

ESSENTIAL CIVIL WAR CURRICULUM

Between North and South: Kentucky in the Civil War 1861-1862

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Introduction

Acknowledging the importance of his native state to the Union cause, President Lincoln stated, in a September 1861 letter, “I think to lose Kentucky is nearly the same as to lose the whole game...Kentucky gone, we cannot hold Missouri, nor, as I think, Maryland. These all against us and the job on our hands is too large for us.....”¹ However, Kentucky was equally important to the Confederacy, and from a military viewpoint, perhaps more so. Had Kentucky seceded, rebel forces would have been firmly established right across the Ohio River from the North; positioned to launch an invasion of Ohio, Indiana, or Illinois. However, the state’s geography, and to a lesser extent, demographics, favored the Union cause.

From the Tug Fork of the Big Sandy River, to Island No. 8 in the Mississippi River, Kentucky measures roughly 420 miles. From Covington, on the Ohio River, to the Tennessee border, the state measures 170 miles; and along the Ohio River, the Kentucky shoreline measures about 700 miles.² The state encompasses over 40,000 square miles, a huge area for Albert Sidney Johnston’s Confederates to defend; and still more difficult to invade and secure. Making matters worse, two big rivers, the Tennessee and the Cumberland, two natural invasion routes, led directly through Kentucky into the heart of the South. In addition, mountainous eastern Kentucky proved a difficult barrier to rebel invasion, from Virginia, not least because of the hostility of local residents towards the Confederacy.

¹ Lincoln to Orville Browning, 9/22/1861

² *Close-Up USA Indiana, Illinois, Ohio, and Kentucky*. Washington D.C.: National Geographic Map, February 1977.

Politics and Economics

The beginning of the Civil War, at Fort Sumter, on April 12, 1861, caused many Kentuckians great anxiety, over the state's role in the conflict. In response to President Lincoln's April 15th call for 75,000 90-day troops to suppress the rebellion, Governor Beriah Magoffin refused, as Kentucky would furnish no troops "for the wicked purpose of subduing her sister southern states."³ Kentucky thus faced the question, 'Secede or join the Union?'

Kentucky did neither. In an April 17th letter to his son, Senator John J. Crittenden, author of the Crittenden Compromise, advocated neutrality, with the state acting as peace-maker between the quarreling sections. The state legislature formally declared neutrality, by a vote of 69 to 26, on May 16th; declaring "...this state...shall take no part in the Civil War...except as mediators...to the belligerent parties...Kentucky should occupy the position of strict neutrality...."⁴ Given Kentucky's economy, history, and political tradition, this response wasn't surprising. Kentucky had been settled by immigrants from many points of the compass; however, by 1861, the state was in some respects, strongly Southern. By 1860, Kentucky's population numbered 1,155,684; a figure that included 225,483 slaves. Confederate sympathy was very strong in western Kentucky, and only slightly less so in the central "Bluegrass" region.⁵ Nevertheless, Kentucky politics revolved around the state's strong affinity for the principle of Union; reinforced by economic ties to the North. This wasn't a particular affinity for the Northern cause; even though Kentuckians believed that their economic prosperity was heavily dependent on the Union's preservation. This belief ultimately overcame the state's strong Southern sentiment.

From 1832 - 1854, Kentucky was heavily influenced by the Whig party, founded by native son and U.S. Senator Henry Clay. The Whigs were strongly nationalist; they favored a national bank, with uniform currency, strongly supporting the Bank of the United States. Thus Kentucky wasn't strongly Democrat. In the 1828 Presidential election, Andrew Jackson carried the state, but not until 1856 did a Democratic Presidential candidate again carry Kentucky. When the Whigs dissolved after Clay's death in 1852, most of Kentucky's Whigs became Know-Nothings. Nevertheless, the state's Democrats also adhered to the principle of Union. Thus when Southern Democrats abandoned the 1860 Charleston convention over the LeCompton Constitution, the Kentucky delegation tried to re-unite the Southern and Northern wings. Failing in that, they helped nominate John C. Breckinridge for President, while the Northern Democrats nominated Stephen A. Douglas. Meanwhile, the state's Whigs had morphed into Constitutional Unionists, and they supported Kentuckian John Bell for President. In the election, 66,000 Kentuckians voted for Bell, 52,800 voted for Breckinridge; about 25,000

³ E. Merton Coulter, *Civil War and Re-adjustment in Kentucky*. Gloucester, Massachusetts: Peter Smith Publishers, 1926, p. 38, citing O.R., I, 27, diary.

⁴ *Ibid*, p. 54.

⁵ *Ibid*, Chapter 1, 1860 U.S. Census, 598-599.

voted for Douglas; while native son Abraham Lincoln received only 1,364, less than 1% of the state's vote total.

The 1860 election results reflected Kentucky's nationalist viewpoint. This resulted, in part, from the state's exporting her population. In 1860, 60,000 Illinois residents were Kentucky-born; Missouri counted 100,000 Kentuckians; Indiana counted 68,000 Kentuckians, while Ohio counted 15,000, and Iowa, 13,000. While Arkansas and Texas had a scattering of Kentuckians, very few migrated to other southern states. In addition, Ohio passed resolutions of respect upon the death of Richard M. Johnson, a Kentuckian who had fought the Shawnee in Ohio in 1813, later becoming Vice-President.⁶

Kentucky's economy depended heavily on northern trade. In 1860, ferries from Cincinnati made over 1,000 weekly crossings to Kentucky; while New York alone bought over 20,000 hogsheads of Kentucky tobacco. The state's southern trade wasn't nearly as active. Kentuckians strongly disagreed with the South's anti-tariff policy, valuing manufacturing more than most southern states. The state had 3,450 manufacturing establishments in 1860, with more than \$20,000,000 capital invested; and finished products worth roughly \$38,000,000.⁷ Nevertheless, slavery was vital to the states' economy.

