate prisoners and recruiting them to join the Union military. The Union needed more men to fight and turned to recruiting Confederate prisoners of war. After the war ended Wallace served on two U.S. military commissions, one to investigate Lincoln’s assassination conspirators and the other commission investigated the conduct of Confederate commander Henry Wirz.⁵⁹ After serving on the commissions he helped the Mexican army before returning to the United States in 1867 to jump into a career of politics. Wallace was well connected with Republican politicians as he was able to gain appointed positions. In 1867 Wallace was the governor of the New

Mexico territory but then was sent overseas as a diplomat in Constantinople by President James Garfield, someone who he may have had connections with while in Cincinnati. While Wallace was successful after the siege Hatch was much less so. In 1863, only a year and a half after he was elected mayor, Hatch was chased out of office to be replaced by Republican Leonard A. Harris. The citizens of Cincinnati felt that Hatch was not doing enough as mayor, especially after the fear of siege had calmed down. Hatch moved to Dayton, Ohio, where he lived out the rest of his life.

Hatch remains an enigma. There is still much to be explored about Hatch and his own personal life as well as his governing of Cincinnati. Knowing more about Hatch himself may allow historians to further understand his actions and policies during that time. Instead, we see Hatch and his personality through the perspective of others, such as Wallace, who often painted him in a negative light. While it appears that Hatch capitalized on the city's racial and ethnic tensions, including downplaying the role of the "black brigade" in defending the city and ignoring the black communities' pleas for help, more records from Hatch or his supporters would be needed to build that case. The society in Cincinnati was much harsher to blacks than it was on any other immigrants who were white (or whiter in nature), such as Italians and Germans.

While the siege of Cincinnati never happened it showed what occurred to a major city when fear spread throughout it. The Union benefitted from this fear of invasion as more men in border states joined the cause. Men in border states feared that a Confederate attack would occur eventually and that they need to be prepared. The immediate threat from the Confederacy allowed Ohioans to agree that the city needed a defense that was better than the quick preparations in 1862. The quick reactions of the leaders as well as the volunteers is what allowed for the fear in the city to subside. For many men, such as the "black brigade" and the

Squirrel Hunters, they were never given their promised pay or recognized for their service. This was not something the men volunteering were concerned with; they were more worried about protecting their homes and families from the Confederates. While the siege may have never happened, the city was prepared for the worst.

¹ Henry Heth, *The Memoirs of Henry Heth* (Connecticut, 1974), 166.

² Vernon L. Volpe, "Squirrel Hunting for the Union: The Defense of Cincinnati in 1862," *Civil War History*, 33 (1987), 242.

³ Baird R. Ullrey, Northern Kentucky University, "The History of Battery Hooper,"

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⁴ Luci K. Petlack, "A Dilemma of Civil Liberties: Cincinnati's Black Community, 1862-1863,"

Ohio History, 120 (2013), 48.

⁵ Volpe, "Squirrel hunting for the Union," 249.

⁶ Peter H. Clark, *Black Brigade of Cincinnati: Being a Report of Its Labors and a Muster-Roll of*

Its Members etc., 3-4.

⁷ G. Donaldson, Western Kentucky University, "Kirby Smith in Kentucky: The Invasion of

1862," <https://difitalcommons.wku.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=3267&context=these>.

⁸ *The Gazette*, September 1, 1862.

⁹ *The Gazette*, September 2, 1862.

¹⁰ *The Cincinnati Enquirer*, September 3, 1862.

¹¹ *The Gazette*, September 4, 1862.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ *The Times*, September 4, 1862.

¹⁵ Robert Herron, *Cincinnati's Mayors*, (Young & Klein, 1957).

¹⁶ Petlack, "A Dilemma of Civil Liberties," 54.

¹⁷ Petlack, "A Dilemma of Civil Liberties," 48.

¹⁸ Petlack, "A Dilemma of Civil Liberties," 49.

