

CONFEDERATES FROM THE BLUEGRASS
STATE: WHY KENTUCKIANS FOUGHT
FOR THE CONFEDERACY

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Chapter 1

The Common Soldier

Upon the outbreak of the Civil War in 1861, Kentucky first chose to remain neutral, and then, after realizing the state's inability to maintain such a stance, cast its lot with the Union. The men of the state were left to form their own conclusion on the war. Some headed south to fight for the Confederacy, more chose to fight for the Union, and still others stayed home and took a personal stand for neutrality. Those who fought often met their brothers, relatives, or boyhood friends on the battlefield. The war divided communities and families. Within Kentucky it literally pitted brother against brother.

This paper seeks to determine what motivated the men and boys who went south to join the ranks of the Confederate army. Little has been written about the soldiers from this state. William C. Davis is the leading historian for Kentucky soldiers, yet his works focus primarily on the First Kentucky Brigade and John C. Breckinridge. A few biographies have been written on Kentucky soldiers such as John Hunt Morgan and William Preston Johnson. Yet none have focused on the motivation of Kentucky Confederates. Although the entire war found family members meeting one another on the battlefield, this reality became commonplace for Kentuckians. Though these men knowingly went into the war against the beliefs of their state, family, and friends, the soldier's life that they led strongly resembled that of many common soldiers.

In 1943 Bell Irvin Wiley published the first in depth study of the common soldier in the Civil war in his book, *The Life of Johnny Reb: The Common Soldier of the Confederacy*. Wiley explains that these soldiers each possessed different motives. A deep hatred of the North, one present from the beginning of their earliest memories, compelled many to take up

arms. These soldiers, along with countless other Southerners held to the position that Northerners remained completely unreasonable in their attitude toward the Southern institution of slavery. In defense of this position they claimed that “the Yankees refused to live up to the Federal law requiring the return of fugitive slaves; they closed their eyes to the beneficent aspects of slavery; they made heroes of such fantasies as Uncle Tom, and chose to look upon Christian slaveholders as Simon Legrees; they tolerated monsters like William Lloyd Garrison; they contributed money and support to John Brown, whose avowed purpose was the wholesale murder of Southern women and children, and when he was legally executed for his crimes they crowned his vile head with martyrdom.”¹ They accused Northerners of hypocrisy due their keeping millions of white factory workers in conditions that the Southerners viewed as far worse than slavery. This Yankee society proved a godless one.²

Still, there did remain many moderates in the region who hoped to give the Lincoln government a chance. Yet Fort Sumter and Lincoln’s call for volunteers ended any hope for this group. Their decision became whether to fight with or against secessionists, an easy choice for most in the South. Many others who enlisted to fight for the Confederacy were not moved to action by a hatred or antipathy of the North. Wiley argues that a desire for adventure provided the leading motivation for these volunteers. War offered a chance to travel, a chance for an intimate association with a large group of other men, it offered glory as well as the excitement that battle could provide. Many volunteered simply because, at the time, enlistment proved the prevailing trend.³

¹ Bell Irvin Wiley. *The Life of Johnny Reb: The Common Soldier of the Confederacy* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1943) 15.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid, 16-18.

The Confederate soldier joined the army to fight and he did not tolerate well any interference with this desire. Wiley explains that “volunteers who rushed so impetuously to war in 1861 seem to have been exceptionally zealous to come to blows with the enemy.”⁴ There were exceptions of course. Even among those who were eager to fight some always remained eager to avoid battle. All told, these shirkers may have numbered in the thousands, but they never comprised more than a small portion of the Confederate Army, in which the aggressiveness of the common soldiers was a notable characteristic.⁵

In the spring of 1861, Southerners entered the war with high spirits, believing in the rightness of their cause and confident in their coming success. The tide of Confederate patriotism that rose during this spring created a rush to arms. Yet as the weeks turned to months, enthusiasm dwindled and recruitment slowed to a trickle long before the first conscription act in April 1862. The morale of the soldiers always seemed to hold up better than that of the civilians, yet the army fell prey to a growing decline of spirit as the war continued. Within months of joining the service, a typical recruit began to express war-weariness in letters. This exchange of letters proved a very important part of a soldier’s life, a communication that continued until his death, or war’s end. Wiley pioneered the extensive use of letters and diaries to gain a deep understanding of those who filled the ranks of Civil War armies, and every subsequent historian of the common soldiers of that war have followed his example in mining those rich sources.⁶

In 1952 Wiley examined the Northern soldier in *The Life of Billy Yank: The Common Soldier of the Union*. Just as in South, patriotic recruits turned out in throngs in the weeks that followed Fort Sumter. Northern society boosted this surge of patriotism in many ways.

⁴ Ibid, 26 & 28.

⁵ Ibid, 89.

⁶ Ibid, 123, 124, 127, 192.

Preachers proclaimed the gospel of patriotism from the pulpit. Women, who were the most spirited of the patriots, displayed flags, raised funds, and made clothing for the volunteers. Young men showed their patriotism through volunteering. The problem that authorities encountered at this time was not to obtain men but rather to hold the volunteers to manageable numbers. Still, as in the South, within a year volunteering had drastically slowed.⁷

Despite the surge of patriotism, motivation for enlistment could vary. Sometimes a man's reasons for volunteering might be economic. Although the thirteen dollars per month for an infantry private may not appear to be much, the first months of the war were a time of depression and unemployment often reoccurred until 1863, making the army's more or less regular pay attractive. For other men, love for country and hatred for those who seemed determined to destroy its institutions provided the motive to enlist. Yet Wiley argued that idealistic sentiments were comprehended only vaguely if at all. Soldiers who indicated their commitment to broad issues spoke of such concepts as law, liberty, freedom, and righteousness. Some fought to free the slaves, although these men made up only a small portion of the fighting forces.⁸

At the opposite extreme were Union soldiers who were definitely not fighting for the good of the African-Americans. A large number of Union soldiers' diaries and letters express hostility toward blacks. Such feelings ranged from blunt hatred to contempt, expressed in belittling remarks. Several factors contributed to these feelings. Many were

⁷ Bell Irvin Wiley. *The Life of Billy Yank: The Common Soldier of the Union* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1952) 17, 18, 20.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 38-40.

prejudiced before they entered the service, especially if they came from border-states, had a Southern background, were Irish, or came from a lower educational or economic group.⁹

In 1991 Larry J. Daniel examined the life of the Confederate soldier in the Army of Tennessee. In his book *Soldiering in the Army of Tennessee: A Portrait of Life in a Confederate Army*, Daniel explores two themes. First he focuses on the differences between eastern and western Confederates, although they were more alike than different. He considers how factors such as refinement and morale showed subtle variations between regions. The Army of Tennessee did not have the good fortune of maintaining its cohesiveness through soldiers' confidence in leadership and battlefield victories. It relied instead on other bonds to hold the men together at the lower ranks. Therefore the unity of this army can only be understood from the bottom up.¹⁰

The typical volunteer in the Army of Tennessee was in his early twenties, nonslaveholding, born in a small log cabin, enjoyed a limited public education, and farmed for a living. The difference in the character of these westerners remained more subtle. They often shared the same comments on rations, drills, and pastimes as those in the East, yet they had rougher edges, less self discipline, and fewer gentle refinements. They also had an intense racism that lay just below the surface. Although they shared these sentiments with eastern Confederates, their lack of self discipline caused them to emerge in dramatic fashion later in the war.¹¹

The cohesiveness of this army rested mostly on the deterrent value of the punishments inflicted on deserters and a well timed religious revival stressing commitment,

⁹ Ibid, 109.

¹⁰ Larry J. Daniel. *Soldiering in the Army of Tennessee: A Portrait of Life in a Confederate Army* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1991) xii.

¹¹ Ibid, 13, 15.

sacrifice, and patience under hardships. Out of the soldiers' suffering came a common bond. It had a grassroots unity with two factors contributing: protracted encampments and marathon troop movements. In these settings the army came to have a strong bond. Indeed, it became a family of sort.¹²

The influence of religion in this army extended through the ranks from the commanding general to the lowest private. In order to gain a full understanding of the cohesiveness of this army, Daniel argues that one must examine its evolutionary pilgrimage. Early in the war the soldiers grew indifferent to religion largely because of the festive atmosphere of camp. Then in the spring of 1863 revival broke out. In 1863 and 1864 the spiritual outpouring reached its climax at the Dalton encampment. Without any question, the fear of death moved many to the altar. Yet many others ignored the revivals, some soldiers even gambling within hearing distance of the worship. For most soldiers this was a genuine transformation and for others it proved the only thing that made life bearable and death hopeful even in the midst of a horrible war. Religion provided the main source of unity in the Army of Tennessee from 1863 until the end of the war.¹³

Still, these men needed a reason to fight amidst great battlefield losses and a lack of confidence in their leaders. Many western troops found their motivation in a different view of the results of battles than that of the modern historians. The perception, or maybe illusion, of battlefield victories kept these soldiers motivated. After they witnessed the fall of Atlanta, a desire to return to the army's birthplace and namesake, Tennessee, provided more motivation in times of peril.¹⁴

¹² Ibid, 22-23.

¹³ Ibid, 115-117, 119, 122, 124-125.

¹⁴ Ibid, 148-150.

In 1993 James M. McPherson delivered the Walter Lynwood Fleming Lectures in Southern History at Louisiana State University. From these lectures came the book *What They Fought For, 1861-1865* in which McPherson presented the preliminary findings of research that would later form a second book. McPherson sought to find the motivation for the enlistment of Union and Confederate soldiers in the Civil War. Like Bell Wiley, McPherson sought out the letters and diaries of these soldiers to gain a true perspective of their motives.¹⁵

McPherson argues that Johnny Reb fought for liberty and independence from what southerners viewed as tyrannical government, while Billy Yank fought for the preservation of the nation from dismemberment and destruction, the nation created by the founding fathers. In times of trouble, Confederate soldiers held on to the memory of the eventual victory of the American Revolution even after defeats. They filled their letters and diaries with the rhetoric of liberty and self government as well as their willingness to give their lives for such a cause. This commitment simply came down to their patriotism and their desire to defend the very existence of what they held to be their country, the Confederate States of America.¹⁶

The defense of their homes against an invading army created a concrete motive for Confederate soldiers, one that quickly turned for many into a hatred and desire for revenge. These motives functioned more powerfully for the Confederacy than for Union soldiers. As the war escalated with mounting casualties and loss of property, such as slaves, an even deeper hatred grew within them. The desire for revenge became the passion of many Confederate soldiers, more powerfully so than for Yankee soldiers. The desire for vengeance

¹⁵ James M. McPherson. *What They Fought For, 1861-1865* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1994) 1.

¹⁶ *Ibid*, 7, 10-11.

for their comrades dead or wounded by Union bullets became an obsession for these rebel soldiers.¹⁷

Union soldiers held similar feelings of patriotism and also felt that they fought with the same goals as their forbearers of 1776. These soldiers viewed secession as “a deadly challenge to the foundation of law and order on which all societies must rest if they are not to degenerate into anarchy.”¹⁸ Although they shared a common patriotism for their countries, the Union soldiers did not hold the same awareness of fighting to defend their home and family. Still, those Union soldiers from East Tennessee and border states, such as Kentucky, that were plagued with guerrilla warfare shared confederate feelings of hatred and a desire for revenge. Many Union soldiers shared the same desire to avenge their comrades killed in the war.¹⁹

It seemed that hopes for a Confederate victory looked best in the months after the Emancipation Proclamation as it divided the northern people and created or intensified the morale crisis in the Union army. Confederate soldiers seemed unaware of the paradox, shared by Union soldiers and Americans in Thomas Jefferson’s time, of fighting for liberty and still holding other people in slavery. Most Southerners felt that they were fighting for “liberty and slavery, one and inseparable.”²⁰ Yet more Union soldiers than Confederates wrote about slavery, possibly because emancipation was so controversial. Few Union soldiers claimed to fight for racial equality or to free the slaves. “The cause of the Union united northern soldiers; the cause of emancipation divided them.”²¹

¹⁷ Ibid, 18, 21.

¹⁸ Ibid, 27, 32.

¹⁹ Ibid, 38.

²⁰ Ibid, 49-51.

²¹ Ibid, 54, 56, 61.

James McPherson went on to publish *For Cause and Comrades: Why Men Fought in the Civil War* in 1997, the long-awaited book that went beyond his preliminary findings in *What They Fought For*. As in the previous book, McPherson focused on those who did the real fighting rather than those who tried to avoid combat. He also challenged the conventional wisdom about the motives of soldiers on both sides.²²

The prevailing motivators for the soldiers lay with a sense of duty and honor. Some of the traditional reasons that have caused men to fight in other wars, such as religious fanaticism and ethnic hatreds, had little if any relevance in the Civil War. Discipline was lacking in volunteer regiments and they received minimal training by modern standards. To this democratic and individualistic nineteenth century society, subordination and unquestioning obedience to orders were unknown.²³

The consciousness of duty remained persistent in Victorian America, leading many Confederate soldiers to cite this as their reason for fighting. Yet more often they spoke of honor, which, according to McPherson, consisted of their image in the eyes of their peers. This emphasis on honor took place more often in the upper class soldiers or officers of the Confederacy. Yet in the Federal army these feelings ranged across the social scale. This concern with honor led to a desire to “see the elephant” – that is, to experience combat. A unit kept in the rear during the fighting felt dishonored.²⁴

McPherson, like many other historians who have studied the common soldier of the Civil War, focused a good amount of attention on religion. He argued that the Civil War armies were the most religious in the history of America. Both sides tended to believe that

²² James M. McPherson. *For Cause and Comrades: Why Men Fought in the Civil War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997) ix-x.

²³ Ibid, 6.

²⁴ Ibid, 22-24, 31.

God was on their side and felt that they were doing their duty to God and country in trying to kill the godless enemy.²⁵

Although the principle sustaining motivations of Civil War soldiers were their convictions of duty, honor, patriotism, and ideology, they were motivated in combat through impulses of courage, self respect and group cohesion. Yet without a firm support in their homes and communities, their morale would not have held up.²⁶

Just as Larry J. Daniel examined the Army of Tennessee, J. Tracy Power studied the Army of Northern Virginia in *Lee's Miserables: Life in the Army of Northern Virginia from the Wilderness to Appomattox*. Power explained that in the spring of 1864 many voluntarily, and some involuntarily, reenlisted in the army. At this time the Confederate authorities were anxious to have as many troops as possible to oppose the Federals. They had worked throughout the winter to fill the Confederate ranks. Congress passed a law extending enlistments for the duration of the war and also drafting all white men between the ages of seventeen to forty five. This law retained many veterans who had fulfilled their original three year enlistment. Still, before word of the new law circulated, many individuals and units voluntarily reenlisted for the war. Many did so because of patriotism and a sense of duty while others only reenlisted to avoid the criticism of their comrades or families at home.²⁷

As in the Army of Tennessee, so in the Army of Northern Virginia religious revivals were always full of emotion and evangelical fervor. Many Christians in the South believed that the military defeats, economic affliction, political clashes, and social upheavals were the

²⁵ Ibid, 63, 72.

²⁶ Ibid, 131.

²⁷ J. Tracy Power. *Lee's Miserables: Life in the Army of Northern Virginia from the Wilderness to Appomattox* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1998) 3.

result of the people's inability or refusal to obey God. Chaplains and ministers drew parallels between religious and patriotic responsibilities. They stressed that God remained on the Confederacy's side, but only the Christian soldiers could triumph over both their earthly and spiritual enemies.²⁸

In spite of patriotic exhortations from the government and chaplains, one particular problem remained in early 1864. Desertion rates became alarming as war-weary veterans sought to return home. Some who had fulfilled their three year enlistment period were encouraged by their family or friends to leave and let others continue the fight. The conscripts who had little desire to serve in the army often bolted at the first chance. The desertion numbers increased during the winter and grew again with the approach of the spring campaign, leading to Lee and the government's efforts to replace these troops through returning absentees, recruiting new troops, and limiting the exemptions from the army.²⁹

The soldiers of the Army of Northern Virginia shared a simple but intense faith in Lee's ability to lead them to victories. These same soldiers came to the realization that they had found a formidable adversary in Ulysses Grant and knew that they had entered a new phase of the war in which intense fighting would last for days, weeks, or even months.³⁰

Despite their faith in Lee, the men of the Army of Northern Virginia began to change. By the last half of 1864 the army needed a victory to renew its confidence, but the fact that it needed a boost in confidence spoke volumes about the state of the army at this time. Clearly Lee now commanded an army far different from the one that he led in 1862 and 1863. The severe losses that Lee's army suffered included a loss of experienced officers. A disturbing incompetence among the new officers revealed another contrast between the army of old and

²⁸ Ibid, 4-5.

²⁹ Ibid, 6-7.

