Enlistment and Conscription in Civil War Kansas

Albert Castel

Northern victory seemed assured as the fourth year of the war drew to a close. It was not, however, to be won without a final determined exertion of will and power. Lee’s ever-dangerous Army of Northern Virginia still stood steadfast in the trenches about Richmond and the forces of Johnston in the Carolinas and of Kirby-Smith in Texas remained intact. Furthermore, the enlistments of thousands of Grant’s and Sherman’s veterans were expiring, and they had to be replaced if the Union armies were to maintain their superiority. Accordingly, on December 19, 1864, President Lincoln issued his last call of the war for troops, this time for 300,000.1

Sen. Samuel C. Pomeroy of Kansas, always glad to be of service to his constituents, sent word from Washington that the War Department had informed him that Kansas “is found to owe no troops” under the new call.2 Kansans welcomed this news with great relief. Already they had provided a larger number of soldiers than any other Northern state in proportion to population. Therefore they felt that it would be unfair of the government to require still more. Besides, they knew that if additional troops were raised in the state, it would have to be by means of the dreaded and unpopular draft, for there remained very few men of military age who were both willing and able to volunteer.

Then, less than two weeks after Pomeroy’s message, there came a startling announcement from the federal provost marshal of Kansas, Sidney Clarke, to the effect that the “revised quota” of the state

---

2. Leavenworth Daily Times, January 14, 1865.
under Lincoln's call was 1,222. The press at once indignantly criticized both the federal and state authorities, the first for assigning a quota to Kansas, the other for not preventing the assignment. Col. John Martin, editor of the Atchison Freedom's Champion and veteran of three years' active service with the army, objected especially to the War Department saying that Kansas "owed" troops: "If the Government wants them without regard to credits and deficits, let the Provost Marshal General say so, and our State can fill his demands. But it is an insult and an outrage to proclaim that we owe troops, or ever did." 4

Gov. Samuel J. Crawford agreed with Martin and perhaps feared the political repercussions of a draft. He therefore had State Adj. Gen. Cyrus K. Holliday prepare a report on the number of men who so far had enlisted in Kansas. The report showed that the state had exceeded its general quota of enlistments based on population by about 10,000, and that it had oversubscribed all specific requisitions by large margins, with the exception of the July 18, 1864, call, from which it had been excused because of surplus credits.

Crawford communicated these figures on January 31 to Federal Provost Marshal Gen. James B. Fry in Washington and requested that an "unjust and oppressive" draft not be imposed on the state. 5 Shortly thereafter he asked Sen. James H. Lane and Clarke to "demand credit for all troops furnished," as it was "a great injustice to be disgraced by a draft after having furnished more troops in proportion to our population than any other state in the union." 6 Lane, however, replied that Fry refused to cancel the call on Kansas or to suspend the draft, which went into operation on February 20. 7

On that day the state legislature adjourned and Crawford immediately started for Washington. Upon arriving there he showed the state's enlistment records to the adjutant general's office. After much delay and haggling he obtained credit for 3,039 more men than had been previously allowed Kansas. This additional credit placed the state about 2,000 in excess of all calls, including that of December 19, 1864.

Secretary of War Edwin M. Stanton, however, refused to suspend

3. Ibid., January 25, 1865.
5. Senate Journal of the Legislative Assembly of the State of Kansas, 1865, pp. 54-57; ibid., 1866, pp. 20-23.
6. Crawford to Clarke, February 9, 1865, "Governor's Correspondence (Samuel J. Crawford)," 1865, Kansas state archives, Memorial building.
the draft in Kansas or to order drafted Kansans released from service. He maintained that to do so would create dissatisfaction in other states which were likewise claiming surpluses of recruits. Crawford then went to Fry, who as an "act of justice" ordered the draft halted in Kansas and telegraphed the assistant provost marshal at Leavenworth to discharge all conscrits and allow them to return home.

