The Military Occupation of Columbia County
A Re-examination

During the months of August, September, and October, 1864, nearly a thousand Union troops were stationed in Columbia County, Pennsylvania. While there, the troops marched into the three northern townships to crush the so-called “Fishing-creek Conspiracy” and to round up some five hundred men supposedly participating in it.

This action on the part of the military came at a time when partisan political feeling ran high. The voting population of the county was overwhelmingly “Peace Democratic,” with a ratio of 4 to 1 in the northern townships, and was opposed to settlement of the war on the issue of slavery. Although these citizens complied generally with the draft, they spoke out strongly against it after 1863. The newspaper that represented the Peace Democratic element damned the administration in Washington for conscripting men to pursue its program in the interests of “War and Niggers.” The Peace Democrats believed that as long as the Lincoln Administration continued in office, peace was out of the question. “He [Lincoln] will not even negotiate,” cried one editor. “He shuts the door in the face of all efforts at settlement. It is the arbitrament of the sword, and he wants 500,000 more [men].” It was in the midst of such sentiment, which was increasing in intensity as the Presidential election approached, that the first contingent of troops arrived at Bloomsburg on the evening of August 13, 1864.

The incident has been discussed under such headings as “The Military Occupation of Columbia County,” “The Military Invasion of

1 Columbia Democrat, Oct. 8, 1864.
3 Columbia Democrat, Oct. 22, 1864.
Columbia County," "The Fishingcreek Conspiracy," and "The Fishingcreek Confederacy." The terms "military occupation" and "military invasion" were used by the Democrats in an effort to prove that the action was an infringement upon constitutional rights; the terms "Fishingcreek conspiracy" and "Fishingcreek confederacy" were taken up by Republicans to prove that a definite combination existed which demanded the intervention of the military. In the years that followed, individuals with political aspirations were made or broken depending upon the stand they took concerning the innocence or guilt of the "political prisoners" confined in Fort Mifflin, Philadelphia. As a result of the strong partisan feeling created by the incident, considerable heat, and very little light, has been shed on the subject.

To date, students of local history who have written on the subject of the "occupation" or "invasion" of Columbia County have been in complete sympathy with the citizens rather than the military. Such a position is understandable when one realizes that these writers rely almost entirely on John G. Freeze’s *A History of Columbia County, Pennsylvania* as the authority for their statements. Freeze was a practicing attorney in Bloomsburg at the time of the incident and on various occasions acted as an intermediary between the military and the people, with whom he was in complete sympathy. He later became one of the defense attorneys for the men who were tried in October and November, 1864, before the Military Commission at Harrisburg. It must also be noted that in late August, 1865, Colonel Freeze was one of the main speakers at the Nob Mountain Democratic Rally, where he reviewed the "military invasion" of the previous year with an eye toward making political capital for the Democrats in the off-year elections.

Much of the material presented at that meeting appeared almost without change in Freeze’s history, which he published in 1883, devoting nearly a third of the contents to the "Military Occupation of Columbia County." In this account he brings together a huge volume of material in an attempt to prove the political thesis which has continued to influence most writers on the subject to the present day. Since this thesis has exerted such a strong influence, not only

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on students of the subject, but also on the people of the county, it would be well to state it again. "During the civil war," Freeze wrote, the Republican party, backed by the administration and the army, which had been subsidized to its purposes, became insolent in its behaviour and revolutionary in its purposes with regard to government. No man was allowed to speak freely against or criticise or condemn the course the dominant party were pursuing. All over the loyal North military spies, irresponsible Provost Marshals and armed forces were distributed for the purpose of overawing the people and of preventing at the elections a fair and free expression of opinion. And the nearer the Presidential election of 1864 approached, the more overbearing became these government officials and employees, until a reign of terror was inaugurated in the country. The State of Pennsylvania was particularly the scene of atrocious outrage. Where it was thought the elections required to be manipulated there soldiers were located, citizens were arrested, property was destroyed, the State itself degraded, and the constitution and laws set at defiance. The counties of Berks, Columbia, Clearfield, Pike, Schuylkill and many others were subjected to military raids the memory of which will abide with the victims and their posterity for generations.  