Geography strongly influenced politics in Kentucky. Residents of western Kentucky and the central "Bluegrass" region were strongly wedded to slavery; while eastern Kentucky mountaineers scorned the South's "peculiar institution." In addition, Kentucky didn't ratify the 13th amendment, which banned slavery, until 1976. Congress had ratified the 13th amendment in December 1865. Thus Kentuckians adopted neutrality; for they knew secession would make the Ohio River a conduit for runaway slaves. As Judge Joseph Holt stated, Kentucky slavery would "perish away...as a ball of snow would melt in a summer's sun."⁸ However, fear of invasion from the North provided another reason for neutrality. The Southern Rights Party opposed secession, until Kentuckians were properly armed; as no less than 12 northern rail terminals were near the Ohio River. Only two railroads ran from Kentucky southward. Had the state seceded, the North would have invaded more quickly than the South. Thus Kentuckians' love of Union and their fears of losing their slaves, of invasion by large numbers of Federal troops, and of losing northern economic ties, kept the state from seceding. Fear of Northern emancipation efforts, disdain for the Lincoln administration, and sympathy for the South, kept them from joining the North.

⁶ Ibid, pp. 13-14.

⁷ Ibid, pp. 16-17.

⁸ Ibid, p. 2, Letter of Joseph Holt to James F. Speed, 5/31/1861

Armed Neutrality

One reason the Unionist-dominated legislature adopted neutrality, was to prevent a state-wide Southern Rights Party convention. However, the seeds of neutrality's failure were sown almost immediately, by the arming of each side. Kentucky's Confederate sympathizers openly displayed their martial enthusiasm in April- May, 1861. The State's Unionists responded politically. Governor Magoffin refused a call from Confederate Secretary of War Leroy P. Walker, for a regiment of state troops. Nevertheless, Blanton Duncan, a southern sympathizer, wrote Walker in response to Baltimore's April 19th Pratt street riot; that Louisvillans were angry "beyond conception" at news of Federal troops passing through Maryland. He also implied that should Federals troops pass through Louisville, they would be fired upon.⁹

Towards the end of March, a border slave states convention had met in Louisville. The Southern Rights Party withdrew their delegates from the election; insuring their lack of influence when the convention adopted a platform. The Unionist candidates supported the Crittenden Compromise; and the 110,000 votes cast to elect delegates, showed that Kentuckians were strongly against secession. However, the convention failed when Unionist delegates, mistrusting Magoffin, proposed to strip him of his power to arm the state militia and give that power to a 5-man military board. When southern sympathizers chose Magoffin as one of the five, Unionist delegates refused to ratify their own proposal.

The "arming of the state" issue arose from the need to make both sides respect Kentucky's neutrality. But neutrality became armed neutrality, and maintaining the balance of power became an unfriendly contest. In April-May, Magoffin had covertly allowed Confederate recruits to leave the state, earning Unionist mistrust. He was able to obtain a few small loans, to train the state's traditional militia; the Confederate sympathizing State Guards. However, a subsequent loan request of \$500,000 was denied by Louisville banks. Meanwhile, Union Major General William "Bull" Nelson supervised the importation of 5,000 rifled muskets, with Lincoln's approval. The "Lincoln Guns" were used to arm Unionist Home Guard units and helped bring the state under Federal control. The first shipment was unloaded May 14th, and the guns' presence precluded coercion by the Southern Rights Party, in the June congressional elections. On June 20th, Kentuckians elected 10 Congressmen, 9 of whom were Unionist. Lincoln was patient towards Kentucky. He realized that interfering with the state's slavery, or a show of Federal force, might cause secession. However, he gave Garret Davis, a Kentucky unionist, the understanding that he reserved the right to use necessary force.

⁹ Ibid, p. 38, Blanton Duncan to Leroy P. Walker 4/20/1861.

Southern Failure Begins

Kentucky's position regarding North-South trade was vital. West of the Appalachians, nearly all North-South commerce passed through the state. An immense amount went south along the newly-opened Louisville & Nashville railroad, or down the Mississippi. However, Northern interference with southern trade nearly caused Kentucky to secede; while southern ineptitude eventually ended their trade with the state.

Soon after the war began, residents of Cincinnati began to police the Ohio River. Using patrol boats, they began to seize Louisville's munitions shipments, angering many Kentuckians. Louisville newspapers printed incendiary headlines, and the danger of river war increased. Though Ohio Governor William Dennison reassured Kentuckians, the Ohio legislature passed legislation making it treason to furnish the enemy munitions. Kentucky's trade with Ohio and Indiana was thereby diminished. Colonel Benjamin Mayberry Prentiss, Federal commander at Cairo, Illinois, told Major General Simon Bolivar Buckner, head of Kentucky's State Guards that munitions bound for Columbus, Kentucky would be stopped. Colonel Lloyd Tilghman, Confederate commander at Columbus, protested, but the blockade was tightened. However, most southern-bound goods passed through.

Northern governors were strongly opposed to Kentucky's southern trade. However, Lincoln, trying to keep the state from seceding, allowed Southern trade to continue; and local efforts to stop it proved ineffective. Columbus, on the Mississippi River, drew trade southward; making western Kentucky a Confederate storehouse. This made the capture of Columbus the objective of Ulysses Grant's expedition to Belmont, Missouri, in November 1861. Northern governors soon received help, in stopping Kentucky's southern trade, from an unexpected source- the South.