But when Crawford arrived back in Leavenworth in April he was astonished to find that a portion of the drafted men were still being retained in service. He immediately telegraphed Fry requesting that they be released. Fry complied, but before his order reached Leavenworth the draftees were sent to St. Louis, then assigned to the Eighth and Tenth Kansas regiments in Tennessee. Political enemies accused Crawford of having made no real effort to stop the draft and of having caused the draftees to be imprisoned by the army at Fort Leavenworth. Nettled by these charges he returned to Washington in June and procured an order from Stanton discharging all conscrits from Kansas.8

Probably most of the difficulty and misunderstanding as to Kansas' quota under the President's December 19 call stemmed from the fact that Fry adopted a new and somewhat complicated formula for assigning state quotas under the call, and from the fact that the War Department records originally credited Kansas with only 15,563 troops instead of the nearly 18,000 to which it was entitled.9 The War Department's inaccurate records, in turn, were probably a reflection of the poor condition of enlistment records in Kansas. During 1863 and early 1864 Provost Marshal Clarke engaged in a heated controversy with the then state governor, Thomas Carney, over the accuracy of these records. Clarke charged that the state adjutant general's office was a "jumble of confusion." Carney and his defenders replied that if the office lacked an accurate record of the number of troops enlisted in Kansas it was because Clarke's political friends, Senator Lane and Maj. Gen. James G. Blunt, had failed to report the number of enlistments made by them while acting as federal recruiting agents in the state.10

8. Kansas Senate Journal, 1866, pp. 22-24; Crawford to Lt. Col. Charles S. Wills (?), June 14, 1865, "Governor's Correspondence (Samuel J. Crawford)," 1865-1867, Kansas state archives; Leavenworth Daily Times, March 16, 1865; Kansas Weekly Tribune, Lawrence, April 27, 1865. Crawford, in his memoirs, Kansas in the Sixties (Chicago, 1911), pp. 208-210, gives a vague account of his efforts to prevent a draft which is at variance with the contemporary records on many points.


10. See Official Records, Ser. III, v. 9, pp. 599, 570, 1098, 1156-1158; Kansas Senate Journal, 1864, pp. 230-238; The Kansas State Journal, Lawrence, August 6, 1863; White Cloud Kansas Chief, January 7, 1864; Leavenworth Daily Conservative, April 9, 10, 1864.
As a result of Crawford's efforts the draft was in actual operation in Kansas only a few weeks. During that period 1,420 men had their numbers drawn, 419 of these failed to report, 616 were examined, 208 furnished substitutes, two paid commutation money, and 119 were actually conscripted.\(^{11}\) These last were the only men to be drafted in the state throughout the war. In the spring of 1864 Fry had proposed to draft men from deficient subdistricts in the state, but Governor Carney convinced him that there were no such districts.\(^{12}\)

For the most part Kansans cheerfully submitted to the draft, although they felt it to be unjust. But in some areas at least the state had reached the bottom of the manpower barrel by the spring of 1865. Sol Miller, editor of the White Cloud Kansas Chief, reported that many of the men assigned draft numbers were elderly, blind, cripples, idiots, or invalids.\(^{13}\) Elsewhere, especially in the Leavenworth region, the provost marshal's agents had little trouble finding plenty of eligible young men.\(^{14}\) Some communities raised bounty money to induce men to enlist, thus avoiding the "disgrace" of a draft. The average bounty was about $200, and a total of $57,405 in bounties was paid, $53,207 of it in the northern district, which included Leavenworth and Atchison, the state's two most populous cities.\(^{15}\) According to the official records these were the only bounties to be paid in Kansas during the war, but the Leavenworth Daily Conservative of February 6, 1864, reported that a $402 bounty was being offered to recruits in Leavenworth at that time.

While the 1865 draft was in progress a "Kansas Draft Exemption and Substitute Company" issued insurance policies to prospective draftees, who if drafted were furnished by the company with a substitute.\(^{16}\) In Leavenworth some of the draftees allegedly even shanghaied or bullied Negroes into serving in their stead, and a Negro "protege" of the radical abolitionist newspaper correspondent Richard Josiah Hinton was stated to have engaged in the business of furnishing his fellows as substitutes.\(^{17}\) The heads of the draft

11. *Official Records*, Ser. III, v. 5, p. 737. Under the Civil War draft legislation men whose numbers had been drawn could avoid being conscripted by furnishing substitutes to serve in their place, or by paying a sum of money to the government—"commutation money."


16. *Leavenworth Daily Times*, February 24, 1865. When a draft threatened in the spring of 1863 a number of men left Kansas to avoid it, going to Colorado, Nebraska, and other territories. —*Kansas State Journal*, Lawrence, July 30, 1863.

insurance company and the "substitute brokers" were the sole ones not to rejoice when the draft came to an end. Nevertheless, charged Sol Miller in the Kansas Chief, they made "fortunes" from their activities, and there was a demand in the legislature that they be investigated.18

Counting conscripts, Kansas raised 829 men under the December 19 call. This gave the state a grand total of 20,097 troops furnished in the course of the war. A portion of these men, however, enlisted for only three months.19 Moreover, a high percentage of them were in fact from other states, principally Missouri. Exactly how many is unknown, owing to the Civil War practice of crediting recruits to the locality where they enlisted, not to the place of their actual residence. Immediately after the war the Kansas adjutant general reported that there were 3,190 men in Kansas regiments who were from outside the state,20 but there is good reason to suspect that this figure is much too low.