³⁰ Ibid, 9, 22, 36.

that of 1864. Yet the soldiers still drew confidence from their faith in Lee's generalship and his efforts to take care of them.³¹

The Army of Northern Virginia then encountered the malady that had already plagued the Army of Tennessee, desertion. By January and February 1865 the flood gates had opened. Those who deserted responded to the conditions within the army or at home rather than the overall military or political situation of the Confederacy. Soldiers increasingly organized amongst themselves in open defiance of authority. Some even threatened mutiny if attempts were made to stop deserters. Though there were striking differences between the Army of Tennessee and the Army of Northern Virginia, even an unwavering faith in their commander could not hold the eastern soldiers who did not want to remain in the army.³²

James I. Robertson, Jr., a student of Bell Wiley, sought to recreate Wiley's study of the common soldier with new diaries and letters. In his 1998 book, *Soldiers Blue and Gray*, Robertson asserted that "the greatest tragedy of all was that both sides were fighting for the same thing: America, as each side envisioned what the young nation should be." Patriotism contributed to enlistment on both sides. Other reasons had more basic human attraction. To the impressionable young men the army offered a different way of life, free from struggling behind a plow or hunching over a desk. It could provide adventure, or bring heroics normally unavailable in their everyday life. The army provided a chance to see new things and live an exciting lifestyle.³³

Both the Union and the Confederate army were made up of a diverse group of men. The Confederate army contained representatives of over one hundred different occupations. The Federal army proved even more diverse with over three hundred occupations among the

³¹ Ibid, 194, 196, 202.

³² Ibid, 236, 262.

³³ James I. Robertson, Jr. *Soldiers Blue and Gray* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1998) 3, 6, 8.

ranks. Within the army camp these diverse groups of men ended their civilian lives and learned about a soldier's life. Here the soldier grew to know the bugle call and drum beats. He learned of the military chain of command, discipline, and the importance of taking care of his equipment. The younger soldiers as well as those from rural areas especially enjoyed this life in the beginning.³⁴

These soldiers from different civilian backgrounds provided the heart of the war, and their determination and devotion kept the war going. Yet homesickness eventually broke the moral fiber of many men. Most, away from home for the first time, felt the pain of their absence from loved ones, at first small and then growing to a chronic pain. Robertson asserted that the men in the ranks of the Civil War armies were the worst soldiers but best fighters America had seen. The men on both sides showed that they could be led but would not be driven. They believed that the American government rested on "the consent of the governed" and thought the army should too.³⁵

Robertson also emphasized the role of religion. He argued that "faith in God became the single greatest institution in maintenance of morale in the armies."³⁶ If their side was winning, ministers told them it happened because the men continued to keep the faith, but if they were losing the temporary setback was a product of their sinfulness. Informal prayer meetings took place more often than structured service and were often held by a small gathering of soldiers who gave their testimonies.³⁷

In his 2005 book *More Damning than Slaughter: Desertion in the Confederate Army*, Mark A. Weitz examined the problem of desertion in the South, seeking to answer the

³⁴ Ibid, 25, 41.

³⁵ Ibid, 80, 102, 122, 124.

³⁶ Ibid, 172.

³⁷ Ibid, 181, 188.

questions of whether desertion hurt the Confederate cause and, if so, how badly. Through answering these questions he also sought to explain the causes of desertion. Lost in the discussion of unequal population growth and different development in the North and South between the Revolution and the Civil War, Weitz explained, was the question of what this meant in terms of both regions' ability to wage war. From a military standpoint the development that the North experienced meant that it would have a "disposable" male population by 1861.³⁸

To find the common Confederate soldier, the student of Civil War history must, as it were, travel down the social food chain of the Old South to the yeomen and poor whites, who provided the backbone of the Rebel army. This was an army of farmers with lives governed by the seasons, just as their fathers and grandfathers had been before them. They were not "disposable" and, unlike the men of the North, could not be spared without seriously affecting their families' quality of life. This meant that once the hardships of war began to take their toll on the southern population, these farmer-soldiers began to look for the opportunity to escape as they became increasingly convinced that home and family stood on the verge of ruin. For these men the nation they fought for proved either unable or unwilling to provide what their families needed once they went to war.³⁹

Although training and drilling could make these soldiers more productive at killing their enemies, many of the men knew relatively little about discipline before the war and found it hard to embrace the strictness of army life. As early as 1861 deserters began to

³⁸ Mark A. Weitz. *More Damning than Slaughter: Desertion in the Confederate Army* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska press, 2005) viii, 11.

³⁹ *Ibid*, 12-13.

appear and although their numbers remained insignificant at that time, the fact that they occurred before the men faced the horrors of battle was very significant.⁴⁰

The draft represented one of the earliest and ultimate statements of the Confederacy's national action. This decision became very controversial and added much fuel to the problem of desertion. The Conscription Act removed any doubt from the lower and yeoman classes that the rich expected the poor to fight. In addition to exemptions based upon occupations that the government viewed as crucial to its operation and that of the home front, the Conscription Act also created an exemption for those Southerners owning more than twenty slaves. The desertion that this act prompted was not that of the conscripts.⁴¹

By the end of 1862, desertion began to spread throughout the weakened Confederacy that had yet to feel the complete burden of war. Weitz argued that desertion spread from the army into the civilian population as citizens also began to feel that their government had broke its promise that lay at the heart of the common soldiers' commitment to leave home and fight for his country – that is to take care of those left behind at home. Some states tried to take care of the families left behind, but too often they lacked the necessary resources.⁴²

Desertion took men from the army in two ways, those who deserted and those who served in state or county units to apprehend the deserters. In 1863 desertion had escalated and many of these deserters had crossed into Union lines and sworn an oath of allegiance to the United States. Desertion also hindered one of the ways that the Confederacy had to replenish its army, the healing and recovery from wounds. Those who lay in hospitals recovering were expected to return to duty as soon as they could. Yet some used this time to desert their army and return home. Although at first glance this may have seemed a minor

⁴⁰ Ibid, 36, 43.

⁴¹ Ibid, 78.

⁴² Ibid, 84.

problem compared to those that deserted in the field, avoided conscription, or failed to return when exchanged, observations of military commanders showed a larger problem.⁴³

Weitz acknowledged that the men who chose to stay and fight are often lost in the desertion story, and as much as it hurt anyone, desertion hurt those who remained loyal and the cause for which they fought. Desertion served as proof that Confederate nationalism did not fail. Instead, Weitz argued, it was the government and the rich that ultimately failed. The Confederacy convinced its population that the government could best protect their homes, and in order for the war to succeed ordinary men had to possess a willingness to leave their homes and fight. Through seizing the idea of home, the Confederacy found a concept that could sum up the national will. Yet despite great efforts in the field, Confederate soldiers could not keep the Northern army out of their home states. Confederate soldiers deserted because they had accepted the notion that service in the army – service for the government – would best shield their hearths and firesides, but protection of their homes and families remained their most important goal and they eventually reached a point at which they no longer believed in the government’s ability to live up to its promises. At that point a sufficient number of them determined to leave the army, Weitz argued, that “desertion truly crippled the Confederate war effort and in the end hurt much more than slaughter.”⁴⁴

Confederate soldier from Kentucky had much in common with the soldiers studied by previous historians. They fought for their families and homes in a state overrun by guerrilla warfare. Many enlisted because of a sense of duty for what they identified as their country. Some sought to defend their honor while others merely hoped for adventure. All held on to a deep patriotism instilled through their forefathers, they also sought to liberate their country,

⁴³ Ibid, 112, 117, 166-167.

⁴⁴ Ibid, 181, 293-294.

the Confederate States of America, from a tyrannical government. Although all of them did not understand the true ideological basis of the war, they had ideologies of their own. All risked, and some gave, their lives to defend these ideologies and their homes.

Unfortunately the number of diaries and letters from Kentucky Confederates remains scarce. Far fewer Kentuckians fought for the Confederacy than for the Union. Yet this is not the main factor in the lack of sources. These soldiers lived across enemy lines from 1861 to 1865, with few returning to the state until war's end. This led to a difficulty in getting their letters across enemy lines to their loved ones. Those that did survive are often from soldiers of a higher class or more educated upbringing. Often these were Kentuckians who served as officers in the Confederate army. Despite the paucity of sources, careful study can still reveal much about why some Kentuckians chose to fight for a cause their fellow citizens rejected.

Chapter 2

A Confederate, Union, or Neutral State?

In the 1860 census Kentucky had a population of 1,200,000 people making it the ninth most populated state in the country.⁴⁵ At this time slaves made up 19.5 percent of the state's population. This percentage had been on the decline for several previous decades and few large slaveholders remained in the state in comparison to the Lower South.⁴⁶ It had more small slave owners than any other state except Virginia.⁴⁷ Still Kentucky remained a slave state, ultimately linked to the other Southern states.

Yet more than slavery joined the state to the South. Originally part of Virginia, Kentucky bore the characteristics of "the mother commonwealth."⁴⁸ In addition, many Kentuckians could trace their ancestral ties to North Carolina and Tennessee to which they felt a strong bond.⁴⁹ The first generation of Kentucky statesmen took on the opinions of those in Virginia and imbibed the political creed of the Southern people. They were strongly attached to their state government.⁵⁰ In early years of statehood, Kentucky was forced to deal with the fact that only they had the interests of their future in mind as the country seemed to ignore them, focusing much attention on the seaboard states. That era gave Kentuckians an individuality and self reliance. This went along with the mentality already held by many who came to Kentucky from other southern states where local interests typically held a higher claim on people's loyalties than did affairs on the national level. The

⁴⁵ *New York Times*, April 6, 1860, 4.

⁴⁶ Lowell H. Harrison. *The Civil War in Kentucky* (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 1975) 1.

⁴⁷ William C. Davis. *The Orphan Brigade: The Kentucky Confederates Who Couldn't Go Home* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1980) 4.

⁴⁸ Basil W. Duke. *A History of Morgan's Cavalry* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1960) 32.

⁴⁹ Harrison, *The Civil War in Kentucky*, 2.

⁵⁰ *Ibid*, 32 – 33.

citizens of Kentucky shared a common struggle against adversity and were joined by a powerful pride in the progress of their state.⁵¹

Kentuckians not only felt the ties of blood and love; they also felt the pull of economic bonds. The state held connections to both the North and South commercially and could see nothing other than disaster coming from the breaking up of the Union.⁵²

Manufacturing still trailed agriculture in economic importance. Kentucky farmers raised a variety of crops, including tobacco, corn, wheat, hemp, and flax. Yet the state ranked fifteenth in the annual value of products as well as in the capital invested in manufacturing.⁵³ Commercially the state identified more with the North.⁵⁴

A change came to the political mind of Kentucky with the career of Henry Clay. Clay taught his generation of Kentuckians to love the Union. He believed that the union of the states guaranteed their safety, honor, and prosperity. In passing on his love for the nation he also taught them to dread the evils of war. After his death and the passing of his influence Kentuckians gradually began to forget these teachings.⁵⁵ Historian William C. Davis dates the beginning of Kentucky's eroding devotion to the Union with the passing of Henry Clay.⁵⁶

In 1851, just one year before Clay's death, John C. Breckinridge, a young Democrat, won Clay's old congressional district. "The rise of a Democrat in Clay's home district signaled a slow explosion all over the state," wrote Davis.⁵⁷ Although these Democrats professed to love the Union just as much as Clay and the Whigs, there seemed more of an

⁵¹ Davis, *The Orphan Brigade: The Kentucky Confederates Who Couldn't Go Home*, 2-3.

⁵² Wilson Porter Shortridge. "Kentucky Neutrality in 1861," *The Mississippi Valley Historical Review* 9, 4 (March 1923), 284.

⁵³ Harrison, *The Civil War in Kentucky*, 2.

⁵⁴ Davis, *The Orphan Brigade: The Kentucky Confederates Who Couldn't Go Home*, 3.

⁵⁵ Duke, *A History of Morgan's Cavalry*, 34-35.

⁵⁶ Davis, *The Orphan Brigade: The Kentucky Confederates Who Couldn't Go Home*, 4.

⁵⁷ *Ibid*, 4-5.

attachment to states rights in them, as well as a closer identification with the South.⁵⁸ In 1856, when Breckinridge became Vice President, his influence had become predominant in the state. Troubles in Kansas and the agitation in the United States Congress led to a stronger Democratic presence and Kentuckians grew more inclined to take a Southern view on debated questions.⁵⁹

By 1860 it seemed as if there were three different Kentuckies. One along her southern border and also scattered throughout the state where her citizens avowed secession. At the northern border along the Ohio River lived the complete opposite, men whose allegiance would always remain with the Union. The third state of Kentucky could be found scattered throughout the state. This group would support the Union as long as they did not have to forfeit what they deemed their rights in the process.⁶⁰

With the election of 1860 came a decision for Kentuckians. At the time the state had two working party organizations. The Democrats were powerful and largely pro-southern but were losing the support of the Union men. The Constitutional Union Party had a platform that was naïve and hoped, in William C. Davis's words, "that if everyone ignored the sectional crisis and stopped talking about it, maybe it would go away."⁶¹ The John Brown raid and his subsequent hanging drove those in favor of slavery and state rights further toward the Southern belief system, while the fire-eaters of South Carolina only made the Union men more determined.⁶² A New York Times article out of Louisville, Kentucky around the time of the Democratic Convention in Charleston, North Carolina demonstrates the sentiments of some Kentuckians. "No man who does not regard African Slavery as a

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Duke, *A History of Morgan's Cavalry*, 36.

⁶⁰ Davis, *The Orphan Brigade: The Kentucky Confederates Who Couldn't Go Home*, 5.

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Ibid.

comprehensive and humanitarian, most beneficent and indispensable, stupendous and prodigious fact; recognized and especially favored by the fathers, and its security and permanence, indefinite increase and expansion provided for by the national Constitution; and to be forever the vital and absorbing subject of national concern, protection and advancement, will have the shade of a shadow of a chance at Charleston.”⁶³

With the breaking of the Democratic Party, Kentucky became split. In Louisville there was a strong Union presence. At a Douglas gathering there in July 1860 enthusiasm for Douglas seemed overshadowed by bitterness against Breckinridge. The issue at hand became Union or disunion, the Bell leaders were acknowledged to be loyal to the Union. The Unionist citizens of Louisville believed Breckinridge guilty, running as the candidate of a clique of secessionists and having lost any aspect of nationalism that he once had. Another Bell rally also condemned Breckinridge and lavished praise on Douglas, vowing “Let the conservative South beat Breckinridge, and Lincoln, if they can, but anyhow beat Breckinridge.”⁶⁴

In November 1860 Kentuckians faced the same difficult decision as other Americans, of how to cast their vote for president. They could choose among their fellow Kentuckian, Southern Democrat John C. Breckinridge, the Constitutional Union candidate from Tennessee, John Bell, the Northern Democrat Stephen Douglas, or Republican – and Kentucky native – Abraham Lincoln. All knew that a vote for Lincoln risked the breaking up of the Union. Still many were not willing to make a move in the complete opposite direction to support the Southern candidate. The choice of many Kentuckians fell on Bell, who received 66,051 popular votes to 53,143 for Breckinridge, 25,638 to Douglas and Lincoln

⁶³ *New York Times*, March 29, 1860, SU2.

⁶⁴ *New York Times*, July 17, 1860, 2.

received 1,364.⁶⁵ Democrats' votes were divided among Douglas and Breckinridge and they therefore lost the state.⁶⁶ Had the Democratic vote gone to one candidate they could have beat Bell by over 12,000 votes, but with this division the vote of Kentucky went to John Bell. Surrounded by extreme abolitionists in the North and fire-eaters South, the state declared to be for peace and Union. Shortly after Lincoln's election South Carolina seceded and other states followed. Kentucky found itself caught in the middle. The North expected the state of Henry Clay to stand with the Union, while secessionists from the South came to meet with Governor Magoffin.⁶⁷

Governor Beriah Magoffin, a Democrat, had been elected in 1859 and bore much of the burden of deciding Kentucky's course during this crisis. A strong defender of slavery, he did not believe it to be a moral evil. He did believe in the right of secession and also that the rights of Southerners had been violated, but he remained opposed to immediate secession. He instead favored a conference of slave states to devise united demands.⁶⁸

The majority of the state seemed to divide along party lines. The wing of Southern Democrats led by Breckinridge, were anxious to take up the Southern cause. The Douglas wing of Democrats sympathized greatly with the South, but shared in the governor's opposition to secession and disunion. Those that supported the Bell-Everett ticket, a party composed of old Clay Whigs, not surprisingly felt a strong loyalty to the Union.⁶⁹

The impulse in Kentucky to follow the slave states into secession proved very strong in the beginning.⁷⁰ Yet most Kentuckians held the same view as the governor. They did not

⁶⁵ Harrison, *The Civil War in Kentucky*, 4-5.

⁶⁶ Duke, *A History of Morgan's Cavalry*, 36.

⁶⁷ Davis, *The Orphan Brigade: The Kentucky Confederates Who Couldn't Go Home*, 5-6.

⁶⁸ Harrison, *The Civil War in Kentucky*, 6-7.

⁶⁹ Duke, *A History of Morgan's Cavalry*, 36.

⁷⁰ Shortridge, "Kentucky Neutrality in 1861," 285.

favor immediate secession, but neither did they approve of forceful coercion to keep the Southern states in the Union.⁷¹ With the outbreak of the Civil War George W. Johnson fled Kentucky but returned to serve as volunteer aide to General Buckner. In December of 1860 Johnson, later elected the Confederate provisional governor of Kentucky, broached the issue in a letter to his brother. No immediate action should be taken, Johnson wrote. The action of the slave states, in seceding and then meeting with other slave states to create their own union would prove a wrong course of action. Instead although political affairs within the state seemed in a most critical condition, he favored “having a general consultation with all the southern states, before either acts separately. Having the same rights and interests at stake, I think it would be wrong in any one state to take such a position as would force others against their wishes to join her, without at least first consulting them on the propriety of the course.”⁷²

The young men of the State often had intense sympathies with the South and many were connected to the State Guard, Kentucky’s militia. These sympathies were spread among the classes and many shared a strong conviction that an attack on any Southerners was an attack on Kentuckians. Even some Unionists thought the same. According to Basil Duke, himself a strong secessionist, one could often hear these men making such comments as “The Northern troops shall not march over our soil to invade the South,” or “When it becomes apparent that the war is an abolition crusade, and waged for the destruction of slavery, Kentucky will arm against the Government.”⁷³

⁷¹ Davis, *The Orphan Brigade: The Kentucky Confederates Who Couldn't Go Home*, 6.

