

General Frank Blair

Francis Preston Blair, Jr. was born in Lexington, Kentucky on February 19, 1821. From secession to Reconstruction, Frank Blair of Missouri made an unbroken series of major contributions to the Union cause. No man did more to block Missouri's move to the Confederacy in 1861. As a U.S. Congressman, he battled for President Lincoln's early war programs. As a soldier, he was a distinguished divisional and corps commander during the Vicksburg and Atlanta campaigns. Finally, as a post-war senator, he confronted the radical Republicans in an attempt to bring reconciliation to a shattered union.



Blair was the son of an advisor to presidents and the brother of Montgomery Blair, President Abraham Lincoln's first postmaster general. He attended the College of New Jersey, was granted a law degree from Transylvania College in Kentucky and served briefly as attorney general of the New Mexico Territory in 1847. There, he first clashed with military governor Sterling Price, who was to be one of Blair's major foes in the fight for Missouri loyalty. As a Missouri congressman in May 1861, Blair teamed with Brigadier General Nathaniel Lyon to wrest the St. Louis Arsenal from Confederate hands in the Camp Jackson affair.

Blair recruited seven regiments during the summer of 1862 and was commissioned a Union brigadier general on August 7, 1862. By November of that year, he was a major general, leading a division in the Yazoo Expedition and earning plaudits from Major General William T. Sherman for his leadership at Chickasaw Bluffs early in the Vicksburg Campaign. Blair was commanding the Union line north of Vicksburg when Lieutenant General John C. Pemberton surrendered the city to Major General Ulysses S. Grant on July 4, 1863. At the Battle of Chattanooga, he led the XV Corps, and during Sherman's drive toward Atlanta, Blair commanded the XVII Corps in bloody fighting. After the fall of Atlanta, Blair led his corps in the "March to the Sea". He was in Goldsboro, North Carolina when word came that General Robert E. Lee had surrendered.



Both Grant and Sherman, highly critical of most "political" generals, rated Blair one of the most competent military leaders of the war. Blair became the Democratic nominee for vice president in 1868 and was appointed to the senate in 1871 to fill a vacant seat. Blair died in St. Louis on July 9, 1875.

The GAR Post #1 in St. Louis was named after him.

Reference:



Contribution by Dean E. Smith
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Frank Blair Statue in Forest
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