Freeze’s statement does not consider one all-important fact necessary for a clearer understanding of the situation. The people of the county were strongly opposed to conscriptions as well as to the political policy of the Lincoln Administration. Freeze refers only incidentally to the draft in elaborating on his political thesis. However, Levi Tate, the editor of the Columbia Democrat and a close friend of Freeze’s, had much to say on the subject, none of it complimentary to the Lincoln Administration. The opposition of the county citizens to the draft increased steadily throughout July, August, and September as the proposed September conscription approached. Tate was reflecting this sentiment when he wrote: "'Howard of the Times' called for a fast and four hundred thousand men—He was put in Fort Lafayette. Lincoln calls for a fast and five hundred thousand men. Now, then, what should be done with Lincoln?'”  

"Do you want another draft?" Tate asked ironically. "If you do, vote for Lincoln.—He is your man." Although this side of the picture was glossed over by Freeze, it must be given full consideration if one hopes to gain a more complete understanding of the incident.

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6 Ibid., 393.
7 Columbia Democrat, Aug. 13, 1864.
8 Ibid., Oct. 29, 1864.
It will be this little-known aspect of the incident which will be the subject of this paper, for, contrary to the picture painted by Freeze, the opposition to the draft in Columbia County (despite the fact that much of it was the figment of imagination) caused the military much concern. It will be necessary first, however, to describe in broad outline the ideas of the people who inhabited the area where the incident occurred. Without such a background the incident loses much of its importance.

During the period of the Civil War, Columbia County was, for the most part, an agricultural area. Except for the mining of coal in one or two of the southern townships, farming was the major occupation. The small independent farmers were largely of English, Scotch-Irish, and German stock. A cursory glance at the list of the forty-four men arrested by the soldiers in the latter part of August, 1864, will reveal such names as Yorks, Roberts, and Steele, Coleman and McHenry, Rantz and Hartman. These farmers were to a large extent self-sufficient, purchasing at the general store the few necessities which they could not produce on their farms.

Such a stable agricultural community was generally opposed to social change and conservative in its political outlook. This was especially true of the people in the northern townships. "While others were changing," one writer has observed, "these Fishingcreek people held fast to their political principles and proclaimed their beliefs loudly, vociferously and not always wisely." A glance at the Presidential election returns for 1860 will reveal the strength of this Peace Democratic group. In the returns for the entire county, Breckenridge, the Southern Democrat, received 2,367 votes; Lincoln received 1,873; Douglas received 86; and Bell, 14. The strong Republican vote was to be found in the towns, the Peace Democratic vote in the outlying rural areas. Glancing at the returns for the three townships directly affected by the "military occupation," we find a somewhat different picture in the voting:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Township</th>
<th>Benton</th>
<th>Fishingcreek</th>
<th>Sugarloaf</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Breckenridge</td>
<td>142</td>
<td>206</td>
<td>114</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Douglas</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lincoln</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>16</td>
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<tr>
<td>Bell</td>
<td>—</td>
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The totals for the three townships show that Breckenridge received 462 votes, while Lincoln received only 111 votes. The ratio was more than 4 to 1 in favor of Breckenridge. It is also significant that neither Bell nor Douglas received a single vote in these townships. It is easy to see how such a vote for the Southern Democrat might be interpreted by the Republicans and the military as an expression of Southern sympathy, how it added an element of plausibility to the numerous rumors and reports of organized resistance in these townships.

We have already alluded to the opinions of the Peace Democrats on Lincoln and the issue of the Union and slavery, but some elaboration is necessary, for the issue played an important role in the November Presidential election. In August, 1864, Levi Tate wrote in the Columbia Democrat: "Lincoln's late declaration that he will only end the war on the basis of the freedom of the negro is satisfactory to the office holders and speculators of the war, but to the poor man who is robbed of his money, or dragged from his family to be slaughtered for the negro, it stands in the light of an unmitigated crime." Lincoln, Tate believed, could have settled the issue of the Union in a few months, but did nothing at all during his term of office. "What could have been done in six months and was not done in four years, cannot be accomplished in another term by the present administration. We must, therefore, vote for a change." In Tate's mind the answer to the question of union and peace was General McClellan. If Lincoln were re-elected, the people could expect nothing but "debt, taxation and endless war." If friends and relatives wanted "Johnny ever to come marching home," they must vote for McClellan. "If Abe Lincoln is re-elected," Tate warned, "Johnny will never come marching home. He may be carried, a corpse." In order to prevent such a terrible possibility, Tate urged the voters to go to the polls and turn out the Lincoln Administration. "What say the Democrats of Columbia [?]" he asked. "Let us thunder out for 'McClellan, Pendleton and Peace.'"
Methodists, Loyal Leaguers, and other abolitionists, who were blamed for the slavery issue, received rather rough treatment at the hands of Tate and the Peace Democrats. Tate's contempt for Methodists is indicated by the question mark which he always placed behind the word "Christian" when he referred to the "Christian (?) Advocate and Journal, Methodist," which he believed guilty of "intentions to devote its columns to party politics." "How high above such men," Tate snarled, "are the real followers of Him whose kingdom is not of this world." 16

