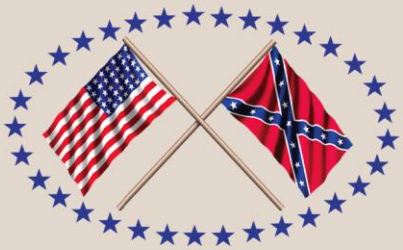
Sumter to Appomattox







American Civil War Round Table of Australia (New South Wales Chapter)
www.americancivilwar.asn.au **Patron: Prof the Hon Bob Carr**

Number 139
Nov-Dec 2026

President's Message

My first contribution for the Newsletter was 27 January 2019. I noted then that it is an unusual and quirky group. I also recorded that I had inherited a Committee of extremely capable people. The last eight years have shown that I was correct in making both observations.

The Committee have made my role a very easy one. The Committee has been wonderful, but I want to draw your attention to our magnificent Secretary, Dan Howard, who is also stepping down at the 2026 AGM. He has been a reliable, gifted, no fuss, no mess Secretary. We are privileged to have had him keeping us on track and organised as a functioning volunteer organisation. I have benefited hugely from the fact that Dan was taking care of our necessary formalities as Secretary.

Three new members were approved at the last Committee meeting because Peter Zacharatos has been very active in talking to other organisations about a conflict that occurred in another land on another continent during the century before last. Some people refer to it as the American Civil War and some refer to it as The War Between the States. Regardless, it is still worthy of study is still significant for us here in Australia. Peter has also talked about the ACWRT. He's been more effective than all of us put together. Thank you, Peter.

See you on 30 November – and get a ticket for your partner. Bring them along as well.

Life Member Len will be pleased that we are not talking about a battle this time but rather are focusing on the people that made up the very large armies involved. Stay quirky!

Ian McIntyre

Our Next Meeting

Monday, 30th November from 6.00pm
(The AGM will start at 6.30pm)
CHRISTMAS FUNCTION AND ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING



Come and enjoy some Christmas camaraderie!
Great value at $40 a head - why not bring a friend as well?
BUY YOUR TICKET(S) now on Trybooking via this link:
https://www.trybooking.com/DRSXV

A buffet dinner will be served with wine on the tables.

30 Help Street, Chatswood. Parking available on site.

Program

The Civil War Soldier
Introduction – John Morrison*: The Famous Ordinary Soldiers*
Peter Headley: *The Everyday Life of the Civil War Soldier*

This year we have focused much attention on the major campaigns of 1863 and the important command and leadership decisions involved. It is timely that we consider the everyday life of the Civil War soldier. The Union and Confederate armies were the largest

conscripted armies in history up until that time. How they were recruited, trained, organised; what they wore, ate, and how they lived.

Peter Headley will give us a presentation on the ordinary Civil War soldier. John Morrison will also discuss the famous ordinary soldiers who featured in many appraisals of the Civil War.



We Look Forward to Seeing you there!
Regards from Dan Howard, Secretary ACWRT NSW Chapter

Future Meetings

Should anyone be interested in presenting any of the other topics, or parts thereof, please contact John Morrison on 0411 197 935 or email at johnjmorrison@bigpond.com
Looking forward to some great nights,
John Morrison
Program Coordinator

Club Parking

The club offers free parking, with ample space for up to 50 vehicles. The parking lot provides direct access to the club.

How to Access the Parking:
The entrance to the parking lot is located at the back of the club, accessible via McIntosh Street.
For GPS directions, enter '12 McIntosh Street, Chatswood'. This will guide you to the general area. Upon arrival, look for the parking complex with signage that reads 'Club Parking' in black lettering. The following image should assist you:



12 Mcintosh St

IMPORTANT: You may need to phone the number on the post outside to get the gate opened. There are internal stairs up to the Club (there's a door on the landing on the right on the top level, just down from the gate) or you can catch the lift to G, then exit the glass doors and re-enter through the adjoining glass doors.

Vale David Alviston Hain



The Roundtable was saddened to hear of the passing of respected member David Hain on the 18th of August. David attended regularly for many years, rarely missing a meeting. He was referred to as a "gentle giant" in many tributes by his ex-colleagues at NSW Police where he had completed 32 years of service.

Our Last Meeting



The Battle of Perryville – A Gamble in the Bluegrass

Peter Zacharatos



In late 1861 President Abraham Lincoln wrote, "I think to lose Kentucky is nearly the same as to lose the whole game". By the Autumn of 1862, that warning seemed on the verge of becoming a reality. The battle fought at Perryville on 8 October decided whether Kentucky turned from Union blue into Confederate Gray and that is why it is remembered, quite rightly, as the Battle for Kentucky.



From the outbreak of hostilities, the Commonwealth of Kentucky was where the idea of "brother against brother" was a lived reality… as individual cities, towns and even families had divided loyalties. It is perhaps fitting that both Lincoln and Confederate President Jefferson Davis were both native Kentuckians.

As a slave state, Kentucky shared cultural ties with the South, yet its commerce and trade were firmly connected to the North. Early attempts to remain neutral proved untenable when Confederate forces under Leonidas Polk invaded the bluegrass state, seizing the city of Columbus in September 1861. In response, the state legislature in Frankfort declared its support for the Union. Meanwhile, Southern sympathisers established a shadow government that passed an ordinance of secession and were admitted into the Confederacy. As a piece of trivia, this is why Kentucky appears as the 13th star on the Confederate battle flag. Heading into 1862, Kentucky had two governments and was claimed by both sides.



Taken from Emperor Tigerstar 'The American Civil War: Every Day'

This slide shows the wars overall strategic picture at the end of July 1862.

In the East, Robert E. Lee had driven back Union forces during the Seven Days Battles and was preparing to go on the offensive.

In the West, the picture was starkly different. Federal forces numbering over 100,000 had advanced through Kentucky, seized Fort Henry and Fort Donelson in February 1862, secured a costly victory at Shiloh and taken both Corinth and Memphis.

From this position, Federal armies began spreading outward, almost amoeba-like throughout Middle and Western Tennessee… Chattanooga and Knoxville were the last Confederate strongholds in that state.

At the same time the Union Army of the Ohio… 55,000 men under Don Carlos Buell was advancing very slowly… towards Chattanooga… the gateway to the Deep South. The overall theme… was of a blue tide rolling steadily southward.

