

**KENTUCKY'S**  
**CIVIL WAR BATTLEFIELDS**



# KENTUCKY'S CIVIL WAR BATTLEFIELDS

A GUIDE TO THEIR HISTORY AND PRESERVATION

RANDY BISHOP



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*In memory of my brothers-in-law:  
David Whaley and Mike Bell*



# Contents

Preface . . . . .	9
Acknowledgements . . . . .	11
Introduction . . . . .	13
<b>Chapter One</b>	
Barbourville . . . . .	17
<b>Chapter Two</b>	
Wildcat Mountain or Camp Wildcat . . . . .	33
<b>Chapter Three</b>	
Ivy Mountain . . . . .	51
<b>Chapter Four</b>	
Rowlett's Station . . . . .	59
<b>Chapter Five</b>	
Sacramento . . . . .	77
<b>Chapter Six</b>	
Middle Creek . . . . .	95
<b>Chapter Seven</b>	
Mill Springs . . . . .	109

<b>Chapter Eight</b>	
Richmond . . . . .	147
<b>Chapter Nine</b>	
Munfordville . . . . .	183
<b>Chapter Ten</b>	
Perryville . . . . .	207
<b>Chapter Eleven</b>	
Morgan’s Christmas Raid . . . . .	253
<b>Chapter Twelve</b>	
Paducah . . . . .	275
<b>Chapter Thirteen</b>	
Cynthiana . . . . .	297
Notes . . . . .	311
Bibliography . . . . .	343
Index . . . . .	363



## Preface

The Bluegrass State of Kentucky found itself in a unique situation during the early days of the American Civil War. While most of its fellow states committed themselves to the service of either the United States or the Confederate Government, Kentucky attempted to remain neutral during the great conflict. With its people as divided as possible about which “side” to adhere to, Kentucky managed to avoid declaring its allegiance, despite the fact that untold numbers of its citizens perished defending its soil or while fighting in other locations across the North and South.

The purpose of this manuscript is to examine the battles that occurred within the borders of the state attempting to avoid losing its sons and daughters to bloodshed. From the smaller sites, such as Ivy Mountain, to the well-preserved and greatly interpreted fields of Perryville, Richmond, and Mill Springs, the book will attempt to conduct an overview of the battles that the Civil War Sites Advisory Commission has deemed as having some significance on the outcome of the war. In addition, the level of preservation or absence thereof, at the time of publication, will be noted.

With this in mind, it is my hope that those individuals reading the text will be able to both gain the mindset of the warriors of long ago and gain an appreciation and understanding of the concept of viewing the sites as they appear today.



## Acknowledgements

Most attempts to begin, much less complete, a manuscript of any significant length would be impossible if not for the assistance, input, and support of numerous multitalented and cooperative individuals. In recognizing this, it is suitable to make mention of most of the people who made this study a possibility and greatly aided its completion. Before indulging upon this task, I must first apologize to any person, group, or entity omitted. Doing so is a careless oversight on my part and in no way is an attempt to minimize his or her valuable contributions.

John Paul Strain allowed the use of his outstanding and unequalled artwork to grace the cover. Likewise, Dave Roth, editor of *Blue and Gray Magazine*, provided outstanding maps that enhance the understanding of most of the battles in this work. Without the skills of these men, the appearance of the book would be lacking some degree of completeness.

Untold individuals allowed the use of photographs from their family archives. So as to not delete the individuals whose ancestors are contained within and to adhere to the guidelines of the publisher, I have made notice of them with the respective picture. To each of these contributors a sincere thank you is certainly warranted.

Also, I have to give a special thank you to Phillip Seyfrit of the Richmond Battlefield, Kurt Holman of Perryville, and Gilbert Wilson from Mill Springs for their willingness to review the chapters related to the outstanding battle sites where they work. Such selflessness has, more importantly, allowed these three areas

of hallowed ground to rise to the forefront in the state of Kentucky. For their input and suggestions, I am deeply indebted.

Lastly, I have to thank three people who make it possible for each and every one of my projects to evolve from an idea to the finished product. My wife Sharon, my navigator on numerous battlefield visits; Jay, my grown son, who is there to lend his dry humor and give encouragement; and Ben, my teenager, who, like his big brother, is a wonderful companion and source of happiness. From spending an entire fall break trekking around most of the Kentucky battle sites in near-record rainfall to braving the others in extreme heat, they are the most attentive and caring family a man could ask for. I fail to see how they do it, but I love them for their support of “the old man.”

## Introduction

Neutrality. In a perfect, utopian-like world, remaining neutral when surrounded by adversity would be the ultimate goal of any noble individual. This was the apparent intention of Kentucky governor Beriah Magoffin during the early months of the American Civil War. Despite the courtship on the part of both Confederate- and Union-biased citizens and government representatives, Magoffin attempted to avoid declaring the allegiance of his state and its citizens; although, history has regularly recorded that he held a strong pro-Confederate stance.

