

OUR CAMP JOURNAL

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"We are but few in number but formidable." -Pvt. James Shelton, 7th Md. Co. B

July 2026

Independence Day during the Civil War

By Pvt. Jeff Joyce

Eighty-five years after the Declaration of Independence the United States was in the midst of the Civil War. Just a few months before, on April 12, 1861, the Confederates had fired on Fort Sumter in Charleston Harbor. In the decades following the Revolutionary War, particularly after the War of 1812, it became common for Americans to celebrate Independence Day with cannon shots, speeches, readings of the Declaration of Independence and fireworks. During the early years of the Civil War the Confederacy continued to celebrate Independence Day, asserting that the South was following the principles set forth in the Declaration of Independence.

That changed with the Confederate defeats at Gettysburg and Vicksburg in early July 1863.

On July 4, 1861, President Abraham Lincoln, General Winfield Scott and members of Lincoln's Cabinet reviewed 20,000 New York soldiers as they marched along Pennsylvania Avenue in front of the White House. Unlike a typical July in Washington, the weather on July 4, 1861, was recorded as "delightful and very favorable" with little humidity. Due to war-

time requirements there was no formal fireworks show in the city, though Union soldiers and private citizens celebrated with their own fireworks and cannon salutes, both in and around Washington.

On Independence Day 1862 President Lincoln commuted to the White House from the Cottage at the Soldiers' Home where he and his family spent the summer months to avoid the



worst of Washington's summer weather. During the day Lincoln welcomed veterans of the War of 1812 and on his way back to the Cottage met ambulance trains carrying soldiers wounded on the Peninsula.

The 7th Maryland, having mustered into service in August 1862, spent Independence Day 1863 near Frederick, Maryland, with the 8th Corps. During the winter and spring of 1863 the 7th Maryland had camped on Maryland Heights overlooking Harpers Ferry. With the Confederate invasion of Maryland and Pennsylvania, the 8th Corps was ordered to forward as a reserve for the Army of the Potomac, protecting the



Above right, Union soldiers march through the town of Frederick, February 1862. Above, President Lincoln's summer cottage on the grounds of Soldier's Home in Washington D.C.

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Upcoming Campaigns

JULY

July 3-5: 163rd Gettysburg, Daniel Lady farm, Gettysburg, PA Visit: www.GBPA.org to register online. **FVB Commanded Event (Individual Event)**

July 17-19: Funkstown, MD <http://www.funkstown.com/special-events/day-in-the-park/>

***(FVB Event) (7th MD COMPANY Event)**

AUGUST

August 29-30: Carroll County Farm Museum- Col. Monzi; Commanding **(Individual Event)**

SEPTEMBER

September 12-13: Frederick County Parks & Recreation Civil War Days-Crampton's Gap

(7th MD COMPANY Event)

September 26-27: Soldering Through the Ages – at [Maryland Veterans Museum](#)

11000 Crain Highway, Newburg, MD 20664 **(Individual Event)**

OCTOBER

October 3: Fort Ward Civil War Camp Day, October 16-18: 161st Battle of Cedar Creek, Middletown, VA - Register www.ccbf.us ***(FVB Event) (7th MD COMPANY Event)**

The Fourth of July that Could Have Wrecked the Country

The nation was already a tinderbox—and then the firecrackers started going off.

By Ted Widmer

The Fourth of July began with so much noise in 1861 that a Washington newspaper reported that it “aroused old fogginess from its sleep.” Even at daybreak, there were firecrackers, small arms fire, cannonades and home-made torpedoes, in addition to the tolling of bells from every church in the city. Then,

as now, many Americans measured the success of Independence Day by how much noise they could make, a tradition that had grown robust in the nation’s capital.