We see Tate at his caustic best when he takes the local Methodist preacher to task for his abolitionist leanings: "The abolitionists held a little meeting on Monday evening, at which little Mr. Wilson, the little methodist preacher, made a little speech. We have not seen a list of the killed, or wounded, but the sick and disgusted comprise about all who were at the meeting." 17 It was Tate's conclusion that anyone "who pays a dollar to an Abolitionist political preacher might as well pay an incendiary to set fire to his own house." 18

With people who were so violently opposed to Lincoln and his prosecution of the war on the issue of slavery, the conscription of men for such an unholy crusade was unpardonable; and, although they continued to fill the necessary quotas, they made use of every opportunity to speak out against the practice. The way to put an end to this evil, as well as the other glaring evils of war and abolition, was to get rid of Lincoln. "All who fear being torn from their families by enforced conscription, will vote for the candidates on a union and peace platform," Colonel Tate pointed out, "for their election will stop all drafts [drafts?], restore all citizens to their homes and families." 19 The Peace Democrats believed that there was an end to the country's manpower and that this end was close at hand. When Provost Marshal James B. Fry announced that men in excess of the quota would be credited to the "next draft," Tate was quick to warn the people of the terrible implications of Fry's statement: "Let the people ponder this official announcement that there is to be another draft. Remember, too, that paying out is played out. The people have

16 Ibid., Oct. 1, 1864.
17 Ibid., Oct. 8, 1864.
18 Ibid., Aug. 27, 1864.
19 Ibid., Oct. 29, 1864.
about filled the Republican programme as far as money is concerned. They have given well nigh the 'last dollar.'—The 'last man' will have to go when the next draft is made.”

It was the army officers and those responsible for the conscripting of the men who received the brunt of local criticism. The issues of the Columbia Democrat during the summer and fall of 1864 are filled with editorial knifings from Tate’s pen. In the issue of August 6, 1864, he wrote: “A John Buckalew, Jr., has made himself so conspicuous in trying to arrest non-reporting drafted-men, in the upper part of the county; that he has been obliged to return to the army, in order to be in a place of safety, and escape arrest for robbery, in his raids.” We have no way of checking the truth of Tate’s accusation, but the fervor with which he criticized the administration might well have led him to an exaggeration of the incident. We do know that in such a political powder keg as Columbia County, the slightest misstep by the military would be fuel for such an astute man as Colonel Tate. On the issue of conscription, many men carried big chips on their shoulders, and Tate was no exception. He was often guilty of picking up rumors concerning the county draft officials and commenting upon them without verification. In many instances he was forced to make public apology. Just a week before the soldiers arrived in Bloomsburg, Tate took Captain Silvers, the local draft officer, to task. “We understand that Capt. Silvers wants Columbia County put under martial law. We could give the Captain some advice on that and kindred subjects,” Tate quipped, “but we suppose that he would not appreciate it.” Captain Silvers emphatically denied that he had harbored or circulated abroad such an idea. “We are glad to make the correction,” Tate wrote one week later, “as we have no desire to do him, or any other man, the slightest injustice. Our voice and pen are for Peace.” However, one might wonder whether Tate would have been so glad to make the correction had he known that the first contingent of troops would arrive in Bloomsburg a few hours after the paper was on the streets.

It is easy to see how the presence of the military in a region where the majority of the people held such views might be interpreted by

20 Ibid.
21 Ibid., Aug. 6, 1864.
22 Ibid.
23 Ibid., Aug. 13, 1864.
local historians like John G. Freeze as an attempt to interfere in the county's political activities. And we can see with equal ease the effect such feeling might have on the minds of the military leaders. This strong opposition to the administration and the draft only served to substantiate the fears of Captain Richard Dodge when he made his report to James B. Fry, the provost marshal general:\(^\text{24}\):

In several counties of the Western Division of Pennsylvania, particularly in Columbia and Cambria, I am credibly informed that there are large bands of deserters and delinquent drafted men, banded together, armed, and organized for resistance to the U. S. authorities. This organization in Columbia County alone numbers about 500 men; in Cambria it is said to be larger. These men are encouraged in their course by every means by the political opponents of the Administration.