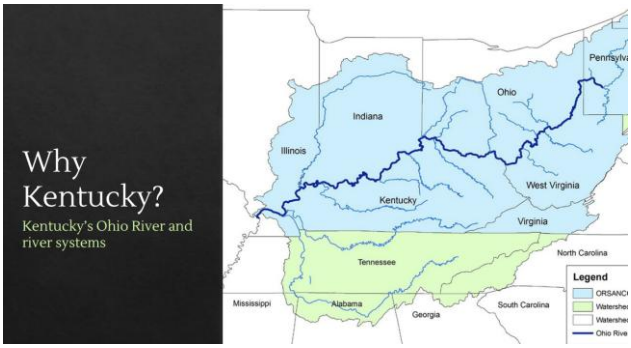
Frustrated by the deteriorating situation out West and by P.G.T. Beauregard's unauthorised leave to an Alabama health spa, President Jefferson Davis removed him from command and replaced him with… Braxton Bragg.

It's fair to say that Bragg was not a popular choice… A strict disciplinarian, he was notoriously abrasive and argumentative. Bragg's irritable personality may have been caused by his poor health as he suffered from fierce migraine headaches, poor digestion and rheumatism. His temperament did not endear him to his peers. In his Memoirs, Ulysses S Grant shared a hilarious anecdote about Bragg:

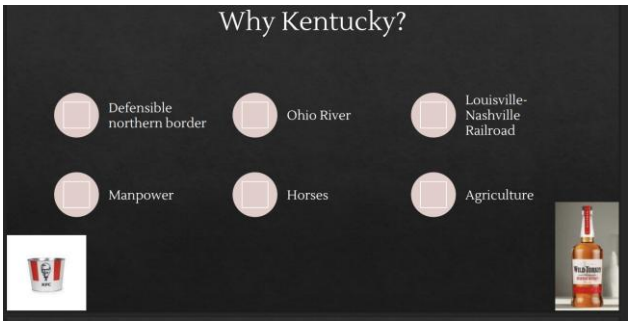
While serving as a U.S. Army officer in the 1840s, Bragg was simultaneously assigned the roles of both company commander and post-quartermaster.
In his role as commander, Bragg submitted a supply request to himself. Acting as quartermaster, he rejected his own request. He then continued to correspond with himself, arguing the case through official paperwork until the matter was finally escalated.
Upon reviewing it, his commanding officer exclaimed: "My God, Mr. Bragg, you have quarrelled with every officer in the army, and now you are quarrelling with yourself!"
Whether embellished or not, this story reflected a widely held view about the man.
During the Mexican War, Bragg so antagonised his own men that they attempted to assassinate him, not once, but twice! By the time of his appointment to head the Army of Mississippi, his subordinate D.H Hill shared a cutting verdict, if there were an eleventh commandment, it would be, "Thou shalt not have anything to do with Bragg."



On 31 July 1862, with the summer heat shimmering around the town of Chattanooga, Braxton Bragg entered a quaint downtown hotel to meet up with the other senior Confederate commander in the West, Edmund Kirby Smith. Both men were determined to reverse Southern fortunes. Bragg commanded roughly 35,000 men compared to Smith's 21,000. Although Bragg technically outranked him, Smith retained an independent command, answerable to Bragg only if their forces combined in the field.
Together, the two men reviewed their options. An assault on Nashville was considered, but a number of geographic and logistic considerations made this impossible. Both men wanted to take the offensive, given that they were too weak to defend and doing nothing was not an option, so they began looking North, towards Kentucky.



A number of factors made Kentucky an ideal target. The first was geography. The Tennessee-Kentucky border is long, wide and indefensible, which is why the union had experienced such success moving its armies through the state over the last year. If Kentucky flipped to the Confederacy, the state's Northern border with the Union would become the Ohio River – even today that river remains a major military obstacle.
Also… the Ohio River flows directly into both the Mississippi and Tennessee Rivers, which were the principal invasion and supply routes for US forces into the South.
Cutting the Ohio would effectively choke all Union armies operating out west. That includes, for example, Ulysses S Grant's army at Memphis, which had just linked up with Farragut's ships and was preparing to strike at the vital city of Vicksburg.



Next… the main supply base for the entire Federal Army West of the Appalachian Mountains was at Louisville, and the forward supply base for Buell's army, and most other Union armies, was further South at Nashville. Both Louisville and Nashville were connected by a 183-mile railroad. Severing that rail line at any point would force the Union to abandon their hard-won gains out West.
In a letter to President Davis, Bragg wrote "the result would be a complete conquest over the enemy, involving the liberation of Tennessee and Kentucky".
Beyond its geographical advantages, Kentucky offered something even more valuable: manpower. As a slave state, Confederate leaders believed that a significant number of Kentuckians were sympathetic to their cause. For months the Confederate shadow

Government of Kentucky had urged Jefferson Davis to invade to 'free them from Lincoln's tyranny'.
Adding to this, famed cavalryman John Hunt Morgan had recently returned from his raid northeast of Lexington, cutting a trail of destruction throughout the bluegrass state. After returning, Morgan reported to Bragg and Smith that 'with 800 men, I was up there and if I had a force big enough to stay, thousands of Kentuckians would join our cause'. Morgan estimated they could recruit up to 40,000 men. As you can imagine, this was all music to their ears.
Kentucky also had an enormous agricultural base that had so far been untouched from the war. If Confederate forces secured part of Kentucky for a few months, they could draw directly on a fresh source of crops, supplying their armies for the next year.
And there were other resources…. I am of course referring to Kentucky's most famous non-liquid or fried chicken product… and that… is horses. Then as now, the central bluegrass of Kentucky is one of the best sources of horseflesh in all of North America.



So… when you add all these factors together, Bragg and Kirby Smith resolved that Kentucky was the place to go… However, as you can see on this slide their armies were divided. An invasion of the bluegrass would require precise timing and unity of effort. Bragg understood this and insisted on a carefully coordinated campaign.
Kirby Smith, however, saw matters differently; he was tempted by what historian Kenneth Noe described as "Kentucky's siren song of glory,". Never a man troubled by excessive humility, Smith decided not to wait. Without informing Bragg, he jumped the gun and invaded Kentucky ahead of schedule.

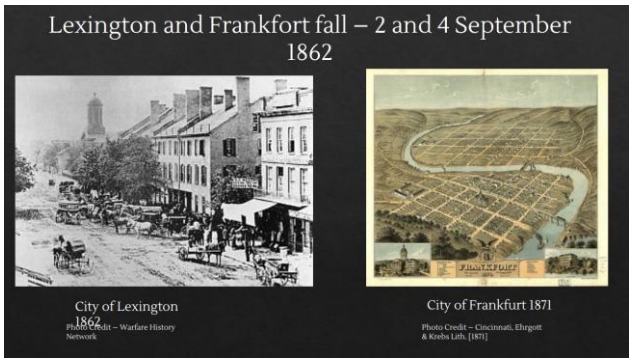


Smith started the campaign on 14 August when, with 12,000 men, he set out from Knoxville marching North aiming for the central bluegrass towards Lexington and Kentucky's state capital at Frankfort.
In his delusions of grandeur, Smith wrote to his wife "My expedition is something like Cortes, I have burnt my ships behind me, thrown myself boldly into the enemy's country, the results may be brilliant and, if successful, will be considered a stroke of inspiration and genius". Smith renamed his command the Army of Kentucky and entered the bluegrass state via the Rogers Gap on 16 August.
As the rebels plunged deeper into Kentucky, they found that the region was in the grip of a devastating three-month drought. The summer of 1862 was one of the driest on record, drying up wells, creeks, and even small rivers, making drinking water a scarcity.
Also… contrary John Hunt Morgan's boast, the locals viewed the Confederates with suspicion or outright hostility… Typical of this attitude, was the response a Confederate cavalryman received from a family sitting on a porch, when the horseman asked, "Where does this road go?", the father replied, "It don't go nowhere dammit, it stays right here!" Smith bemoaned to his wife that "the people are bitterly and violently opposed to us".