Still, the sound of so many explosions was disturbing in a city that was still jumpy, afraid that it might be invaded at any moment by violent militias, furious that a presi-

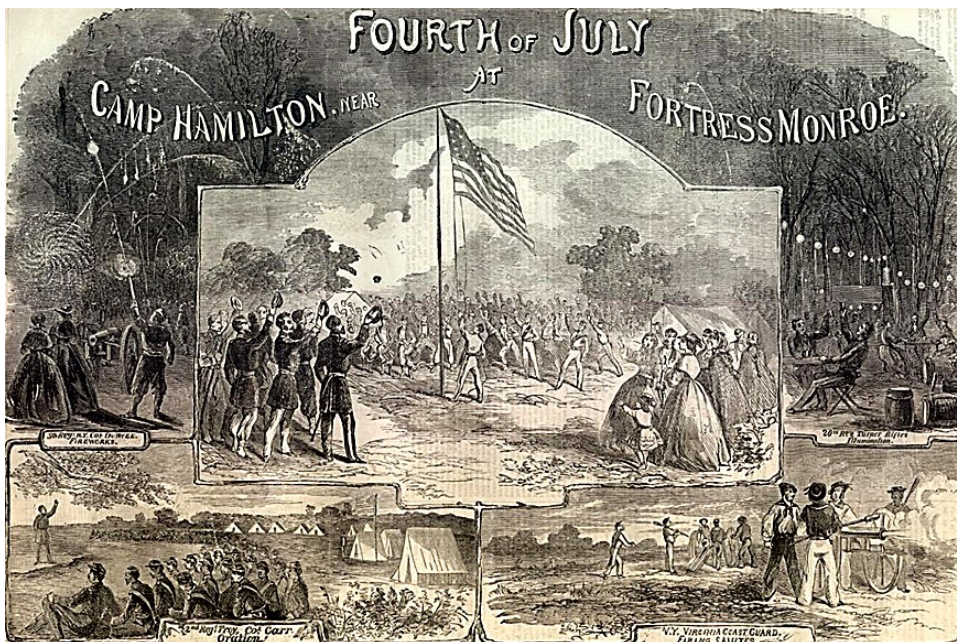
dential election had not gone their way.

Only a few months earlier, the Capitol had been threatened by angry mobs who tried to prevent the counting of the electoral votes that would certify Abraham Lincoln as the 16th president. As July Fourth approached, there were still many malcontents living in Washington, and Confederate troops were perilously close, roaming the Virginia countryside near what is now Dulles Airport. Many feared another assault on the Capitol by anti-Lincoln vigilantes.

The Civil War had begun at Fort Sumter three months earlier, when South Carolinians fired on the U.S. flag on behalf of a Southern Confederacy that had formed before Lincoln even arrived. The skirmishes had been small since then, but emotions were running high, as Americans argued over race, slavery, and the right of states to withdraw from the Union.

So began the strangest Independ-

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A Fourth of July Tinderbox

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ence Day in our history, a day that mixed celebration, self-reflection and a palpable tension that any spark would be enough to ignite a hot war between the armies stationed around Washington.

Yet each of these armies felt the same sentimental attachment to the rituals of July Fourth. Could it be that the holiday would bring them closer together, and reduce the chance of bloodletting? Or would over-eager celebration actually increase it, as firecrackers mingled with artillery fire? Either result was possible as the day began.

The way Washington celebrated that day went a long way to determine the republic we became. In a fraught moment, with two versions of America competing against each other, one version — of a country rooted in calm democratic protocols — prevailed over the other. Despite his lack of experience in elective office, and his meager education, Lincoln clearly won this often-overlooked skirmish. He had a better Fourth of July than Jefferson Davis. As a result, we live in a single country, instead of a Balkanized set of mini-Americas separated by military checkpoints.

As divided Americans limped toward that July 4, the cause of democracy was in deep trouble. Seven Southern states had seceded from the Union before Lincoln even arrived; four more quit after he asked for volunteers to defend what was left. To the south and west of Washington lay Virginia, the most powerful state in the Confederacy. To the north and east was Maryland, deeply divided in its loyalties. With danger on all sides, it was not clear that Washington could be defended.