Kentucky's respect for the South had been waning since April; when Georgia Senator Howell Cobb, remarked that "the border states would have to do all the fighting," while the rest of the South "undisturbed might go about its business raising slaves and cotton." Though Cobb heatedly denied saying it, the remark was published in the *Louisville Journal*, alienating many Kentuckians.¹⁰ Nevertheless, the South was convinced that the North couldn't exist without its products. Thus, on May 21, 1861, the Confederate Congress prohibited the exportation of Southern cotton northwards. In August, this prohibition was expanded to include tobacco, sugar, rice, molasses, syrup and naval stores. In July, the Confederate army, in Nashville, foolishly seized L & N Railroad rolling stock, valued at over \$110,000; destroying Southern sympathy in Kentucky, closing one main conduit for valuable Northern goods.¹¹ As a result, the South lost the Kentucky trade, and the state remained in the Union.

¹⁰ Ibid, p. 45.

¹¹ Ibid, p. 79.

Neutrality Dissolves

“Armed neutrality” became a contest for control of Kentucky. Although the state constitution gave the Governor the power to arm the militia, the legislature stripped Magoffin of this power, giving it to a 5-man military board. As a result, the Federal government ignored Magoffin, directing their queries to the board’s President.¹² The presence of the “Lincoln Guns” tipped the balance of power to favor the Unionists. The military board blocked funding for the State Guards, then recalled their arms; resulting in large numbers of State Guardsmen leaving Kentucky to join the Confederacy. The legislature abolished the State Guards in September.¹³ Nevertheless, the Southern Rights Party looked confidently ahead to the August state legislature elections. However, they failed to run enough candidates, and subsequently lost to the Unionists; in the House, 24 to 76 and in the state Senate, 11 to 27. Without a balance of political power, neutrality soon dissolved; over control of the Mississippi, and recruiting within Kentucky.

The Federal government’s position soon became obvious. Despite Lincoln’s soothing platitudes on Kentucky’s neutrality, on May 28th, the Federal government set up the Military Department of Kentucky, encompassing the area within 100 miles of the Ohio River. A native Kentuckian, Major Robert Anderson, of Fort Sumter fame, was given command. Placing native Kentuckians in various commands obscured the Federal government’s purpose - control of Kentucky’s strategic areas. Federal officers soon began recruiting Kentuckians, across the Ohio from Louisville, at Camp Jo Holt.¹⁴ Nevertheless, as time passed, the Federals became bolder, starting to recruit within the state. Encouraged by victory in the August state elections, Major General Bull Nelson set up Camp Dick Robinson, in Garrard County, close to the Kentucky Central Railroad, and began to raise an army. This resulted in widespread panic; rumors circulated that Lincoln would send mobs of armed blacks into the state.¹⁵ Governor Magoffin regarded Camp Dick Robinson a flagrant breach of neutrality; sending a letter of protest to Washington. Lincoln brushed aside Magoffin’s objections; refusing to remove the troops; justifying his lack of action by stating that he couldn’t find, in Magoffin’s “not very short letter,” any indication that he entertained “...any desire for the preservation of the Federal Union.”¹⁶

Nevertheless, the Confederacy withdrew recruiting officers from Kentucky, upon the state’s adopting neutrality, depending instead on the desire of Kentucky’s southern sympathizers to leave the state and enlist. For that purpose, they established Camp Boone, just below the Tennessee border. When Kentucky protested the theft of state-owned weapons, by Camp Boone recruits, the South refused to accept them, returning them to Kentucky. This was respect for neutrality, taken to absurd lengths; the result was Federal consolidation of authority over Kentucky, while the state’s confidence in the

¹² Ibid, p. 87.

¹³ Ibid, p. 91.

¹⁴ Ibid, p. 101.

¹⁵ Ibid, p. 103.

¹⁶ Ibid, p. 104.

Confederacy plummeted. In addition, the well-attended orations of Judge Joseph Holt, a radical Unionist, caused southern sympathy to fall still further and the Confederacy became a passive observer of events in Kentucky. However, the state remained important to the South and the July 21st victory at Manassas resulted in the Confederacy accepting all Kentucky recruits. In addition, the Confederate Congress appropriated \$1 million, to “aid the people of Kentucky in repelling any invasion...by the armed forces of the United States.”¹⁷ Neutrality was fading rapidly.

The Confederates Invade

Meanwhile, on the Mississippi River, a tense situation developed. The Mississippi flowed past Columbus, to the Gulf of Mexico; while the Tennessee and Cumberland Rivers flowed northward, through Tennessee and Kentucky, emptying into the Ohio at Paducah and Smithland. Whichever side controlled these strategic points would likely dominate Kentucky, western Tennessee, and points further south. In April, western Kentuckians invited Jefferson Davis to occupy Columbus, and seize Cairo, a strategic point at the tip of southern Illinois, where the Ohio and Mississippi rivers merge. The next day, Federal troops seized Cairo; controlling river traffic thereafter. From Cairo, Federal troops made a few forays into Kentucky; and on August 22nd, a Federal gunboat removed a Confederate boat from the dock at Paducah. Northern politicians echoed Federal disregard for the state’s neutrality. Indiana’s Governor Morton stated, “Civil War in Kentucky is inevitable,”¹⁸ and promised to send troops there.