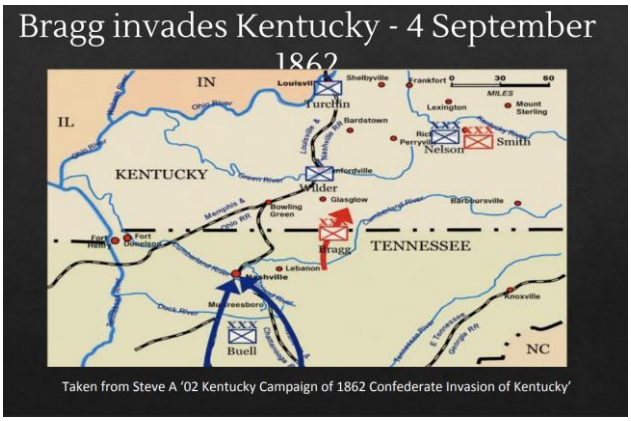


Despite their lacklustre reception, the speed of the rebel advance panicked the North… Union authorities scraped together 7000 men made up of fresh Illinois and Ohio recruits who had never fired a rifle at live targets before.
The green federal force faced Smith's hardened veterans at the Battle of Richmond on 29th and 30th of August 1862. By dusk on the 30th, of

those 7000 men, 4400 were captured, over 1000 were killed or wounded, Smith suffered only 750 casualties.
The Battle of Richmond was the most lopsided Confederate victory of the entire war. Lost Cause novelist Shelby Foote described it as "the nearest thing to a Cannae ever scored by any general, North or South..." The road to Lexington was wide open.
The timing of this victory was psychologically devastating for the North, as…
Does anybody know what else was going on over in the Eastern Theatre at the same time? That's right!! The Battle of Second Manassas! Where Robert E Lee won what I would call his greatest victory… when he swept John Pope's Army of Virginia off the field and back into the defences around Washington DC also on the 30th of August… Together with Smith's victory at Richmond, this has to rank as the one of the best days in Confederate history!



Following their victory at Richmond, Smith's forces entered the city of Lexington on 2nd September to a thunderous reception.
Population-wise, Lexington was almost the same size as Atlanta and was known as the 'Athens of the West' because it was the centre of higher education in the Western half of the United States at the time. It has since lost that title….
When the Confederates entered the city, the local civilians threw a street party that lasted for up to 48 hours. One rebel soldier remembered that "the balconies, housetops and windows, in fact every place available for view was full of people cheering and waving handkerchiefs, whilst we marched through the streets". Not only was taking such a large city a morale boost… but it also had symbolic importance, as it was the birthplace of first lady Mary Todd Lincoln and former Vice-President-turned Confederate General John C Breckenridge.
Not resting on his laurels, on 4 September Smith's troops marched into Frankfort, the capital of Kentucky, which was the only Union state capital to fall during the entire war…
Confederate patrols then pushed out towards Louisville and began probing the defences around Cincinnati, Ohio. And… as an interesting piece of trivia, the man who famously fired the very first shot at Gettysburg in 1863 was called Henry Heth. Heth was also the man who would probe the Cincinnati defences.
Smith reported to Jefferson Davis that "the enthusiasm of the people here upon the entry of our troops, they evidently regard us as the deliverers of their oppression and have continued in every way to show that the heart of Kentucky is with the South in the Struggle".
Smith hence force began to refer to himself as 'Moses'.



As Smith or Moses wrote those words, Bragg moved out from Chattanooga with 30,000 men, driving into the heart of central Kentucky.
On the Union side, Buell recognised the looming disaster in the bluegrass state and ordered the Army of the Ohio to abandon its slow advance on Chattanooga and turn back toward Nashville.
Throughout the summer, Buell had faced mounting criticism. Many in Washington questioned his loyalty because of his family's Southern connections, while morale within the Army of the Ohio had sunk. Rebel guerilla activity had cut his supply lines, and his men were subsisting on half rations.
Once at Nashville, Buell resupplied and closely monitored Bragg's movements.
Bragg's army entered Kentucky on 10th September 1862, targeting Buell's lifeline, the Louisville-Nashville railroad. On 14 September, Bragg besieged the 4000-man Union Garrison at Munfordville, guarding a key rail bridge over the Green River. The Green River was wide, with steep banks, and if its bridges were destroyed, Buell would face a significant logistical problem down at Nashville. Bragg vastly outnumbered the Munfordville garrison, and made preparations to destroy the place via assault.



An interesting story comes out of the Munfordville siege. On the evening of 16 September, Bragg sent an ultimatum to the Union commander John Wilder that he "surrender, or he will be destroyed in the morning". So… the one thing they do not teach in the US army is how to surrender. The last US army surrender that Wilder would have been aware of was the surrender of Charleston in 1780 during the Revolutionary War. Quite honesty, the young Wilder just had no idea what to do, so he replied to Bragg stating, "Unless you can demonstrate your superiority, I will fight it out".

Bragg was furious with the reply. He began dictating a response telling Wilder exactly what he could do with it… when the one man in either army who completely understood Wilder's predicament intervened… Munfordville native, Simon Bolivar Buckner.

Buckner had recently been paroled back into the Confederate Army after surrendering Fort Donelson and his 15,000 men 'unconditionally' to Grant 7 months earlier…. Buckner knew what it meant to hold the fate of an entire garrison in one's hands.

Taking pity on Wilder, Buckner offered to act as an intermediary and arrange the surrender. Bragg reluctantly agreed and sent back a message to Wilder reiterating his request for unconditional surrender with a cover note, "If you have any further communication, talk to General Buckner".

Afterwards, both armies bedded down that night, as September 16th passed into September 17th. In the early morning hours, Buckner was in his tent doing paperwork when, suddenly, he heard from one of his staff officers "Sir, you have a visitor". Buckner replied, "Show him in".

The visitor was blindfolded and wore the uniform of a colonel in the US Army. It was of course, Wilder, who nervously said to Buckner "I come to you to find out what I ought to do".