But Lincoln understood two important ideas, and he brilliantly joined them together. If he called

Congress into a special session, he could use democracy to save democracy, by raising spending and public support for the cause of saving the Union. By asking that session to meet on July 4, he could link his efforts to the Declaration of Independence, and to the memory of a country that began in a most idealistic way.

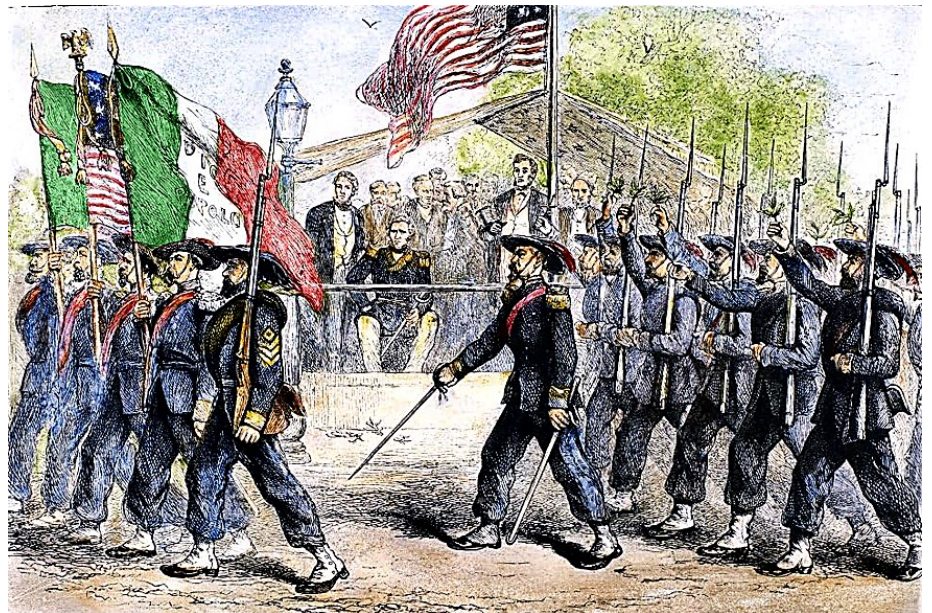
Lincoln had never achieved the kind of glittering career in Washington that Jefferson Davis had. His only elective office was a single term in the House, not very successful, 12 years earlier. But he had a lifelong relationship with the Declaration of Independence, which he had carefully read and re-read since encountering it, as a youth, inside a book of Indiana statutes. He seemed to grow taller while talking about it, as he did throughout his debates with Stephen Douglas. He particularly loved the second paragraph, with its promise of the fundamental rights that belong to all humans. Especially “life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.” Together,

those human rights constituted a powerful argument against human bondage.

There was also a Southern way of reading the Declaration, as a free pass for any disgruntled voters who wanted to start a new country after a disagreeable election result. Davis had floated this idea in his farewell speech to the Senate, inside the Capitol, six months earlier. He had also gone out of his way to say that Black Americans had no rights of any kind.

But Davis never spoke to the nation — either nation — on July 4, 1861. He had never shown much interest in history. And he may have found the Declaration uncomfortable for other reasons. Just when it seemed that Tennessee might join the Confederacy, the eastern part of the state issued its own “Declaration of Independence” so that it could remain in the Union. Similarly, West Virginia was leaving Virginia so that it would not have to leave the United States. Defending the right of secession could leave Davis the president of a very small country.

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President Abraham Lincoln and General Winfield Scott review a regiment of Garibaldi Guards from New York during a parade in Washington, D.C., July 4, 1861. | Library of Congress

Ghosts of Gettysburg Past

A fond look back with members of the 7th Maryland at the event through the years.



1st Sgt. Steve Bush jokes with Life magazine photographer Phil Toledano, in 2006.



Sickly Pvt. Steve Giovannini awaits his medical exam during the 143rd Gettysburg in 2006. "Hellooo!"



