

**REPORTS TO THE WAR
DEPARTMENT;
CHIEF OF RAIL AND
RIVER TRANSPORTATION**

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Reports to the War Department; Chief of Rail and River Transportation by Lewis B. Parsons

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LEWIS B. PARSONS

**REPORTS TO THE WAR
DEPARTMENT;
CHIEF OF RAIL AND
RIVER TRANSPORTATION**

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R E P O R T S

TO THE

WAR DEPARTMENT,

BY

BREV. MAJ. GEN. LEWIS B. PARSONS,

C H I E F

OF

RAIL AND RIVER TRANSPORTATION.

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ST. LOUIS, March 25, 1867.

Major-General LEWIS B. PARSONS,

St. Louis, Mo.

GENERAL:—Believing that your records, as Chief of the important Department of Rail and River Transportation during the late rebellion, contain much information of interest to the general public, no less than to those of us who were more directly concerned with this branch of the public service, we would respectfully solicit the same for publication, or such portions thereof as you may think proper to furnish.

JOSEPH BROWN,
President Atlantic and Mississippi Steamship Co.

JOHN J. ROE.

HENRY W. SMITH,
President St. Louis and Memphis Packet Co.

JOHN A. SCUDDER,
Secretary St. Louis and Memphis Packet Co.

BARTON ABLE.

DANIEL G. TAYLOR.

W. D. GRISWOLD,
President Ohio and Mississippi Railway Co.

GEORGE R. TAYLOR,
President Pacific Railroad Co.

T. McKISSOCK,
Superintendent Pacific Railroad Co.

E. W. WOODWARD,
President Little Miami Railroad Co.

S. S. L'HOMMEDIEU,
President H. & D. and Atlantic & G. W. R.R. Co.

H. C. MOORE,
Superintendent Alton and Terre Haute R.R. Co.

ISAAC H. STURGEON,
President North Missouri Railroad Co.

THOMAS ALLEN,
President Iron Mountain Railroad Co.

C. S. ROGERS,
President Naples Packet Co.

THOMAS H. GRIFFITH,
Secretary Northern Line Packet Co.

C. G. PIERCE.

THOMAS COOK.

THOMAS GAFF.

JOHN G. COPELAN.

W. E. CARTER.

D. J. HANCOCK.

St. Louis, March 30, 1867.

Messrs. JOSEPH BROWN, JOHN J. ROE, HENRY W. SMITH, JOHN A. SCUDDER, BARTON ABLK, DANIEL G. TAYLOR, W. D. GRISWOLD, GEORGE R. TAYLOR, T. MCKISSOCK, E. W. WOODWARD, S. S. L'HOMMEDIEU, H. C. MOORE, ISAAC H. STURGEON, THOMAS ALLEN, C. S. ROGERS, THOMAS H. GRIFFITH, C. G. PIERCE, THOMAS COOK, THOMAS GAFF, JOHN G. COPELAN, W. E. CARTER, D. J. HANCOCK.

GENTLEMEN:—In reply to your note of the 25th instant, I would state that an analysis of the great mass of reports and records made during the war has not yet been completed, and, consequently, it will be impossible at present to show, with any detail, the immense transactions of the Transportation branch of the service.

Such information as is derived from general Reports, the most of which have been already submitted to Congress by the War Department, and are published, I herewith submit.

The great part performed by the Rail and Water Transportation of the country, and especially by that of the Mississippi river and its tributaries, in the suppression of the rebellion, cannot be overestimated, nor its importance, with reference to the future, too carefully considered.

But for these aids, the task, herculean as it was, must have surpassed the powers of the Government, and our Republic become only a historic landmark and warning to all nations aspiring to free institutions.

You will find in the Reports submitted that I have ever appreciated and borne testimony to the indomitable energy, courage and valuable services performed by those in civil life who have been connected with this branch of the service.

Very respectfully,

LEWIS B. PARSONS, *late Brevet Major-General,*
and Chief of Rail and River Transportation.

R E P O R T

OF

GEN. LEWIS B. PARSONS TO THE QUARTERMASTER GENERAL.

WASHINGTON CITY, October 15, 1865.

