

Gen. Charles P. Stone, A Casualty of the War

By Rick Kubiak

It is midnight, Feb. 8, 1862 and Federal Army Gen. Charles Pomeroy Stone has just been arrested, without explanation, and thrown into solitary confinement at Fort Lafayette prison in New York Harbor.

He is to be held there, without formal charges filed, for 50 days and then transferred to Fort Hamilton prison where he is held an additional 139 days. He is released on Aug. 16, 1862 still unaware of any charges against him.

His confinement, without formal charges, has been a clear violation of the Articles of War. What is it that General Stone had done that warranted such harsh and seemingly unjust treatment?

Stone was born Sept. 30, 1824 in Greenfield, Mass. He was the son of a doctor and a descendant of Puritans who had fought in every war in which the American people had been involved. He was appointed to West Point as a cadet and was graduated seventh in his class in 1845. He was promoted to second lieutenant in the ordnance corps and assigned to the Military Academy as an acting assistant professor.

In 1846, during the war with Mexico, Stone, as ordnance officer for Gen. Winfield Scott, took part in all the principal battles from Vera Cruz to



January Luncheon

The January meeting of the San Joaquin Valley CWRT will be at noon Friday, Jan. 26 at the Downtown Club, 2120 Kern Street. Each member will be allocated five minutes to present a vignette, read an article or display and explain Civil War memorabilia.

Reservations may be made by sending checks made out to the Downtown Club for \$10 for each luncheon. Mail to SJVCWRT, P.O. Box 5695, Fresno, CA, 93755. Seating will not be guaranteed unless a reservation is received by Jan. 24.

The February meeting will be a dinner session in the Remington restaurant, Kings Canyon and Clovis Avenues on Thursday, Feb. 29 beginning with a social hour at 6 p.m. and dinner at 7. The program will be re-enactor Robert Snowden portraying Frederick Douglass and Leigh McLean with members of Ebony Verses.

In March, John Peterson of Gettysburg, author of a book on Federal General John Buford, will present a program on Buford

Mexico City. He was twice breveted for gallant and meritorious service.

At the end of the war with Mexico, with letters of recommendation from General Scott, Stone was granted a leave of absence for 20 months to visit Europe and study the armies. When he returned he was ordered to Benecia, Calif., where he was appointed chief of ordnance.

In 1856 he resigned his commission and was employed by the Mexican government for a scientific exploration of the state of Sonora.

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In January 1861, in anticipation of the Civil War, Stone again donned his military uniform and under orders from General Scott, served as inspector-general of the District of Columbia Militia, organizing volunteers for the protection of Washington. By March 1861, Stone had organized 3,400 volunteers, most of whom were mustered into service after the firing on Fort Sumter.

In this position Stone was the closest thing to a security chief that the government then possessed. He became responsible for providing security for President Lincoln and was involved in rerouting Lincoln's travel through Baltimore, which prevented an assassination attempt by Baltimore rowdies. He also played a key role in maintaining order during the inauguration. As a result, Lincoln came to trust Stone implicitly.

On May 14, 1861 Stone was appointed colonel of the 14th Regular Infantry and three days later was promoted to brigadier general of volunteers. In August, he took command of a special "corps of observation" on the upper Potomac. Here, in October, an unfortunate tragedy occurred.

Forty miles upriver from Washington, the Confederates held the town of Leesburg, Va. Gen. George B. McClellan, commander of the Army of the Potomac, felt that a show of force might remove the enemy from Leesburg. He ordered Gen. Stone and his division to make a "slight demonstration" to dislodge the Rebels. This "demonstration" on Oct. 21, 1861 became the Battle of Ball's Bluff.

Stone assigned command of the mission to Colonel Edward D. Baker, 50, who was no ordinary colonel. He was a United States Senator from Oregon and a longtime friend and adviser to Lincoln. Baker, though in command of a regiment, kept his seat in the Senate. He would rush from camp into the Senate chambers in full uniform, unbuckling his sword and lending his voice to the debates over the war. Baker's military experience had been limited to command of a volunteer regiment during the Mexican war.

A small detachment of Baker's troops on Ball's Bluff became engaged in a firefight with Confederates. Stone ordered Baker, on his option, to either withdraw those troops or send his brigade as reinforcements. Electing the latter, Baker impulsively ordered his troops to cross the Potomac and scale the 70-foot bluff. He had, however, failed to scout the area, and had not left sufficient boats to quickly move his men back across the river.

Confederate forces were concentrated in woods near where Baker's brigade made the river crossing. They attacked the Union troops in open ground between the woods and the river bluff. After some lively skirmishing, during which Baker was killed by a Confederate sharpshooter, the Union forces, under fierce attack, were driven in disorder down the bluff and into the river.

The battle became a rout as hundreds of desperate men, unable to board the few boats, tried to swim to safety. Many who escaped bullets were drowned. More than half of Baker's brigade of 1,700 men were killed, wounded or captured. The final casualty toll, 921. More than 100 of the 700 listed as missing, in fact drowned, and their bodies washed ashore at Washington for several days after the battle.