Major General Leonidas Polk, commanding Confederate units just below the Kentucky-Tennessee border, told Magoffin, “I think it is of the greatest consequence to the Southern cause in Kentucky...that I should be ahead of the enemy in occupying Columbus and Paducah.”¹⁹ On September 2nd, Grant’s Federals occupied Belmont, preparatory to seizing Columbus, across the river. Upon hearing the news, Polk ordered Brigadier General Gideon Johnson Pillow to occupy Columbus; which he did the next day. However, despite his statement above, Polk failed to advance on Paducah, 45 miles northeast of Columbus, and Grant’s Federals occupied Paducah on September 4th, and Smithland a short time later. Paducah proved more strategically valuable than Columbus, as Grant’s gunboats steamed up the Tennessee River, to Muscle Shoals, Alabama.

While residents of Columbus joyfully welcomed the Confederates, Secretary of War Walker opposed the move. Asking for an explanation, he instructed Polk to order Pillow’s immediate withdrawal. Tennessee Governor. Isham Green Harris also advocated immediate withdrawal, opining that the move would hurt the Confederate cause in Kentucky. Simon Buckner likewise thought the move a great mistake. However, Davis agreed with Polk, that occupying Columbus was necessary to defend the Confederacy, and aid Kentuckians. Soon after Polk’s occupation of Columbus, Brigadier General Felix

¹⁷ Ibid, p. 106.

¹⁸ Ibid, p. 107.

¹⁹ Ibid. p. 108.

Kirk Zollicoffer led his rebels into southeastern Kentucky, to prevent Federal occupation of that area. The state legislature formally declared neutrality ended on September 18, 1861.

Neutrality's end saw Kentucky enter the war on the Union side. Federal troops quickly flooded into the state, mostly into Louisville. A week after neutrality's end, the city was feeding 2,000 to 3,000 soldiers daily.²⁰ The state legislature called on the people to expel the Confederate invaders; calling for volunteers to be mustered into the Union army. The Military Board was reorganized, leaving Governor Magoffin out entirely. In August 1862, Magoffin resigned; and state troops had been completely merged into the Union army, thus the Board was abolished. Brigadier Generals Thomas Leonidas Crittenden and George Henry Thomas began training their troops, while General Bull Nelson, at Camp Kenton, promised forgiveness to those eastern Kentucky rebels that surrendered their weapons. Brigadier General William Tecumseh Sherman commanded east of the Cumberland River, while Major General Henry Wager Halleck oversaw western Kentucky, from St. Louis. However, relations between Kentuckians and the Federals quickly began to sour.

Sherman and Thomas mistakenly believed that the state was about to be overrun by Confederate troops; and Kentuckians didn't respond. Enlistments ran far short of expectations, even in Unionist Louisville. Most of the young men were secessionist, and left the state to join the Confederacy. While the middle-aged and older men were Unionist, very few enlisted. Sherman saw spies everywhere; Thomas didn't believe that Kentuckians would "ever be in the least reliable."²¹ Tact and caution became habitual among Federal officers, towards Kentuckians; and immediate payment for purchases positively influenced local Unionist sentiment. Mostly native Kentuckians were appointed to command positions.

When Kentucky declared for the Union, Confederate military hopes fell. The rebels occupied southern Kentucky, establishing a rough defense line from Columbus, through Bowling Green, into and through the Cumberland Gap area. General Albert Sidney Johnston succeeded Polk as Confederate commander in the state, on September 10th. He maintained that the South had invaded Kentucky in self-defense; if the state wanted strict neutrality, he would drive the Federals out, and then retire himself. He would welcome them if they joined the South; but if they joined the North, and declared war, Kentuckians should expect him to meet "that war whenever and wherever it may be waged."²² This reflected Jefferson Davis' policy. Major General John Cabell Breckinridge, referring to the Federal government, told Kentuckians: "...you have to deal with a power which respects neither Constitution or laws, and which...will reduce you to the condition of prostrate and bleeding Maryland."²³ Buckner demanded that the legislature re-open the L & N railroad. However, the first Confederate military efforts in Kentucky failed.

²⁰ Ibid, p. 125.

²¹ Ibid, p. 129.

²² Ibid, p. 133, citing O.R., III, pp.256-257.

²³ Ibid, p. 133, citing O.R., III, pp. 256-257.

On September 19, 1861, several hundred Confederates, led by General Zollicoffer, scattered 300 Unionist recruits that had been training at Camp Andrew Johnson, near Barbourville, destroying the camp. The skirmish was thereafter called "The Battle of Barbourville". A Nashville newspaper editor before the war, Zollicoffer entered Kentucky from Tennessee, advancing along the old Wilderness Road. Leaving a force behind to guard Cumberland Gap; he found the Wilderness Road blocked by Colonel Theophilus Toulmin Garrard's Federals, at Wildcat Mountain. Late in the afternoon of October 20th, Zollicoffer attacked. However, Garrard was reinforced during the fighting, by a brigade sent by Thomas. The Federals proved too strong, and Zollicoffer retreated back to Camp Buckner, near Cumberland Gap. The Confederates' first attempted invasion from the east had failed.