Miss Emma Bush and her boys, Pvt. Matt Piston, Sgt. Pat Ellis and Cpl. Keith Watts, pose for a formal photograph at the 144th event in 2007.



Vincent's Brigade, Second Regiment marches over the bridge towards their encounter with Kershaw's Brigade Sunday afternoon in 2007.



Left, Capt. Rick Boyle enjoys his morning coffee as 1st Lt. Jeff Bush awaits the orders of the day. Cpl. Steve Giovannini, fresh from a fracas gathers his strength as he waits for the coming of the day in 2008.



Gettysburg through the years



Lt. Jeff Bush confers with 1st Sgt. Patrick Ellis during a lull in the action in camp in 2009



Above, Pvt. Dan Hart stands with Ed Helms along with 1st Sgt. Patrick Ellis and Pvt. Patrick Hipp, during the actors "research" visit to the 146th Gettysburg event.



Left, a classic photo from 2010. Above, Pvt. Dan Hart practices his field culinary skills, here working on a presentation for a company meal.



Left, Melanie Garvey, Rizzi Ouskui and Sarah Harris doing a stellar task of cleaning up after mess in 2010.



Right, Melanie Garvey finishes up needlework in the comfort of the shade at the 147th event in 2010.

A Fourth of July Tinderbox

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Lincoln, on the other hand, had a remarkably expansive understanding of the document. Its freedoms belonged to all Americans, including immigrants. In the fullness of time, he expected those freedoms to grow stronger, and reach other peoples, living in what he called “the vast future.” Us, in other words.

Lincoln also understood the power of the day itself, and on July Fourth, the members of Congress came back into the Capitol for the special session. It was a muggy day; a New York diarist who was in Washington complained of “crowd, heat, bad quarters, bad fare, bad smells, mosquitoes and a plague of flies.” But by coming back to the Capitol, in a non-violent way, Americans were reclaiming their democracy.

To seize the high ground, Lincoln worked for weeks on a carefully written message that restated the country’s highest truths, the way a Fourth of July oration should. He argued that the war was “essentially a people’s contest,” and reminded Americans that democracy required a fundamental trust in others to work. If “discontented individuals” attacked the government every time they lost an election, with false “sophisms,” and other ways of “drugging the public mind,” it would put an end to democracy everywhere. When ballots have “fairly and constitutionally decided,” there can be no appeal “back to bullets.”

As the members of Congress listened to a clerk read it, they often broke into applause, stunned that their new president had found a language so compelling.

Many others spoke and wrote about America’s meaning that day. Some Southern papers tried to argue that they were the true heirs of the Rev-

olution; but it was hard to argue freedom’s cause in the same newspapers that advertised for a thousand slaves, as this New Orleans paper did, on July 4, or reported on a recent double-lynching, as this Memphis newspaper did, also on July 4.

After Congress received Lincoln’s message, it held a series of internal elections, for a new speaker, door-keeper, sergeant-at-arms and chaplain, humble but important positions that help to move the people’s business forward. There were speeches, and votes, and disagreements, but all of the disagreements were resolved by the end of a long day. It would have been difficult to arrange a more fitting tribute to the idea of America.

The building was also looking better than it had for some time, with new flooring, and revarnished desks, and frescoes cleaned after having been defaced by angry vandals. A newspaper wrote, “everything is looking substantial and comfortable once more.”

In the afternoon, Lincoln walked

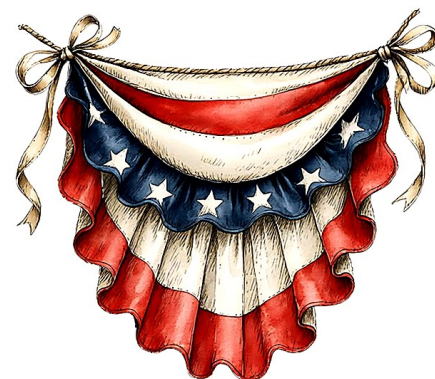


out of the White House and climbed the steps to a reviewing stand on Pennsylvania Avenue. There he stood as thousands of New York soldiers marched past, carrying their colors, and he hoisted a flag himself, to the top of a tall flagpole. Flags were everywhere in Washington — a paper reported, “never have we beheld half the number of flags and other patriotic emblems in our city.” The papers reported that the Declaration was read over and over again, throughout the soldier camps.