⁷² Letter, December 2, 1860 from George W. Johnson to W.H. Johnson, Special Collections, Kentucky Historical Society, Frankfort, Kentucky, 83MO1.

⁷³ Duke, *A History of Morgan's Cavalry*, 36-37.

Secessionists in Kentucky spoke of the benefits to the state of joining the Confederacy. A correspondent for the New York Times declared, “They tell our merchants that the bulk of their trade is with the South, and that they must go for Disunion or break . . . Secession would secure and perpetuate Kentucky Slavery, and make Louisville the New York City of the South! But our Unionists know better and talk better. They avow that their State and metropolis, out of the Union would gain nothing and lose everything; that all their interests and pursuits would be prostrated, paralyzed and ruined.”⁷⁴ Torn as the state was when the war started many there shared the governor’s opposition to immediate secession, although he did not completely oppose secession, and opinion that the Union should not use force to hold it together.⁷⁵

Many Kentuckians felt dissatisfied with the society based on slavery. They, or their forbearers, had taken up land beyond the mountains where the poor man could attain something more than poverty and were innately suspicious of the slaveholding gentry. The state now boasted a number of thriving towns with lawyers, merchants, teachers, and mechanics who had very little property interest in slavery.⁷⁶ At the end of 1860 many of the industrial population gathered in Louisville for a Union rally. They emphasized their Union purpose as well as a belief that “in the Union’s dissolution and the Constitution’s destruction they can see nothing but inevitable and sweeping ruin, bankruptcy to the rich and starvation to the poor, blood and carnage, civil war and servile insurrections.”⁷⁷ They went on to urge

⁷⁴ *New York Times*, February 21, 1861, 2.

⁷⁵ Harrison, *The Civil War in Kentucky*, 8.

⁷⁶ Wm. T. McKinney, “The Defeat of the Secessionists in Kentucky in 1861,” *The Journal of Negro History* 1, 4 (October 1916) 380-381.

⁷⁷ *New York Times*, January 5, 1861, 8.

all Louisville mechanics, artisans, manufacturers or working men to organize into Union Clubs.⁷⁸

Kentucky held a strategic location in the Civil War, creating much interest from both sides. Possession by the Confederacy would place the rebellion's northern boundary on the south bank of the Ohio River, a potential barrier against invasion from the North.⁷⁹ From this position the Rebels could threaten a drive to the Great Lakes, splitting the Union. Union leaders also felt the significance of Kentucky to their cause as Abraham Lincoln stated, "I think to lose Kentucky is nearly the same as to lose the whole game."⁸⁰ The transportation facilities offered by the Cumberland and Tennessee rivers would provide the key to the Union's plan to penetrate the South.⁸¹ Otherwise, Kentucky's several hundred miles of accessible frontier on both north and south worried the people of Kentucky, who knew their homes would likely become battlegrounds if Kentucky chose to follow the other Southern states into secession.⁸²

When Lincoln called for 75,000 volunteers he informed Kentucky that her quota would be four regiments.⁸³ Governor Magoffin sent his reply to Secretary of War, Simon Cameron, "In answer, I say, emphatically, that Kentucky will furnish no troops for the wicked purpose of subduing her sister Southern States."⁸⁴ On May 16 the state legislature endorsed his refusal to send troops.⁸⁵ On the same day the Kentucky House of Representatives resolved to take no part in the war being waged "except as mediators and friends to the belligerent parties; and that Kentucky should, during the contest, occupy a

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ McKinney, "The Defeat of the Secessionists in Kentucky in 1861," 377.

⁸⁰ Harrison, *The Civil War in Kentucky*, 2-3.

⁸¹ McKinney, "The Defeat of the Secessionists in Kentucky in 1861," 377.

⁸² Duke, *A History of Morgan's Cavalry*, 31-32.

⁸³ Davis, *The Orphan Brigade: The Kentucky Confederates Who Couldn't Go Home*, 9.

⁸⁴ Duke, *A History of Morgan's Cavalry*, 41.

⁸⁵ Davis, *The Orphan Brigade: The Kentucky Confederates Who Couldn't Go Home*, 10.

position of strict neutrality.”⁸⁶ The Senate adopted a similar resolution and the governor announced the neutrality of the state on May 20, 1861.⁸⁷ With this decision the previously divided state government, united on the unprecedented position of neutrality. Although the governor had favored the Confederacy and the legislature favored the Union, both now vowed that they would not tolerate either side sending troops onto Kentucky soil. Yet the decision would shortly prove unrealistic as the fighting inevitably breached the borders of the state. Neutrality simply could not last.⁸⁸

Extreme Kentuckians wanted more aggressive policies. Fire-eaters wanted immediate secession. Some Unionists wanted to stamp out the rebellion at once, but a majority of Kentuckians agreed with the policy of neutrality.⁸⁹ The case for neutrality had been stated well before Kentucky adopted that policy. A correspondent for the New York Times, writing from Frankfort, Kentucky, in January 1861, noted the state’s opposition to any attempt to subdue the rebellious states in the South. Many Kentuckians had no intention of involving their state in a war, especially one in which they approved of neither side’s conduct.⁹⁰

Those who favored secession but saw no immediate hope of it also approved of neutrality, as it seemed the best arrangement that could be made. They knew if this neutrality was respected a vital portion of the South, a border of hundreds of miles would be safe from invasion. They also believed that under the condition of neutrality more men could leave the state and enlist in the Confederate army.⁹¹

⁸⁶ Harrison, *The Civil War in Kentucky*, 9.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ Steven E. Woodworth. *Jefferson Davis and His Generals: The Failure of Confederate Command in the West* (University Press of Kansas: Lawrence, 1990) 35.

⁸⁹ Harrison, *The Civil War in Kentucky*, 8.

⁹⁰ *New York Times*, January 26, 1861, 3.

⁹¹ Duke, *A History of Morgan’s Cavalry*, 46.

Volunteers began to slip away to join the armies being raised and some covert recruiting took place in the state. During this period each side organized its own military force. Simon B. Buckner's State Guards were largely Southern sympathizers, while the new Home Guards leaned overwhelmingly to the Union side. Both began an intense hunt for weapons.⁹² Kentuckians had created the State Guard after the John Brown raid in expectation that similar attempts might be repeated. With its origin in the fear of slave rebellion, the State Guard unsurprisingly expected the enemy only from the North and its members formed a feeling of animosity to toward Northern people as well as sympathy for the people of the South.⁹³ Kentucky could not hope to enforce her neutrality without having a powerful State Guard. The threat of warfare had encouraged many to volunteer while the more enthusiastic Union men already in the Guard rethought their decision. Few companies remained the same in 1861 as 1860 and some companies altogether fell apart. Many men would not march under certain banners expressing sectional sentiments. Many of them took their weapons home and refused to report for further muster. Some of them joined informal companies, leaving the state in May headed for Virginia to join the Confederate Army. At the same time these men were leaving to join the Rebel army the legislature, in reflecting the divided state, provided for a second militia, the Home Guard. This move to counter the State Guard's pro-southern tendencies brought out many Union men just as eager for their cause as Buckner's State Guard recruits of the year before had been – and still were – for the opposite side. It did not take long for rival companies to begin parading through the streets of the same towns. Violence would probably have followed in short order had not both sides been so preoccupied with recruiting and finding arms. Both sections in the state abandoned

⁹² Harrison, *The Civil War in Kentucky*, 9-10.

⁹³ Duke, *A History of Morgan's Cavalry*, 36.

restraint and soon the race to arm and prepare for the confrontation became open and blatant. Union men began to smuggle guns to arm the Home Guard and the federal government secretly assisted in the equipping of loyal citizens in the state. Soon the state legislature demanded oaths of allegiance to the Union from the members of the State Guard. Late in the summer of 1861 the legislature took the further step of stopping all funds for the State Guard and calling for all arms in the hands of guards to be returned to the arsenals.⁹⁴

The dream of neutrality proved to be short lived. Early on, most Union recruitment of Kentuckians took place in camps north of the Ohio River. Then after the August 1861 elections, which gave Unionists control of the state legislature, Naval Lieutenant William “Bull” Nelson established Camp Dick Robinson, located twenty six miles from Lexington. For many weeks the citizens of Kentucky remained in a state of excitement about this Federal camp. Many moderate Unionists did not like the idea of a Federal camp in their state as they still viewed neutrality as the best policy. John Crittenden, a strong supporter of the state’s neutrality, voiced discontent with Nelson’s camp. Nelson replied, “That a camp of loyal Union men, native Kentuckians, should assemble in camp under the flag of the Union and upon their native soil [and] should be a cause of apprehension is something I do not clearly understand.” Governor Magoffin protested the breach of Kentucky’s neutrality to President Lincoln. The president refused to close the camp or halt enlistments, instead he pointed to Magoffin’s lack of desire to preserve the Union. Lincoln continued, “I do not believe it is the popular wish of Kentucky that this force shall be removed beyond her limits; and, with this impression, I must respectfully decline to so remove it.”⁹⁵

⁹⁴ Davis, *The Orphan Brigade: The Kentucky Confederates Who Couldn't Go Home*, 10-11.

⁹⁵ Harrison, *The Civil War in Kentucky*, 11-12; Duke, *A History of Morgan's Cavalry*, 47.

The Confederate authorities were more cautious with their activities. They remained in contact with those in the state sympathetic to their cause and a flow of Kentucky volunteers entered Camp Boone.⁹⁶ Three Kentuckians selected this spot in Montgomery County, Tennessee. Just two miles west of the Louisville and Nashville Railroad the location attracted their attention for its wide, flat fields, very fitting for drilling new military recruits. More importantly it remained only a few miles from the border of Kentucky and therefore would be easily accessible for those Kentuckians eager to join the ranks of the Confederate Army without violating the neutrality of their beloved state. James Hewitt, Robert Johnson, and William T. “Temp” Withers established Camp Boone in July 1861, when they began to make a camp to hold several hundred men. Within days the Kentucky boys began to pour in. The Confederate Secretary of War authorized Withers to raise only one regiment. Yet he found that “a military spirit in Kentucky” had been awakened. By July 12 Withers had twenty companies of the twenty six he was allowed and suggested that they should form a third regiment. By July 25 he had fifty companies applying for service. Union men in Kentucky complained of the recruiting, saying that “so many of our giddy young men have gone into the Southern army, that almost every man who goes into our army, knows that he has to fight a neighbor, a relative, a brother, son or father.”⁹⁷

By August supporters of the Confederacy were the strongest supporters of neutrality, knowing that if the state moved from this stance it would do so only to join the Union. By this time secessionists in the state realized that the secession movement no longer had any hope of succeeding in Kentucky.⁹⁸

⁹⁶ Harrison, *The Civil War in Kentucky*, 12

⁹⁷ Davis, *The Orphan Brigade: The Kentucky Confederates Who Couldn't Go Home*, 13-14.

⁹⁸ Harrison, *The Civil War in Kentucky*, 11-12.

In the same month many in the North were sure of Kentucky's interest in their side. An article in Harper's Weekly commented on the intention of the Union leaders in the state to prosecute the war vigorously. "This is a sort of Unionism that needs no explanation and leaves no loophole for treachery: it finds practical expression in the daily increasing volunteer force which is being assembled near Louisville. Kentucky, we think we may now say, is not only safe, but is sure to contribute a fair share of soldiers to the Union army."⁹⁹

Meanwhile, forces outside the state were about to put an abrupt end to Kentucky's neutrality. Confederate General Leonidas Polk set his sights on Columbus, Kentucky, located on the Mississippi River. He hoped to fortify the town and thus prevent Union gunboats from navigating down the river. Confederate interest in Columbus had been brewing for several months. Polk's subordinate General Gideon Pillow, previously a professional politician, had first hatched the idea of seizing the town. The banks of the Mississippi south of the Tennessee and Kentucky line were too hard to defend, Pillow claimed, and therefore he must have Columbus, which perched atop high bluffs known locally as the Chalk Cliffs and the Iron Banks. With this in mind he sent a messenger to Governor Magoffin in May 1861 asking permission to occupy Columbus. Anticipating that the governor might not comply, Pillow had also written to Davis, explaining the situation and warning that if Magoffin did not consent he, Pillow, would have to go ahead with his plan and take the responsibility. Pillow was somehow convinced not to go through with his plans at the time. That summer however, Polk, who had been sent to control Pillow, revived the idea. By the end of August, Pillow had begun to pressure Polk about seizing Columbus and Polk soon took hold of the idea. Neither informed Davis of their plan prior to their action, and the Confederate president had even responded to a letter from Kentucky's governor on

⁹⁹ *Harper's Weekly*, August 24, 1861, 530ab.

August 28 reassuring him that “the Government of the Confederate States of America neither intends nor desires to disturb the neutrality of Kentucky.”¹⁰⁰

Ironically it seemed at this point that Kentucky neutrality was about to end in favor of the Confederacy. John Charles Frémont, the Federal commander for the western region, made an ill advised proclamation on August 30, declaring the end of slavery in the territories under his command and threatening to hang any rebel who had taken up arms. This announcement would not win the hearts of those undecided Kentuckians, which still represented a large number within the state. Frémont then directed Ulysses S. Grant, one of his subordinates, to seize Columbus. Once word of these actions spread throughout the state, Kentuckians very well could have invited the Confederate Army into their state. With Kentucky joining the Confederacy, the position of the South could have been greatly strengthened and Polk could have marched into the Bluegrass State as a liberator, welcomed by its populace. With this in mind Governor Harris of Tennessee sent Polk a telegram on September 2 advising him not to send troops into the interior of Missouri but to instead maintain their readiness and a watchful eye on events within Kentucky. Polk however, did not heed the advice of Harris. At the end of August, the force led by Grant appeared in Belmont, Missouri, located directly across the river from Columbus.¹⁰¹ With this General Polk became convinced that Union troops were in position to make a move.¹⁰² Polk feared that they intended to occupy the city. On September 1, Polk sent a letter to the governor stating that it was “of the greatest consequence to the Southern cause in Kentucky or elsewhere that I should be ahead of the enemy in occupying Columbus and Paducah.” Paducah lay north of Columbus, located on the Ohio River at the mouth of the Tennessee

¹⁰⁰ Woodworth, *Jefferson Davis and His Generals: The Failure of Confederate Command in the West*, 36-37.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid*, 38-39.

¹⁰² Harrison, *The Civil War in Kentucky*, 12-13.

River. Polk considered this location of strategic importance to block access to the Tennessee and so he began making preparations to take both towns. On September 3, he set his plan into action, sending steamers with Confederate troops under Pillow's command up the Mississippi River to Hickman, Kentucky. There they landed and marched to Columbus in order to avoid any guns Grant might have at Belmont. When they arrived in Columbus they found the town unoccupied by any military force and there they set up camp.¹⁰³ In a letter sent to Governor Magoffin on September 9 Polk offered to withdraw his Confederate troops from the state if Federal troops were withdrawn simultaneously and with an agreement that the Federals would not be allowed to occupy Kentucky in the future.¹⁰⁴ After Pillow had seized Columbus, Union forces then moved in and seized Paducah. Magoffin denounced both sides for violating Kentucky's neutral rights and demanded all military forces withdraw at once. The Unionists by this time had made headway in the state legislature and instead demanded a complete Confederate withdrawal.¹⁰⁵ On September 18, 1861 the legislature voted to end neutrality and ally itself with the Union.¹⁰⁶

The operation, according to Polk's plans, was a complete success, yet it also became one of the greatest catastrophes suffered by the Confederacy. The Confederate army moved into Kentucky, seized the town, and started work on fortifications within the town as if its purpose was to permanently remain. This final blow to Kentucky neutrality also destroyed any hope for the Confederacy to gain from the mistakes of Frémont. To compound this loss, when the Union seized Paducah, Polk's possession of Columbus became utterly useless.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰³ Woodworth, *Jefferson Davis and His Generals: The Failure of Confederate Command in the West*, 39.

¹⁰⁴ Duke, *A History of Morgan's Cavalry*, 48-49.

¹⁰⁵ Harrison, *The Civil War in Kentucky*, 12-13.

¹⁰⁶ Davis, *The Orphan Brigade: The Kentucky Confederates Who Couldn't Go Home*, 12.