Some weeks later, on November 9th, a Union force, led by General Bull Nelson defeated Colonel John Stuart Williams' Confederates, at Piketon, in eastern Kentucky's Big Sandy Valley. Williams retreated to 2,000 ft. high Pound Gap, where he was succeeded in command by Brigadier General Humphrey Marshall. A 300-pounder who had seen combat in the Mexican War, Marshall had publicized the advantages of invading Kentucky through Pound Gap. Marshall had a strategic sense; however, because of his size and easy going nature, he was ill-suited for command in mountainous eastern Kentucky. Logistics problems made his situation worse. In addition, Marshall was angry at having to serve under Major General. George Bibb Crittenden, a political rival. With about 2,000 hungry, ragged, barefoot, and poorly armed men, Marshall invaded the state, through Pound Gap. To his dismay, he found that few Kentuckians would enlist. On January 8-9, 1862, a Federal column, led by future President, then Colonel, James Abram Garfield, executed a few multi-pronged attacks against Marshall's army, and drove them back to Virginia.²⁴ The Confederate cause in Kentucky had suffered a serious setback, but worse was to come.

The Battle of Mill Springs occurred on a cold Sunday, January 19, 1862. General Zollicoffer provided a classic example of an overly aggressive commander committing an ill-prepared army to battle, with only a tenuous escape route. Zollicoffer was looking for a winter camp site that commanded the Cumberland River. His engineers found such a site, at Mill Springs, Kentucky. A strong defensive location, Mill Springs was located atop high bluffs, on the Cumberland River's south bank. The town also boasted grist and saw mills.

Zollicoffer's army arrived on November 29th, and immediately began to fortify the town, as local Unionists watched suspiciously. Major General Don Carlos Buell had replaced Sherman, as Union commander in Kentucky. On November 15th. Buell ordered Thomas

²⁴ James M. Perry, *Touched with Fire: Five Presidents and the Battles that made them*. New York: Public Affairs, 2003, pp. 60-92.

to move to Lebanon, where he could be supplied by rail from Louisville; and launch a campaign against Zollicoffer.

Thomas sent an advance unit, led by Brigadier General Albin Francisco Schoepf, to watch Zollicoffer.

They encountered Confederates building fortifications, on the north bank, an area called Beech Grove. Schoepf's force quickly retreated. However, the next day, December 5th, Zollicoffer began crossing the river in force, despite miserable weather. On December 10th, he received a dispatch from Gen. Johnston, expressing strong disapproval of his move, urging him to retreat to Mill Springs. Angered by Zollicoffer's rash move, Johnston ordered Gen. George B. Crittenden, son of Senator John J. Crittenden, to take command of Confederate forces at Mill Springs. Arriving on January 3, 1862, Crittenden was dismayed to discover Zollicoffer's force still on the north bank; with the flooding river having destroyed the rafts and barges used in the crossing. He was further alarmed by the unfinished fortifications at Beech Grove, and ordered them strengthened. However, when Thomas learned that Zollicoffer had crossed the Cumberland, he decided to strike the isolated rebels. He left Lebanon on December 30th; however, because of foul weather the roads became rivers of mud; causing Thomas to take 2 ½ weeks to get to Logan's Crossroads, 9 miles north of Mill Springs. He was reinforced by Schoepf on Jan. 18th.

Crittenden was determined to cross the river, back to Mill Springs. However, when he received information—incorrect—that Schoepf hadn't joined Thomas, he changed his mind. Calling a council of war, he planned a surprise attack, before daylight. Leaving Beech Grove at midnight, January 19th, Crittenden's 4000 rebels trudged through the mud towards Thomas. The battle began when they encountered Federal cavalry at daybreak. For hours, rain, fog, and smoke often made it impossible to tell friend from foe. Zollicoffer himself fell victim to weather-induced uncertainty and his own impetuous temperament. Unaware that Federal reinforcements had arrived, he became convinced that one of his units, the 19th Tennessee infantry, was firing on fellow Confederates. Because Federal and Confederate uniforms sometimes looked similar, Zollicoffer mistook troops of the 9th Ohio and 10th Indiana Infantry for Confederates. Ordering the 19th Tennessee to cease firing, he rode northwards on Mill Springs Road to investigate; coming foolishly close to the Union troops. He soon encountered Col. Speed Fry, commanding the 4th Kentucky Infantry; also mounted. Fry mistook Zollicoffer for a high-ranking Union officer. The two officers briefly conversed; then Fry returned to his troops nearby. At that moment, Zollicoffer's aide galloped out from behind a tree, and opened fire on Fry. Fry and the 4th Kentucky returned fire, killing Zollicoffer and his aide. Their bodies lay in the mud on Mill Springs Road throughout the battle; Union troops later placed Zollicoffer's body under a large oak, away from tramping feet.²⁵

²⁵ Kent Masterson Brown, ed., *The Civil War in Kentucky: Battle for the Bluegrass State*. South Carolina: Savas Publishing, 2000, pp. 55-63.

Sometime thereafter, Thomas appeared on the field; ordering fresh Union regiments to reinforce the front line. The 4th Kentucky and 2nd Minnesota stabilized the bluecoat line. Crittenden had ordered his rebels to advance; resulting in fierce fighting around a rail fence, between the 15th Mississippi and 2nd Minnesota. However, the Confederate advance stalled.

Heavy rainfall and the constant damp had caused their obsolete 1812-era muskets to not fire, or misfire; resulting in many gray-clad troops walking off the battlefield. As this became widespread, Thomas ordered an all-encompassing attack. Already discouraged by Zollicoffer's death, the Confederate left broke and ran, before a Federal bayonet charge; while other Union units attacked the Confederate right. The 16th Alabama and 17th Tennessee (Confederate) stopped the charging Federals long enough for the remaining rebels to begin retreating towards Beech Grove. Most of them arrived at Beech Grove by 3:00 p.m. Using a small steamboat, the *Nobel Ellis*, they managed to re-cross the Cumberland; throughout the night, abandoning most of their supplies. The next day, as they retreated into Tennessee, without food or supplies, Thomas' Federals looted their camp. For Crittenden's troops, Mill Springs was a bitter and perhaps unnecessary defeat. Hungry though they were, most would live to fight another day, at the battle of Shiloh.