Any doubts in the minds of the military about the plausibility of such reports were quickly dispelled when word reached Dodge that a Lieutenant Robinson of Luzerne County had been fatally wounded while on patrol in the northeastern part of Columbia County. Robinson and a squad of eight men had "attempted to stop by challenging a party of citizens whom they met."\(^\text{25}\) When the party refused to heed the challenge, Robinson ordered his men to open fire. The fire was returned. Robinson was fatally injured while the challenged party escaped into the darkness. Dodge reported to Fry that the provost marshals were powerless to do anything in the face of such resistance. As a result, there was "a constantly increasing boldness and defiant spirit on the part of the opposers of the Administration and a growing despondency and indisposition to exert themselves on the part of its friends." "In my opinion," Dodge wrote, "the most serious consequences are to be apprehended should this state of things exist when the next draft takes place."\(^\text{26}\)

To prevent these "serious consequences" from materializing, Captain Dodge believed that the government would have to act "immediately and with vigor." Any attempt to break the growing resistance and enforce the draft in all the areas at the same time, however, would be sheer folly. "My plan," suggested Dodge,

is to enter one county with a force sufficiently strong not only to put down but to overawe resistance; to remain in that county until every deserter, delinquent drafted man, and abettor of rebellion be arrested or run out of the county. When that is done, proceed to another. By this means bloodshed, in which there is the greatest danger, will be avoided, and the moral effect of the complete and bloodless subjection of the county will render success in every other county more certain and easy. One regiment of Invalids, under the command of a competent and discreet officer, and placed exclusively under my control, will, I believe, enable me to carry this point to a perfectly satisfactory conclusion.

I therefore respectfully request that a regiment be sent me without delay, that at least one county may be disarmed before the draft commences.\(^{27}\)

The fact that nearly every detail of Dodge's plan of a "complete and bloodless subjection" was carried out in Columbia County gives the document even greater significance when viewed in the light of Freeze's thesis. Freeze earnestly believed that the troops were sent into Columbia County and located in areas "where it was thought the elections required to be manipulated."\(^{28}\) However, except for Dodge's belief that the delinquent drafted men were "encouraged . . . and assisted . . . by the political opponents of the Administration," the document is barren of any suggestion of occupying the county for political purposes. Dodge's chief aim was to disarm the county so that the proposed September draft might be carried out without danger of armed resistance. Had manipulating the elections been his aim, it would stand to reason that greater success would have been achieved by occupying townships where the Peace Democrats did not comprise such an overwhelming majority of the voting population.

General Fry approved Dodge's plan, stating that "Every deserter from the late draft should, if possible, be arrested before the September draft commences." However, he cautioned Dodge, saying, "[I] hope you will so use this force as to secure a thorough administration of the law without unnecessary collision."\(^{29}\)

Dodge began immediately to put his plan into operation. An examination of the disposition of his forces from August through October indicates that he planned to begin with the occupation of Columbia County. As his objectives were attained, the force in that

\(^{27}\) *Ibid.*

\(^{28}\) Freeze, 393.

county would be pulled out gradually and sent to Philipsburg in Centre County by way of Muncy and Williamsport. With this in mind, the initial phase of the operation went into effect when the first contingent of troops arrived in Bloomsburg on the evening of August 13, 1864, and set up camp on the Agricultural Fair Grounds. On August 15, 1864, Major General D. N. Couch, Commander of the Department of the Susquehanna, in transmitting a “field return” of his command, made the following report: “Lehigh District—. . . Bloomsburg, Pa., one company mounted (100-days’) Pennsylvania Volunteers, one section Keystone Battery (100-days’), Pennsylvania Artillery.”

Following this report, General Couch set out for Bloomsburg, where he arrived on August 16. He was accompanied by a battalion of infantry under the command of Lieutenant Colonel Charles Stewart. This force was subsequently reinforced “by a batallion [sic] of Veteran Reserve Corps, completing the Army of Occupation.”