One month after the bombardment of Fort Sumter, the Kentucky legislature officially proclaimed the state's neutrality. Ironically, both the Confederate president, Jefferson Davis, and his U.S. counterpart, Abraham Lincoln, had been born in the Bluegrass State and, in turn, exemplified the growing division of sentiments within the state's borders. Governor Magoffin firmly declined Lincoln's request for four regiments of troops. Magoffin replied to the executive plea, stating that he would "furnish no troops for the wicked purpose of subduing" people whom he termed as Kentucky's fellow Southerners. Subsequently, Davis's similar call for one Kentucky regiment to join the Confederate cause was turned down due to Magoffin's self-proclaimed lack of power to grant such.

Proponents from each side of the struggle continued to maintain hope for Kentucky to offer its assistance, and Lincoln reportedly acknowledged the state's high value, saying that while he hoped God was on his side, he had to have Kentucky's support in order to

win the war. Lincoln allegedly stated, "I think to lose Kentucky is nearly the same as to lose the whole game." Ironically, Lincoln had failed to carry Kentucky's popular vote in the 1860 presidential election months earlier, as less than 1,400 Kentuckians had cast votes for their native son.<sup>1</sup>

The division Kentucky experienced was not only confined to her general populace, but it was also felt in the legislative bodies. The state's house of representatives was largely pro-Southern, while the senate held a pro-Union stance. This division becomes clear when viewing two resolutions presented in the early days of the war. One called for the disapproval of Lincoln's "coercing" Kentucky to obey the U.S. government. Another proclaimed that Kentuckians would join "their brethren of the South" to prevent an invasion of the South "at all hazards." The former unanimously passed the house while the latter met the overwhelming approval of 87 to 6. The Kentucky senate defeated both resolutions. As Governor Magoffin became convinced that a U.S. invasion of Kentucky was inevitable, he attempted no less than three times to secure funds to purchase weapons to defend the state. However, the general assembly refused to even address the issue.<sup>2</sup>

It has been expressed that should the three states of Kentucky, Missouri, and Maryland have joined the Confederacy, the nation's number of horses and mules would have increased some 40 percent, its white population would have increased by 45 percent, and its manufacturing capability would have grown by 80 percent. Specifically, Kentucky had the third-largest white population among pro-slave states, giving the area the added asset of potential military manpower. Added to this was the fact that Kentucky's border with Ohio, Indiana, and Illinois consisted of the Ohio River, the all-important east-west flowing waterway. Given these facts, it becomes clearer as to Lincoln's concern over the control of his home state.<sup>3</sup>

Kentucky was similar to Maryland and Missouri in that they were all border states, slave-holding entities that, for the time being, retained membership in the United States. Kentucky,

Maryland, and Missouri were filled with pro-secessionists, leading to fears for Lincoln and his preservation of the union. Western Kentucky's farmers relied upon slave labor a great deal, but their fellow statesmen in the eastern mountainous region saw little need for implementation of what abolitionist Frederick Douglass called the "peculiar institution" of slavery. The oft-noted Hatfield-McCoy feud and other lesser-known disagreements and family divisions mirrored the divisiveness of the war and its components.

Various resolutions from Magoffin and/or the Kentucky legislature eventually seemed to place Kentucky in a pro-Union stance, but by war's end approximately 40,000 Kentuckians volunteered their services to the Confederacy. This statistic frequently invoked Northerners' comprehension of Kentucky as a "rebel state." Exemplifying the state's uneasy peace, some 90,000 Kentuckians joined the service of the United States in its war effort.<sup>4</sup>

Kentucky's name, interpreted from Cherokee, means "dark and bloody ground." The attempts at establishing and maintaining neutrality are to be judged by others; however, there can be little argument that in the years 1861 to 1865 the Cherokee definition for Kentucky was clearly demonstrated. In 1862, Governor Magoffin resigned after his "public policy of strict armed neutrality," forbidding either the Confederacy or the United States to enter his state, and the failure to "force their evacuation when they did" led to an outcry for his removal. Some four hundred engagements of varying sizes bloodied the soil of Kentucky and robbed it and other states, North and South alike, of thousands of their finest young citizens.<sup>5</sup>

To this point military engagements had taken place in areas that literally surrounded Kentucky. Thus, the American Civil War, as the esteemed historian Bruce Catton wrote, "was incomplete. It had two ends and no middle. . . . Once the war broke into Kentucky it could begin to develop its full potential."<sup>6</sup> The battles that inevitably lay ahead soon appeared in Kentucky's southeastern section and quickly spread across the state. Sadly, the presence of the hostilities would cease only when the war itself reached its conclusion.

The intent and purpose of this book is to conduct an overview of a portion of these battles, primarily those regularly regarded as individually having an impact on the outcome of the war. The overview of each battle is combined with the success or failure of preservation efforts at the respective battlefield. The battles included are largely based upon a list the Civil War Sites Advisory Commission produced in a multi-year study and are, therefore, not a group the author randomly composed. These commission-noted sites are: Barbourville, Camp Wildcat, Cynthiana, Ivy Mountain, Middle Creek, Mill Springs, Munfordville, Paducah, Perryville, Richmond, and Rowlett's Station. In addition, the relevance of an additional battle at Sacramento, Kentucky, and the recent success in respect to the preservation efforts at that site has warranted its inclusion in the text. Thus, the latter provides the minor "waver" from the Civil War Sites Advisory Commission list.

Let the journey begin.