



The Civil War in Utah

"For the last twenty-five years we have trusted officials of the government, from constables and justices to judges, governors, and presidents, only to be scorned, held in derision, insulted and betrayed."

-- Brigham Young, Tribune Almanac, 1859 --

President Abraham Lincoln, it was reported, said that when he was a boy there was a lot of timber to be cleared from his farm. Sometimes he came to a log that was "too hard to split, too wet to burn, and too heavy to move," so he plowed around it. That, Lincoln contended, was exactly what he planned to do about the Mormons in Utah. "You go back and tell Brigham Young that if he will let me alone I will let him alone."

The Utah Territory during the American Civil War was far from the main operational theaters of war, but still played a role in the disposition of the United States Army, drawing manpower away from the volunteer forces and providing its share of administrative headaches for the Lincoln Administration.

The history of Utah during the Civil War can be written largely in terms of two personalities; Brigham Young, the dynamic and commanding president of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, and General Patrick Edward Connor, the mercurial Irishman who commanded federal troops in Utah from 1862 to 1865. Utah probably best illustrates the paranoia, suspicion, and fear--real or feigned--that characterized the poles of authority--civil, military, and religious during the war.



Brigham Young



General Patrick Edward Connor

Before the war, John F. Kinney had been named as Chief Justice of the Territory of Utah by President Buchanan. He served from June 26, 1860, until March 1863. He was directly involved in the events leading up to the Morrisite War of 1862, and allowed a condemnation of Territorial Governor Stephen S. Harding to be read into the public record after Harding issued a blanket pardon for all Morrisites convicted in connection with the war. Kinney was elected as the Territory of Utah's Democratic delegate to the 38th Congress and served from March 4, 1863 until March 3, 1865.

In 1861, President Lincoln appointed James Duane Doty to the position of Superintendent of Indian Affairs for the Utah Territory. In 1863, Utah's territorial governor, Stephen Harding, was removed from office after public backlash from his criticism of the Mormon Church and the practice of polygamy. Lincoln appointed Doty to the governorship shortly thereafter. As governor, Doty was able to repair the relationship between the Federal government and the territory's Mormons.

As the war began in early 1861, the War Department pulled the Federal troops out of the Utah Territory and reassigned them to other regions where they were more immediately needed to quell the brewing rebellion. However, the void in military presence allowed the Mormons to regain control over the territory. Although the Mormons were the majority of settlers in the Great Salt Lake basin, the western area of the territory began to attract many non-Mormon settlers. In early 1861 a large portion of the eastern area of the territory was reorganized as part of the newly created Colorado Territory. In March the Nevada Territory was created out of the western part of the territory.

Many Mormons in Utah viewed the events in the east as fulfillment of statements made by their prophet/founder Joseph Smith nearly thirty years earlier: "Verily, thus sayeth the Lord concerning the wars that will shortly come to pass, beginning at the rebellion of South Carolina." In a later statement made in 1843, Smith added: "The commencement of the difficulties which will cause much bloodshed previous to the coming of the Son of Man will be in South Carolina. It may probably arise through the slave question."

Even while the Latter-day Saints believed that the dissolution of the Union vindicated their prophet's statements, they also had profound regard for and belief in the divine nature of the U.S. Constitution. Such potentially conflicting emotions created a unique atmosphere in Utah.

Because some Saints construed Smith's words to mean that the Second Coming of Christ was near at hand, they also had mixed emotions about the Civil War. In addition, they were still insecure in the aftermath of the Utah War. While they were interested in self-rule and state's rights questions, it is apparent that the people in Utah never really seriously considered supporting the Confederacy. In fact, on numerous occasions they affirmed their loyalty to the Union. Although the majority was suspicious of Lincoln's policies during the early days of his presidency, the Saints changed their attitude, especially after a reported favorable statement made by Lincoln about them gained general circulation in Utah.

Lincoln was concerned that California would be cut off from the rest of the United States. In addition, neither Lincoln nor the U.S. War Department trusted the Mormons to remain loyal to

the Union, in spite of telegrams and assurances by Brigham Young that the Utah Territory was still loyal to the Federal Government. A fairly substantial militia was made up of Mormon settlers that seemingly answered only to Brigham Young himself and not the Federal Government. Lincoln specifically ordered, with congressional authorization, several regiments to be raised from the population of California that were to help protect the mail routes and communications lines of the Western USA. Their specific orders were to protect the Overland Mail Route and keep the peace in the region.

In July 1861 Confederate Soldiers under General Philip St. George Cooke, on their way from Camp Floyd to join the Confederate Army, were caught in a summer snowstorm at Soldier Pass. A few of them died in the storm and were buried on the summit. The pass now derives its name for these unknown men.

In October 1861, the First Transcontinental Telegraph was completed, with Salt Lake City being the last link. Mormon leader Brigham Young was among the first to send a message, along with President Lincoln and other officials.

In 1862, with the ranks of the Union army swelled by more than 100,000 volunteers, the U.S. government believed it could now spare enough men to again occupy the Utah Territory. In addition, it was important to protect the overland mail route and telegraph lines along what later became known as the Oregon Trail.

Col. Patrick E. Connor marched into Utah with a regiment of California volunteers. His soldiers, of the 3rd California Infantry, constructed a small garrison just three miles east of the Mormon stronghold of Salt Lake City. The post, named Camp Douglas for former Illinois presidential candidate and Congressman Stephen A. Douglas, was officially established on October 26, 1862. Connor at once engaged in an acrimonious and bitter cold war with Brigham Young and the Mormon people, whom he accused of being disloyal and immoral. During the rest of the war, the fort served as the headquarters of the District of Utah in the Department of the Pacific.

During the late 1850's and early 1860's, the Shoshoni and other Native American tribes engaged in several small conflicts with immigrant settlers in northern Utah and south-eastern Washington Territory (present day Idaho). One incident in particular, involving miners from Montana traveling through Cache Valley, was enough to justify an expedition to investigate the situation further. Eager for combat, Connor marched his regiment 140 miles over the frozen winter landscape to deal with the Indians. On January 29, 1863, Connor's troops encountered the Shoshoni encampment along the Bear River. His men massacred the Indian encampment and then marched back to Utah.

Connor encouraged his men to explore the Utah region for mineral deposits; the discovery of which he believed would bring more non-Mormons into the territory, changing the balance of political power. His efforts were successful. His men discovered gold, silver, lead, and zinc deposits in Tooele County in 1864. As Connor hoped, miners began to flock to the territory. The Rush Valley Mining District was established by soldiers in the western Oquirrh Mountains and more than 100 claims were staked in the first year.

There is an interesting article regarding the history of the conflict in Utah on line at the Utah Civil War Reenact or's web site.

Sources:

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Utah_in_the_American_Civil_War

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bear_River_massacre

<http://www.utcwa.org/floyd.html>

<http://www.media.utah.edu/UHE/c/CIVILWAR.html>

<http://www.amazon.com/Saints-Union-TERRITORY-DURING-CIVIL/dp/0252070119>