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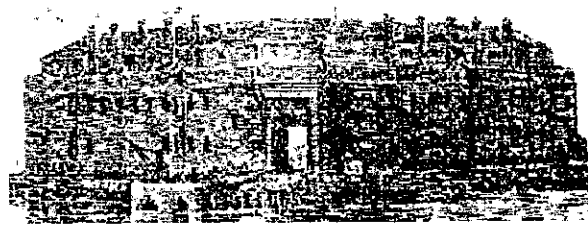
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Stone immediately asked McClellan for a court of inquiry to fix blame for the tragedy. McClellan called the Battle of Ball's Bluff a butchery and sent a circular to his generals exonerating them and fixing the blame on the amateur soldier, Baker. He said Baker's inexperience, was, beyond a doubt, the immediate cause of the defeat. Stone then dropped his request for a court of inquiry.

The humiliating defeat and Baker's death evoked tears from President Lincoln. In addition, it prompted the Senate to launch an angry search for a scapegoat to be held responsible for the death of one of their own.

In December, Congress formed a Joint Committee on the Conduct of the War to investigate the causes of the defeats at Ball's Bluff and Bull Run. The committee soon concluded that the responsibility for the defeat at Ball's Bluff was Baker's immediate superior, General Stone. He was known to have returned fugitive slaves to their owners and had gotten into a heated discussion of this policy with Senator Charles Sumner, falling just short of a duel with him. The committee found witnesses willing to question Stone's military competence and his loyalty as well.

There were vague suggestions that Stone was a Southern sympathizer, and that just before Ball's Bluff had held a mysterious conference with Confederate officers under a flag of truce. He also was accused of passing messages to Fort



Fort Lafayette in New York harbor
Confederates across the Potomac. None of these charges were ever proved. Stone was called before the committee but was given no chance to confront his accusers or even to read their testimony.

Margaret Leech's "Reveille in Washington," describes the scene: "The vague accusations of communicating with the enemy were repeated; and Stone sat staring at the committee . . . In his outrage his words tumbled over each other. 'That is one accusation I had hoped I never should be subjected to,' he cried to (Committee Chairman) Ben Wade. I thought there was one calumny that could not be brought against me . . . I raised all the volunteer troops that were here during the seven dark days of last winter . . . I could have surrendered Washington . . . I have hardly been out of my clothes for the last year guarding the outposts of the capital. I got into my blankets every night without undressing. The most I've done was to pull off my boots . . . If you want more faithful soldiers you must find them elsewhere. I have been as faithful as I can be. '"

On Jan 31, 1862 Stone went before the committee a second time. No specifics or names of his accusers were given. Chairman Wade stated that if Stone heard the witnesses' names he might make reprisals against them.

McClellan tried for a time to protect Stone, but soon realized that the committee's next target might be himself and he had no intention of taking Stone's place on the chopping block.

Secretary of War Edwin Stanton issued an order to McClellan to arrest Stone on Jan 28, 1862. After 12 days of attempting to delay or stop Stanton's order, McClellan reluctantly had his provost marshal take Stone into custody and jailed at Fort Lafayette in New York harbor.

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Civil War Graves

If you have an ancestor who served in the Civil War and is buried in California or know of any cemetery where Civil War veterans are interred, please inform Shelia Benedict, P.O. Box 335, Nuevo, CA 92567-0335. She is compiling a comprehensive register of such burials that will be useful to researchers and descendants.

Stone (continued)

Lincoln, upon hearing from Stanton of Stone's arrest, said, "I suppose you had good reasons for it; and having good reasons, I'm glad I knew nothing of it until it was done."

Later, Stanton offered his views: "To hold one commander in prison untried is less harmful in times of great national distress than to withdraw several good officers from active battlefields to give him a trial. Individuals are nothing; we are contributing thousands of them to save the Union, and General Stone in Fort Lafayette is doing his share in that direction."

After 189 days in prison, Stone was released. Margaret Leech described it. "Among the thronging soldiers, a white-faced general moved unnoticed. He had a star on his shoulder and his military exactness bespoke West Point training; but no command awaited him. . . ."

Stone was released Aug. 16, 1862 and waited in Washington for orders until the following May. The remainder of Stone's Civil War career included service with Major General Nathaniel Banks at Port Hudson and in the Red River campaign. During his commands of relatively unimportant posts, he was kept under

surveillance. Tired of the strain of the suspicions, he resigned from the Army Sept. 13, 1864.

He worked at various jobs; superintendent of a Virginia mining company for four years; chief of staff of the Egyptian army, remaining in Egypt for 13 years. He returned to the United States in 1883 and worked as an engineer for the Florida Ship Canal Co. In 1886, a year before his death, Stone completed work as engineer-in-chief for the pedestal of the Statue of Liberty.

It is ironic that the Civil War general who was unjustly deprived of his liberty should have been the builder of the foundation for the statue that became the symbol of freedom and liberty to the entire world. Stone died in New York City Jan. 24, 1887 and is buried at West Point.

Sources used: "Generals in Blue," by Ezra J. Warner; Historical Times Illustrated Encyclopedia of the Civil War," edited by Patricia Faust; "The Army of the Potomac: Mr. Lincoln's Army," by Bruce Catton; "George B. McClellan, The Young Napoleon," by Stephen W. Sears; "The War Years, Volume I," by Carl Sandburg; "Stanton, Lincoln's Secretary of War," by Fletcher Pratt; "Battle Cry of Freedom," by James McPherson; "Reveille in Washington," by Margaret Leech; "Forward to Richmond, McClellan's Peninsular Campaign," by Ronald H. Bailey and the editors of Time-Life Books and "The Civil War Dictionary," by Mark M. Boatner.

San Joaquin Valley
Civil War Round Table
P.O. Box 5695
Fresno, CA 93755