So… Buckner only talked about this exchange once in an interview that he gave to *Confederate Veteran* in 1909, he said, "At that moment, I was touched, I would not have deceived that man under those circumstances for anything."

Buckner carefully removed Wilder's blindfold, sat him down and said, "Well, Colonel, I can't advise you about that. You are in command of your troops, and you must decide for yourself…"

To help Wilder decide, Buckner then took him on a personal tour of the Confederate camp, showing him the rebel guns and siege preparations. Afterwards, Buckner, in so many words, said to Wilder 'you know what I've got'… "You need to decide if can you live under this fire? And if you can, it's your duty to fight it out."

After some silence, Wilder replied, "We can't. I believe I will surrender."

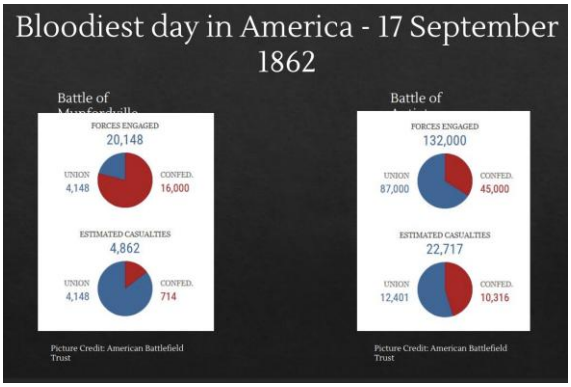
Now… 99 officers out of 100 would have said, 'Great, let's go see General Bragg', but not Buckner, who said, "No, Colonel, if you have information that the sacrifice of your every man in this garrison will aid your cause elsewhere, it is your duty to fight it out".

Wilder mulled it over and concluded "I have no such information… I believe I will surrender".

And at 4 o'clock in the morning, both men went to General Bragg's tent. And at 6 o'clock, that sunrise that the Federals thought was going to be their last, was not their last, as Wilder surrendered the whole garrison unconditionally.

Wilder was forever grateful for his treatment by Buckner.

On the morning of 17 September 1862, the 4000 Union boys marched out of Munfordville with the honours of war, accepted their paroles and were sent south to Buell's forces.

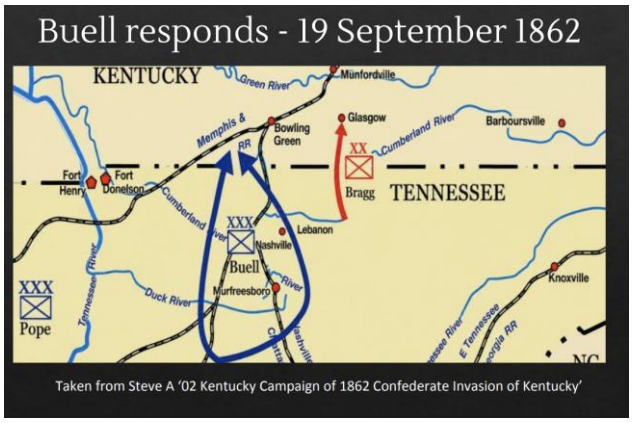


Why am I dwelling on this story? Well, what else was going on 17 September 1862? The Battle of Antietam… the bloodiest single day in American military history!

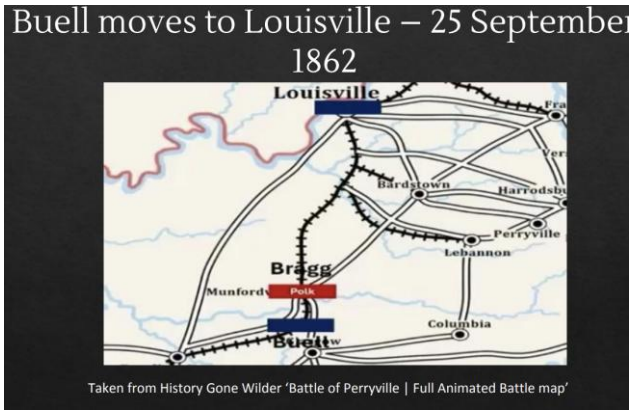
It certainly was, but everybody always gets that day's casualties wrong. In addition to the 23,000 causalities in Maryland, most historians often forget to factor in the 4000 men in the Munfordville surrender. Altogether there was closer to 28,000 casualties that day.

But,, to me this demonstrates one of the great stories of humanity during the war: at the same time as men were slaughtering each other a

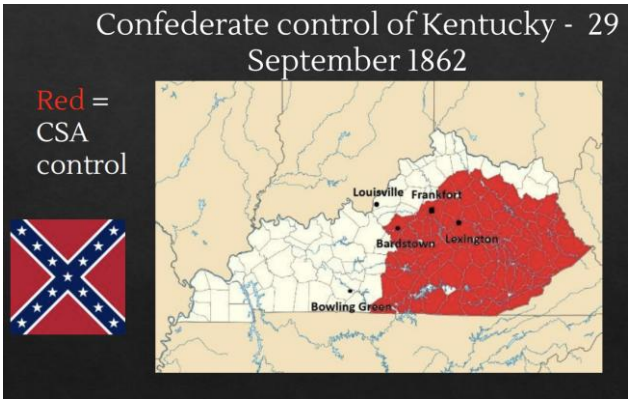
few hundred kilometres away in Maryland, Munfordville was surrendered through mutual respect between two opposing commanders, sparing thousands from a grim fate.
Munfordville was Braggs first victory as army commander and would be one of the largest federal surrenders of the entire war.
Combined with Smith's success… the Kentucky campaign was off to a great start.



Meanwhile, Buell's Army of the Ohio had not been idle. They received some reinforcements from Ulysses S Grant, bringing his numbers up to 55,000 men. They marched up to Bowling Green about 15 miles away. Buell's main concern was preventing Louisville from falling. Louisville was the last Union stronghold in Kentucky and the principal Federal supply base. If the city fell, the entire Union western operation would be in jeopardy.



Immediately after Munfordville, Bragg's army stood directly between Buell and the city. Although this was a solid tactical situation on paper, it was unsupportable logistically. Wilder's garrison had stripped the area around Munfordville of supplies, and the drought had been harsh on this part of the state, reducing rivers and creeks to little more than "scum puddles."
Bragg was not only stuck with 35,000 thirsty and hungry men, but around 10,000 malnourished horses and mules too. Bragg's quartermaster warned, "Sir, if we stay here more than 48 hours, we will starve". As you can see on this clip, Bragg had little choice but to abandon this excellent position and march northeast to Bardstown, where he was hoping to resupply and link up with Kirby Smith's army. Bragg's decision, though entirely understandable, opened the way for Buell's Union army to return to Louisville uncontested, which it did on 25 September.



