

Abraham Lincoln papers

From Mark W. Delahay to Abraham Lincoln¹, [June - July, 1863]

1 This undated letter is from either June or July, 1863 when Governor Thomas Carney, Senator Samuel C. Pomeroy and other Kansas officials sought the removal of General James G. Blunt.

Sir:—

It is with extreme reluctance that I again find myself constrained to address you. I should not do so, did I not esteem it my duty as an Officer of the Government, and a hearty supporter of your Administration, to bring to your notice the attempts now being made to injure the Commanding General of this District, Maj. Gen'l Blunt, by accusations of a serious character which have no foundation in truth, and which are prompted by personal and political malice on the part of the accusers.²

2 For more on this feud, see Thomas Carney to Lincoln, June 25, 1863; Lincoln to James H. Lane, July 17, 1863; Carney to Lincoln, July 19, 1863; *Collected Works*, VI, 339; and Lincoln to Blunt, August 18, 1863.

I refer to the charges lately made to your Excellency, and to the Hon. Secretary of War, substantially to the effect that Gen. Blunt has inaugurated a reign of terror in our State, over-riding the Civil Authority, which is, it is stated, sufficient to protect the Citizen; that by the military executions he has commanded, and the Mob-law he has countenanced he has virtually placed the State of Kansas at the mercy of the irresponsible despotism of a mob backed by the Military power in his hands. These, I understand to be the charges made by Gov. Carney and U. S. Senator Pomeroy, to which I refer. I put their case thus strongly thus strongly that I may be able to answer in the same strain—

The Military District which Genl Blunt commands, has been, and is now, almost denuded of troops. There are not 5000 effective men in it, and nearly all of them are engaged in the defense of the territory of our Cherokee Allies. I need hardly remind you that the border Counties of Missouri are reeking with numerous gangs of pestilent guerrillas, that in the State of Kansas itself, there are many violent and lawless men, whose numbers have within six months past been largely increased by accessions — from Missouri, of sympathizers with bushwhacking who have been driven out of that State by the severe measures of the Federal Officers there, and who, unknown to our people have scattered themselves through our midst.

In addition to these elements produced by our border strife, and the present Civil war, we have more than our share of the lawless criminals who are always found on the receding frontier. Horse thieves, Gamblers, and all the scum of Older States find their way to our midst, and have held a carnival of crime among our unfortunate citizens for years past. Never since the State has been admitted have our civil authorities been able to cope with this evil. Both our Governors have been too busy — the one in endeavoring to thwart measures of defense, because conducted by Genl Lane, and the other in intriguing for his future election to the U. S. Senate — to earnestly endeavor to protect the interests of the community committed to their charge. The Authorities State, County, and Civic have in nearly every instance been unable to suppress crime and disorder. As a consequence, Bushwackers, Jay-hawkers — & “red-legs” by turns have held sway in different sections of the State, until life and property were entirely unsafe—

Gen. Blunt knew these facts. He is the first man in any position of authority who has taken effective steps to suppress these evils. Owing to the inadequacy of the force at his command, he has not been able to do this as effectually and summarily as the circumstances demanded.

Since the hanging of a thief named Shirley — by his order after being tried and sentenced by a Military Commission, for the robbery of a discharged soldier, which robbery occurred on the Military Reservation of Fort Leavenworth; we have had unbroken peace in this city. Had Gen. Blunt not taken this man from the civil authorities, he would have been wrested from their hands and hung by a mob—

The principal Citizens here cordially endorse endorse the action of the General— Among those who support him in this Act, will be found, our Mayor, the District Judge and Prosecuting Attorney, and other Officers of the County. I have no doubt that these gentlemen will at any time endorse their previously-expressed approval of this Act of General Blunt—

In relation to the countenancing of mob-law, it appears that the Citizens of Atchison, and Doniphan Counties, seized, in the act, almost, a number of thieves, who for a long time past, have been the terror of those communities, and who set at defiance the civil authority. The people tried them and condemned them to death, hanging two, first and then sending a Committee to Gen. Blunt to present the other cases to him with the evidence of crime they possessed, and asking that they might inflict the same penalty on them.

No one doubts the gross criminality of the parties the people tried. Gen. Blunt consented to their wishes; acting with him, were all the civil officers of the counties—

Even if he had not so consented — having no force at his command, he could not have prevented the executions—

As it appears to all here who are unbiassed and who know the circumstances, these are occurrences similar to those which have arisen in all our Western States, when in order to protect the people, it is necessary to adopt irregular means to secure justice. Every new State has this ordeal to pass through.

Had the State Executive devoted as much time to seeking a co-operation with the Commanding General as he does in finding fault with him for doing that which he — the Governor — is powerless to accomplish, a better state of things would exist here today—

There are various parties moving in this matter of destroying General Blunt's Credit with your Excellency and the War Department — besides Senator Pomeroy and Gov. Carney. All the influence they can command, unites in the movement— Officers of the Regular Army, stationed at Fort Leavenworth, whose sympathy with the War and the Administration, are more than questioned, and who have been under the suspicion of the Commandg Genl therefore, — are combined in the movements now making against him. In addition to these will be found prominent Missouri influences, already so potent, I regret, (you will allow me to say) in securing the present change in Department Commanders.

But beyond these political influences will there be found a strong under current of opposition from Officers and parties connected with the Indian Bureau.

It is known here that extensive frauds and outrages have been perpetrated on the loyal Indians and the Government. Gen. Blunt has rendered himself obnoxious by ferretting out and suppressing these crimes.

Doubtless, ere this, these grave matters have been upon his information been brought before the War, and Interior Departments. This influence, with which Gov. Carney is largely connected as the principal Contractor for Indian Supplies, in this region, will be found on investigation, to be among the most active for the causes now seeking the removal of Gen. Blunt from his present command.

I have written at greater length than I had intended in the commencement. But the charges are grave and supported as they were by our State Executive and a U. S. Senator, it seemed evident that they must be regarded gravely. Feeling that interest that a faithful Citizen should, and knowing the facts, as well as the animus of the parties engaged in the movement, I deem it my duty to vindicate a valuable Officer from aspersion and at the same time enable your Excellency to know something



of the actual facts— This sense of duty must be my excuse and apology for thus intruding on you
valuable time— Verry Truly Your friend

M W Delahay