Upon his arrival, General Couch was urged to call on Senator Charles R. Buckalew, who had just returned from Washington; “whereupon,” wrote Freeze, “the General mounted Cedar Hill, ‘solitary and alone,’ and found the Senator at work in a field.” According to Freeze, Couch “detailed to him [Buckalew] his dreadful story of the insurrection in the Fishing Creek Country.” He told Buckalew that he had been informed that Colonel Hiram R. Kline was the leader of the insurrection. “Mr. Buckalew’s reply was, as we are informed,” said Freeze, that he had no particular information of what had occurred in the Creek region beyond newspaper statements; that he did not believe there was any general combination of the inhabitants to resist the draft; that the statement about Col. Kline was inconsistent with the character of that gentleman and was no doubt a falsehood, that in his opinion any military or civil officer could proceed into any of the upper townships without being molested.

Couch also had “long and earnest interviews” with the leading Republicans in Bloomsburg. Following the interviews, he authorized

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31 Freeze, 394.
32 Ibid., 397.
33 Ibid.
34 Ibid.
Colonel Freeze, in a letter dated August 16, 1864, to inform all “those persons in Columbia County, who have not reported as required under previous ‘drafts,’ and are known as deserters, that the charge of desertion shall be remitted by me provided they duly report themselves on or before 12 P.M., Saturday, August 20, current.” General Couch left Bloomsburg the following day without waiting for Freeze’s report. However, Freeze had an interview with Colonel Stewart the same evening, in which he gave a full report of his mission, assuring Stewart that “there would be no resistance by any citizens to the arrest of alleged deserters, that ten men could arrest them as safely as ten hundred.” Freeze also made the same offer to Stewart that he had made to Couch, that he would take him “in a carriage up the creek to all points and have him personally meet the people and hunt the fort alleged to have been erected.” Both Stewart and Couch refused the offer.

It would appear that no one in the county complied with General Couch’s order, for neither Freeze nor Tate make mention of any alleged deserters reporting on or before noon, Saturday, August 20. On the following day, Stewart and his forces broke camp and began their march up Fishing Creek “to the music of the fife and drum.” As Freeze saw it, “the flag of the United States prostituted for a base purpose, was borne in front.” The military force was followed by large numbers of the civilian population in carriages and on foot. “It was for them a joyful Sunday,” wrote Freeze, “and their looks spoke their exultation. So far as they were concerned, the churches were abandoned, the quiet of the day disregarded, and a political raid upon their fellow citizens attended and encouraged.” Freeze’s friend, Colonel Tate, also had some rather caustic remarks to make. After describing the march of the troops through Bloomsburg, he wrote: “Who brought these Soldiers here, is well known; for what cause is a question; and what their mission will effect, time alone must determine. The thing is rather funny and excites no little curiosity. We await the ‘inexorable development of events.’”

35 Quoted in ibid., 394-395.
36 Ibid., 396.
37 Columbia Democrat, Aug. 27, 1864.
38 Freeze, 398.
39 Ibid.
40 Columbia Democrat, Aug. 27, 1864.
After a march of some ten miles, the soldiers pitched their tents for the night in Stucher's Grove. The next morning they broke camp and marched to Peter Appleman's sugar grove just south of Benton where they set up camp. Throughout the following week, activity was confined to scouting the area, "searching unsuccessfully for evidence of armed insurrection, but," as one writer observed caustically, "raiding successfully hen roosts, pig pens and cornfields." On Saturday, August 27, Major General George Cadwalader arrived in Bloomsburg with about two hundred additional troops. The next day they joined Lieutenant Colonel Stewart at the camp south of Benton. Cadwalader made a brief survey of the area and returned to Bloomsburg, August 30, 1864.

During the night he issued orders that the troops encamped at Benton be posted at various locations in the northern townships. This operation was carried on throughout the night with the utmost secrecy. The following morning more than one hundred persons were placed under arrest and taken to a church near Benton. "Here they were subjected to a summary ordeal and inspection," wrote Freeze bitterly, "their cases being passed upon by a scoundrel officer [Stewart] in the pulpit upon whispered consultations with prominent Radicals of the neighborhood." James McHenry, one of the men arrested and sent to Fort Mifflin, has given a firsthand account of these arrests. Writing from Fort Mifflin on September 13, 1864, he said:

On the morning of the last day of August I was very unceremoniously aroused from my bed by thumping at the door of my house. Looking out in the dim twilight [dawn?] I saw my residence was surrounded by a squad of cavalry; walking to my front door and opening it, one Capt. Lambert stepped in, enquired if my name was Jas. McHenry, and if I kept the stors [store?] ; being answered in the affirmative, he said Col. Stewart wanted to see me at Benton. Four of the squad remaining, the balance galloped down to New Columbus, as I afterward learned, to bring my friend, D. L. Chapin. One of these polite gentlemen took a seat in the carriage with me to console me in my awfully frightened condition; . . . arriving at Benton Church, found quite a number of the citizens of the surrounding country had been

41 McHenry, 11.
42 Freeze makes reference to "Saturday, August 28." This is obviously a misprint.
43 Freeze, 399.
44 Quoted in the Columbia Democrat, Sept. 24, 1864.
similarly arrested and brought there,—quite a large congregation for so unreasonable an hour,—doors and windows guarded. Instead of a Preacher in the pulpit men in uniform occupied it.

