

# ESSENTIAL CIVIL WAR CURRICULUM

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## Nathan Bedford Forrest

By Michael R. Bradley

### Resources

If you can read only one book

Author	<i>Title</i> . City: Publisher, Year.
Wyeth, John Allan	<i>That Devil Forrest: Life of General Nathan Bedford Forrest</i> . New York and London: Harper & Brothers, 1899. Wyeth was a cavalryman who served under General Joseph Wheeler. He became an internationally known surgeon following the Civil War. He corresponded with many people who served under Forrest and used their letters as the basis for much of his book.

### Books and Articles

Author	<i>Title</i> . City: Publisher, Year.   “Title,” in <i>Journal</i> ##, no. # (Date): #.
Bradley, Michael R.	<i>Nathan Bedford Forrest's Escort and Staff</i> , Gretna, LA: Pelican Press, 2006. This book deals with some of the men who were closest to Forrest during and after the War. It is a history of Forrest's Staff officers and his personal bodyguard, or escort. These men formed an association following the war and continued to meet until 1909.
Cimprich, John and Robert C. Mainfort	“Fort Pillow Revisited: New Evidence About an Old Controversy,” in <i>Civil War History</i> 28, no., 4 (December 1982): 293-306.

	These three articles are the major sources cited by those who assert a deliberate massacre took place at Fort Pillow.
_____.	“Dr. Fitch's Report on the Fort Pillow Massacre,” in <i>Tennessee Historical Quarterly</i> 44, no. 1 (Spring 1985): 27-39.
_____.	“The Fort Pillow Massacre: A Statistical Note,” in <i>Journal of American History</i> , 76, no. 3 (December 1989): 830-7.
Hurst, Jack	<i>Nathan Bedford Forrest: A Biography</i> . New York: Knopf, 1993. Hurst deals with both the pre-war and post-war life of Forrest more extensively than any other biographer.
Jordan, Thomas and J.P. Pryor	<i>The Campaigns of Lieut.-Gen. N. B. Forrest and of Forrest's Cavalry</i> . New Orleans, LA/Memphis, TN: Beleock & Company, 1868. Thomas and Pryor were closely associated with Forrest and it is assumed by many historians that Forrest read and approved their manuscript.
Maness, Lonnie E.	<i>An Untutored Genius: The Military Career of General Nathan Bedford Forrest</i> , Oxford, MI: The Guild Bindery Press, 1990. As the title indicates, this is a military biography and does not deal at length with Forrest in the post-war period.
Parsons, Elaine Frantz	<i>Ku-Klux: The Birth of the Klan during Reconstruction</i> (Chapel Hill, University of North Carolina Press, 2016).
Wills, Brian Steel	<i>A Battle From the Start: The Life of Nathan Bedford Forrest</i> , New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1992. Wills book provides a scholarly biography.
Wills, Brian Steel	<i>The River Was Dyed With Blood: Nathan Bedford Forrest &amp; Fort Pillow</i> . Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2014. This is the most recent examination of the controversial capture of Fort Pillow. Wills contends that combat rage, not a planned massacre, was responsible for the

	deaths which occurred in violation of the rules of war.
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## Organizations

## Web Resources

URL	Name and description
	Because Forrest is a controversial figure there are numerous web sources dealing with him and his career. All should be treated with caution.

## Other Sources

## Scholars

Name	Email
Michael R. Bradley	<a href="mailto:michaelrbradley@lighttube.net">michaelrbradley@lighttube.net</a>
Jack Hurst	
Lonnie Maness	
Brian Steel Wills	<a href="mailto:bsw5c@uvawise.edu">bsw5c@uvawise.edu</a>

## Topic Précis

<p>It has been said that Bedford Forrest was the most effective cavalry commander produced by the Civil War. It has also been said that Forrest is the most controversial figure produced by the war. Born in 1821, by 1860 Forrest had amassed a fortune of \$1.5 million in the business of trading livestock, land and slaves. Commissioned a Lieutenant Colonel in 1861 he raised the 3<sup>rd</sup> Tennessee Cavalry regiment. In his first major engagement at Fort Donnelson in February 1862 Forrest refused to surrender along with the rest of the Confederate garrison and led 4,000 men to safety through Union lines. Forrest fought at Shiloh in April 1862 where he led the Confederate rear guard stopping the Union pursuit and was severely wounded. In July 1862 he was promoted to Brigadier General after he led his cavalry brigade to victory at the First Battle of Murfreesboro. In December 1862 Forrest destroyed Grant's supply line in Tennessee forcing Grant to call off his Vicksburg Campaign. In September 1863 he led his men at Chickamauga and harassed the Union army as it retreated towards Chattanooga. The most notorious incident in Forrest's career involved the massacre of USCT troops at Fort Pillow in April 1864. Whether from a deliberate order which was rescinded or through the heat of combat, Forrest's role in the massacre remains a source of debate today. Forrest's men fought at the battles of Franklin</p>
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and Nashville in late 1864. Hearing of Lee's surrender Forrest surrendered his remaining force at Gainesville Alabama on May 9, 1865 where he gave his famous proclamation to his men. Post war Forrest attempted to rebuild his fortune but failed. Controversy dogged him further when he became the first leader of the Ku-klux Klan, then ordered it dissolved (or some argued ordered it to go underground) in 1869 and then confusingly denied it all in Congressional testimony in 1871. He died in Memphis at the home of his son in 1877. Today Forrest remains controversial. Originally buried at Elmwood Cemetery, in 1904 his and his wife's remains were reinterred under a statute in a Memphis city park originally named Forrest Park since renamed Health Science Park and now the subject of a movement to have the statute and their remains moved once again.

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