

Wade Hampton, Troops in the Statehouse - Part 10

General Wade Hampton, 28. June 2021
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By Bob Dill - Publisher of The Times Examiner
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General Wade Hampton, whose ancestors had fought Indians in the Upstate and British during the American Revolution, had been a brilliant and fearless military leader in defense of his homeland. Federal troops under Gen. Sherman had invaded his beloved state, looted and torched his home and that of his family and neighbors, leaving him virtually penniless and his family homeless.

The powers that ruled South Carolina for almost a decade during "Congressional Reconstruction," had "caused more destruction than the four years of war."

South Carolinians who had supported the Confederacy were banned from voting. Control of the state government was left to opportunists from the north called "Carpetbaggers," unscrupulous local opportunists called "Scalawags," and freed former slaves, who were manipulated, used and abused by Carpetbaggers and Scalawags. The state government was controlled by the national Radical Republican Party and backed in all they did by federal troops who kept the native whites in check at the point of bayonets.

Wade Hampton's campaign to oust the Radical Republicans and federal troops from the South Carolina State House was not warmly received by Republicans, including those in control of the federal government at the time.

Hamptons' campaign for governor was supported by an overwhelming majority of whites and in the Upstate, by an increasing number of former slaves who knew him or knew of his reputation for fairness.

When the election was over, Hampton and the other elected Democrats were barred from the State House by federal troops, and for a time, the state had two governors and two legislatures.

The election laws had been lax to benefit non-residents and illiterate former slaves, and the Democrats supporting Hampton took advantage of the lax rules as did the Republicans.

"No one slept the night before the election," it was reported. Henry T. Thompson wrote in his publication that, Radical Republican leaders in both the north and south "were resolved that there should be violence in South Carolina so as to furnish justification for interference on the part of the United States Government."

Alfred B. Williams, the newspaper reporter from Charleston, after the fact concluded: "Nobody ever will know how the state would have gone with a fair and free election. The Democrats cheated and intimidated and bribed and bulldozed and voted repeatedly where they could and the Republicans did likewise. It was a revolution, a battle for life, and force and cunning were applied and both sides disregarded the law.... At some polls the managers were bought, at others intimidated."

A struggle to determine the winners in the election began on November 10, 1876 between the election board, courts and Congress. "Within a week after the election, "The attention of the

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country and a large part of the world was concentrated on the South Carolina State House.”

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Republicans protested the election results in Laurens, Edgefield and Barnwell Counties. Democrats protested the results in Beaufort, Darlington, Richland and other Counties.

“If the White people of the state had undertaken to deliver her by peaceful and lawful means, they would have had no hope of change against a mass of ignorance, prejudice, fears, and hate directed by unscrupulous and conniving” people, Williams concluded.

In his recent (2003) biography of Hampton, *Gentleman and Soldier*, Edward G. Longacre disputes claims by revisionist historians that Wade Hampton III condoned violence, intimidation, coercion, and fraud as a means of dealing with blacks.

Hampton, he wrote, “was genuinely desirous of promoting the political rights to which freedmen were entitled under the law, and he consistently strove to protect those rights.

Hampton attacked so-called “black codes” in his campaign speeches and “made consistent and effective appeals to black’s dreams of a better life, promising them economic, educational and even political opportunities such as no Democrat had ever offered.”

He pledged that he would “render to the whole people of this state equal and impartial justice.”

Hampton “won the thanks of African-Americans and the grudging respect of many Caucasians when he declared: ‘If any white voter believed I will stand between him and the law or grant to him any privileges or immunities that shall not be granted to the colored man, he is mistaken and I tell him if that is his reason for voting for me, let him not vote at all.’”

With federal troops in the South Carolina State House and two Governors and two legislatures deliberating at the same time, the situation was explosive.

The election commission composed of all Republicans and the courts were deadlocked.

Governor Hampton sent a letter to newly elected President Hayes. The letter stated that if assured of non-interference by troops, he would take possession of the State House and government without violence, but under an act passed by the Republican legislature in 1868 for summary removal of persons unlawfully claiming office.

On March 23, 1878, President Hayes invited both Governor Hampton and Gov. Chamberlain to Washington. Many South Carolina Democrats advised Hampton not to go, fearing some kind of trap.

Republicans were elated, thinking this would be the end of Wade Hampton’s struggle to become governor.

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Hampton's longtime friend and Confederate General M C Butler from Greenville, accompanied him on the journey to Washington.
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Hampton was cheered by large crowds at every train stop along the way.

He assured the people who greeted him that he was going to Washington "to demand our rights and we will accept nothing less, so help me God." Bands and cheering crowds met the train carrying Governor Hampton throughout North Carolina as well.

Williams reported that, "Over in Virginia, Petersburg went as crazy as Abbeville County ever did, with bands playing and rockets flying ... At Richmond, more than five thousand people were out to cheer and Mayor Kelly made an address of welcome and Godspeed."

On the morning of March 29, Hampton and Butler and a delegation from Charleston made a formal call on the President. At one O'clock, Gov. Hampton was invited to join the President for lunch.

Both Hampton and Chamberlain were set to leave Washington on April 3rd. Hampton had written the President on April 1st advising the president that no compromise would be accepted.

Williams reports: "On the first, the Governor was invited again to launch at the White House, escorted Mrs. Hayes and afterward by invitation, spent most of the afternoon driving with the president.

"therefore, there was no surprise in Washington, when on the second (of April) the cabinet directed that the troops be withdrawn from the South Carolina State House."

At first Chamberlain refused to believe what had happened. Then he acknowledged: "That ends the struggle." It makes General Hampton practically Governor."

Hampton quickly wired Columbia and asked that there be no demonstrations. "He knew his Red Shirts and knew that once they cut loose and began to jubilate there probably would be some settling of old scores which might be awkward at that moment."

He wired Lt. Gov. Simpson:

"Everything is satisfactorily settled. I expect our people to preserve absolute peace and quiet. My word is pledged on this. I rely on them."

"Greenville got the news of what had happened by private wire from General Butler to a relative there and instantly stood on its head," wrote Williams. "The entire city and county celebrated a night and a day, the universal feeling expressed in many banners and endless shouts: 'We are happy!'"

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Reports from Abbeville indicated that town and county was "crazier than ever, if that is possible. The entire state was sharing its lunacy." Williams reported.
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At noon on April 10, 1877, the officer in charge of the federal troops at the State House held a formation in the corridor downstairs and marched them from the building by the south door.

Henry T. Thompson concludes: "Deprived of the soldiers, the Carpetbag-Negro government collapsed without a struggle. On April 11, 1877, at 12 o'clock, Chamberlain turned over the Governor's office to Hampton, and the final curtain was rung down upon the most soul stirring drama ever enacted in South Carolina."

Williams adds: "Hampton went to the State House and took possession without demonstration. The climax of one of the most remarkable and spectacular episodes in the history of any English-speaking people and the changed condition of South Carolina from the prostrate state to a state equal among her sisters."

Next issue: *Wade Hampton III as Governor, US Senator, Private Citizen*