McHenry mentioned that during the course of the investigation there was considerable "whispering and erasures and significant signs." However, we do not know who was doing the whispering, for McHenry made no mention of the "prominent Radicals" who Freeze charges were in attendance.

Following this investigation, forty-four of the men questioned were marched on foot to Bloomsburg where they boarded a train for Harrisburg. Here they changed cars and proceeded on to Philadelphia where they arrived at 7 A.M. the following morning. "After decamping in Market Street [they] were marched out to 5th and Buttonwood to the Provost Marshal's barracks," wrote McHenry, and "were taken up five stories high in a filthy room, doors and windows all strongly guarded." After receiving the first food since leaving Benton they were marched to the Arch Street Wharf where they boarded the steamer Ray Bold, and arrived at Fort Mifflin at 3 P.M., September 2, 1864. The listing of the names of these men "from the point of view of friends and sympathizers has always been considered an honor roll of Martyrs."47

These arrests were followed by a thorough search of the northern townships. The information given to the officers, some gratis, some gleaned from questioning, varied greatly. Not only were there supposedly "armed men up the creek, organized against the Government, and in resistance to the laws," but also a fort and a cannon. From where this mythical cannon was procured no one knew. One sympathetic writer, in ironic jest, suggested that it may have been brought all the way "from Richmond straight through the Union lines."49 Although such a well-armed organization was considered by writers like John Freeze, May McHenry, and Levi Tate as a figment of the imagination developed by Radical propaganda, the military entertained no such idea. To them the possibility of an organized

45 Ibid.
46 Ibid.
47 McHenry, 16.
48 Columbia Democrat, Oct. 8, 1864.
49 McHenry, 8.
conspiracy was a grave reality, and they were determined to destroy it. The search, however, uncovered nothing that would point to an armed conspiracy with a stronghold supported by cannon. General Cadwalader, who had personally conducted the search, returned to Bloomsburg on the evening of September 6, and is supposed to have stated in the presence of Judge William Elwell, Senator Charles R. Buckalew, and Levi Tate,

that he had made a thorough military examination of the entire country, extending his research over the North Mountain and into Sullivan—that he had sent his Cavalry around by the Turkpike, up the ravines and down the valleys, and—said Gen. Cadwalader,—I am satisfied that there are no armed forces there nor were there any evidence of any in all that country. The whole thing, said Gen. C., is a “GRAND FARCE.” We are content to leave the case upon this statement, to the judgment of the public.\(^50\)

In a letter to General Couch, Senator Buckalew also states that Cadwalader had “characterized the alleged erection of works of resistance and the assembling of men in arms to resist the Government, as a ‘farce.’”\(^51\) However, when we read Couch’s reply to Senator Buckalew, we get a somewhat different picture. “I fully agree with you,” wrote Couch, “that no fortifications were erected by the ‘insurgents,’ but General Cadwalader who made a close examination of the country is satisfied that they had one, and probably two pieces of artillery, that there was an organization to resist the draft, the members of which were armed, and I have other information to the same effect.”\(^52\)

After the arrests had been made and the search for the fort completed, Captain Dodge began the withdrawal of troops from the area. On September 14, 1864, General Couch wrote to him, “For the present, I believe it well to have two companies of, say, veterans, together with the mounted men left in Columbia County, the loyal citizens being in some alarm for fear of the vengeance of their enemies

\(^{50}\) Columbia Democrat, Oct. 8, 1864.

\(^{51}\) Quoted in Freeze, 424.

\(^{52}\) Quoted in ibid., 427. It is quite possible that the report made to Col. Tate, Judge Elwell, and Sen. Buckalew was a guarded statement based on the results of the search, for Cadwalader found no concrete evidence that would point to the existence of such a conspiracy. However, he probably believed that such an organization had existed and stated this belief to Couch. Such a belief if stated in the presence of such prominent Democrats as Tate, Elwell, and Buckalew might well have touched off a storm of criticism unless supported by conclusive evidence.
in case they are left unprotected."