One regiment, the Garibaldi Guards, was filled with immigrants; later in the day Lincoln would visit with a regiment commanded by a Jewish colonel from Germany. When the soldiers demanded a speech, he got a laugh by saying that dignity of his position required that he say nothing at all, for fear of misspeaking.

But he had already spoken volumes through his message to Congress, and his unwavering belief in the Declaration. The real fighting had not started yet, but by winning the day, Lincoln began to win the war. Even with all of our divisions, we celebrate a single country today, thanks to a very important Fourth of July, 160 years ago.

Ted Widmer is Distinguished Lecturer at Macaulay Honors College of the City University of New York, and the author of *Lincoln on the Verge: Thirteen Days to Washington*.



July 4, 1863: "This Most Eventful Day to the American People"

By Sarah Kay Bierle

Seth J. Wells served in the 17th Illinois Infantry Regiment at the time of the Siege of Vicksburg. His unit was part of the Third Brigade, Third Division of General James B. McPherson's XVII Corps. Wells left a diary that was published in part in 1915, highlight his experiences near Vicksburg, Mississippi, and including these entries from July 3 and July 4, 1863.



Seth J. Wells

163 years ago, soldiers on both sides realized that a Confederate surrender was imminent and then witnessed a Fourth of July with joyous and tragic scenes unlike any other Independence Day.

July 3. Friday. *There was a brisk skirmish on our left last night. The Rebs came out of their works and attempted to drive in our picket, but were driven back with a loss of nearly one hundred men whom they left on the field. At 10 o'clock a flag of truce came out and the bearer was escorted to Gen. Grant's headquarters. As to the object, every one has his own opinion. I hope to Heaven it is to propose terms of surrender. Most of the boys think it is to bury the killed of last night.*

Neut. Davis and I took advantage of the cessation of hostilities and crossed the hill to the old fort. We slipped the guard and reached the far end of the works within a few yards of those of the Rebels, who lined their parapets as far as the eye could see. We stood face to face with them, almost near enough to shake hands, yet not a word was spoken on either side until their officers ordered us down as we were inspecting their works too closely. Gen. Leggitt ordered us to go out-

side the guard and their officers drew off their men. Hostilities were suspended until 2:30, when a few shells came over and burst, banishing for a while our fond illusions.

But at 3 o'clock! Hail Columbia, Happy Land! Vicksburg is ours! General rejoicing along the line. Gen. Grant and his cavalry are to go in and capitulation commences. Thus ends one of the most brilliant campaigns the world has known since the days of Austerlitz. No one but Napoleon has equalled it. It has resulted in the complete destruction of the Rebel army at Vicksburg. They have lost without doubt about forty thousand men. The boys are beginning to think Grant is a Napoleon. He has completely wiped out his Shiloh affair. Papers of the 29th in camp show very discouraging news from the East. The Rebs are throwing heavy columns into Pennsylvania, and are threatening Pittsburg, Harrisburg and Baltimore. Northern papers give no account of the army movements. Hooker has been superseded by Gen. Meade of the 5th Army Corps.

July 4. Saturday. *The sun rose bright and clear to usher in this most eventful day to the American people, but a sad accident happened early in the morning, which served to mar in no slight degree our rejoicing. A shell which had been lying around the quarters for two weeks with the cap taken off and most of the powder knocked out, and some of the time filled with water, was put in a post fire with the intention of scaring a certain shaky individual, and had been forgotten. Dreggs of Co. E lit it and watched the post fire burn for a*

while and then he picked it up and carried it and threw it over into the quarters. It no sooner touched the ground than it burst, and as good luck would have it, only one man was hurt. Brown, of Co. E, a fine fellow and a good soldier, was hit in the side, it going through and tearing off part of the lung. He lived but a short time.