¹⁰⁷ Woodworth, *Jefferson Davis and His Generals: The Failure of Confederate Command in the West*, 39

For Simon Bolivar Buckner, previously inspector general of the state guard, the invasion of Kentucky proved a turning point. Up till this time both the Union and the Confederacy had tried to recruit him. In August Lincoln had even sent him an unsolicited commission as a Union brigadier general, but to no avail. On the day after the legislature ordered the Confederates out of the state, Buckner issued a call for the citizens of Kentucky to defend their home against an invasion from the North. Albert Sidney Johnston, commanding general of the Rebel army west of the Alleghenies, appointed Buckner a brigadier general. Johnston felt it vital that Confederate troops occupy Kentucky in order to protect Southern interest and seized Bowling Green.¹⁰⁸

On September 18, 1861 Buckner issued an address “To the People of Kentucky” from Bowling Green. In it he described the Kentucky legislature as “faithless to the will of the people. They have endeavored to make your gallant State a fortress,” Buckner continued, “in which, under the guise of neutrality, the armed forces of the United States might secretly prepare to subjugate alike the people of Kentucky and the Southern States.”¹⁰⁹ He defended Polk’s actions, blaming the legislature for not enforcing the state’s neutrality, failing to force both the Federals and the Confederates to leave, and he went on to announce his return to the state “at the head of a force, the advance of which is composed entirely of Kentuckians. We do not come to molest any citizen, whatever may be his political opinion. Unlike the agents of the Northern despotism, who seek to reduce us to the condition of dependent vassals, we believe that the recognition of the civil rights of citizens is the foundation of constitutional liberty.”¹¹⁰ Buckner next turned his pen to an attack on Lincoln’s decision to suspend the writ of habeas corpus, and finally he declared the Confederate occupation of Bowling Green

¹⁰⁸ Davis, *The Orphan Brigade: The Kentucky Confederates Who Couldn’t Go Home*, 7 & 25-27.

¹⁰⁹ *Harper’s Weekly*, October 5, 1861, 627.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*

an act of self-defense.¹¹¹ Here in Bowling Green recruiting of Kentuckians for the Confederacy began once again.¹¹²

On October 8 William T. Sherman took command of Union troops in the state and felt much disappointment in the reaction of Kentuckians. He had expected them to erase all hints of secession and put forth essential help to the Union's efforts in the war. Instead he complained that rather than helping the Union, the Kentuckians called for the protection of Federal troops against secessionists. He also complained that the young men of the state were typically secessionists who had joined the Rebels, where as the Union men were aged and conservative, and would not engage in the conflict. Union and state authorities had both authorized too many units to be raised. Would-be officers were plentiful but recruits willing to serve in the ranks were less so. By the end of the first year of the war Union authorities had authorized the recruitment of 42,000 Kentucky soldiers, but only 29,203 had enlisted.¹¹³

Many Kentuckians of Southern sympathies had left to join the Confederate Army in the days immediately following the fall of Fort Sumter. Yet the Confederacy did not push for enlistments in the state both because of a shortage of equipment and because of the neutrality of the state. The number of pro-Confederate men leaving Kentucky increased after the establishment of Camp Boone as well as after the end of neutrality when Union authorities began to arrest Confederate sympathizers.¹¹⁴ John Hunt Morgan was one of those who fled. He had previously been captain of the Lexington Rifles, a volunteer militia absorbed by the State Guard upon its creation.¹¹⁵ On September 20, 1861 Morgan slipped away with other members of the Lexington Rifles to southern Kentucky. John C.

¹¹¹ Ibid.

¹¹² Davis, *The Orphan Brigade: The Kentucky Confederates Who Couldn't Go Home*, 27.

¹¹³ Harrison, *The Civil War in Kentucky*, 14-15.

¹¹⁴ Ibid, 15-16.

¹¹⁵ Duke, *A History of Morgan's Cavalry*, 88.

Breckinridge, former Vice President and Presidential candidate also fled, instead to Virginia, where he joined the Confederate Army. Many Kentuckians would not see home again for years, but Breckinridge did not return for eight years. Other distinguished citizens such as former Governor Charles S. Morehead were captured and sent to Northern prisons.¹¹⁶

When John C. Breckinridge arrived in Bowling Green after Kentucky's neutrality had ended, Brigadier General Simon Buckner was struck with another way to recruit Kentuckians to the Confederate Army. He felt that if anyone could bring the Southern Rights faction under the flag of Dixie it would be Breckinridge. Buckner immediately wrote to Richmond, recommending Breckinridge be commissioned a brigadier general and given command of the First Kentucky Brigade. When the former vice-president went to Richmond in October rumors flew that Davis would name him to his cabinet where, critics claimed, the Kentuckian would bring some prominence to a group that was otherwise uninspiring. Instead the Confederate president chose to stick with Buckner's original proposal, believing that Breckinridge could best serve the Confederate cause by returning to Kentucky. On November 16, 1861 he took command of the First Kentucky Brigade. Composed entirely of volunteers from Kentucky, the Brigade was one of a handful of Confederate brigades made up entirely of soldiers from a state that remained in the Union. Most of them volunteered "for the war," instead of for a standard twelve months common in 1861.¹¹⁷

Many men looked for someone to follow to the Confederacy, afraid to go on their own. Some of these joined Morgan. When the troops at Camp Dick Robinson and the Home Guard began showing hostility toward those not of Union loyalty, Morgan made his decision to go South. Upon the disarming of the State Guard he decided to save the guns at all cost.

¹¹⁶ Harrison, *The Civil War in Kentucky*, 16.

¹¹⁷ William C. Davis. *Breckinridge: Statesman Soldier Symbol* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1974) 294-297.

Feeling that his best chance of this was to make his way to Confederate lines, he resolved to head for southern Kentucky. Many of those he had commanded in the State Guard joined him in stealing the weapons from the armory, loading them into wagons, and heading out of town. When the weapons were safe he went back into town, contacted others who might go with him, and left the next night with his following. A few miles from Bardstown he met up with Captain John Cripps Wickliffe who also had saved his guns and was leading the majority of his company to join the Confederate Army. Wickliffe turned over to Morgan the weapons of a neighboring Home Guard unit, which Morgan promptly distributed to the unarmed men in his camp, many of whom had come in that day as part of an unorganized band making its way to the Confederate lines. The men dubbed their bivouac “Camp Charity,” and many new recruits joined the ranks there over the next few days.¹¹⁸

Upon assuming the Confederate command in Kentucky, Albert Sidney Johnston expressed the same feelings of disappointment as Sherman. He wrote to a friend that “there are thousands of ardent friends to the South in the state, but there is apparently among them no concert of action.”¹¹⁹ Later when the number of volunteers rose to a more acceptable level, Johnston found that he lacked the capability to equip them.¹²⁰

In September 1862 General Braxton Bragg created another opportunity for recruiting as his Confederate Army invaded Kentucky. Dallas Mosgrove, only eighteen at the time, described this as a very exciting time with thousands of young Kentuckians eager to enlist in the Rebel army. In advance of Bragg’s army recruiting officers such as the trio of Henry Giltner, Tandy Pryor, and Nathan Parker entered the state. The three operated in the counties along the Ohio River, from Louisville to Cincinnati, and in those adjoining them. Colonel

¹¹⁸ Duke, *A History of Morgan’s Cavalry*, 89-91.

¹¹⁹ Harrison, *The Civil War in Kentucky*, 17.

¹²⁰ Ibid.

Pryor, shortly after the April 1862 battle of Shiloh, had visited his home in Carrolton, on the Ohio River northeast of Louisville, remaining for four days. On August 9, 1862 he visited again, this time in conjunction with Bragg's Confederate incursion into the state and in company with his fellow recruiters, Giltner and Parker. Their efforts resulted in the raising of the Fourth Kentucky Cavalry Regiment. The recruits were forced to stay quietly at home until a marshaling of them for organizational purposes could take place. There was a Federal presence and a threat of being captured due to information given by unfriendly citizens, forcing them to be very discreet in their operations. On September 9 the regiment headed for Confederate lines.¹²¹

In early 1863 an order came from Richmond for another round of recruiting. Each Kentucky regiment was to send a commissioned officer, a non-commissioned officer and two enlisted men into the state for the purpose. From the Fourth Kentucky Cavalry Lieutenant Archie W. Smith of Company E, Sergeant Will Helm from Company H, and privates William J. Corbin and T.J. McGraw from Company D were selected to go to Kentucky. On reaching central Kentucky the group split up for their several hometowns, where they thought they might be able to work more efficiently on familiar ground. The entire group was captured. They had risked much by entering Union territory. Pursuant to General Ambrose Burnside's General Order Number 38, Corbin and McGraw were ordered shot. Sergeant Helm "took the oath" (of loyalty to the Union) in order to avoid the same fate. Lieutenant Smith went to prison but escaped without forgetting his mission. Instead of returning to Confederate lines he did some of the war's most successful recruiting in Kentucky. When he

¹²¹ George Dallas Mosgrove. *Kentucky Cavaliers in Dixie: Reminiscences of a Confederate Cavalryman* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1999) 15 & 54.

arrived in Abingdon, Virginia to report to General William Preston he brought with him sixty four volunteers.¹²²

The coming of the Civil War confronted the citizens of the Bluegrass State with stark choices, chief of which was where their loyalty should lie. The mood of some Kentuckians during these years is best illustrated by a statement made during the secession crisis by Philip Lightfoot Lee. A resident of Bullitt County, on the Ohio River just south of Louisville, Lee had a simple rule for determining his allegiance. Should the Union break up Lee vowed to remain with Kentucky, if Kentucky split he would go with Bullitt County, if his county split then his sympathies would remain with Shepherdsville, his hometown. And if Shepherdsville should also be torn apart then he would stand with his side of the street.¹²³

For most Kentuckians the decision was not that simple. Not only were communities and streets split but families as well, father against son and brother against brother. The decision for many Kentuckians proved difficult. Many left their homes for the adventure that the war might bring them, some thought the only true justice would be in the victory of the South, others felt it their duty and fought for honor. Still others had more complicated reasons for leaving behind their family and friends, going against the stance of their beloved state and heading south to join the ranks of the Confederate Army.

¹²² Mosgrove, *Kentucky Cavaliers in Dixie: Reminiscences of a Confederate Cavalryman*, 121-122.

¹²³ Davis, *The Orphan Brigade: The Kentucky Confederates Who Couldn't Go Home*, 1.

Chapter 3

More “Lincoln Weather”

The election of Lincoln in 1860 meant the end of support of the Union for some Kentuckians. A deep hatred for the Republican Party and its antislavery ideology motivated many of these men to cross state lines and enlist in the Confederate army. Others feared that the election of a Republican meant the end for states’ rights. Soon the Federal government would increase its own power and thereby lessen the power of the states to govern themselves. To these Kentuckians this meant an end to slavery and the Southern way of life. Once the war broke out in April 1861 these men felt that Lincoln tried to keep the country together through coercion and they would not stand for it. Whether a hatred of the North, contempt for Lincoln, or a fear of losing states’ rights, the motivation for these men was founded in politics.

Kentucky’s vote for Bell in the 1860 Presidential election seemed to foreshadow a middle of the road stance for Kentucky, siding with the only candidate who did not take a clear stance on slavery, but rather ran on a platform of simply preserving the Union.¹²⁴ Yet the state did make one point clear. With only 1,364 of the 146,196 votes cast for Lincoln, the state showed that it knew what fate the Republican’s election would bring and wanted no part of it. On January 18, 1861 Mildred Fry Bullitt, the mother of three future Confederate soldiers as well as two loyal Union men, expressed the fear shared with many in her home town of Oxmoor and surrounding areas. The slaves in that area of Kentucky near Louisville began to tell their owners of their coming freedom. They believed once Lincoln came to

¹²⁴ Ibid, 4.

power that he would set them free. Mrs. Bullitt set them straight when she told them that Lincoln did not have the power to set them free.¹²⁵

Her son Thomas Bullitt cast his vote for John C. Breckinridge in 1860, the first vote he ever cast.¹²⁶ Thomas felt, upon his examination of the Constitution, that the Southern cause proved “Constitutionally right – politically unwise.”¹²⁷ He remained convinced that the purpose of the Republican Party was war and that the Democrats seemed too cowardly to resist them.¹²⁸ In the days before the First Battle of Manassas Bullitt visited Washington D.C. During this visit he caught his first glimpse of President Lincoln and was not at all impressed. In his recollections of the war written in 1907 Bullitt remembered his dislike of Lincoln’s position and ideology. Of that first sight of Lincoln he commented, years later, “I did not understand the power which resided in that homely face and ungainly figure.”¹²⁹

Bullitt believed that the heart of the South was moved to action through the conviction that the war was one of conquest, designed to destroy the South’s cherished theory of government and, if successful, destined to the loss of their independence and freedom. He remained aware that the main political issue leading up to the war was slavery. Still he held that a love of slavery and a desire to continue it did not motivate the South to resist Northern aggression, rather it came from the universal conviction that the forcible destruction of slavery also meant the destruction of the Constitution and the conquest of the

¹²⁵ Letter, January 18, 1861 from Mildred Fry Bullitt, Bullitt Family Papers, Filson Historical Society, Louisville, Kentucky.

¹²⁶ Thomas W. Bullitt, *Some Recollections of the War*, August 29, 1907, 2, Bullitt Family Papers, Filson Historical Society, Manuscript Collection, Louisville, Kentucky.

¹²⁷ Thomas Walker Bullitt, *Diary*, 9, Thomas Walker Bullitt Papers, Filson Historical Society, Manuscript Collection, Louisville, Kentucky.

¹²⁸ Ibid.

¹²⁹ Bullitt, *Some Recollections of the War*, 13-14.

South. To Bullitt and many other Southerners, the Constitution and freedom were directly related to the institution of slavery.¹³⁰

At the time of the election, secession, and the outbreak of the Civil War, Thomas resided in Philadelphia with his brother, John C. Bullitt, studying law. Although Thomas's sympathies lay with the South, John felt himself in a more difficult position. Although raised in Kentucky he had lived in Philadelphia for twelve to fourteen years and built up a large law practice. Politically John identified with the States Rights Democrats and held sympathies for the Southern cause and its struggle against what he perceived as Northern aggression in the years leading up to the Civil War. Yet his judgment led him to condemn the Southern leaders for "forcing secession."¹³¹ Upon the outbreak of the war, since he was now a citizen of Pennsylvania, he felt bound to give his support to the government of the United States. Although he remained loyal to the Union he strongly disagreed with the policies of Lincoln. John fervently denounced the actions of the Federal Government in forcing the South to remain a part of the Union and also resented Lincoln's suspension of the writ of Habeas Corpus.¹³² If men who remained loyal to the United States despised Lincoln for what they chose to characterize as his radical stance on slavery and the actions that he and his administration took against the Southern states, it is no wonder that John's brother Thomas, who had not resided in Philadelphia so long, or those who remained in his native state of Kentucky, could be motivated by their hatred of the President.

Thomas Bullitt had another brother, Joshua, still residing in Kentucky who also took a Union stance and sat on Kentucky's Court of Appeals. He remained a strong supporter of the Union cause until after Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation. Upon entering Kentucky

¹³⁰ Bullitt, *Some Recollections of the War*, 10.

¹³¹ *Ibid*, 2-4.

¹³² *Ibid*, 5.

on a raid in John Hunt Morgan's army, Thomas Bullitt came into contact with Judge Duvall, a friend of Joshua's. Duvall informed Thomas of his brother's change of heart in his absence. Joshua had turned an about face in his attitude toward the Federal Government and had become "about as staunch a rebel as Judge Duvall or myself."¹³³ It seemed that Lincoln's proclamation on slavery, as well as other events, had convinced him that the war no longer sought to preserve the Constitution and the Union, but rather had become a conquest of the South. Thomas believed that Joshua could have done immense good for the Confederacy had he immediately gone south at this time and enlisted. At only forty or forty one years old he could have provided great influence. Yet, as was the case with many other Kentucky men, he felt that his duty lay elsewhere. He instead became involved in "some serious complications" which resulted in imprisonment and then exile for many years.¹³⁴

Thomas Bullitt along with many from Kentucky and throughout the United States had hoped that something might be done to end the war quickly or to find a solution for peace. He even held out this hope after the First Battle of Manassas, believing that something could be done to prevent any further bloodshed. He became alarmed with President Lincoln's 1861 annual message to Congress and with the legislative branch's response. Those steps, Thomas later wrote, rid him of the illusion that reunion might be achieved peacefully by what would have amounted to a northern surrender to Southern demands. Now, as Thomas saw it, "War, war and war [was] the purpose of the administration in the North." Like his brother John, Thomas found great fault with Lincoln's suspension of the writ of habeas corpus. "A Reign of absolute terror had been established," he later wrote.¹³⁵

¹³³ Ibid, 48.

¹³⁴ Ibid.

¹³⁵ Bullitt, *Diary*, 11.

Edward O. Guerrant, a newly minted officer in the Confederate Army followed the lead of one of his superiors and referred in his diary to rainy days as “Lincoln weather.”¹³⁶ In 1862 he transcribed an account of the situation in Kentucky given by a fellow soldier, Josh. He described a scene of Lincoln rule in the state, in which the situation had become so bad that it did not even permit exaggeration.¹³⁷ He even marked the second anniversary of the day Lincoln became President with a bitter outburst: “O what years! What ruin he has wrought! Centuries will not repair it. Only half his time expired. In the other half he may make Earth a Pandemonium.”¹³⁸ Guerrant believed at first that the war would end with the expiration of Lincoln’s term in office, as he considered Lincoln the cause. Lincoln would not see the end of the war in his term so that the ending of the disgraceful war would remain on someone else’s hands. Guerrant could see no reason for continuing it.¹³⁹

Still, as much as Edward Guerrant despised Abraham Lincoln, as well as the Republican Party and their policies, and blamed Lincoln for the war, it seemed that he despised McClellan even more. On September 19, 1864 he wrote of his desire for Lincoln to beat McClellan in the upcoming presidential election. Yet he realized that this put a very bleak outlook on any hopes that he had for peace.¹⁴⁰

Henry Boyd and his brother William, who grew up in Kentucky but lived in Texas during the outbreak of the Civil War, also placed blame on Lincoln. William seemed to see the South and slavery as going together hand in hand. In 1860 he hoped that whoever the Democrats chose to run for president would “be a good & true man possessing sound

¹³⁶ William C. Davis and Meredith L. Swentor, ed. *Bluegrass Confederate: The Headquarters Diary of Edward O. Guerrant* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1999), 69.