¹⁹ Petlack, "A Dilemma of Civil Liberties," 47-69.

²⁰ Petlack, "A Dilemma of Civil Liberties," 55.

²¹ Petlack, "A Dilemma of Civil Liberties," 55.

²² Petlack, "A Dilemma of Civil Liberties," 56.

²³ Petlack, "A Dilemma of Civil Liberties," 56.

²⁴ Petlack, "A Dilemma of Civil Liberties," 56.

²⁵ Petlack, "A Dilemma of Civil Liberties," 57.

²⁶ George Hatch Collection, MSS qC574ma RM Letter 3, Cincinnati Museum Center.

²⁷ Lewis Wallace, *Lew Wallace; An Autobiography*, (2 vols., University of Michigan, 2006), II, 598.

²⁸ Wallace, *An Autobiography*, II, 560.

²⁹ Wallace, *An Autobiography*, II, 606.

³⁰ *The New York Times*, September 2, 1862.

³¹ *The New York Times*, September 2, 1862.

³² *The New York Times*, September 2, 1862.

³³ George Hatch Collection, MSS qC574ma RM, Letter 36, Cincinnati Museum Center.

³⁴ Indiana Historical Bureau, *Indiana Arsenal*, [IHB: Indiana Arsenal](#)

³⁵ Wallace, *An Autobiography*, 614.

³⁶ George Hatch Collection, MSS qC574ma RM, Letter 48, Cincinnati Museum Center.

³⁷ Wallace, *An Autobiography*, 615.

³⁸ Volpe, "Squirrel Hunting for the Union," 251.

³⁹ Volpe, "Squirrel Hunting for the Union," 251.

⁴⁰ Volpe, "Squirrel Hunting for the Union," 251.

⁴¹ Volpe, “Squirrel Hunting for the Union,” 252.

⁴² Volpe, “Squirrel Hunting for the Union,” 252.

⁴³ There are multiple stories about this incident but there is no consensus on where it came from.

All stories have the same idea, this is a white man’s war and therefore blacks are not to enlist.

⁴⁴ Cincinnati History Library and Archives, *Black Brigade*, library.cincy.museum.org.

⁴⁵ National Underground Railroad Freedom Center, *The Black Brigade of Cincinnati*,

[ActivityBk BlackBrigade 200616 v02.pdf \(freedomcenter.org\)](#)

⁴⁶ Charles Theodore Greve, *Bench and Bar of Ohio: A Compendium of History and Biography*, (2 vols., 1939), I, 145.

⁴⁷ Charles Theodore Greve, “Centennial History of Cincinnati and Representative Citizens,” 769.

⁴⁸ Brent Coleman, WCPO, “The Striking Link between Cincy Judge, Lincoln”, [The striking link](#)

[between Cincy judge, Lincoln \(wcpo.com\)](#)

⁴⁹ Clark, *Black Brigade of Cincinnati*, 9.

⁵⁰ Wallace, *An Autobiography*, 613.

⁵¹ Nelson Edward Jones, *The Squirrel Hunters of Ohio; Or Glimpses of Pioneer Life*,

(Cincinnati, 1898), 341.

⁵² Jones, *The Squirrel Hunters of Ohio*, 335.

⁵³ Jones, *The Squirrel Hunters of Ohio*, 336.

⁵⁴ Jones, *The Squirrel Hunters of Ohio*, 338.

⁵⁵ Jones, *The Squirrel Hunters of Ohio*, 345.

⁵⁶ Lack, "Iowa Inherits Squirrel Hunters,"

⁵⁷ Lack, "Iowa Inherits Squirrel Hunters," 152.

⁵⁸ Nell Woods Lack, "Iowa Inherits Squirrel Hunters," *The Annals of Iowa*, 36 (1961), 152.

⁵⁹ Gail Stephens, "The Shadow of Shiloh: Major General Lew Wallace in the Civil War,"

(Indiana, 2010).