

Recent EBay Auction Features R. E. Lee “Postal” Order

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Another blank in the postal history of the Army of the Kanawha has been filled in by the document pictured on page 127.

The Special Order, dated “Campon Sewell Mtn, October 3, 1861,” reads in part,

1. The mail will be forwarded & received by the Principal Q^r M^r. The letters of each regt will be deposited with the regiment Q^r M^r, who will cause them to be delivered to the Principal Q^r M^r to be forwarded. On the reception of the mail, the Principal Q^r M^r will send to the regimental Q^r M^r the letters for each regt. The mail bags will be in charge of the Princp^l Q^r M^r who will take possession of the keys.

The order is signed R.E. Lee Commd Genl and is addressed to Gen John B. Floyd, his subordinate officer.

Confederate forces assigned to operate in the Kanawha River Valley, in what is now West Virginia, were placed under the command of Brigadier General John B. Floyd on August 11, 1861, and denominated the Army of the Kanawha. This force and one under Brigadier General Henry A. Wise were its chief constituents. Their operations against Union troops were marked by severe fractiousness and feuding between Wise and Floyd and a

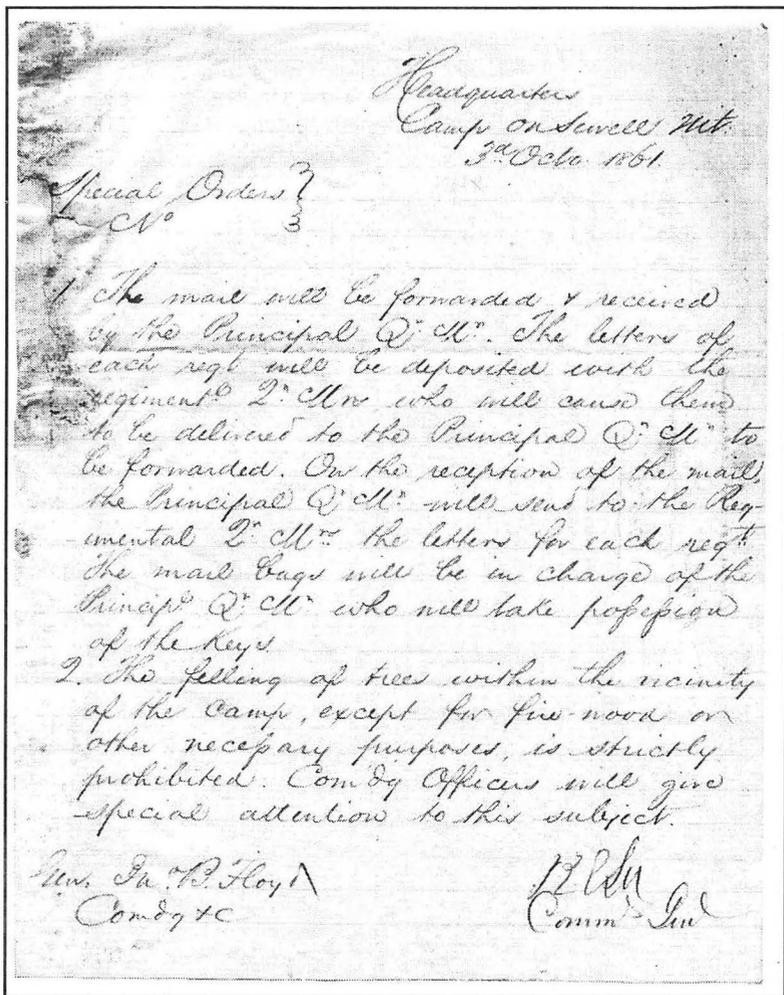


Figure 1. Special Orders, October 3, 1861, from General Lee, organizing distribution of mail within the Army of the Kanawha.

resulting breakdown of command and a series of Confederate defeats. In October 1861 General Lee tried to create a more coherent command but ultimately failed. After the Confederate defeat during the Cheat Mountain campaign these forces were arrayed on Sewell Mountain.

How the mail to and from these forces was handled has not been clear. A few comments in soldiers' letters indicated there was mail service. Mail was presumably transported on the James River Turnpike between the army and Lewisburg, which connected to the railroad at Covington, via White Sulphur Springs on Route 4383. Post Office correspondence indicates that in November 1861 mail for the Army of the Kanawha, as well as other military concentration points such as Manassas, was to be directed to the Richmond Post Office for forwarding.¹ On December 4, 1861, the Lewisburg and White Sulphur Springs postmasters were informed that all mail for Wise's Brigade at Meadows Bluff (near Sewell's Mountain) were to be put in separate bag to that place for distribution there to alleviate very irregular mail service.² This action was evidently taken in response to the request of Floyd's Assistant Adjutant General, Capt. W. W. Auld, on November 21.

The present document indicates that the Quartermaster, possibly Major Alfred W.G. Davis, Floyd's Quartermaster, was in charge of accepting and distributing the mails. What is a bit unusual was his possession of the mailbag keys, a responsibility normally restricted to sworn postmasters.

Notes and References:

1. Confederate Post Office Department, Contract Office Letters-Sent Books. Pickett Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington DC, Vol 31, p. 523.
2. *Ibid.*, Vol. 31, p. 531.