At 10 o'clock terms were concluded. The Rebs are to be paroled and the officers are to retain their side arms and personal property. Between 10 and 11 o'clock the Rebs marched outside and stacked their arms, after which they returned to camp. At 2 o'clock the troops on the left began marching in. At 3 we formed, and after marching a while in the broiling sun and suffocating dust, our division moved in and up to the courthouse.

We passed a large number of Confeds. They are as good a looking set of Reb. troops as we have seen. Most of them are glad they have surrendered. Only a few look sober and sullen. They had holes dug into the side hill to protect them from our shells. They look as if it were a sorry 4th of July for them. Their burial grounds in the different hollows testify to the number they have had killed. The ground back of their camps is badly torn up by our mortars, the trees are all marked up, and the limbs cut off by our shot and shell. Minnie balls, whole shells and pieces, and solid shot cover the ground. They have defended the place bravely and I say "All honor to them."

We marched around the courthouse, stacked arms, and lay there about three hours. Citizens had nice little caves dug into the banks where they took their families and lived during the siege. The mortars have nearly

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Independence Day during the Civil War

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bridges over the Monocacy River. During the fighting at Gettysburg July 1-3, the 7th Maryland could hear the distant rumble of artillery. Independence Day brought news of the Union victory at Gettysburg. Soon after, the 7th Maryland marched in response to the Confederate retreat from Gettysburg. It would "See the Elephant" for the first time during a skirmish at Funkstown, Maryland July 12 and 13.

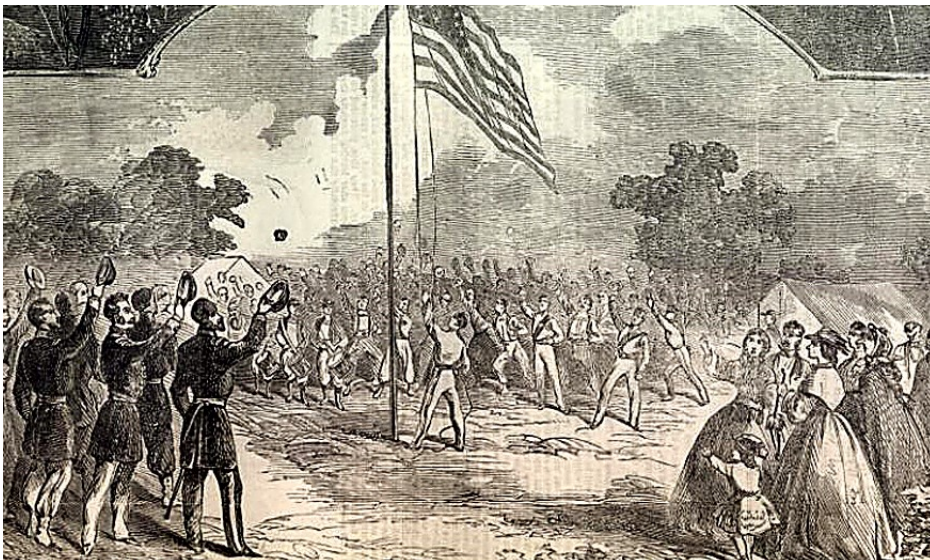
President Lincoln and Mary Lincoln spent Independence Day 1863 at the Cottage at the Soldiers' Home. Mary had suffered a serious carriage accident on July 2 while visiting a hospital in Washington. She had jumped from the carriage after her coachman was thrown to the ground and the horses began galloping unattended. While Mary recovered the President waited anxiously for news from Gettysburg and Vicksburg.

Independence Day 1864 found the 7th Maryland outside Petersburg with the 5th Corps. Having suffered heavy casualties during the Overland Campaign and initial attacks on the Confederate defenses at Petersburg, the 7th Maryland and the rest of the Army of the Potomac began digging in for a siege that would last until April 1865.