The overall situation was positive for the Confederacy. As you can see on this graphic, they controlled virtually everything east of the Louisville–Nashville Railroad.
That said, they faced shadows over the expedition…
Firstly, despite the grandiose expectations of the Confederate high command, only 5,000 Kentuckians had rallied for the South. The Confederates brought an additional 20,000 rifles into the state and were unable to distribute many of these. Kirby Smith complained that, "their hearts are with us, but their bluegrass and fat grass cattle are against us". Smith wasn't too far off the mark, because the loyal Union Kentucky government, meeting in Louisville, as Frankfort was currently under new management, had passed a law that if a Kentuckian joined the Confederacy, all their property was forfeited. As you can imagine, this was a lot of money for merchants and farmers. A number of slave plantation owners stood to lose everything.
Realistically… the state was not going to rally until Buell, sitting undefeated in Louisville, was taken care of.
Bragg's mood on the Kentuckians soured…
The frustration came through in a message to Jefferson Davis, who had attended Lexington University in his youth. In so many words Bragg said that 'If [the Kentuckians] don't rise up', "we must abandon the garden spot of Kentucky to its own selfishness and cupidity".
Now… I would have loved to have seen Jeff Davis's reaction after receiving that message about his beloved home state.
A further complication lay in Kirby Smith's continued refusal to join Bragg at Bardstown. Smith understood that Bragg's seniority meant both forces would pass to him the moment they

united in the field. Smith did not want to jeopardise his chance for personal glory by surrendering his autonomy. So, despite occupying almost all central and eastern Kentucky, the two Confederate forces remained divided and too
weak to individually confront Buell.
The final shadow over the expedition was, of course, Buell's Army of the Ohio, which now, with new recruits, had amassed up to about 70,000 personnel in Louisville, nearly twice the size of Bragg and Smith's armies combined. Bragg surmised that Buell would need several months to refit and reorganise his command in Louisville. He wasn't worried about the Union's numerical advantage, because he thought poor morale and political pressure would make Buell too cautious to act aggressively.
Quite honestly, Bragg thought he had plenty of time to consolidate the Confederate position in Kentucky. And also, quite honestly, he was spectacularly wrong on every assessment.



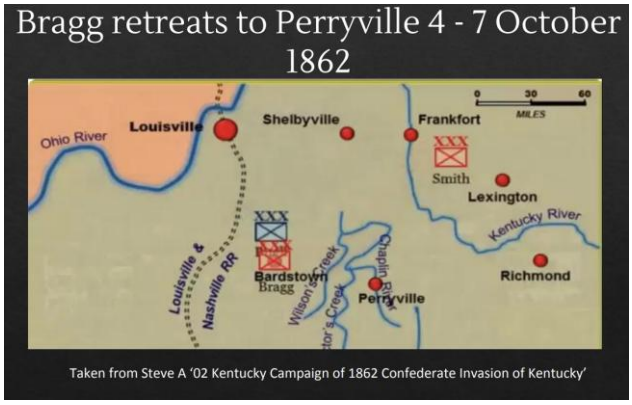
Blissfully unaware of just how wrong he was, Bragg turned his attention from war to politics. On 4 October, Bragg left his army at Bardstown and set out with a small party towards the state capital at Frankfurt to formally install the pro-Confederate shadow government in the state legislature.
The shadow government aimed to consolidate their hold on the state. Their immediate priority was the introduction of conscription… a clear signal that the Confederacy aimed to integrate Kentucky into the war effort. At this point, it's fair to say, Kentucky stood on the brink of turning from Blue to Gray.
Frustrated with Buell, the War Department fired him, but sent the proviso, "Turn over command to George Thomas unless you are about to actively participate in a campaign or fight a battle". Given that Buell was planning his campaign, Thomas viewed it as dishonourable to force Buell out and replied to the department, "General Buell should retain the command…" That says a lot about the character of George Thomas.



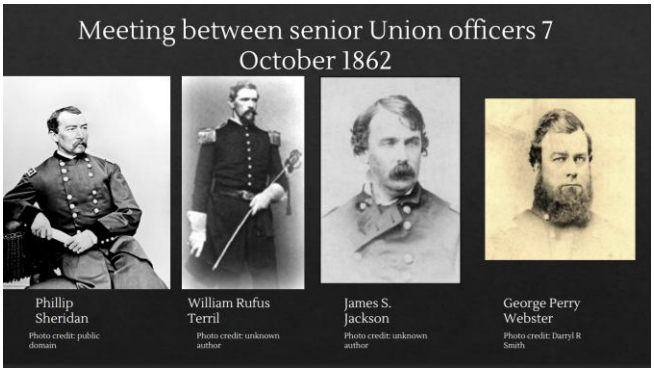
With a "sword of Damocles" effectively hanging over his head, Buell realised that he needed to act, not only for geographic and strategic reasons… but also because the November 1862 mid-term elections were weeks away, which would be the first referendum on Lincoln's conduct of the war.
Yes… Buell is a controversial General for many good reasons, but the man could plan a campaign! Looking at the map, Buell identified that Camp Dick Robertson, the main supply base and communication for the Confederates, lay to his Southeast.
Buell recognised that, advancing in that direction, he would force the Confederates to fall back to the central bluegrass region to protect their lifeline, while allowing Union forces to reclaim both Frankfort and Lexington with minimal resistance. As Napoleon observed, "In war, dictate the operations of your enemy". By advancing on Camp Dick Robertson, Buell would do precisely that.
The Union army marched out of Louisville on 1st October. As you'll see on this clip, Buell divided his army into four columns: the Northernmost column under Joshua Sill with 20,000 men marched towards Frankfort as a decoy; the remaining three corps under McCook, Crittenden and Gilbert, 55,000 men all up, advanced southeast on Bardstown and into the central bluegrass towards Camp Dick Robertson.



Whilst Bragg was heading to Frankfurt, he left Leonidas Polk in command of the Army of Mississippi at Bardstown. On 4th October, it did not take long for Polk to realise that the whole Yankee army was bearing down on them.
Bragg ignored Polk and continued to Frankfurt for the inauguration of the Confederate shadow government. At Frankfort, Bragg finally met up with Smith, although their commands were still separate as their armies had not yet joined.
Despite the collapsing military situation and desperate appeals from all his subordinates to focus on the advancing Federals… Bragg was determined to press ahead with the ceremony.
During the event, Bragg gave a fiery two-hour speech about how the "unimpeachable invincible power of the Confederacy will be in Kentucky forever".
Everybody in the newly-installed Confederate Government listened and then sat down for an inaugural luncheon. During their luncheon, to the horror of the whole congregation, they heard what sounded like thunder to the West.
Reports came through that there were 20,000 uninvited guests wearing blue on the outskirts of town. These guests were of course…. Sill's advancing column… As Kirby Smith summed up the following actions in an exact quote, "We skedaddled..." By that evening, after 30 days, Kentucky's state capital was once again in the possession of the United States and would remain so for the rest of the war.