On September 18, Colonel Stewart was ordered to "proceed without delay with three companies of 100-days' infantry and half of the Independent Mounted Company, under the command of the first lieutenant, to Muncy, Pa., and await orders from Capt. Richard I. Dodge." By the same order the remaining company of the 186th Regiment of Pennsylvania Volunteers was relieved of duty in the county.

Although the troops were rapidly being pulled out of the county, there was still a sufficient number remaining in late September to cause Senator Buckalew great concern. On September 26, 1864, he wrote to General Couch: "I shall hope you will find employment elsewhere for the remainder, and if not, you will give the officers in command stringent orders against interfering with our elections, and particularly against placing troops at the places of election in contempt of an ancient statute of this commonwealth." Couch was quick to assure Senator Buckalew that "as regards the troops interfering with the elections, you and your friends may rest assured that there will be no just cause for complaint," for he had been "instructed by the Secretary of War, not to interfere with politics," and this, he said, "has been scrupulously carried out." This statement was probably prompted by Buckalew's threat of "an investigation of the whole transaction."

On October 5, the section of the Keystone Battery, 100-Days' Pennsylvania Artillery was relieved from duty in the county and ordered to report to Captain M. Hastings in Philadelphia. On the following day, Captain J. P. Short, in command of the troops at Johnstown, was ordered to "proceed to Bloomsburg and resume command of the troops in Columbia County."

Captain Short was in command when the local elections were held on Monday, October 11, 1864.

It was the important and highly questionable action of the troops in connection with this local election which led Freeze to conclude

54 Ibid., 109.
55 Quoted in Freeze, 426.
56 Quoted in ibid., 427.
57 Quoted in ibid., 426.
59 Ibid., 307.
that it was solely for political purposes that military forces were sent to the county. The action took several different forms: squads were placed at the polls in several townships; citizens in several localities were arrested and held in confinement until the day after the election; and, in Jackson and Sugarloaf townships, according to Freeze, the soldiers marched into the place of election and demanded the returns. The greatest effect of the action, however, was an indirect one. The fear of being intimidated by the soldiers kept many of the voters from going to the polls. "What does it mean," asked Tate, "the bringing of such a mass of troops to this county and keeping them or part of them here so long at very heavy expense?" The falling-off in the voting as compared to the previous year was the answer as far as Tate was concerned. A comparison between the voting returns for 1863 and those for 1864 in the northern townships shows that Tate had a valid reason for such a belief.

October Election Votes

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The total vote in the three townships in 1863 was 675, while in 1864 it was only 410. "Making all allowances for arrested men and absentees," Tate wrote, "it is plain that a large number of citizens have been deterred from attending the election by the presence of a military force in the county, in connection with arrests and threats intended to intimidate and break the spirit of the people." There is no evidence to show that this interference in the election was ordered by high-level military authorities, such as General Couch, General Cadwalader, or Captain Dodge. The little information available seems to indicate that it was purely a local action originating with the commander of the troops stationed in the county. If Buckalew and Tate had suspected Couch of breaking his written promise they would certainly have been quick to take him to task for such a breach.

60 Freeze, 404.
61 Columbia Democrat, Oct. 22, 1864.
62 Ibid.
63 Ibid.
of good faith; but neither Tate nor Buckalew apparently believed that Couch had broken his promise. "These were good words," Buckalew wrote to Couch, "and I have no disposition to think them or to represent them as insincere. But, unfortunately, the proceedings of your subordinates have not been consistent with them." Captain Short may have ordered such action to protect Republicans from acts of revenge on the part of the Peace Democrats; but in the light of his promise to Senator Buckalew, it seems most unlikely that Couch would have ordered the troops to be posted at the polls and thus place himself in an exceedingly awkward position.

Shortly after the election, part of the mounted cavalry left the county. This withdrawal of additional troops from the county did not meet with the approval of the Secretary of War, for on October 22, Stanton wrote to Couch demanding the reason why he had "removed the cavalry company from Columbia County that was recently there." Couch wrote Stanton that all available troops were called to the Cumberland Valley "in consequence of the existing alarm among the people, . . . that a raid at this time would be very disastrous to the country." Couch, however, assured Stanton that if necessary he would return half of the company to Columbia County. After the cavalry had gone Tate wrote: "Another portion of the 'Army of the Fishingcreek' took their departure from Columbia county, for parts unknown this week. There is now only a small number to subdue the 'great conspiracy,' which the abolitionists say 'exists in the Rebel county of Columbia.' Isn't it time, these pimps and abolitionists, got ashamed of themselves." It appears that the cavalry was returned to the county, for when Couch wrote to Dodge stating his reasons for not complying fully with Dodge's request for troops, he stated that the "cavalry you mention as intending to order from Columbia County I consider are there by superior orders."