*Brevet Major-General M. C. MEIGS,
Quartermaster-General, U. S. A.*

GENERAL:—I with pleasure comply with your request, before leaving the service, by furnishing a concise report of my connection with the department, and the events of interest which have transpired under my own orders or observation, and also by making such suggestions as I think may be of service in the future. I must, however, state that, owing to the mode of reporting the transactions and auditing the accounts of the department now required by law and army regulations; by which a full analysis of the same cannot be made for from one to two years, it will be impossible at present to give those tabular statements showing the large transactions of the transportation branch of the service, which would be both interesting and instructive, and my report must consequently be general in its character, leaving details and most of the exhibits to be furnished at some future period, when peace has given time for a careful examination and classification of the great mass of reports and documents accumulated during the progress of the war.

The subject of transportation in the conduct of war has always been one of primary importance; and the application of steam to transportation has perhaps as much modified the art of war as it has the pursuits of peace, and should, through its ability for more rapid concentration of troops and supplies at distant points, give greater vigor to a campaign, and vast advantage to the party having superiority in this respect. Not only has the world never before seen such vast armies so suddenly and so easily created, but never has it witnessed such *rapidity* in the transit of those armies for long distances, with their vast munitions and supplies. It is now practicable, on twenty-four hours' notice, to embark at Boston or Baltimore a larger army than those with which Napoleon won some of his most decisive victories, and landing it within three days at Cairo, twelve hundred miles distant, there embark it on transports, and, within four days' more time, disembark it at New Orleans, a thousand miles far-

ther, or two thousand two hundred miles from the point of departure. Boats could easily be gathered at Cincinnati, Louisville, and St. Louis, which could within a week precipitate two hundred thousand troops, with all necessary munitions and supplies, upon Cairo or Memphis.

Hence, and from statements of various expeditions hereinafter given, it will be easy to see the great importance of the best possible management of our river and railroad transportation, in order to a successful campaign, especially when the theater of war is so expanded as has been the present.

On entering upon the duties to which I was assigned by my superior officer, Major (now Brevet Major-General) Robert Allen, in November, 1861, as Chief of Rail and River Transportation, at St. Louis, my first object was to introduce, as far as possible, such system as should combine uniformity with responsibility, and efficiency with economy, not then existing, owing to the confusion generally prevailing at the commencement of the war, and especially in the Western department—it being the period between General Frémont's and General Halleck's administrations. Under General Frémont's orders, the entire river transportation was performed by *chartering* boats; nearly all of those within the department being so employed, though we then only commanded the river as far south as Cairo. Satisfied, on a cursory examination, that this mode of conducting the service was as wrong in principle as it was extravagant in practice; that a very small proportion of the boats then in service were actually required, (many of them being either idle or unprofitably engaged, according to the caprice of officers in command,) with the approval of General Allen, I made temporary contracts by the hundred pounds or by the piece for government transportation, and discharged all boats from charter, with the multitude of employes connected therewith. The result was that half the boats were at once out of service and lying idle at the levee, while government transportation was not only performed at a less cost, but in a much more prompt and satisfactory manner. Subsequently, by authority of General Halleck, upon whose staff I had been placed, and whose command then extended over almost the entire country west of the Alleghany mountains, I prepared a few concise rules and regulations, producing responsibility and giving information as to the duties of officers connected with transportation. The change was immediate and favorable beyond my own expectations. Order soon arose out of confusion; officers who had been improperly furnishing transportation were made accountable; railroads which, in their anxiety to serve the country, had honored thousands of orders, ignorant as to their propriety or whether compensation would be made therefor, were highly gratified, and the

service greatly improved in all respects. Soon after I made formal contracts by the piece or hundred pounds for all government transportation required on the Mississippi and Missouri rivers, so far as our authority extended; and, as our armies opened new territory, like contracts were made, until the government transportation between nearly all points under our control was performed in the same manner, with continued improvement and satisfaction both to government officers and the steamboat interests. The latter became satisfied with the change, inasmuch as, under the former system, boats were paid alike, whether faithful in their service or not; while, under the new mode, the energetic and industrious secured the advantages to which they were justly entitled.