In 1863 Brig. Gen. Thomas Ewing, Jr., commander of the District of the Border, expressed the opinion that 1,000 was a "very low estimate" of the number of men who had entered Kansas regiments from western Missouri alone. Most of these men, he added, were from Kansas City, and had joined Kansas units at Wyandotte (now a part of Kansas City, Kan.).21 That this was the case is borne out by the fact that Wyandotte county which had a population of only 2,609 at the beginning of the war, was credited with 1,127 recruits by the summer of 1863.22

According to its historian, the majority of the Union men of Vernon county, Missouri, served in Kansas regiments, mainly the Sixth and 14th.23 The 15th and 16th Kansas regiments consisted almost entirely of Missourians. Indeed, these regiments, which were raised late in the war, could not have been formed at all had it not been for Missouri recruits.24 Most of the Missourians in Kansas regiments were of course Unionists, but a large proportion were former Confederate troops who preferred to serve in the Union

19. Reduced to a three-year standard the number was 18,706.—Official Records, Ser. III, v. 4, pp. 1264-1269. The Kansas adjutant general's report of 1866, in Kansas Senate Journal, 1866, pp. 20, 21, claimed a grand total of 22,774.
20. Ibid.
army rather than rot in a Yankee prison. These last were usually "faithful, good soldiers." 25 The 14th Kansas, in addition to Missourians, contained a whole company of Indians and perhaps one of Texans. Other Kansas regiments also had unspecified numbers of Indians. 26 The Seventh Kansas obtained several companies from Illinois and Ohio. 27 Two Colored regiments, which were credited to Kansas, were recruited from refugee Missouri slaves and Negroes in Arkansas. They alone gave the state some 2,000 soldiers who could not be truthfully called Kansans on the basis of the 1860 census. 28

All in all, probably not more than two-thirds of the Kansas troops were Kansans.

But if Kansas received credit for a greater number of soldiers than actually derived from its population, the same was equally true of other Northern states, many of which offered rich bounties, imported Europeans, and recruited Negroes in the South. 29 Moreover, quite a few Kansans joined Missouri regiments, although not to the extent that Missourians enlisted in Kansas. 30

Neither should it be overlooked that the actual population of Kansas in 1861, as the result of emigration occasioned by the drought of 1860, was probably considerably lower than the official census figure of 107,206. 31 Therefore, if the state contributed even half as many men as it was supposed to have done, it did exceedingly well. Thus it would seem that the favorite boast of Kansans after the Civil War, that their state furnished a higher percentage of troops to the Union army than any other state, was well-founded.

Kansas troops suffered 8,498 casualties from all causes, of which 1,000 were battle fatalities and 2,106 deaths resulting from disease and exposure. Kansas led all other Northern states in the number of mortalities per 1,000 among its troops, 61.01, and the ratio of desertions, 117.54 per 1,000. The first record the provost marshal


29. Fred A. Shannon, The Organization and Administration of the Union Army, 1861-1865 (Cleveland, Ohio, 1928), v. 2, pp. 67, 68, 76-79.


general of the United States in his post-war report attributed to the “peculiarly pugnacious” nature of Kansans, which “increased their exposure to the casualties of battle”; the second to there being “an unusually large percentage of men” in the state’s regiments “whose presence was necessary to the subsistence and protection of their families,” and to the “lax state of discipline natural in border regiments serving . . . in a somewhat irregular defense of their own frontiers.”  

Nearly three-fourths of the Kansans who served in the Union army joined during the first two and one-half years of the war. The heavy enlistments of this period reflected the fervent patriotism of most Kansans, their fear of being invaded by the Missouri Confederates, the presence of a large number of “foot-loose young men” in the state, and the efforts of various political leaders whose military ambitions and patronage rivalries led them in some instances to raise regiments which the War Department did not even want.

After 1862 the readily available military manpower was practically exhausted, and the citizens felt that their state had furnished more volunteers than “in reality she was able to spare.” This attitude, a general waning of martial enthusiasm, and the belief prevalent by the end of 1864 that the war was about over, caused Kansas to respond far differently to Lincoln’s last call for troops than it did to his first.

33. Ibid., p. 11.