Surrender on the River - Forts Henry and Donelson

Meanwhile, Confederate units in western Kentucky were strangely inert. After occupying Paducah on September 4th, Grant led several thousand Federals out of that city, on Halleck's orders, on January 9th. In two columns, they tramped through Kentucky, destination Mayfield, testing Confederate will. Polk's 18,000 troops were in Columbus, roughly 25 miles from Mayfield²⁶. Polk sent 1,000 cavalry to harass the Federals, as they returned to Paducah, but made no serious assault. Nor had he advanced on Paducah between September and January.²⁷ Grant's probing expedition puzzled Johnston and Polk; and their lack of reaction gave him confidence in the success of a move up the Tennessee and Cumberland rivers.

The Achilles heel of the Confederate defense of Kentucky was the Tennessee and Cumberland rivers. Whichever side controlled them would have a highway into northern Alabama; and would have Johnston's Confederates under the arc formed by them. Thus Forts Henry and Donelson, overlooking these twin rivers, were crucial to controlling Kentucky and points further south. Nevertheless, from September 1861, when Grant occupied Paducah, until the February 6th battle of Fort Henry began, Johnston was content to sit tight at Bowling Green; not supporting these vital points with his troops or his military acumen. Although sickness had incapacitated part of his army, Johnston told General Pierre Gustave Toutant Beauregard that he had no intention of supporting Forts

²⁶ Benjamin Franklin Cooling, *Forts Henry and Donelson: The Key to the Confederate Heartland*. Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1987, p. 83.

²⁷ *Ibid*, p. 81.

Henry or Donelson. Johnston never visited either place, allowing subordinates to defend them. Despite his January 17th order to Lloyd Tilghman, by which he told the rebel commander to “occupy and intrench the heights opposite Fort Henry. Do not lose a moment. Work all night,”²⁸ Tilghman did little to strengthen Fort Henry’s defenses, or to develop Fort Heiman, on the heights opposite Fort Henry. As a result, high water on the Tennessee River, 30 feet above normal, threatened the gun emplacements and magazine of Fort Henry; and made torpedoes useless to defend the river.

Thus on February 6th, in a combined Army-Navy operation, Grant attacked Fort Henry. His ironclad gunboats, led by Captain Andrew Hull Foote, bombarded the fort, braving enemy fire. When Federal fire and technical problems made most of the fort’s guns useless, Tilghman surrendered to Foote, on February 7th.²⁹ At a high-level conference at Bowling Green’s Covington House that evening, Johnston, Major General William Joseph Hardee, Beauregard, and Colonel William Whann Mackall decided to leave Kentucky, and concentrate their commands at Nashville. Beauregard later claimed that at the conference, he urged Johnston to march to the aid of Fort Donelson, and defeat Grant.

About six miles from Fort Henry, Fort Donelson was besieged by Grant and Foote on February 12th. Confederate fire repulsed Foote’s gunboats. However, even though the Confederates successfully resisted Grant’s infantry, they inexplicably surrendered, three days later. In one of the war’s most shameful episodes, Brigadier General John Buchanan Floyd gave command to Brigadier General Gideon Pillow, who in turn passed it to General Buckner, who surrendered the fort. Colonel Nathan Bedford Forrest, angry at the surrender, escaped with his Mississippi cavalry. Thus, with Polk’s March, 1862 evacuation of Columbus, the Confederates abandoned Kentucky. However, they would invade the state again, in a second bid to secure it for the Confederacy.

Kentucky’s Shadow Government

In 1861, while Union and Confederate armies occupied different sections of the state, the Confederate government of Kentucky was born. It would have a short, tenuous existence, then disappear. The state’s southern rights adherents thought that it would strengthen support for their cause; legitimizing their efforts. 63 delegates from 34 counties met in Russellville, October 29-30, to plan Kentucky’s Confederate government. They denied the authority of the government in Frankfort; affirming that Kentucky’s citizens had “an inalienable and indefeasible right,” to change or abolish their government, “in such manner as they think proper.”³⁰ They then called for a convention to meet in Russellville, on November 18th.

²⁸ Ibid, p. 85. & Brown, p.56.

²⁹ Cooling, pp. 105-106.

³⁰ Brown, p. 83.

The November convention was attended by 216 delegates from 61 counties. On November 20, 1861, the convention declared Kentucky's allegiance to the United States null and void; establishing a temporary provisional government, until a free election could provide a permanent one. They would seek admission to the Confederacy, on an equal basis with other Confederate states. Bowling Green was designated the state Capital, a Constitution was adopted, and George Washington Johnson, a wealthy planter from Scott county, was elected Governor. A popular choice, Johnson opposed immediate secession, but believed slavery was a state issue, beyond the reach of the Federal government. He also believed that a state couldn't be coerced into remaining in the Union, and worked diligently to maintain neutrality. He fled to Bowling Green to avoid arrest, after the Union victory in the summer legislative election. He became an aide to General Simon Buckner. However, the power of Kentucky's provisional government was severely limited. Governor Magoffin, himself a southern sympathizer, denounced it as not representing a majority of Kentuckians. The state legislature also denounced it, as an "effort to subvert and overturn the civil government of the state...by an insignificant and factious minority...."³¹