When, upon my report of December, 1863, you issued General Order No. 22 $\frac{1}{2}$, December 9, 1863, placing the Cumberland and Ohio rivers under my control, I determined immediately to abandon the charter system, which up to that time had prevailed on those rivers, and though there was a general combination of the steamboat interests of the Ohio against me, I succeeded, after much labor and perplexity, in the reform, the result of which was, if possible, more satisfactory than it had been on the Mississippi; and, instead of one hundred and twenty-three steamers reported as in service on the Cumberland in supplying General Rosecrans' army in the winter of 1862-3, only sixty-six were reported as required in supplying, in a more satisfactory manner, the same army combined with the large armies of Generals Grant and Sherman during the winter of 1863-4. As illustrative, I would state that one of the largest government contractors, who for two years furnished most of the forage for the army of the Cumberland, and amounting to millions of bushels annually, subsequently informed me that the same boats he had loaded the year before as chartered boats carried more than double the cargo, and received, transported and discharged it in half the time. To the same point I would respectfully refer to the following extract from the Report of Brevet Major-General J. L. Donaldson, Supervising Quartermaster of the Department of the Cumberland:

"Colonel L. B. Parsons, in charge of Western River Transportation, St. Louis, Mo., having become satisfied that the charter system was a vicious one generally, abrogated it, and made contracts for the delivery of supplies at Nashville by the hundred pounds, at an average of about fifty cents per hundred. He experienced great opposition in changing the system, as the per diem paid well; and whether boats were working or lying up, delaying along the rivers, or hurrying back and forward, as they should do, the pay was the same, and it was too lucrative to be willingly yielded. Colonel Parsons, however, carried his point, after strong opposition; and, although I have not the data at hand, as Captain Winslow, my officer in charge of river transportation, is now out of service, I am satisfied that, by the change from charter by the day to service by the hundred pounds, it can be easily shown that the Government saved one to two millions of dollars in its operations in this department alone."

I also beg leave to refer to a Report recently received from Captain F. S. Winslow, late A. Q. M., and a most efficient and valuable officer, to whom General Donaldson refers in his Report above, a copy of which is herewith transmitted, and from which I make the following extract:

"The following condensed statement will show you the amount of work done during the season of navigation, at Nashville, from February 1 to May 27, 1864:

Months.	Number of Steamboat and Barge Arrivals.		Amount in tons of freight discharged at Nashville.
February	178 boats	carrying	35,860 tons.
March	213 "	"	62,666 "
April	158 boats and barges..	"	41,029 "
May	65 "	"	15,461 "
Total	614 boats and barges..	carrying	158 016 tons.

(One hundred fifty-eight thousand and sixteen tons.)

"Although the figures I shall now present will appear almost fabulous, yet I am honestly convinced they are too low. I wish to establish the *difference of cost* of the above 158,016 tons, if it had been transported on chartered vessels, instead of, as it was, on boats contracted at a given price per hundred pounds.

"From all data, it is sufficiently established that freight carried on chartered boats never cost the Government less than \$1 50 per hundred pounds. The cost for transporting the above 158,016 tons would consequently have reached the sum of \$4,740,493. The contract price under which the stores were actually transported ranged at from 50 cents to 60 cents per hundred pounds. Taking the outside figure, the transportation cost the Government the sum of \$1,896,192. Consequently, the change from the charter to the contract system saved the Government the enormous sum of about *three millions of dollars*.

"At the same time, the extra expense incurred by me in single cases, where want of levee room compelled me to keep boats waiting above the time allotted them for discharging, amounted, during the whole season, and for all the boats, to 50 5-24 days of demurrage, which, at an average of \$125 per day, amounts to \$11,300.

"To you belongs the credit of having accomplished such great results; to me the satisfaction of having supported you to the utmost of my ability. And I remain, with sincere considerations of respect, truly your obedient servant,

" F. S. WINSLOW, late Captain and A. Q. M."

I would also call attention to this Report, as illustrating the large transactions of this department, by showing the *freight* transportation service upon a small river, only generally navigable by a light class of boats for a brief period of the year—troops having been transported by the Louisville and Nashville railroad.

In further proof of the correctness of the policy I have pursued in performing the government business, so far as practicable, under contract with private parties by the hundred pounds or the piece, I would respectfully refer to various contracts made by me, or under my instructions, during the war, copies of which I transmit herewith, and by which it will be seen that, in the early part of the war, the cost of the transportation of troops was only from two to three mills per man per mile, or an average of \$1 05 per man from St.