¹³⁷ *Ibid.* 131.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*, 225.

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*, 255.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 528.

principals of Democracy and having an eye single to the welfare of our Southern institutions that he may be a man the whole South will concentrate on and vote as a unit.”¹⁴¹ In February 1861, in a letter to his family still in Kentucky, Henry did not think that the bad political state of the country would ever cause the two sides to come to blows, that is, unless Lincoln interfered. He feared that Lincoln would try to coerce the Southern States, which in his view would lead to war.¹⁴² When Henry Boyd and his brother enlisted in the Confederate Army in May of 1861 he still believed that his services would not be needed. Instead, he felt that those closer to the “seat of war” would see the fighting and that a great amount of preparation would take place, but with no fighting.¹⁴³

A native of Bath County, Kentucky, Henry Lane Stone spent the second half of his childhood in Putnam County, Indiana. At the time of the 1860 presidential election he had lived in the state for nine years and at the age of eighteen he campaigned heavily in his county for John C. Breckinridge. Stone proclaimed to be an intense supporter of states’ rights and therefore with the onset of war enlisted in the Confederate army to serve “that cause, which I believed to be right.” This sentiment apparently did not encompass his entire family, as three of his brothers served in the Federal army.¹⁴⁴

As did many other men at the time, Lane put aside his studies to fight. Like Thomas Bullitt had studied law, and both poured themselves into the study of the Constitution and believed in an ideology which they thought the Constitution supported, that of states’ rights. On September 18, 1862, Stone left the opposing views of his family and state to return to

¹⁴¹ Letter, August 24, 1860 to Bro. and Relatives from W.M. Boyd, Boyd-Wilson-Wherritt Papers, 97SC205, Kentucky Historical Society, Frankfort, Kentucky.

¹⁴² Letter February 13, 1861 to Ma from H. W. Boyd, Boyd-Wilson-Wherritt Paper, 97SC205, Kentucky Historical Society, Frankfort, Kentucky.

¹⁴³ Letter, May 29, 1861 to Mother and Family from Henry W. Boyd, Boyd-Wilson-Wherritt Papers, 97SC205, Kentucky Historical Society, Frankfort, Kentucky.

¹⁴⁴ Henry Lane Stone. *Morgan’s Men*, Regimental Histories, Mary Couets Library, Texas Christian University, Fort Worth, Texas, 4.

Kentucky in search of the Confederate army. He returned to his birthplace of Bath County the next week. Then on October 7, 1862 Henry Lane Stone enlisted in the Confederate army at Sharpsburg, Kentucky, joining a company composed of his boyhood schoolmates that belonged to Major Robert Stoner's battalion of cavalry.¹⁴⁵

At the beginning of the war the state lost some who had previously supported the Union, abandoning their earlier stance to fight for the Confederacy. In 1860, Robert W. Hanson won a seat in the legislature through his strong support of the Union against Kentucky's fire-eaters. With the beginning of hostilities between the North and South, he spoke against secession. Yet his fears of federal encroachments caused him to have a change of heart. Hanson first made the transition to neutrality and then eventually to support the Confederacy. He felt that the Southern people were his people and shared in the beliefs of their institutions as well. "He stood firmly by the Constitution of his country, and could not quietly submit to seeing its powers transcended for the purpose of achieving designs inimical to any section; and as events began to develop themselves, they unfolded to his clear insight the purposes of the administration. He now paused in his opposition to the Southern movement, and found himself compelled, as he seemed to consider it, to choose between two evils." Hanson made his choice for the less of the two evils. His connection to the Southern people and their institutions led him to side with the Confederacy. Then on August 19, 1861, this former Union man was commissioned a colonel in the Confederate army and, shortly after, took command of the Second Kentucky.¹⁴⁶

Politicians were more than plentiful among Kentuckians who took up the Confederate cause. Another of them was John C. Breckinridge. Breckinridge lost his father at an early

¹⁴⁵ Ibid, 5-6.

¹⁴⁶ Davis, *The Orphan Brigade*, 40; Ed Porter Thompson. *History of the Orphan Brigade* (Santa Maria: Janaway Publishing, 2004, 1898) 376.

age, and his uncle Robert J. Breckinridge stepped in to help John's mother in raising him. Robert Breckinridge was a nationally known Presbyterian minister and a strong supporter of emancipation.¹⁴⁷ At the outbreak of the Civil War he had two sons in the Confederate army and one in the Federal Army.¹⁴⁸ After the election of 1860, John C. Breckinridge was attacked as a secessionist and a friend of slavery, though according to his leading biographer, William C. Davis, neither charge was true. Breckinridge according to Davis, "was strict in his construction of the Constitution."¹⁴⁹

After his term as vice president expired, the state elected Breckinridge to the Senate.¹⁵⁰ During this stay in Washington D.C., Thomas Bullitt paid him a visit. Breckinridge thoroughly impressed Bullitt with his knowledge of his constituents and outlined to him "what seemed almost prophetic foresight the course of events in Kentucky." He told Bullitt that the state would not secede, since too strong a division of opinion existed among Kentucky's leading men. He also felt that the young men of Kentucky would begin entering the opposing armies according to their own views.¹⁵¹ Still, Breckinridge continued to speak often for calm, compromise, and for federal recognition of states' rights. He promoted neutrality for the state and worked to maintain Kentucky's position. His son left for Camp Boone during this period of neutrality and enlisted in the Second Kentucky, C.S.A. against the wishes of his father. During the same time John Breckinridge planned a series of "peace picnics" where he spoke for neutrality. Still, by the end of August, events spiraled out of control. Although he did not identify with secessionists, powerful Union men within

¹⁴⁷ Ibid, 41.

¹⁴⁸ John B. Castleman. *Active Service*, Civil War Unit Histories, Mary Coats Burnett Library, Texas Christian University, Fort Worth, Texas, 41.

¹⁴⁹ Davis, *The Orphan Brigade*, 41-43.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid, 42.

¹⁵¹ Bullitt, *Some Recollections*, 12.

the state were convinced otherwise. Even if he was not for secession they did not want someone of his popularity to stand in their way of linking the state with the Union. They became determined to arrest Breckinridge early in September and although the plan failed and would not be renewed, he quickly found himself on the defensive. With this he left for Frankfort to meet with close friends, some of them Union men, where he revealed that he knew that the South could not succeed, yet he also knew that if he spoke in favor of the Lincoln administration he could expect to be rewarded, possibly with a command in the United States army. Still, Breckinridge knew that he could not do this. He felt he must stand for neutrality until the very end.¹⁵²

The end of neutrality loosened the restraints that had bound Federal military men and the next day they issued orders for Breckinridge's arrest. He received a warning of this plan and escaped, forced to leave the Union that he had loved since his birth and then saw no other home but the Confederacy. Left behind in Kentucky were the men who had forced him to leave that then bragged they were right all along. Because he left they felt that they had confirmed their beliefs. Still no one seemed to take notice that Breckinridge had not previously left on his own accord, but, according to Davis, left the state only when forced to do so.¹⁵³

Many Kentuckians were raised by parents who loved the Union and sought to instill the same love in their children. Yet their love for the Union never overcame their crusade to keep the institution of slavery. Born in Henderson County and raised in Louisville, Kentucky, Johnny Green learned at a young age to love the Union. His mother, from Boston, was the daughter of a United States Congressman and instilled this love in her son. Green

¹⁵² Davis, *The Orphan Brigade*, 42-43.

¹⁵³ *Ibid*, 43-44.

hoped that dissolution might be prevented but he felt that coercion was “fratricidal and unconstitutional.” When Lincoln issued a call for troops Green believed it was for unconstitutional coercion and “sad as it made me to take up arms against the country I loved I recognized that my first duty was to the cause of Constitutional government.” He went on to fight the next four years in the Confederate army, in theory, at least for the glorious cause of the right of a state to govern itself.¹⁵⁴

In fact, however, Johnny Green’s case – and his motivation – was a bit more complicated than that. His grandfather owned many slaves, and he grew up in close proximity to the institution. In a passage that revealed as much about his own attitudes as it did about the conditions on the Green plantation, he described his grandfather’s slaves as the best and most intelligent sort, “whose lives were made happy by the comforts provided for them, freedom from all responsibility and the knowledge of the fact that their master was one of the best and most important men in the country.” Green himself did not own any slaves at the start of the war as he was not even twenty years old when he enlisted, but the institution had already made a large impact on him.¹⁵⁵

Twice during the war Green’s father was arrested as a Confederate sympathizer, and by December 22, 1864 Green had become very embittered that the Federal army had caused such devastation in the South. Yet more than that he suffered almost unbearably at the thought that the Confederate army had failed so far to hurl them back and show them that coercion was a sin that a wicked and tyrannical majority can never force upon a liberty

¹⁵⁴ A.D. Kirwan, ed. *Johnny Green of the Orphan Brigade: The Journal of a Confederate Soldier* (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 1984) 7.

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 3.

loving people. He felt that because the Confederate cause was just, God would not let it fail.¹⁵⁶

Even those native Kentuckians who had left the state to make their home elsewhere joined with their fellow Kentuckians to fight. Adam Rankin Johnson, born in Henderson, Kentucky, had moved to Texas in 1854, at the age of twenty. When Texas seceded from the Union and began forming military companies, Adam's two brothers Ben and Thomas attached themselves to a battery while two of his friends left for their native states. Each told Johnson to remain home with his new wife, only sixteen years old. He did not heed their advice and instead made preparations to make her comfortable for at least a year and began his trip to Kentucky.¹⁵⁷

He planned to visit his parents, still in Henderson, before doing anything else. They were both Unionists, and two of his brothers had enlisted in the Federal army. When Johnson arrived in Bowling Green, Kentucky he found a number of his old friends attached to Graves' Battery, C.S.A. His friends tried to convince him to cast his lot with them, but he declined and continued his trip. In Hopkinsville, Johnson came into contact with Nathan Bedford Forrest, in command of the cavalry force there. Colonel Forrest reminded him of his father and seemed like a born leader. At once Johnson decided to follow him. Johnson enlisted in the Texas Company of Forrest's command and became one of Forrest's main scouts.¹⁵⁸

When Johnson finally arrived in Henderson he called on his two brothers in the Federal army. The three "walked and slept and talked freely together, there being no

¹⁵⁶ Ibid, 184.

¹⁵⁷ Adam R. Johnson, *The Partisan Rangers of the Confederate States Army*, Civil War Unit Histories, Mary Coats Burnett Library, Texas Christian University, Fort Worth, Texas, 1-2, 38.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid, 38-39.

concealment on my part as to my military connections,” although in war they were enemies, nothing could break their familial ties. There even seemed a brotherly understanding that they would do all that they could to protect each other during the war.¹⁵⁹

During this visit to Henderson Johnson’s true feelings toward Yankees came forth. One Sunday morning before he returned to the Confederate army he accompanied his mother to church. Along the way, part of the walkway was covered with a double row of planks. A number of ladies walked ahead of him and his mother, ahead of the ladies, and moving in their direction, was a company of soldiers, marching by twos with locked arms. As they passed the women the soldiers forced them off of the walkway and into the mud. Johnson declared, “All the chivalry and gallantry of my nature and education as a Kentuckian rebelled at this indignity.” Furiously he exclaimed to his mother that this revealed what kind of men the Northern army was composed of.¹⁶⁰

On August 11, 1862 Johnson revealed his true sentiments as he entered the state with only three men and recruited a battalion called the Buckner Guards. Commanding the battalion, Johnson issued a proclamation to the citizens of Kentucky. “For the love of liberty, and the homes of those you hold dearer than all, will you stand still and inactive, while the enemies of your country are attempting to fetter your wrists and consign you to slavery . . . The Lincoln Government, while pretending protection, is despoiling you of your property, and robbing you of your liberty.” A hatred of Yankees and their lack of chivalry coupled with a strong resentment for the Lincoln administration proved motivation enough for

¹⁵⁹ Ibid, 48.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid, 51.

Johnson to fight. Although he did not give his life for the cause he did give his sight, losing both eyes in the war.¹⁶¹

A soldier in the Seventh Kentucky Infantry, C.S.A. quoted Horace Greely from the New York Tribune, revealing the entire country's view toward secession. In an article written just three days after Lincoln's election Greely wrote, "If the cotton states shall become satisfied that they can do better out of the Union than in it, we insist in letting them go in peace. The right to secede may still be a revolutionary one, but it exists nevertheless. We must ever resist the right of any State to remain in the Union and nullify or defy the laws thereof. To withdraw from the Union is quite another matter, and wherever a considerable section of the Union shall deliberately resolve to go out, we shall resist all coercive measures designed to keep it in. We hope never to live in a republic whereof one section is pinned to another by bayonets." According to this soldier, during the first century that the United States existed, this idea became prevalent. The idea is one that he took hold of and led him to enlist and fight so that the South would not be forced into remaining a part of the Union.¹⁶²

Many who left their homes in Kentucky to fight for the state's enemy did so based on their political ideologies. These men fought with "the conviction that the War was one of conquest, designed to destroy her most cherished theory of government."¹⁶³ Yet none of these men defined the South's theory of government, held so dear that they laid their life on the line for it. Although many expressed their strong support of states' rights and their fear that the South would lose its independence, they did not elaborate. There seemed to be an unspoken understanding between these men of just what defined the Southern theory of

¹⁶¹ Ibid, 110, 174.

¹⁶² Henry George. *History of the 3d, 7th, 8th and 12th Kentucky C.S.A.*, Civil War Unit Histories, Mary Couets Burnett Library, Texas Christian University, Fort Worth, Texas, 11.

¹⁶³ Bullitt, *Some Recollections of the War*, 10.

government, states' rights, and Southern independence, the unspoken meaning can most likely be found in their support of the Southern institution of slavery. To these Kentuckians who fought for the Confederacy the Southern theory of government and slavery were one and the same.

Though these men each joined the Confederate army amongst very different circumstances, they all fought for similar reasons. Many fought for the idea of states' rights, held onto so tightly by Southern men. Some completely despised their northern counterparts, each for their own reason. Still others simply disagreed with Lincoln and his administration, blaming him for the war that they took part in, feeling that had he only let them be, that there would have never been a war. Whatever their exact justification for enlisting in the ranks of the Confederate army these men shared a similar political vision that gave them a cause, and in their eyes, a cause worth giving their lives for.

Chapter 4

“The Bloody Altar of Freedom’s Cause”

Many Kentuckians fought for reasons other than politics or contempt for the North and Lincoln. Some enlisted in the Confederate army seeking to settle personal grudges or for adventure. Getting revenge was a motivation for some who felt they had been wronged by the North or the Union army to enlist, for others a desire for revenge kept them going once the battles began. Others were moved by a deep patriotism in their country, which they identified as the Confederate States of America. Although Kentucky chose to remain with the Union they felt that the South was their home. They believed it their duty to defend this home and therefore crossed enemy lines into the South, to be separated from their families for years in order to defend the honor of the country that they identified as their own.

Federal soldiers robbed Henry Bullitt, the younger brother of Thomas Bullitt, twice in 1861 while encamped near Crescent Hill on the Shelbyville turnpike. They overcrowded his wagon on his way home from Louisville, stealing fifteen dollars the first time and eleven dollars the second. Henry quickly made a decision to even up the score with them at the first opportunity presented to him.¹⁶⁴

Henry, far from alone in this intention, was joined by other thrill seekers in the Confederate army. These men typically entered the cavalry, some under the command of the famed John Hunt Morgan, accompanying him on raids into their native state and even into Indiana, while others enlisted in the cavalry commanded by Nathan Bedford Forrest. Still some sought adventure in the infantry. All of these men surely got more than they bargained

¹⁶⁴ Henry M. Bullitt, October 2, 1906, 1, Bullitt Family Papers, Filson Historical Society, Manuscript Collections, Louisville, Kentucky.

for, still if they sought adventure they surely found it during their service in the Confederate army.

According to his older brother Thomas, Henry was at this time not yet twenty one. Though underage, he desperately desired to enlist in the army, but Thomas advised him that until he turned twenty one he had to respect their mother's wishes. Reluctantly he had agreed to remain at home. The day before Thomas left to go south their mother asked if there remained any possibility of changing his mind. When Thomas told her there was not, she decided that he should not go alone and withdrew her objection to Henry going. Their brother Jim came home to pursue his study for the ministry there, although he was destined to join the Confederate ranks as well.¹⁶⁵

Henry headed south with Thomas to join the Confederate Army as soldiers in John Hunt Morgan's cavalry. Both planned to enlist as privates. Along their trip they encountered something they had not expected. While traveling through Tennessee they stopped for dinner at a house alongside the road. There they found a man, wounded a few weeks before at Shiloh or Fort Donelson. The young man described how a rifle ball had entered the upper part of the thigh striking the bone and then scraped down it until almost to the knee. It then passed out striking the bone of the other leg just above the knee and scraping it upwards towards the thigh. Both of his legs were withered and to Thomas it seemed that nothing remained except the shriveled skin upon them. At this moment Thomas and Henry came to the realization that "War might mean something far worse than death."¹⁶⁶

The two finally reached the army and having already decided which command to join before they left Louisville, they sought out Morgan. Once in Mississippi they learned that

¹⁶⁵ Bullitt, *Some Recollections*, 23.