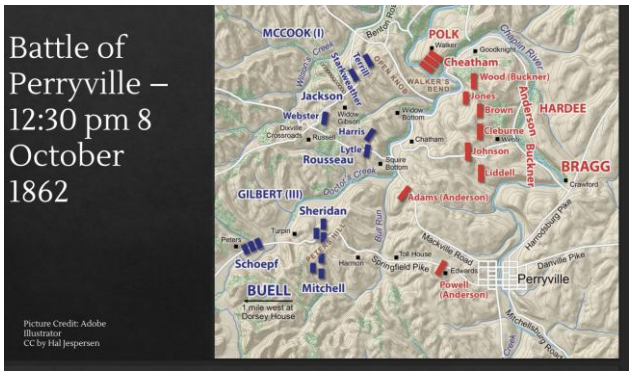
Bragg and his party withdrew from Frankfort, joined Polk and the Army of Mississippi, and hurriedly sought to counter the advancing Union forces. Bragg realised that all their recent gains in Kentucky were at stake. As 'dictated' by Buell, Bragg concentrated his army in the central Bluegrass region at Harrodsburg, northeast of Perryville. Coincidentally, Harrodsburg was the first permanent English settlement west of the Appalachian Mountains. Smith, once again opted not to support Bragg and kept his army North near Lexington.
Buell had his three other columns stay in close pursuit of Bragg. By the evening of 7 October, the three columns converged near the town of Perryville, with Gilbert being the first to arrive.
Buell planned to wait until McCook and Crittenden arrived, so he could use his overwhelming force against his outnumbered enemy.
Despite his army being driven to near exhaustion in their pursuit to Perryville, Bragg was still operating under a dangerous misconception… believing that most of Buell's forces were up near Frankfort targeting Kirby Smith. As you can see on this slide, they certainly weren't!
He ordered General Polk to attack at first light and sweep aside what he thought was an isolated enemy column... This order set the stage for the Battle of Perryville the next day.
To put it simply, Buell was expecting a decisive engagement, whilst Bragg was expecting a minor rearguard action.



As dusk fell and both armies bedded down for the night, a group of senior Union officers gathered west of Perryville. Phillip Sheridan met with Colonel George Webster, William Terell and James Jackson. There was a nasty feud between Sheridan and Terell going back to Westpoint days… where the former attacked the latter with a bayonet… but, touchingly, that evening both men buried the hatchet… or the bayonet… and made peace.
In a sombre turn, their conversation drifted to the unlikely possibility that all four might all be killed in the battle the next day… Little did they know, that three out of these four men would not survive.



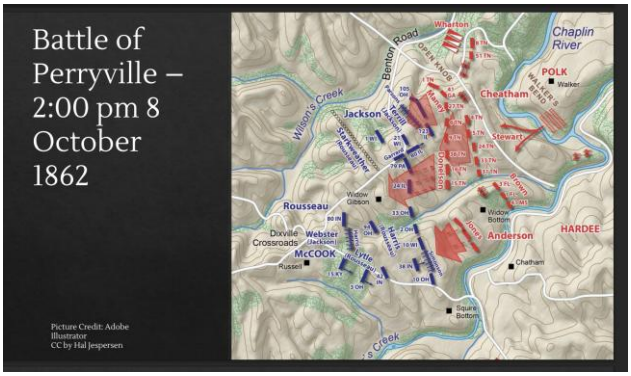
Portions of the rival armies blundered into each other around 2 am on 8 October after two federal Indiana regiments discovered some small water pools in the otherwise dried up Doctors Creek outside Perryville. The drought, summer heat and unrelenting pursuit of the Confederates had left these federals thirsty… Whilst replenishing their water, they were spotted by two Arkansas regiments also looking for water… naturally a firefight broke out over the water source. Seeing the opportunity, under the cover of a full moon, Sheridan ordered his division forward and, after a short but sharp engagement, they routed the Arkansans and seized all of Doctors Creek and the hill beyond. Sheridan was ordered to cease his advance given it was still nighttime. Minor skirmishing continued until sunrise.
Polk arrived on the scene in the early hours of the morning and quickly realised that he was facing Buell's main army. Recognising that Bragg's plan for a limited rearguard engagement was no longer feasible, he ordered his men to entrench and prepare a defensive position.



Bragg was 10 miles away listening for the sound of his diversionary battle. Hearing nothing, he rode from Harrodsburg down to Perryville to take charge, arriving mid-morning.
Bragg was furious that his planned attack wasn't in progress… He refused to accept Polk's assessment that they were facing the main body of Buell's army and overrode every objection presented to him. Bragg ordered his men to prepare for an afternoon assault striking the northernmost column of the Buell's army under McCook… for no strategic reason other than it being the most visible to him… At 12:30 pm, Bragg ordered his artillery to begin shelling the Union lines. The rolling terrain made accurate firing difficult, rendering the bombardment largely ineffective; the bombardment did however foreshadow the coming confederate attack.
On the Union side, McCook's and Crittenden's columns were well behind schedule, with many tardy divisions only taking up their positions' late morning. Frustrated by the delays, Buell postponed his offensive until the next day on 9 October, later admitting that he "no longer anticipated a battle that day." Buell saw himself as George McClellan's protégé and favoured careful preparation over rapid engagement. Despite arriving late, McCook's men established strong defensive positions on the broken ground east of Perryville, anchoring their flank on the elevated Open Knob and extending their line along the largely dry Doctors Creek.
But… the same dilapidated landscape that provided defensive strength also produced an interesting geographic phenomenon… called an acoustic shadow. An acoustic shadow occurs where uneven terrain distorts and dampens sound across the battlefield.