The trials of the forty-four men arrested on August 31 commenced in Harrisburg on October 17, 1864, and continued through the re-

64 Quoted in Freeze, 428.
66 Ibid., 451. The people in the Cumberland Valley feared that McCausland would make another raid on Chambersburg; however, the feared raid never materialized.
67 Ibid.
68 Columbia Democrat, Oct. 22, 1864.
remainder of October and the first part of November. Although a lengthy discussion of these trials has no place in this study, a few remarks must be made. It was not until the trials began that the Columbia County prisoners knew the nature of the charges being made. These men were charged with uniting to form an organization the purpose of which was to resist the execution of the draft. J. H. Battle states that on October 17, 1864, “twenty-one of them were conditionally relieved from arrest. Among those twenty-one, five were previously discharged on account of sickness, one [William Roberts], however, having died in prison before his discharge had reached him.” The remaining twenty-three were brought to trial. Of these, the three leading men were sentenced as follows: William Appleman was fined “$500 and one year’s confinement in Fort Mifflin, to be released on payment of the fine”; Samuel Kline was sentenced to two years’ imprisonment; and John Rantz was fined $1,000 and sentenced to two years’ imprisonment. Five others were given varied sentences, and the remainder were released. Appleman paid his fine; Samuel Kline was pardoned by President Lincoln; and John Rantz, John Lemons, Joseph Van Sickle, Rev. A. R. Rutan, Benjamin Colley, and Valentine Fell were pardoned by President Johnson.

There were still a few soldiers in the county at the time of the Presidential election in November, and some of them were stationed at the polls in at least two townships. The returns of this election were still low, the voters again staying away for fear of intimidation. However, Lincoln lost considerable ground over the four-year period from 1860 to 1864. In 1860 he had received 43% of the total vote cast in the county; in 1864, he received only 36% of the vote cast. This percentage would undoubtedly have been less if the voting had been normal.

By November 1, 1864, Captain Dodge was already devoting all his attention to the second phase of his plan. It will be recalled that Dodge had recommended the subjection of one county at a time. Columbia County having been cleared to his satisfaction, he now turned to Clearfield County. He planned to move his troops to

70 Battle, Part II, 130.
71 Columbia Democrat, Nov. 19, 1864.
72 Freeze, 392.
73 Ibid., 404.
Philipsburg, the terminus of the railroad, and conduct the rounding-up of deserters in Clearfield County from that point.

Following the election the remainder of the troops in Columbia County were withdrawn. On November 13, Captain Bruce Lambert and the mounted detachment were ordered from the county, and by December 1, 1864, the last soldier had left, thus bringing to a close the "military occupation of Columbia County." On that date the War Department liquidated the Department of the Susquehanna and formed the Department of Pennsylvania with headquarters at Philadelphia.

When viewed in the light of the *Official Records*, Freeze's political thesis is open to serious question. That there was definite local interference in the Columbia County elections cannot be denied; however, Freeze's charge that this interference was ordered by high-level military authorities in Chambersburg and Washington is not supported by the evidence. Since the Peace Democrats accused the abolitionists and "Republican Spies" of having asked that troops be sent to the county, it is quite plausible to assume that the Peace Democrats might seek revenge. Such an idea may have prompted Captain Short to order the troops to be stationed at the polls to protect the Republicans. Although there is no definite proof as to what might have prompted this action, there is every reason to believe that it originated with Captain Short and not with General Couch or Captain Dodge. Freeze has also charged that "no man was allowed to speak freely or criticise the course the dominant party" was pursuing. If such were the case, it would be reasonable to assume that the opposition press in Columbia County would have been quieted. That Freeze's charge is unfounded is borne out by the vitriolic condemnation of the Lincoln Administration which Levi Tate waged in Columbia County throughout the period of the "military occupation." Available evidence indicates that troops were sent to the county "to overawe resistance," and "to remain in that county until every deserter, delinquent drafted man and abettor of rebellion be arrested or run out of the county," not to "manipulate the elections," as Freeze has charged.

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74 Ibid., 393.