John C. McNeil   July 1866

2nd Commander, appointed by Gov Fletcher to take his place. Appointment confirmed by Soldiers and Sailors Meeting to go forward with chartering.

John McNeil (February 14, 1813 – June 8, 1891)

Early life and career

McNeil was born in Halifax, Nova Scotia, to parents descended from Torieswho had fled the American Revolution. He received a common school education, and then learned the hatter's trade in Boston, MA. He engaged unsuccessfully in the business first in New York City and subsequently for twenty years in St. Louis, MO.. He prospered there, though he lost his fortune to southern repudiation as the war began. He was a member of the Missouri legislature, 1844-45, and president of the Pacific Insurance Company, 1855-61.

Civil War

When the war began, pro-secession Governor Claiborne Jackson counted on McNeil's support, as he was known as a strong Democrat and closely allied with Southern men. On May 8, 1861, however, McNeil enlisted in the Union volunteers and was immediately made captain of a company. Shortly afterwards, he was promoted to colonel of the 3rd Regiment, U. S. Reserve Corps.

On May 10, 1861, he commanded some troops at the Camp Jackson incident. On July 17, McNeil with about 600 men defeated the State forces under General David B. Harris at Fulton, MO.. He was then placed in command of the city of St. Louis by General Frémont. On August 3, McNeil was commissioned colonel of the Nineteenth Missouri Volunteers ("Lyon Regiment") to which he had been named by General Lyon. He resigned in December to accept a colonelcy in the State troops, with the command of a district on the Kansas state line. He spent the winter organizing forces and protecting the Union citizens.

He returned to St. Louis in the spring of 1862 and took over a cavalry regiment, with command of the District of Northeast Missouri, and the special charge of clearing the area of guerrillas—notably, those flocking to Joseph C. Porter. He spent the summer in pursuit of Porter, who had been ordered into the region to recruit troops to be sent into the Confederacy for training, as well as to generally disrupt Union operations. McNeil decisively defeated Porter at the Battle of Kirksville, and was lightly wounded in the action. In the aftermath of the fighting, he ordered the execution of fifteen allegedly paroled Confederates, charges which have been derided by some, and an action which would be held against him by others, particularly in light of his actions at Palmyra (see below). He also ordered the execution of Frisby McCullogh, an action which was also generally criticized, but which he just as staunchly defended.

The Palmyra Massacre

His subsequent campaign in Monroe Co., MO, , was also regarded by some as excessively brutal and indiscriminate. He himself said that "where a Union man could not live in peace, a secessionist should not." He concluded his campaign on September 14, taking Palmyra after its abandonment by Porter, and avenging the abduction and presumptive murder of Union loyalist (and alleged informer) Andrew Allsman by executing ten Confederate prisoners in what came to be known as the "Palmyra Massacre." McNeil was criticized even by Union sympathizers for the act, and excoriated in the press. However, _Harper's Weekly_ quoted a defender:

"These measures were severe, but not from the character of General McNeil: he will receive the applause of all earnest patriots for treating treason as it deserves. The fruit of his policy is pointedly exhibited where he has ruled. Before his advent murders and all lesser crimes were frequent, for no fault of the sufferers except that they were true to their country and to God. Now no more peaceful, stable, and Union-abiding people are to be found than those who live in Northeast Missouri. Jefferson Davis is thirsting for the blood of the brave General, and his coadjutors in the North are maligning General McNeil, fabricating statements of his brutality, and even asserting the two-fold falsehood that the wife of Allsman petitioned that the rebels might not be executed, and that the old man has since returned. But he will bear such calumnies, and live to reap grateful tributes."

It was true that Confederate President Jefferson Davis had threatened to execute ten Union prisoners unless McNeil was handed over to the Confederacy, but the threat was not carried out. It was also true that a number of local Union-supporters had pleaded with McNeil for the lives of the captives (Allsman's wife not among them). The local loyalist paper however supported
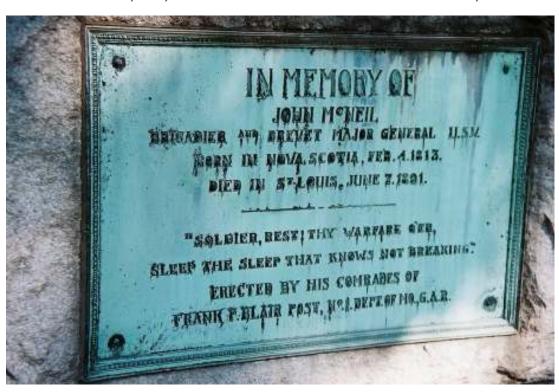
McNeil: "The madness of rebellion has become so deep seated that ordinary methods of cure are inadequate." (*Palmyra Courier*, October 18, 1862) and McNeil himself would respond years later "...cherishing, as I do, the firm conviction that my action was the means of saving lives and property of hundreds of loyal men and women, I feel that my act was the performance of a public duty." (July 1889 response to an article in "The Century" magazine).

In any event, the act earned him the unshakeable title of "Butcher of Palmyra." As a pair, McNeil and his nemesis, Joseph C. Porter, illustrate particularly well the horrors of the war and the difficulty of moral evaluation; it seems likely that the culpability of each was minimized by his own side and exaggerated by the other.

Later campaigns

McNeil was made brigadier general to rank from November 19, 1862.

In the spring of 1863, McNeil held Cape Girardeau with 1,700 men against Gen. John Sappington Marmaduke's force of 10,000. In 1864 he was appointed to command the district of Rolla, Missouri, and, with the assistance of Gen. John B. Sanborn, Clinton B. Fisk and E. B. Brown, he

saved the capital from Price's army. Afterwards he joined his cavalry force with that of General Brown and participated in the campaign which led to the defeat of Price's army at the Second Battle of Newtonia in October. During the Battle of Westport, McNeil was relieved of command for "cowardice and failure to attack the enemy" by General Alfred Pleasonton. He then commanded the district of Central Missouri until April 12, 1865, when he resigned.

McNeil was given the brevet rank of major general of volunteers in recognition of faithful and meritorious services during the war, to date from the day of his resignation.

Postbellum career

Subsequently, McNeil was clerk of the criminal court in St. Louis County, Missouri 1865-67; sheriff of the county, 1866-70, and clerk of the criminal court again, 1875-76. He was in 1876 commissioner to the Centennial Exposition in Philadelphia, was an inspector in the U. S. Indian service in 1878 and 1882, and at the time of his death was superintendent of the United States Post Office, St. Louis branch.

He died in his chair, in his office at St. Louis, and was buried in Bellefontaine Cemetery (Block 35, Lot 1103). His monument carries the verse *Soldier, rest; thy warfare o'er, Sleep the sleep that knows not breaking.*