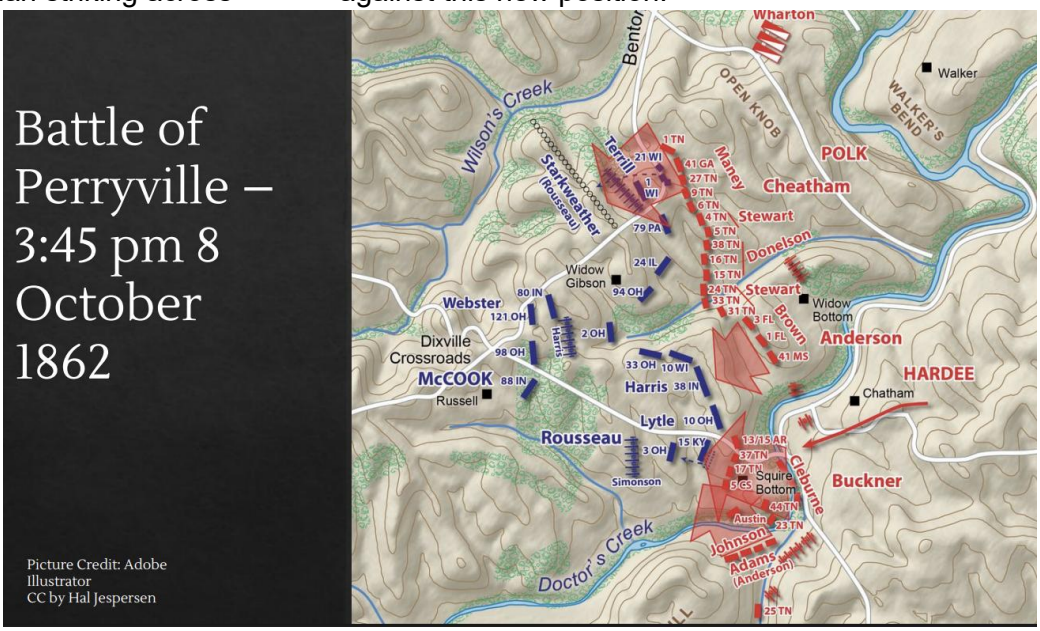


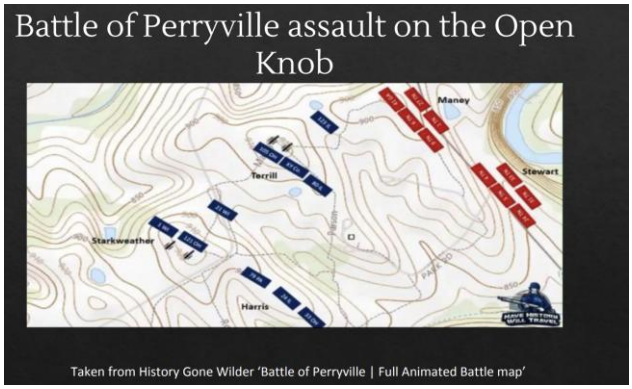
The acoustic shadow prevented the sound of Bragg's noon bombardment from reaching Buell's headquarters only 3 km away. Buell, who was in bed nursing a wound on his foot, remained unaware of the scale of the fighting at Perryville.
Believing the morning skirmishing had subsided, Buell dismissed all reports of a potentially larger battle and declined to commit reinforcements… and then he laid back down in bed. This decision left McCook's mostly green column to bear the full weight of the coming Confederate assault.



Bragg planned to seize the intersection behind McCook's flank called the Dixville Crossroads. The Dixville Crossroads was the federal's line of retreat and communication. If seized, McCook's column would be cut off from Buell's army and surrounded and annihilated.

Whilst Bragg's overall strategy at Perryville was adequate, his battlefield tactics were ridged, predictable and also… just lazy. Bragg ordered his men to line up in a formation known as the 'echelon attack'.
The 'echelon attack' was made famous from the Theban victory over the Spartans at the Battle of Leuctra in 371 BC. In essence, this tactic involved forming a diagonal staggered attacking line, concentrating force against a single section of the enemy rather than striking across the entire front at once. He aimed to apply considerable pressure to the right of McCook's column and roll up the rest of the Union body as separate parts of the echelon moved forward.
So… why is this tactic lazy? Well, as everybody has their orders, all Bragg has to do is sit and watch. It requires no intervention on his part. Bragg also repeated the same tactic over and over again throughout his career, such as at Stones River and on the second day of Chickamauga. The echelon manoeuvre robbed the smaller Confederate army of its flexibility. If success was not achieved at the decisive point, the opportunity for adjustment was minimal. So, the strength of this formation was also its weakness.



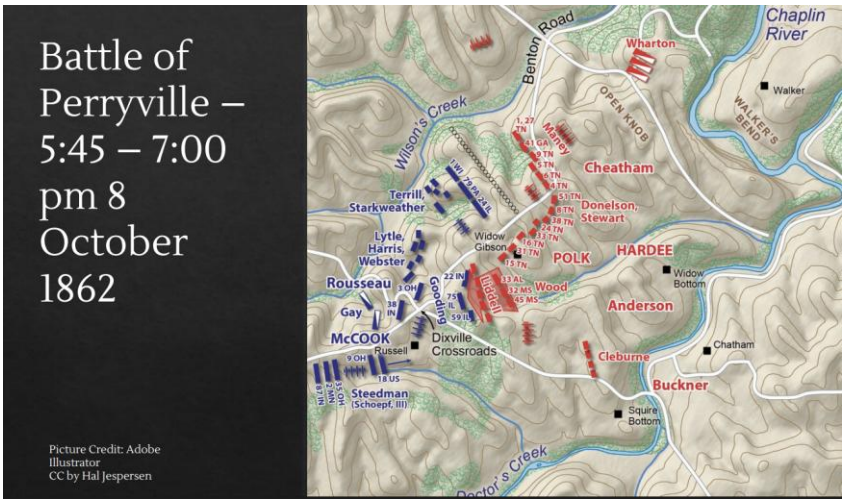


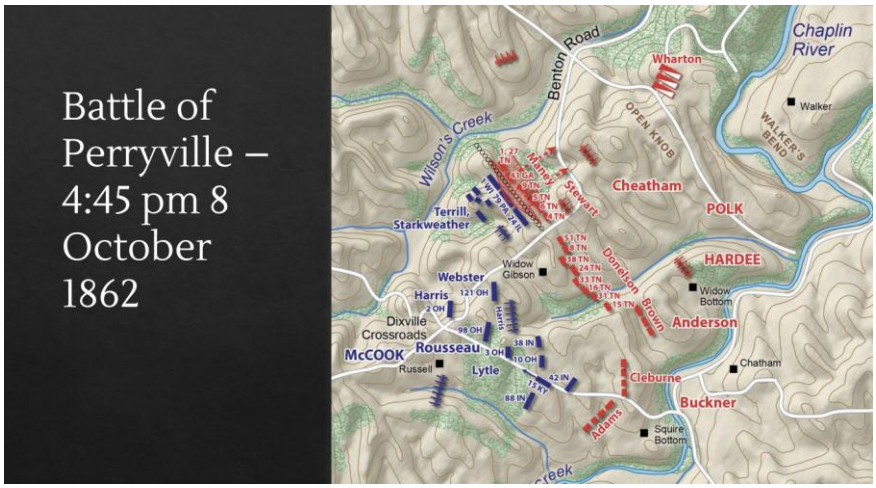
At two o'clock in the afternoon, the Confederates launched their attack. The rolling hills and dust kicked up marching over the dried Chaplain River concealed the scale of the assault. The federals mistakenly believed the rebels were retreating and relaxed their guard. Then the Confederate infantry emerged from the cornfields before the Open Knob and surged forward. The blood curdling scream of the Rebel Yell echoed across the field… Fearlessly they charged McCook's defences… As shown on this clip, at great difficulty, they seized the Open Knob, driving the Federals back and capturing several guns.
The fighting was savage. Union Divisional commander James S Jackson had two bullets rip through his chest, knocking him off his horse and killing him instantly.
McCook's corps fell back to a series of ridges with a stone wall known as Starkweather Hill. Having taken their first objective, the Confederates immediately pressed forward against this new position.