¹⁶⁶ Bullitt, *Some Recollections of the War*, 28.

Morgan's command had gone to Knoxville, Tennessee. Colonel Nathan Bedford Forrest was preparing to start for Tennessee and would be escorted by a body guard that Henry and Thomas were permitted to join. During the trip Tommie Mayes, serving in Adams's Cavalry regiment under Forrest, tried to discourage them from joining Morgan. He explained how Adams had an easy going personality and did not give his boys any hard work, leaving them much freedom. In the country they had passed through of late good food and pretty girls seemed plentiful. In stark contrast, Mayes explained, Morgan's command went around fighting all the time. This, to Mayes's surprise, proved an ineffective argument to those seeking an adventurous command such as Morgan's.¹⁶⁷

Soldiering in Morgan's command proved difficult. Every man who served with him found Mayes interpretation completely true. Service under Morgan required courage, "endurance, submission, hardship to labor," and loss of sleep.¹⁶⁸ Many of his cavalrymen proved wild and reckless, and had all the makings of adventurers. They rode day and night, often without sleep, food, tents, wagons or cooking utensils. Many times they would lie down on the wet ground already drenched, to steal a few hours of sleep.¹⁶⁹ Many sought Morgan's command. His career became known throughout the South and especially in Kentucky, drawing the admiration of many young Kentuckians. Fascinated by Morgan and his daring cavalry raids into Kentucky Henry and Thomas made the decision to serve under him largely in order to get in on that adventure.¹⁷⁰

William Milton began serving the Confederate Army before he formally enlisted. Along with other members of the Lexington Rifles he lent a hand in the removal of John

¹⁶⁷ Ibid, 30, 32, 35.

¹⁶⁸ Thomas Bullitt, *Eulogy of Jim Mitchell*, 3, Filson Historical Society, Louisville, Kentucky.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid, 3-4.

¹⁷⁰ Bullitt, *Some Recollections of the War*, 32.

Hunt Morgan and his weapons from the state of Kentucky. Milton states that due General Braxton Bragg's invasion of Kentucky during September 1862 the Union army occupied the state. An Ohio regiment hastily left Richmond, Kentucky and left behind tents, blankets, guns and knapsacks. When examining the knapsacks Milton found in each a vial of arsenic. Several of Mr. Adam's, on whose land the Union regiment had set up camp, cows had died after drinking water from the stock tank. Milton concluded that the Union soldiers must have thrown the arsenic into the tank in order to destroy the herd of cattle. This heinous act led Milton to seek revenge. He first lent he aid to the Confederate army when he collected the supplies left behind by the Ohio regiment and passed them on to the colonel of the Thirteenth Arkansas. Although he was anxious to enlist in the Southern Army to have his revenge on the Yankee soldiers, at only eighteen years of age he waited until he could tell his mother because of a promise made to her. With that obligation fulfilled he took the first chance he got to enlist in Morgan's cavalry.¹⁷¹

The cavalry seemed a favorite for many adventurous Kentucky youth whether cavalry was what the cause needed or not. By September of 1862 young Kentuckians had flocked to the cavalry in numbers the Confederacy found embarrassing. When Humphrey Marshall sought to raise another regiment, Edmund Kirby Smith sent a sharp reply that more cavalry was already in the field than could be used advantageously. Instead he told Marshall that he should attempt to enlist infantry and decline cavalry.¹⁷² Five days later Marshall replied that

¹⁷¹ William Agan Milton, *Some Recollections of the War Between the States*, 3-4, Special Collections, Kentucky Historical Society, Frankfort, Kentucky.

¹⁷² Edmund Kirby-Smith to Brig. Gen. Humphrey Marshall, September 7, 1862, Edmund Kirby-Smith Papers, Filson Historical Society, Louisville, Kentucky.

President Davis had authorized him to raise a regiment of cavalry and if Smith had more men than he wanted, then he could turn the applicants over to Marshall.¹⁷³

This problem of overly plentiful horsemen existed early in the war as many men sought the perceived excitement of mounted service. Even those who had fought in the infantry wished to make the move to horseback. Johnny Green's regiment, the Sixth Kentucky originally enlisted for twelve months. After their initial enlistment ended, every man in the regiment wanted to join John Hunt Morgan. General John C. Breckinridge formed them on dress parade and proceeded to explain that their country could not spare them from the infantry service. One man cried out, "Lets reenlist for thirty years or during the war," and the regiment met his declaration with a shout of approval. The papers were drawn up and each signed to remain for three years or during the war.¹⁷⁴

George Dallas Mosgrove explained that for many Kentucky boys the thought of going into the infantry was disgusting. The Confederate government rarely furnished the cavalryman with clothes or arms and never furnished their horse. They expecting the soldier to obtain these things from the enemy, which he usually did. Because he had to provide his own horse he typically took good care of it. The cavalryman often had four days rations in his haversack, but just as often ate them in one day. Yet he remained "more provident for his horse than for himself."¹⁷⁵ The typical Confederate cavalryman as defined by Mosgrove "was a daring, reckless, happy-go-lucky, sufficient-unto-the-day-is-the-evil-thereof sort of a fellow."¹⁷⁶ Since the Rebel riders did not have their horses furnished for them, loss of a mount meant involuntary transfer to the infantry. That fit perfectly with Morgan's style of

¹⁷³ Humphrey Marshall to Edmund Kirby Smith, September 12, 1862, Filson Historical Society, Louisville, Kentucky.

¹⁷⁴ Kirwan, *Johnny Green of the Orphan Brigade*, 49-50.

¹⁷⁵ Mosgrove, *Kentucky Cavaliers in Dixie: Reminiscences of a Confederate Cavalryman*, 61.

¹⁷⁶ *Ibid*, 61-62.

warfare. Besides that, the Kentucky cavalryman always longed to go into Kentucky, and Morgan often made this possible on his raids.¹⁷⁷

Yet cavalry was not the only resort of Kentucky adventure-seekers. Some Kentuckians did not mind being in the infantry. In early 1861, C. A. Withers was the captain of a company of State Guard consisting of thirty two boys from his hometown. At the age of eighteen, sensing that war could break out at any moment he spoke to his company inquiring who would go with him to join the Confederate Army. Eighteen other young men, all fearing the war would end before they could get there, hurried to Virginia. Along the way he recruited enough men to make up a full company that enlisted in the First Kentucky Battalion. As soon as Withers joined the army he went to have his first picture taken as a Confederate soldier with, as he put it, an “expression of gore and blood in my eyes, as if I wanted ten Yankees before breakfast, to give me an appetite!” Yet a few months later the original lust for adventure had worn off after a few skirmishes and one intense battle. Now he would exchange a pistol for a pair of boots, give another to a new comer, use his bowie knife to cut up salt pork and rather than wanting ten Yankees before breakfast, “I wanted one after supper, and wanted him exceedingly small!”¹⁷⁸ First ordered to Maryland Heights, the First Kentucky Battalion arrived without tents. Yet coming from comfortable backgrounds Withers stated that “the boys enjoyed ‘roughing it,’ immensely.”¹⁷⁹

John S. Jackman of the First Kentucky Brigade left home on a spur of the moment decision. On September 26, 1861 he left his home to go to the depot for the daily paper. There he met his friend William Stoner who said to Jackman, “Let us go to Bloomfield to-

¹⁷⁷ Ibid, 61-63.

¹⁷⁸ C.A. Withers, *Humor and Pathos*, 4, Southern Historical Collection, UNC-Chapel Hill.

¹⁷⁹ Ibid.

night, and join the party going through to Dixie!”¹⁸⁰ Jackman had not considered going prior to this encounter, not knowing if his health would permit him to do so, but at once made up his mind to go with his friend. He went home and put on a heavy suit of clothes, trying to slip out without his parents knowing. The very next morning at Camp “Charity” Jackman was put on guard and for the first time proudly “buckled on my armor” – that is, put on the accoutrements of a soldier¹⁸¹

Jackman had an encounter during the war like many others. On May 15, 1864 as darkness came a line of skirmishers were sent a short distance over the works to watch the enemy. As the Federal skirmishers advanced the two groups came within speaking distance of each other and agreed not to fire on the other. Yet instead of trading coffee and tobacco they held a conversation. Discovering that Kentuckians made up both groups they each spent the time inquiring about friends that fought for the other army.¹⁸²

Whether they experienced it on foot or in the saddle, the war provided the opportunity for many experiences that were a far cry from the everyday lives of Kentuckians. If these men – and many others like them - had an idea of the ideological differences over which the Union and the Confederacy were waging war they left no record of it in their letters and diaries. Adventure proved a strong motivation for many Kentuckians who served as Confederate soldiers, yet as a whole, for Kentuckians it seemed less of a motivating factor than others such as political ideologies and a sense of duty. Still, those seeking adventure simply fought because of the times that they lived in. War broke out and they would not be

¹⁸⁰ William C. Davis, ed. *Diary of a Confederate Soldier: John S. Jackman of the Orphan Brigade* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1990), 12.

¹⁸¹ *Ibid*, 13, 15.

¹⁸² *Ibid*, 125.

left behind to hear the tales of war from others. In their youth these men sought what would become the adventure of a lifetime.

Thirst for adventure was not the only non-ideological motivation for Kentucky Confederates. Some residents of the Bluegrass State went to war because they believed that their honor was at stake. In the Victorian time in which they lived they had to fight as a matter of duty. Not to do so would have revealed a lack of manliness. Victorian Americans understood that duty was a binding moral obligation involving reciprocity, argued James McPherson, “one had a duty to defend the flag under whose protection one had lived.” Confederate soldiers more often mentioned honor. To suffer dishonor meant to be publicly shamed.¹⁸³

Not only a duty to their country but also to God. From the state that sparked the Great Revival came many religious men who believed their cause to be that of God’s. If God believed the South’s cause just then they could not lose. Yet both sides believed that they fought for a holy cause against an evil enemy and felt they were fulfilling their duty to God and country.¹⁸⁴

John Breckinridge Castleman was born on June 13, 1841 in Fayette County, Kentucky. Castleman felt that “nowhere is found a land with a people more attractive or more loyal. A Kentuckian is always a Kentuckian.” Yet in 1861 this meant very different things for different people. For Castleman and his two younger brothers it meant leaving home to fight for the Confederate army.¹⁸⁵

In Lexington prior to the war there were two local military companies, Morgan’s Lexington Rifles and another commanded by Captain Sanders D. Bruce and called the

¹⁸³ McPherson, *For Cause and Comrades*, 23.

¹⁸⁴ *Ibid*, 72.

¹⁸⁵ Castleman, *Active Service*, 60

Lexington Chasseurs. At the outbreak of war the two companies took opposite allegiance, with Morgan and most of his command going south, while Bruce's Chasseurs sided with the Union. Some of the Chasseurs Followed Morgan, however, Castleman included.¹⁸⁶

Castleman, a corporal in the Lexington Chasseurs, prepared to give his "life to the Confederate cause." Once he returned to Bowling Green, John C. Breckinridge swore him in and Castleman set out to raise a company for John Hunt Morgan's cavalry. One by one he recruited soldiers from Fayette County and he then set the date to meet at his mother's house. Forty one men assembled – average age, less than twenty years old. His mother's only request was that John leave Humphreys, her next youngest son, and George, only thirteen, with her for the time. She expressed her purpose to send Humphreys later and then George as well, if the war continued, when he had grown big enough to carry an army rifle.¹⁸⁷

The night after Castleman left with his company, a detachment of United States infantry surrounded his mother's house. They arrested Humphreys and sent him to Johnson's Island as a political prisoner. While there he answered to a dead prisoner's name, was exchanged, and then served in Morgan's cavalry until the end of the war. His youngest brother George also eventually enlisted and served with his brother in Company D of the Second Kentucky Cavalry.¹⁸⁸

During the middle of July 1862, Castleman experienced his first independent command and fight. This fight, although in some ways much like others that he experienced throughout the war, proved much different in others. It occurred as Morgan's cavalry was in Kentucky on one of its famed raids. After Castleman's Company D had marched on the Iron Works Road for about two miles they halted about 800 yards from an intersection known as

¹⁸⁶ Ibid, 73.

¹⁸⁷ Ibid, 73, 77, 92.

¹⁸⁸ Ibid, 79, 100.

Taylor's Crossroads near Lexington. There they encountered three boys known by Castleman who informed him a Union cavalry brigade was approaching from Lexington and was even now at the crossroads, less than half a mile ahead. The Federal horsemen numbered some 2,000, along with a battery of artillery, under the overall command of Colonel Leonidas Metcalf. The battery commander, Captain Henry T. Duncan, had been a boyhood friend of Castleman's. The Confederate officer described Duncan as a lovable boy and man who had grown up only four miles from Castleman's own boyhood home. Their experience in this fight was all too common for Kentuckians in this war, that of fighting against someone that they cared deeply about. "We exemplified the horrors of a civil war by opposing each other in hostile armies, he with his Parrott guns to defend against the assault of the cavalry led by me, and with me were a number of Captain Duncan's neighborhood boy friends." Still, they remained friends and kept in touch after the war ended.¹⁸⁹

In September 1861 as Kentucky abandoned its stance of armed neutrality, Union men forced John C. Breckinridge out of the state. In his farewell address Breckinridge told the people "I go where my duty calls me."¹⁹⁰ In this statement he shared a sentiment with many of the men who had already, or were destined to, leave the state for the Confederate army, many of whom had voted for him in the previous election. Breckinridge was destined to have a strong bond with these men, his fellow Kentuckians, who left, unlike him, on their own accord. Yet although they ultimately left the state for different reasons, they fought for many of the same. They shared a common patriotism for their Southern heritage and fought out of a sense of duty. They viewed the South as their country, having grown up with its institution of slavery and having been brought up to love the region as their own, this gave

¹⁸⁹ Ibid, 81-83.

¹⁹⁰ Davis, *The Orphan Brigade*, 43.

them the motivation to enlist in the Confederate army in defense of their home and their family of Southerners.

As early as December of 1861 Sue Dixon, the sister of Henry and Thomas Bullitt, seemed very disappointed in the Southern sympathizers in Kentucky. These secessionists had looked forward to the arrival of the Confederate Army, but once the army arrived they began speaking of running from it. Of course Sue mentioned the “honorable exceptions,” those men who would fight for their cause rather than just talking for it. Even the women, left behind in war so that their men could pursue their duty to fight, felt that those who did not stand up for their beliefs acted in a dishonorable manner. It is no wonder that men enlisted because they feared that their peers would look down on them as men without honor if they did not fight.¹⁹¹

Many men who left behind their Union state of Kentucky to fight for the Southern cause did so for love of their country, for honor, and out of a sense of duty. Many who had ties to slavery or hoped to own them identified the South as their country. If the South lost, the only way of life that they had known would be taken away. They fought to protect their country, the Confederacy, with a government that sought to save their peculiar institution and the Southern way of life. In doing so their hopes of future prosperity through the institution would also be protected and they would not have to live a life with African Americans as their equals, instead they would keep them where they felt that they would be better protected. Because they believed in these things they felt that they had to stand of and fight. They had a duty to defend their belief system alongside those that shared it, if they did not they feared they would be dishonored.

¹⁹¹ Sue Dixon to , December 22, 1861, Bullitt Family Papers, Filson Historical Society, Louisville, Kentucky.

Even some who had moved beyond the place of their childhood returned to defend a cause that they believed just. Thomas Bullitt had become a citizen of Pennsylvania while living there with his older brother and his family. Yet he did not consider any allegiance due to that state. “Kentucky was my birth place; the South was my home.”¹⁹² But he did not leave for Kentucky immediately, later regretting his decision to respect the original position of neutrality because of his loyalty to states rights could not allow him, at the time, to go against the voice of his native state. From his study of the Constitution, Thomas did not believe states had the right to nullify acts of Congress or to renounce the Union. Instead he believed in the right of revolution and because of this view he eventually decided it his duty to cast his lot with the people of the South, the people of his home.¹⁹³

Thomas Bullitt made the decision to return to Kentucky after Albert Sidney Johnston took possession of Bowling Green. His brother released him from his obligation of working for him and he wrote home informing his mother that he would be home for Christmas. His mother, Mildred Bullitt, either guessed his intentions or else figured that if he did come home the excitement would soon persuade him to join the army. So she instead went to Philadelphia to join him. This forced Thomas to remain until her visit ended in April, at which time he returned with her. Rather than going straight to the Confederacy to enlist in the army he went to Kentucky. He did this in order to resume his citizenship in Kentucky so that he did not subject himself to the charge of entering the Confederate army while still a citizen of Pennsylvania. When he reached home his father told him that he would offer no

¹⁹² Bullitt, *Some Recollections of the War*, 8.