President Lincoln and his family made their annual summer move from the White House to the Soldiers' Home on July 4, 1864. Soon after, Confederate troops under Major General Jubal Early approached Washington after defeating Union forces along the Monocacy River. In response, the Lincolns returned to the White House at the urging of Secretary of War Edwin Stanton. On July 11 and 12 President Lincoln and Mary rode out to Fort Stevens in northern Washington to observe the skirmishing as Confederates probed the defenses of Washington. According to legend, President Lincoln, wearing his distinctive stovepipe hat, was ordered off the parapet as Confederate sharpshooters took aim.



Above, a patriotic envelope used by soldiers to mail home letters and news of the war. Below, Union soldiers raise the flag during a patriotic ceremony.



A year later, the Civil War was over and the surviving 7th Marylanders had been mustered out of service to return to their homes and families. Americans still mourned the death of President Lincoln but Northern states celebrated the first peaceful Independence Day since 1860. As observed by the *New Hampshire Sentinel*: "Never before since the birth of the nation, had we so abundant cause for public rejoicing as now. Formerly we rejoiced as a country gained; now, in a country gained and a country saved."



OUR CAMP JOURNAL



*Civil War Re-enactors;
America's Living Historians.*

Seth Wells Diary

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destroyed the town. Large buildings were torn to pieces, each by a single shell. Some went straight through, and some exploded inside and tore them. A few citizens were killed. Citizens are moving back to their ruined dwellings. They look down-hearted and sad, I suppose that in their hearts they wish that

the ordinance of secession had never been passed. Two shells struck the courthouse. One took a pillar from the observatory and just nicked the roof as it descended. The other passed down the roof, burst, and killed eighteen. Some of the boys, together with several Confeds, broke into a store and stole a large quantity of tobacco and some other things before the guard came around. A number of gaily dressed Confed officers passed us, among them being Col. Montgomery, chief of Pemberton's staff. The Confeds and our boys mingle together like old friends and have apparently forgotten that but a short time ago they were engaged in deadly strife.

About 6 o'clock we were formed and marched back and camped inside the works, close behind where their old mortar had been fired. Also, where their big siege gun had been planted and was afterward dismantled. The ground around the two pieces is all torn up by our shot and shell. I went up to the right and saw a beautiful English gun which our boys used to call "Whistling Dick." It is a Whitworth and some of the Confeds told us it was the gun they had at Fort Pemberton, that sunk the Chillicothe.

The works are full of artillery, most of which they never fired. I saw between the Whitworth and the fort, a distance of three-quarters of a mile, twenty-eight guns.

Just at dark I was detailed to go over to camp and help fetch the supper. The Rebs have been living on one-fifth rations and are nearly starved. They mingled with us freely and we have divided our rations with them. They tell us they hope we may never know want while life lasts. Some of their regiments actually had mule meat issued to them on the morning of the 3rd, and it was in market at fifty cents a pound. We saw a shoulder of it dressed. Details are at work picking up small arms and accoutrements, of which they had a large number. Each man had two guns, one new Enfield (drawn since coming here) for long range and sharp-shooting, and the other loaded with cartridges of their own make and fifteen buckshot, of which each man had forty rounds. If we had charged, we should have lost heavily. We found glass bottles filled with powder and balls, with fuses in the ends, which were used as hand grenades. Grant dispatched Sherman's and part of Ord's corps to the rear this evening.

And so, as the other corps fell back from surrendered Vicksburg, July 4, 1863, came to a close in Seth Wells's diary. The last Confederate stronghold on the Mississippi River had surrendered. The scenes within the city — at least from Wells's perspective — had been on the rather amiable and even compassionate side. A turning point of the Civil War had occurred in the Western Theater, but nearly two more years of fighting would continue until the country was reunited.



Left, General Ulysses Grant and CSA General John C. Pemberton work on terms of the surrender of Vicksburg, Mississippi, July 4, 1863.