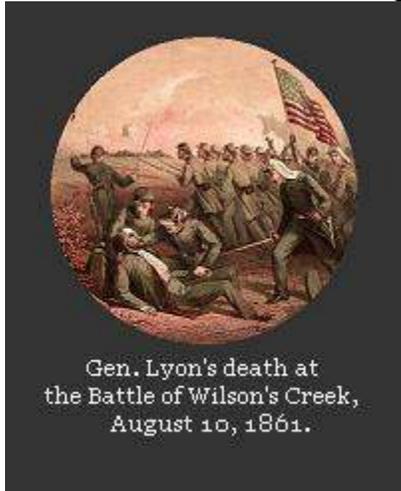


General Nathaniel Lyon

Nathaniel Lyon was born on July 14, 1818 in Ashford, Connecticut. He attended the United States Military Academy at West Point and graduated 11th in his class of 52 in 1841. After graduation, Lyon went on to serve in both the Seminole and Mexican wars. After the Mexican War, Lyon was promoted to captain and was assigned to Fort Riley, Kansas. There, he found himself in the middle of the turmoil associated with "bleeding Kansas". Originally a Democrat with few convictions about slavery, he witnessed the slavery controversy in Kansas, and subsequently hardened into a furious Republican who detested that institution.



In 1861, when Lyon was transferred to St. Louis, Missouri was sharply divided between a pro-Confederate governor, Claiborne F. Jackson, and a pro-Union legislature, with a valuable arsenal in St. Louis as the prize for the victor. Lyon was only too willing to overstep any boundaries to keep Jackson from taking control of the arsenal and using the guns against the Union. When the governor called out the state militia, allegedly to train for home defense,



Gen. Lyon's death at the Battle of Wilson's Creek, August 10, 1861.

Lyon grew suspicious and disguised himself as a farm woman to spy on the militia's camp. Concluding that Jackson intended to use the militia to seize the arsenal for the Confederacy, he surrounded the camp with his own soldiers and captured it. It was an ill-timed, hot-headed gesture, and a riot broke out in St. Louis when Lyon paraded his prisoners through the city. Nevertheless, he had saved the arsenal, and probably Missouri, for the Union.

His action provoked Jackson to openly declare for the Confederacy and call for outright insurrection. Lyon, who had been promoted to brigadier general on May 17, mounted a campaign to drive him from the state. The Confederates were waiting for Lyon on August 10 at Wilson's Creek near Springfield, Missouri. In a bloody battle generally considered a Confederate victory, he was killed, impetuously trying to lead a last charge.

Reference and Credits:

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Contribution by Allen C. Guelzo in Historical Times Illustrated

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NY 1986.

Photos of Gen. Lyon monuments (Lyon Park, St. Louis, MO by Scott Williams)

Photo of Gen. Lyon grave site thanks to [David P. Wilson](#) (a kinsman of Gen. Lyon who does research of Eastern Connecticut families)

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Marker at Wilson's Creek National Battlefield, Republic, MO.