Kentucky was admitted into the Confederacy on December 10, 1861. The new provisional government - Johnson and the council - held a state-wide election on January 22, 1862, for representatives to the first Confederate Congress; which held its first session February 18th. The new government also filled minor offices vacated when Confederate forces entered Kentucky. However, the authority of the fledgling government was respected only in areas occupied by rebel forces; and strong Unionist sentiment frustrated Johnson's efforts. The fall of Forts Henry and Donelson made the Confederate defense of the state unworkable. The provisional government's last shred of authority disappeared as General Johnston's army withdrew into Tennessee; and Governor Johnson's office was now in a tent, in Johnston's camp.³²

Nevertheless, George Johnson, a husband and father, believed wholeheartedly in a Confederate Kentucky. He vigorously protested when Johnston proposed relinquishing command to Beauregard; then volunteered as an aide, to Major General John C. Breckinridge. Thus on Sunday morning, April 6, 1862, the Governor of Confederate Kentucky found himself at the battle of Shiloh. He became separated from Breckinridge's command; and his horse was killed beneath him. He then joined the 4th Kentucky infantry, fighting as a private soldier. On Monday afternoon, April 7th, as the rebels fought to contain an overwhelming Federal counterattack, Johnson took two bullets, in the stomach and thigh. He lay unattended on the field, until the next morning, when a fellow Mason, Union Brigadier General Alexander McDowell McCook, noticed him, moving him to a hospital ship. He died on board the following morning, April 9th. Even Johnson's political foes mourned his death.

³¹ Magoffin to editor, *Louisville Journal*, 12/13/1861, & *Journal of the House of Representatives* 11/29/1861, as quoted in Brown, p. 86.

³² *Ibid*, pp.89-90

Sixty-five year old Richard Hawes, a Virginia born lawyer, replaced Johnson as Governor. A strong antebellum Unionist, Hawes blamed the Republicans for starting the war. He fled south when neutrality ended. Despite his age, he served as a brigade commissary, under Brigadier General Humphrey Marshall. Before the Provisional Government Council, Hawes took the oath of office, on May 31st, 1862, becoming the second and last governor of Confederate Kentucky. After driving Federal forces towards Louisville, General Braxton Bragg and Major General Edmund Kirby Smith were in Frankfort on October 4th, for Hawes' installation as Governor; necessary to implement a state-wide draft.³³ Addressing a large crowd inside the Capitol building, Hawes stated that "the Union cannot be restored," and that emancipation "would be the most unmitigated curse which could be inflicted on the slave race," and would "crush and desolate" the planting states. He also stated that his purpose was "to restore our Commonwealth to the true basis of Constitutional liberty."³⁴ However, as he spoke, Federal units had come into artillery range of Frankfort, and by 4 p.m. Bragg, Smith, and Hawes had evacuated; forfeiting the scheduled evening banquet. Five days later, after the inconclusive battle of Perryville, Confederate forces left Kentucky. The Provisional government went into exile again, never to return.

Hawes spent the remainder of the war writing upbeat letters to the Confederate government; urging another invasion of Kentucky. By 1864, he was living in Nelly's Ford, Va., about 100 miles west of Richmond; still hoping for another rebel strike against Federal forces in eastern Kentucky. With the April 1865 collapse of the Confederacy, Kentucky's Provisional government dissolved. Hawes returned to the state in September, swore allegiance to the Union, and received a Presidential pardon. He was elected Master Commissioner to the Circuit Court of Bourbon County; holding that office until his death, in May 1877. However, in an act of supreme irony, in 1869 the former Governor of Confederate Kentucky ruled that part of the Freedmen's Bureau Act didn't apply to Kentucky. The Act applied to only those states that had seceded; and Hawes opined that Kentucky had never left the Union.

Confederate Summer - 1862

With defeat at Shiloh, and the death of Albert Sidney Johnston, the Confederate cause in Kentucky waned. However, the state's exiles remained optimistic that another invasion would drive the Federals out, and secure the state for the Confederacy. That hope was sparked, in part, by a July 16th telegram, from Gen. John Hunt Morgan to Kirby Smith; in which Morgan stated that his cavalry was "...sufficient to hold all the country outside Lexington and Frankfort. These places are garrisoned chiefly with Home Guards...." He further stated, "...25000 to 30000 will join you at once." Kentucky may have been ripe for conquest, but "25000 to 30000" recruits was fantasy. About 2500 Kentuckians enlisted during the 1862 Confederate invasion.

³³ Ibid, p. 179.

³⁴ Ibid, p. 95.

Meanwhile, Braxton Bragg had taken command of the Army of the Mississippi, on June 27th. His goal was to drive the Federals out of Nashville, retake central Tennessee, and if possible, advance into Kentucky. Major General Edmund Kirby Smith led the Army of East Tennessee. He met with Bragg at Chattanooga on August 1st. Smith badly wanted to invade Kentucky, but just as badly wanted independent command. Coordination between Bragg's and Smith's forces would have almost assured a successful Kentucky invasion. At one point, Smith indicated that he would place his command under Bragg's. However, it wasn't to be, as Jefferson Davis failed to give Bragg any authority over Smith. Nevertheless, Smith took the initiative, moving north from Knoxville on August 14th, making coordination with Bragg's force difficult. Smith entered Kentucky, avoiding George W. Morgan's 9000 Federals at Cumberland Gap. However, because of inadequate forage and the hostility of local residents, he was forced to advance into the "Bluegrass" region - central Kentucky. Smith's forces numbered about 18000; but 9000 were left behind to watch Morgan's Federals. Nonetheless, Smith's premature invasion forced Bragg to abandon plans for Tennessee, and follow him. In turn, Don Carlos Buell, leading the Union Army of the Ohio, also marched north towards Kentucky. The two Confederate armies' presence in Kentucky panicked local Union commanders.