¹⁹³ *Ibid*, 7, 9.

advice, that Thomas should make his own decision based upon his own judgment. Although he insisted that Thomas should also act the part of a man of honor.¹⁹⁴

When Thomas and his brother Henry joined the ranks of Morgan's command, they believed they were following their father's advice and acting in an honorable fashion. Although many men voiced their motivation defending their honor, they actually defended their ideologies. For most the ideology that motivated them was the defense of their way of life in the South, slavery. For them to stay at home while others fought to defend a way of life that they valued would cause them to lose honor. When Mr. Bullitt told his sons to act in an honorable fashion he was telling them to stand of and fight for what they believed in.

Thomas felt that the talents which he possessed were strictly in the profession of law and so he had no desires to command. In what he perceived as his duty in serving what he perceived as his country, he felt that he would fulfill it as a private, offering his service and possibly his life in defense of it. He also commended the young men entering the Confederate Army who he believed mostly entered with a disregard for rank. It was common to see men in the army whose social position at home was above that of their officers. "Yet," in Thomas Bullitt's words, written long after the war, "no disciplined army ever gave more loyal or ready obedience to their officers than did these soldiers on the field of battle or on the march."¹⁹⁵

On January 30, 1862 Edward O. Guerrant learned of a position secured for him as a secretary to General Humphrey Marshall. After much consideration and in "consulting my wishes more perhaps than judgment & friends" he made the decision to go in to the army

¹⁹⁴ Ibid, 21-22.

¹⁹⁵ Ibid, 31.

with his friend Peter Everett who had been in town on furlough.¹⁹⁶ He chose to try his luck in a field where “honor & patriotism” called him. Guerrant had been teaching at a school with thirty three students where he made fifty dollars a month and had a nice boarding house, with, he believed, everything his heart could desire, “except the consciousness of not fulfilling my duty to my country.” Guerrant came from a highly educated family. His father was a doctor and Edward Guerrant hoped to go into the ministry.¹⁹⁷ He did not identify with the South because of agricultural ties, but whether his family owned slaves or not, he grew up in a close proximity to them. He was a native of Bath County where slaves made up twenty percent of their population, although only four hundred and twenty five men or three percent of the county’s population owned slaves. Most of these men only owned a small number of slaves. For Guerrant slavery did not make him a Confederate, but rather patriotism for a region of the country that he identified with. His family had migrated to Kentucky from Virginia and therefore always maintained their Southern identity leading him to call the Confederacy his country.¹⁹⁸

On February 12, 1862 General Marshall swore Guerrant into the army of the Confederate States of America. The next morning he awoke as a soldier, although not feeling any more bloodthirsty than the day before. He continued to hold out much hope for the Confederate cause because of its justness. He quickly came to see the horrible nature of war, its trials, hardships, danger, and death. Should white Southerners gain what they believed to be their liberties, they would do so at a great price as every day witnessed the sacrifices of hundreds, even thousands, “laid upon the bloody altar of Freedom’s Cause.” He

¹⁹⁶ Davis, *Bluegrass Confederate: The Headquarters Diary of Edward O. Guerrant*, 14.

¹⁹⁷ *Ibid*, 4, 14-15.

¹⁹⁸ Kenneth H. Williams and James Russell Harris. “Kentucky in 1860: A Statistical Overview,” *The Register of the Kentucky Historical Society* 103, no.4 (Autumn 2005), 749.

believed the South could never be conquered, but Southerners could be slaughtered. He thought that the Kentuckians fighting for the Confederacy deserved a name “on the proudest page of our country’s history” because of their self sacrificing patriotism, courage, and their endurance through the worst of hardships.¹⁹⁹

Men seeking adventure did not make up the entire cavalry. Morgan’s command also included men such as Thomas Bullitt and his friend Jim Mitchell who fought because of their concept of duty. Mitchell “when a boy abandoned the hope of the high education for which he had entered college and cast in his lot with the people he loved.” His love for his fellow Southerners inspired him to fight for their cause. It required manhood to follow John Hunt Morgan as he demanded that from his men. The men making up this command often came from a high position in society, having friends to watch their career. Above all these young men sought to serve for the love of it and out of an eminent sense of duty to their country. They also recognized that a lack of obedience to their officers and without promptness in their performance of duty they would impair the command. All of these men felt the honor of his commander and his command resting upon himself. The sense of duty kept these men going throughout their constant activity, day after day demanding labor, any day demanding the sacrifice of life. The duty to their country, rather than mere ambition, helped these men to continue to perform at their best.²⁰⁰

John Lafferty started south on September 15, 1861 and on October 1, was mustered into service for the Confederate Army. At this time he enlisted for one year of service to his country. On November 6, 1862 he met the terms of his original enlistment and was discharged. Instead of heading home his company immediately, and with few exceptions,

¹⁹⁹ Ibid, 27-28, 31, 35, 37.

²⁰⁰ Bullitt, *Eulogy of Jim Mitchell*, 1, 3, 9.

reenlisted for a term of either four years or the duration of the war. He admitted that by this time all issues had been defined between the North and the South. With this they felt that they served a just cause and therefore willingly pledged their services, and quite possibly their lives, to the Confederate Government.²⁰¹

George W. Johnson, who served as a volunteer aid to General Buckner early in the war, had a hard time thinking of the “crimes and follies” of the war. The price to protect their freedom was high. “Who can estimate correctly the amount of sorrow, and of misery to say nothing of the loss of money, caused by those who wantonly broke down the safeguards of our rights and who determined to make us submit to their will.”²⁰²

Sometimes Johnson worried that the private citizens should be letting the government take care of itself, while they attended to their own business. Still in January 1862 he held an unshakable nerve, and no matter the news he believed that his purpose would not waiver because of the inspiration that it remained his honor and his duty to take up the fight for the Southern Cause.²⁰³

By February 1862, Johnson had determined that this honor and duty should also concern his son. During this month he sent a letter to his wife asking if she could spare him. Johnson told her to give their son up to his country and that God would bless her for doing so. Mrs. Johnson was asked to have faith in God. After months of thought on the subject, George Johnson had chosen to write to her, to ask for this sacrifice on her part, because of a

²⁰¹ John Lafferty, *John Laffery Narratives*, 99SC13, Kentucky Historical Society, Frankfort, Kentucky, 2, 8-9.

²⁰² George W. Johnson Correspondence, Letter October 15, 1861, to ?; Letter January 23, 1862 to My Dear Wife from George W. Johnson, Kentucky Historical Society, Frankfort, Kentucky.

²⁰³ Ibid.

conviction that it should be done and that God would reward them for such a great sacrifice.²⁰⁴

C. G. Edwards described his desire to serve in the Confederate ranks to his mother in the summer of 1861. Edwards felt that he had fallen into a glorious cause. After the First Battle of Manassas he explained that he knew that someone would fall during the battle. Yet he chose to face this head on and hoped that if someone were to fall that it would be him and determined to accept his fate and “bear it without a groan.”²⁰⁵

Lot D. Young remembered that the history of Kentucky Confederates in most cases proved very similar. “All were imbued with the spirit of patriotism and love for the cause in which they had engaged, each determined to do whatever he could to promote and advance the cause in which he was enlisted.” Young enlisted in the Confederate army on September 8, 1861, just four months before his twentieth birthday. Yet for two years before this Young had been a member of the Kentucky State Guard with the “Flat Rock Grays.”²⁰⁶

On September 6, 1861 Young set out on his way to become a Confederate soldier. First he began by substituting his “pumps” for “brogans” which would be more suitable for a soldier’s march. That night he stayed at the Louisville Hotel, but the night was filled with thoughts of the next morning. When morning came he went downstairs and flipped through the pages of the newspaper. Young felt terror stricken when he found that General William T. Sherman was stopping there. His fears were then intensified when a middle age man who had been eying him walked across the room, put his hand on Young’s shoulder and asked

²⁰⁴ Letter, February 15, 1862, to My most beloved, my Dear Wife from George W. Johnson, George W. Johnson Correspondence, Kentucky Historical Society, Frankfort, Kentucky.

²⁰⁵ Letter July 30, 1861 to My own dear mother from C.G. Edwards, Edwards Family Letters, 95SC22, Kentucky Historical Society, Frankfort, Kentucky.

²⁰⁶ Lot D. Young. *Reminiscences of a Soldier of the Orphan Brigade*, Civil War Unit Histories, Mary Coats Burnett Library, Texas Christian University, Fort Worth, Texas, 11-12.

him to a corner of the room. The man told him not to worry, but that the shoes he was wearing hinted of his desire to join the army. This man thought correctly that Young intended to go south. The stranger then told him that the train leaving that very morning for the South would likely be the last. Upon the his advice Young made his way to the station and by that evening had safely reached his boyhood friends at Camp Burnett, Tennessee. The group became Company D of the Fourth Kentucky.²⁰⁷

“Yet the anomalous position which it [the First Kentucky Brigade] occupied, in regard to the revolution, in having revolted against both State and Federal authority, exiling itself from home, from fortune, from kindred, and from friends – abandoning everything which makes life desirable, save honor.” This concept of honor that gave Hodge’s brigade the motivation to keep going at a time when they needed it the most, when they abandoned their native state. He remembered nothing sadder than the retreat of the Kentuckians from their home. There still remained hope for the rest of the army as their families lay further south, still in security. Between their families and the advancing enemy lay numerous places where a battle could stop the invader, but for the Kentuckians such hope was lost. Behind them lay the graves of their fathers and their homesteads full of childhood memories. Amidst the invaders remained their wives and children. On February 13, 1862 the First Kentucky crossed the state line into Tennessee. They had left their homes and families and would trust their honor to sustain them for the next three years.²⁰⁸

The definition of honor as given by *Merriam-Webster’s Pocket Dictionary* is a good name or an outward respect. These men who were motivated to enlist and keep going during the war because of honor did so in defense of their good name. They felt that if they did not

²⁰⁷ Ibid, 12-16.

²⁰⁸ Adjutant General G. B. Hodge. *Sketch of the First Kentucky Brigade*, Civil War Unit History, Mary Coats Burnett Library, Texas Christian University, Fort Worth, Texas, 3, 10.

fight for what they believed in then they would be acting in a dishonorable fashion and they, therefore, prided themselves in the maintenance of their honor.²⁰⁹

Johnny Green, who originally enlisted “for the right of a state to govern itself,” later felt other sentiments take hold. He believed that Southern men must do their duty to God and their country, the Confederacy, and that they fought for a just cause which God would not let fail. Green felt that the losses incurred at Vicksburg and Gettysburg did not hurt their faith. After all their cause was just and therefore would surely prevail. He feared that the soldiers must have been “a little too puffed up with pride and confidence in our powers.” What Green saw as justice may have been delayed but he remained confident that it would ultimately prevail. They should not hope to achieve their independence in less time than it took their forefathers to win victory over Great Britain.²¹⁰

On the night after the first day’s bloody fighting at Chickamauga, Green lay awake thinking about the combat that lay ahead on the next day. In the day’s fighting that had just ended, the men on both sides of him had been killed and he could not shake the feeling that in the next day’s battle he would share their fate. He lay there and prayed that God would give him strength, so that when he met his impending death he would be found “gallantly doing my duty.” He prayed also that he would not run from death but rather that it would help the cause to triumph. Green did not meet his death that day, nor any other day during the war. Yet his willingness to give his life as his duty to his country mirrored the thoughts of many who fought by his side on the bloody battlefields.²¹¹

²⁰⁹ Merriam-Webster. *Merriam-Webster’s Pocket Dictionary* (Springfield: Merriam-Webster, Incorporated, 1995).

²¹⁰ Kirwan, *Johnny Green of the Orphan Brigade*, 7, 85, 184; Harrison, *The Civil War in Kentucky*, 11.

²¹¹ *Ibid*, 93.

For John Will Dyer it was principle that provided the motivation for the soldiers in the ranks to endure privation, cold, hunger and imprisonment, to face death in the hospital or on the battlefield. For him as an individual, his “only aim was to do my duty to the cause I had espoused along with thousands of other young men impelled by the same motive.” Dyer describes an election, likely the election for the state legislature in August 1861 where Kentuckians chose between Unionists and secessionists, held to discover the sentiment of the people of Kentucky in which they were asked, “Are you for the Union or State’s Rights?” He, against the vote of almost all of his family and friends, voted for states’ rights.²¹²

Up to this point Dyer had always been a strong Union man. He had even tried to keep his friends from enlisting in the Confederate army. Yet he realized that an attempt to maintain Kentucky neutrality could bring a two fold disaster, forcing the state to fight two enemies instead of one. He also came to the realization that conflict was imminent, and he went where his sympathy lay and headed south. He then did what he had warned so many friends not to. He enlisted in the Confederate army and became a member of the First Kentucky Regiment, in which he fought under Ben Hardin Helm, the brother-in-law of President Abraham Lincoln.²¹³

Dyer’s father owned three slaves. He described the loyalty of the slaves that stayed with the defenseless women and children of the South, although this probably occurred more with those owning only a few slaves and therefore having a more meaningful relationship with them. He thought this told much about the slaves’ character. He argued that although

²¹² John Will Dyer. *Reminiscence of Four Years in the Confederate Army*, Civil War Unit Histories, Mary Coats Burnett Library, Texas Christian University, Fort Worth, Texas, 5,14.

²¹³ *Ibid*, 15, 17.

Lincoln had proclaimed their freedom, many chose to stay and refused to sever the ties which had bound them for so long to their owner's family.²¹⁴

These young men left behind their mothers, and no matter what side they fought for they could rest assured that they remained in her prayers. Dyer knew that at home his mother prayed "that he should do his duty to his God and his country." Not only did she pray for him to follow through on his duties but also that he would do the right thing. Often times when the men got a little too reckless or were tempted to overstep their boundaries, Dyer claims it was always their mothers' injunction, "do right, my son," that would bring them back and restrain them. These mothers did not push their sons to fight for one side or the other, but rather encouraged them to fight nobly and bravely for whatever side they chose. Many Kentucky mothers had sons fighting for both armies and they prayed this for all of their sons, not just those for the Confederacy. These women encouraged their sons to act as they were reared to do, in an honorable fashion as they dutifully fought for their country and their ideologies.²¹⁵

Kentucky soldiers lacked one single motivating factor between them, but instead had many that intertwined with those of other men fighting for their own cause. The feeling of patriotism that arose among these Southerners instilled in them a desire to fight for both God and country. They identified the South as their home and therefore chose the Confederacy to be the country for which they fought. Each saw the Confederacy as their country for different reasons but the most prominent were slavery and ancestral ties to other Southern states. They felt duty bound to fight for the defense of this country. To turn their backs on it would be to turn their backs on God, as many claimed to be fighting for God and country. In

²¹⁴ Ibid, 65-66.

²¹⁵ Ibid, 195.

this they would have lost the honor which they had spent their entire lives defending, which showed their worth in the eyes of their peers. God and country, duty and honor in the letters, diaries, and most prominently the reminiscences of Confederate soldiers from the Bluegrass State have a deeper underlying meaning. These words often masked the ideologies that they supported, in essence their cause was the ideologies that they shared with other Southerners. Yet they felt that they had a duty to defend these ideas and if they did not stand up and fight they would be dishonored. These men fought because of a sense of duty, but their duty lay in the defense of ideologies and therefore they fought for the same reasons as those who argued their motivation lay in defense of states' rights and the Southern theory of government.

Chapter 5

“Time Will Move Its Truth to be Certainty”

When the last shot had been fired and the war had ended, the Kentuckians set off for home. For some it took a little longer to get there, a group of Kentuckians gave Breckinridge an escort as he fled the South to escape Federal forces. The former vice president would not return to his beloved state until 1869, after an absence of eight years. Those who returned to the state contributed to the rebuilding process. Some went back to their studies, some practiced law, others worked their farms, and still others went into public office. No matter how these men lived out the rest of their lives, they never forgot the four years of their life that they gave to the Confederacy. Though they ultimately failed to defend their cause they moved on and adjusted to a new life, free from slavery.²¹⁶

John B. Castleman stated that “Kentucky from its admission to the Union of states has been at fault in not being positive in state matters, and in being injudicious in its law’s enforcement.” Even when it came time to determine the attitude of Kentucky toward the war, the state failed to issue a positive declaration. Because of this, the sons of Kentucky, without guidance and in accordance with their accustomed habit of individual action and self reliance, were left to choose their own direction. This split households, with many families contributing men to both the United States army and the Confederate army. Kentucky also provided the leader of both governments. Both Jefferson Davis and Abraham Lincoln were natives of the state.²¹⁷

²¹⁶ Davis, *The Orphan Brigade*, 255, 265-266.

²¹⁷ Castleman, *Active Service*, 60, 63.

On October 25, 1861 George W. Johnson laid out the situation, as he saw it, to his wife. He believed that Kentucky could have peace on her own terms if the legislature maintained the state's neutrality and offered mediation. He believed they could do so on terms of independence and free trade, the former to satisfy the South and the latter for the North, and this would save the state from total physical ruin. Johnson believed that the North would be ruined or conquered by the Confederate Army and reduced to a dependency of the Confederacy. He attributed this to the military genius of the Southern people and their determination. "If I were to say this however to some sanguine Union man, he would consider me mad. Time however will move its truth to be certainty." Time did tell, only the outcome was different than Johnson could ever have dreamed.²¹⁸

Those from Kentucky who identified themselves with the Southern cause believed it a just one with a higher purpose and in a sense thought themselves to hold a certain amount of invincibility in fighting for a cause such as this.²¹⁹ Yet to their dismay, their faith could not make such dreams into reality. Although Kentucky received far less physical damage than other Southern states, the war affected the lives of most of its citizens.