Marching northward, Buell sent Gen. Nelson to organize local Union units. Gen. Horatio Wright, in Cincinnati, ordered Nelson to Lexington, to meet Smith's advance, along the high bluffs just north of the Kentucky River. However, Nelson made a grave mistake; ordering his troops south to Richmond, abandoning the Kentucky River's strong natural defenses. By August 28th, Nelson had organized 6500 troops at Richmond; the self-styled Army of Kentucky. However, because Lexington had telegraph connections to scattered Federal units west of Richmond, Nelson left Richmond for Lexington, that day; leaving Brigadier Gen. Mahlon D. Manson in command.

On August 29th, Manson's green troops were attacked in force by Smith's Confederates. Despite their brave stand, the brigades of Gen. Patrick Cleburne and Gen. Thomas J. Churchill outmaneuvered and outfought Nelson's raw levies. Sometime after noon on August 30th, Nelson returned, but by then, the Army of Kentucky had been reduced, from 6500 troops, to less than 2500 available to fight. Nelson's presence steadied the Federals, and they made a brief stand. However, in the face of repeated Rebel volleys, they broke and ran, through Richmond, towards Lexington. Nelson took two bullets in the thigh, but managed to escape. The Federals lost 206 killed and 844 wounded, with 4304 missing. As a percentage of those engaged, Union losses equaled those of Antietam and Shiloh. Confederate losses were much less. The Confederate cause was on the rise in Kentucky; and for a brief month, the Federals were powerless to stop it.

Meanwhile Bragg wanted to first capture Nashville. On August 28th, as Smith was fighting Nelson at Richmond, Bragg's 24000 rebels marched northwest from Chattanooga, towards Nashville. Bragg soon discovered that Buell, upon hearing of Smith's invasion of Kentucky, had come up from Mississippi, and occupied Nashville. In response, Bragg's army marched towards Glasgow, Kentucky, and the Louisville &

Nashville railroad. His goal was to deny the use of the railroad to Buell, who was slowly advancing northward, behind Bragg.

In response to Bragg's invasion, Gen. Jeremiah T. Boyle, Federal commander in Louisville, sent Lt. Colonel John T. Wilder to command 2122 troops at Munfordville; site of a crucial L & N railroad bridge over the Green River. Taking command on September 8th, Wilder strengthened the bridge defenses and fortifications on the south bank; found forage for his animals, and waited for reinforcements. However, Wilder would soon carry out the strangest surrender of the war.

The fight for possession of the bridge began early Sunday morning, September 14th. Around 5 a.m. a battalion of rebel sharpshooters encountered Federal troops, 1 ½ miles below Munfordville. After some hours of hard fighting, Brigadier Gen. James Chalmers realized his force wasn't strong enough to penetrate the Federal works. He demanded that Wilder surrender; Wilder refused. A truce was called, and both sides buried their dead, throughout the night, and into the next morning. Learning of Chalmers' failure, Bragg realized that he needed to seize the Green River bridge, and force its defenders' surrender.

Around 9:30 a.m. September 16th, Bragg's vanguard reached Rowlett's Station, 1 ½ miles below the bridge. A few hours later, his entire force faced the much smaller Union force; behind their works on the south bank. Gen. Buckner persuaded Bragg that a show of force might cause the Federals to surrender. Late that afternoon, under a flag of truce, Bragg's messenger told Wilder that he was surrounded by overwhelming force, with no hope of reinforcement. Bragg demanded the surrender of the Union garrison; or he would take the works by storm. A Union council of war decided on surrender, but only on condition that Confederate strength be verified by a competent officer.

Thus in the wee hours of September 17th, a blindfolded Colonel Wilder was escorted into Buckner's presence. Wilder asked Buckner whether he should surrender. Somewhat taken aback, Buckner gave a non-committal answer. Wilder then asked to observe Bragg's army, to verify their strength. Buckner agreed, and both rode along the rebel lines, Wilder inspecting troop placements. He then told Buckner he would surrender; they went to see Bragg. Bragg left the surrender terms to Buckner's discretion. Wilder's men lay down their arms; they were then paroled, given captured rations; and began the long march back to Louisville. The Confederates now controlled the vital Green River Bridge; with Bragg wiring Jefferson Davis that his "junction" with Kirby Smith's army was now "complete." However, there had been no joining of forces; and Bragg now faced a quandary. What should he do next?

Bragg made a grave mistake; one that he later regretted. Instead of turning to fight Buell; and keep him away from Louisville, Bragg chose to march east to join Smith. On September 22nd, after burning the Green River bridge, he marched north towards Bardstown. In response, Buell took advantage of his now vacant front, racing his army up the L & N railroad, and occupied Louisville. Poor intelligence, disobedient subordinates, the failure of Kentuckians to enlist, and his own negativity hamstrung Bragg. Nevertheless, he was finally forced to fight Buell, at Perryville, on October 8th. After that

inconclusive battle, Bragg retreated to his supply depot at Bryantsville. He received Smith's reinforcements on October 10th, but didn't fight Buell again. Shortly thereafter, Bragg marched his troops back to Tennessee, abandoning Kentucky. The Green River bridge was repaired; to be used by Union forces until war's end. However, the Confederates had left Kentucky a second time. They would never again threaten Federal control of the state.