When Braxton Bragg invaded Kentucky in the late summer and fall of 1862 he fully expected that the appearance of a Confederate army within the state would cause many of Kentucky's men to flock to the Confederate banner, ready to fight for the Southern cause. Then once the state had become Confederate it would provide a bulwark against the North for the entire Southern heartland. Bragg knew there would be added advantages for his campaign if prominent Kentucky generals and their troops marched with him into the state. Of course Breckinridge was his first choice, but Bragg wanted Breckinridge to leave behind

²¹⁸ Letter, October 25, 1861, to My Dear Ann from George W. Johnson, George W. Johnson Correspondence, Kentucky Historical Society, Frankfort, Kentucky.

²¹⁹ Bullitt, *Diary*, 13.

his Orphan Brigade and come by himself. This Breckinridge refused to do. Yet Bragg wanted Breckinridge so badly that he quickly reached a resolution for the problem. On August 18 an order from Bragg reached the Kentuckians' camp, all of the regiments raised a great cheer as they heard the news that they would soon return to their beloved state. At one point all of the regimental bands joined together, playing "My Old Kentucky Home." Yet they were destined for disappointment.²²⁰

Despite Bragg's order, district commander Earl Van Dorn had his own campaign to fight and did not want to let the Kentuckians to go. Bragg gave Van Dorn peremptory orders to release the Kentuckians, but in the end it took a mandate from the Secretary of War to finally get Van Dorn to cooperate. As a result it was a full month before the Orphan Brigade started toward Knoxville and, somewhere beyond, a link-up with Bragg. On September 19 they boarded the train that took them away from Van Dorn and toward home. Twelve days later they arrived in Knoxville, and Breckinridge immediately wired Bragg. By that time, however, Bragg and his army were already deep in Kentucky. The next day, September 20, they captured Frankfort, the capital city, and for a time the Confederate conquest of Kentucky seemed within their reach. Then the fortunes of this highly fluid campaign shifted against them even more rapidly than Rebel hopes had risen during Bragg's rapid northward march. Within hours of the Confederate occupation of Frankfort, an advancing Federal army forced the gray-clad ranks to turn their backs and march out of the city on what turned out to be the first leg of a retreat that would take them out of the Bluegrass region and, finally, out of Kentucky. With the tide of war flowing back toward them, Breckinridge and his men never got beyond Knoxville.²²¹

²²⁰ Davis, *The Orphan Brigade*, 120-121.

²²¹ *Ibid.*, 123-124, 126.

The Kentucky campaign had been problematic from the beginning. Edward Guerrant was one of the Kentuckians that did enter the state during Bragg's campaign. As a secretary on the staff of Brigadier General Humphrey Marshall on September 9, 1862, he "walked part of the way up the mountain. On the top of the mountain I crossed from the territory of the gallant old Dominion, into the 'sacred soil' of our own Kentucky. The shackles so long binding the vigorous limbs of Hope fall from her, & she steps forth free into the boundless realm of enticing & promising possibilities. May her fondest & most cherished aspirations be fully realized. The long looked-for 'Good Time' has at length come, & we see the end's beginning." Yet by October 11 Guerrant and other Kentuckians had become completely disillusioned with the men who remained in the state. Many of the generals he encountered expressed disgust with Kentucky. General William C. Preston defined Kentucky's position as one of "General *Sympathy & Feeble Resistance!*" Guerrant went on to mention that "Tom Marshall said 'did ye never call the spirits from the vasty deep, & they *didn't come!*' So of K'ys volunteers! God help our native State. We came & offered her help! She refused & *we go away!*" Later Guerrant offered that the women of the state were the only remaining "diadem in the once illustrious Crown of old Kentucky." On October 21 he expressed more disappointment in his home state. As the army fled he realized what this meant for the state. He could not believe that the Southern army had come to save them and Kentuckians had not responded. "Our footfalls have died away along the beautiful landscapes of Kentucky and now astonished at the suddenness of our advent & the unexpected & unexplained exit of our armies – we leave Kentuckians *NOT where we found them!* That is what we accomplished!! We solved the problem – long in solution – as to whether Kentuckians will defend their

liberties or not: *whether they are fit to be free or not!!* It is answered! And oh! The answer!!!”²²²

During the campaign Bragg gained only 2,500 recruits. These men did not even compensate for the losses to his army.²²³ It hit Guerrant hard that the army lost more than twice as many soldiers as it gained.²²⁴ Bragg felt these same pains and needed someone on whom to place the blame for the failure of his great scheme. This he blamed on “the unsympathetic people of Kentucky, their self-important generals in his Army, and particularly the foremost Kentuckian of them all, John C. Breckinridge.”²²⁵

Even though the men of Kentucky did not flock to the Southern army as Bragg had hoped, they were not happy with the Union army or government either. Much of the bitterness toward the federal government that existed within the state after the war came from problems that developed during its last two years. Kentucky’s resentment of suppression of secessionism and the anger felt over the freeing of the slaves shaped the state’s political stance. Kentucky did not experience physical damage to the extent of the states in which most of the war was fought, but the conflict did change lives because of the great demands placed on Kentuckians throughout the war.²²⁶

In 1861 a pro-Union legislature was elected. Late that year and in early 1862 they passed a number of measures in an attempt to curb Confederate support within the state and lend assistance to the Union. These laws required all teachers, ministers, and jurors to take loyalty oaths in addition to the political officers. They also created severe penalties for those Kentuckians that invaded the state, enlisted in the Southern army, or tried to entice others to

²²² Davis, *Bluegrass Confederate: The Headquarters Diary of Edward O. Guerrant*, 144, 157 164-165.

²²³ Harrison, *The Civil War in Kentucky*, 55.

²²⁴ Davis, *Bluegrass Confederate: The Headquarters Diary of Edward O. Guerrant*, 159.

²²⁵ Davis, *The Orphan Brigade*, 126.

²²⁶ Harrison, *The Civil War in Kentucky*, 78-80.

enlist. Governor Magoffin, a Southern supporter elected on the Democratic ticket in 1859, became a problem for the Kentucky Unionists. After the election of 1861, Magoffin could do little more than delay the actions of this hostile majority, who with little effort overrode his vetoes.²²⁷

The failure of antislavery Union army officers within the state to return fugitive slaves to their masters created unrest in Kentucky. The army's demand for slave labor, often resembling a draft, only heightened the fears of many slaveholders. This concern grew when President Lincoln suggested that the Border States show their loyalty to the Union through freeing their slaves. On March 6, 1862 Lincoln recommended that Congress provide compensation in order to encourage the Border States to follow his suggestion. Kentucky officials angrily rejected his proposal and their response reflected majority opinion in the state.²²⁸

In 1864 it seemed that some in Kentucky may have regretted their original Union stance. When William Preston Johnson returned to the state that year he encountered men who would have cut his throat at the time he left the state. Yet these same men were the first to greet him and welcome him home. In Johnson's opinion Kentucky had become just as much Southern as Virginia.²²⁹

Toward the end of the war, many Confederate Kentuckians expressed the same disappointment in the men of their state that Guerrant had felt in 1862. Henry Bullitt remembered hearing a speech given by President Jefferson Davis and another by John C. Breckinridge, then Secretary of War for the Confederacy. Although Bullitt thought their

²²⁷ Ibid, 80-81.

²²⁸ Ibid, 92.

²²⁹ William Preston Johnston to Basil Duke, June 22, 1864, William Preston Johnston Papers, Filson Historical Society, Louisville, Kentucky.

speeches grand, they simply could not bring soldiers into the field. Still, this problem existed throughout the South, and not just in the Bluegrass State.²³⁰

By midsummer 1865 most of the formerly Confederate Kentuckians who wished to do so had returned home. What they found when they returned to Kentucky seemed to justify the anguish they had felt for the state during their years in exile. Their state had suffered during the occupation of federal forces, although not as badly as other states. Trade, industry, and agriculture all suffered greatly during the war. The Emancipation Proclamation, though it liberated no Kentucky slaves, infuriated the state's slaveholders and then the passing of the Thirteenth Amendment that December freed more than two hundred thousand slaves, including all of those in the Bluegrass State. This wiped out a capital investment of over \$34,000,000 in Kentucky alone. Although never fully in rebellion, Kentuckians still encountered what many saw as a rigid federal military regime within their state. As was typical of Kentuckians, they felt different from other Americans and therefore entitled to different treatment. Yet instead, as some of them felt, they were dealt with as felons.²³¹

During the war guerrillas and other irregulars roamed the mountains and preyed on Kentuckians of both Union and Confederate sentiments. Group and individual violence overwhelmed the state for years. Later it would become a byword that Kentucky had waited until after the war to secede. The bitterness that grew out of the war, which divided families and friends against each other, did not lighten until many years after the once Confederate

²³⁰ Bullitt, October 2, 1906, 22.

²³¹ Davis, *The Orphan Brigade*, 260-261; Harrison, *Kentucky in the Civil War*, 94.

states had returned relative quiet. Kentucky quickly fell into the hands of ex-Confederates who served in government roles within the state, and remained there for many years.²³²

Some had a hard time grasping that the war was over. The cause for which they had fought for so long, for which they had sacrificed and suffered, was lost. “God and the world apparently against us,” wrote Lot Young, “without country, without home or hope, the old family being broken up and separated forever, our very souls sinking within us, gloom and sorrow overhanging the world; what would we do; what could we do?” Groups of men that had grown close for almost four years of war were then broken up. “The eyes that gleamed defiance in the battles’ rage were now filled with tears of sorrow at parting. The hand that knew no trembling in the bloody onslaught now wavered and trembled – the hour for the last parting had arrived, the long struggle ended forever.” As Lot Young made his way back to Kentucky he worried about their status as citizens and how those at home would receive them, as they returned defeated. Still they knew that their loved ones would welcome them home lovingly and with open arms.²³³

In Thomas W. Bullitt’s mind, the fact that the Civil War was one of ideas led to the passing away of the passions and prejudices after it ended. Once each side began to understand the motives of the other, Bullitt believed, they came to give and accept a mutual respect. In his post-war view of the matter, the conflict began with a difference of ideas in government and loyalty, as well as a misconception on the part of each side as to the character of the people in the other. The North looked at the South with a sort of contempt for what they perceived as weakness. Yankees might respect individual Southerners, but they saw the South as a whole as haughty, domineering, vain, and weak. The South in turn

²³² Ibid, 261.

²³³ Young, *Reminiscences of a Soldier of the Orphan Brigade*, 19, 22.

regarded the North as lacking in courage and having more interest in money than justice or honor. Southerners believed Northerners inferior in talent and courage and unable to resist Southern arms. Yet Bullitt believed the events of the Civil War proved the misconceptions of both sides wrong.²³⁴

John Will Dyer understood that the men of both the North and the South disagreed on public policy, and having failed to settle their differences peaceably they took up arms and fought. After the end of the war the same men came together in order to form a new nation out of the wreckage of the old. “The civil war cost us millions of treasure, oceans of blood and tears, untold suffering and misery and the lives of thousands of our best men; yet it has been worth to our country all it cost.” From people divided on sectional lines they emerged a united people, proud that they had the greatest country “and grandest record of any nation on the globe.” Dyer believed that because of the high moral and patriotic training and the general agreement in their declaration of political and religious liberty, the American people fought in the greatest civil war the world had ever seen on such a high plane as to enable victor and vanquished to unite for the common good when the war was done and work together with equal fervor for the advancement of a united country.²³⁵

John B. Castleman remembered all too well the wars beginning, which afterward seemed almost ridiculous to him. “It was to the whole world cause of wonder and reverence,” he wrote with some exaggeration, “that one-third of the states composing the United States Government should, by force of arms, in 1861 have enunciated their constitutional rights of states, and without having any of the strength which governmental organization supplied, should have risked all in maintenance of principle. And the world

²³⁴ Thomas W. Bullitt, *1907*, 1, Bullitt Family Papers, Filson Historical Society, Louisville, Kentucky.

²³⁵ Dyer, *Reminiscence of Four Years in the Confederate Army*, 100, 313.

watched with increasing respect the struggle of the Southern States organized in 1861 as a Confederate Government without a treasury, without an army, without a navy, and continuing in defense of asserted principles without recognition of any European power, and against opposing armies recruited from the world.”²³⁶

In the years after the war Henry Lane Stone, like many others, remained proud of those Kentuckians who had fought beside him for the Confederacy. He believed they deserved the highest praise, for good soldiers in time of war proved to make good citizens in time of peace. The hardships they had endured in the army prepared them for the battles they were to face in their civilian life. Kentucky elected from Morgan’s men many legislative, judicial, and executive officials.²³⁷

On October 26, 1892, William C. P. Breckinridge delivered an address to the Association of the Army of Northern Virginia entitled “The Ex-Confederate, and what he has done in Peace.” Breckinridge realized that they had fought, in a sense, for a lost cause. “The formation of a separate confederacy bounded by the geographical boundaries of those States which attempted to establish it has forever passed away. It would now be an anomaly; it would not receive the support of those who survived that war, the cause which made that geographical boundary important having passed away. When the surrender took place at Appomattox, when the greatest of modern soldiers laid down the noblest of modern swords, the hope of the South for a separate independence was forever ended.”²³⁸

Breckinridge also commended the ex-Confederates for the way they lived their lives after the war. Although they faced hardships brought on by the war and when they returned

²³⁶ Castleman, *Active Service*, 129.

²³⁷ Stone, *Morgan’s Men*, 33.

²³⁸ William C. P. Breckinridge. *The Ex-Confederate, and What He Has Done in Peace*, Civil War Unit Histories, Mary Couets Burnett Library, Texas Christian University, Fort Worth, Texas, 5.

to their homes they found nothing but ruins and their families, these men worked to pick up the pieces. Breckinridge, as have many others, gave credit to the women of the South who kept life going on the home front as best they could. “When we recall what the women of the South did during those times, we can scarcely repress our tears.” The men who had fought for the Confederate cause, moved on to give their services to the communities in which they lived.²³⁹

Although these men could have lived the rest of their lives bitter over the outcome of the war, they instead chose to have a life worth living. In the twenty seven years after the war that led up to Breckinridge’s speech these men realized the flaw in their plans. Breckinridge came to realize that had their dreams become successful they would have had a country built upon sand. They were simply dreamers, men without “knowledge of technical principles, and ignorant of the practical affairs of life; that we were a race of planter gentleman, living in pastoral retirement; and that the government we founded would have been swept away at the first phrenetic impulse from within.” They had established a government based upon the protection of slavery and many men fought in order to preserve it, though years after the war they came to realize the foolishness of such a plan.²⁴⁰

At a reunion of Morgan’s Cavalry a letter was read in regards to the flag that these soldiers followed for four years, stating best the sentiments of the men who gave their all for the Southern cause. “It was the national emblem of a free republic, whose life, though brief, was long enough to leave to State and country and to humanity and to the world an imperishable record of glory and renown. It was followed by the great principles of American constitutional government and the Declaration of Independence. It went down in

²³⁹ Ibid, 8, 14.

²⁴⁰ Ibid, 9.

sorrow, but not in shame. No more as a national banner will it wave on land or sea; no more will it be followed by the bravest armies ever enlisted in liberty's cause. Henceforth it shall be used on occasions like this or when it moves in the funeral procession of some old soldier who in life honored it and in death is honored by it.

“As the flag of the Southern Confederacy, it shall wave no more, but this we will say: ‘No breeze ever wafted, no sunlight ever kissed a flag that represented a better cause.’ We will ever love it. We loved it in the hour of the most glorious victory that ever perched upon banner; we loved it as it has withdrawn from before superior numbers and as it went down in final defeat. We loved it from Sumter to Appomattox. Living we loved it, dying we will love it, and I know of no human law that can or divine law that will forbid us to love it when we reach the other shore.” Though they failed in their defense of their cause, their ideologies only a distant memory of the past, they chose to look back upon their experience with pride. They did their duty, they defended their honor, country and ideas of how their country should be governed and what institutions it should hold, and they had failed. They did not regret their decision to fight and they would not forget either.²⁴¹

These men, who fought for four years for a cause they so deeply believed in, returned to their homes after the war. They sought to pick up the pieces and try to return to the life that they knew prior to the conflict, but life had changed and they adjusted as best they could. They never forget what they fought for, although some realized that it had been a foolish dream. Foolish or not, they held a deep pride in the country they had fought for and that they willingly gave their friends and family in defense of. These men would have gladly died for the cause that they fought for, but it was ultimately the cause that died.

²⁴¹ Unidentified United Daughters of the Confederacy Publication, Simon Bolivar Buckner Collection, Special Collections, Kentucky Historical Society, Frankfort, Kentucky.

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Vita

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Abstract

When the Southern states began to secede from the Union after the election of Abraham Lincoln in November 1860, the South expected Kentucky to join them. The Union also worked hard to keep Kentucky in the Union. The state originally took a stance of neutrality but in September 1861, chose to remain with the Union. Still, Kentuckians remained greatly divided over the matter.

Many men from this Union state chose to go south and fight for the Confederacy, often against the wishes of their community, family, and friends. The war divided many families within the state and these soldiers often found themselves fighting against their cousins, fathers, brothers, and boyhood friend. This begs the question, why would these men go against their state and fight in the Confederate Army? This paper seeks to answer this question in the context of politics, personal beliefs, and desires for a different life.