What followed was brutal, close-quarters fighting. Union artillery unleashed devastating canister fire into the advancing Confederates. As one private, Sam Watkins, recalled: "The guns were discharged so rapidly that it seemed the earth itself was in a volcanic uproar… The iron storm passed through our ranks, mangling and tearing men to pieces. The very air seemed full of stifling smoke and fire, which seemed the very pit of hell."

Elsewhere on the field, the Southern assault gained momentum as separate parts of the echelon attack surged forward hitting McCook's column from all directions.
Around 3:30 pm, the Southerners pushed the Union lines back in the centre, towards McCook's headquarters at the Russell House. Federal batteries poured devastating fire into the attackers who were struggling uphill, blasting huge gaps through their ranks… To encourage his men, McCook walked up and down the line of battle, waving his cap back and forth atop his sword.
Rallied by his presence, the Union soldiers held in the centre… some were equipped with the new Henry Repeating Rifles. However, they were running dangerously low on ammunition...
Around 4 pm, the southernmost echelon began its attack from the Union left. The fresh veteran confederates charged through the ammo-

depleted defenders and the entire Union line along Doctor's Creek collapsed… Two Union regiments were completely shattered and one regimental commander, Colonel Webster, was killed whilst trying to rally his broken regiment.
Over the next hour, McCook's line recoiled. The Russell House was abandoned as the Union centre fell back to the high ground around Dixville Crossroads.
Fighting for their very existence, the McCook's core was becoming squeezed between the crossroads and Starkweather Hill. A confederate shell struck Union Brigade commander William Terrell in the chest and mortally wounded him. He died later that evening. Desperate for relief, one exhausted Union officer reportedly cried out, "Will that sun never go down?"



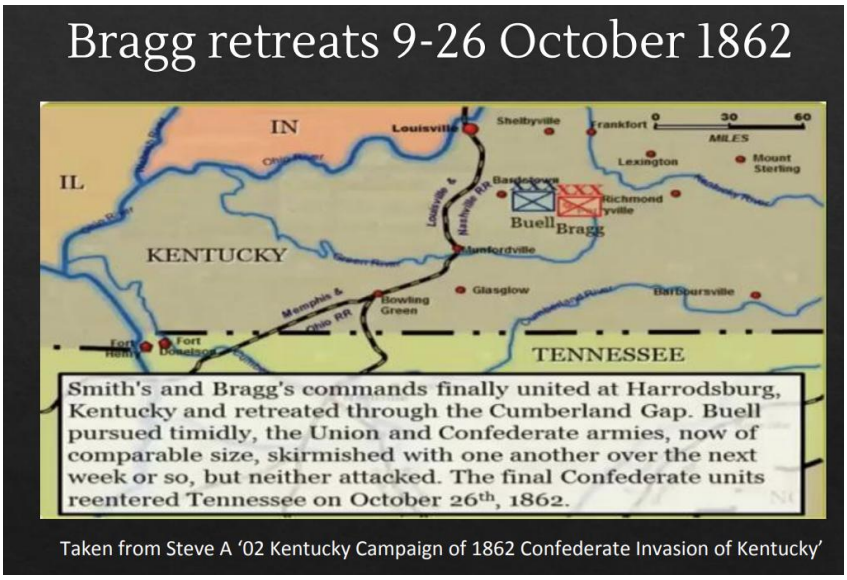


Despite the carnage on their right, Gilbert and Crittenden's columns remained stationary, while the desperate battle played out in plain view of their men.
Confederate troops even pushed into the town of Perryville itself and skirmished with the Union troops there, which was the first major street fight of the war.
Having only become aware of the severity of the fighting late in the afternoon, Buell, finally… finally… got out of his bed and did something useful... He dispatched desperately needed reinforcements under Sheridan to steady McCook's collapsing column.
Around 5:30 pm, Sheridan's reinforcements, arrived just in time for the final wave of assaults on Starkweather Hill and the Crossroads. He quickly deployed his artillery, relieving McCook's exhausted men. Sheridan declared his intention to 'tear the traitors to shreds'…
Four times the Confederates assaulted the high ground and four times they were repulsed.
Historian Kenneth Noe described the final repulse as less important than the Angle at Gettysburg.

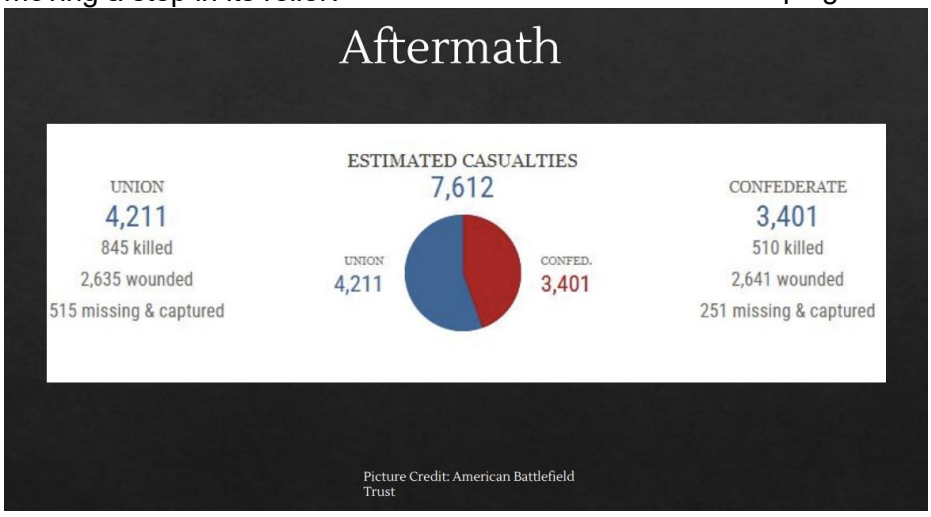
After nearly five hours of relentless fighting, Confederate momentum finally began to ebb. The Southerners held the field, but the Union had clung to the Dixville crossroads by the skin of their teeth… as darkness settled over the battlefield around 7pm.
In the dark, General Leonidas Polk moved forward to organise the last Confederate reserves for a final strike at the Crossroads. In the pale light of a full moon, his grey overcoat took on a faint blue hue. Polk rode up to a body of troops he believed to be his own and began issuing orders.
The Union commanding officer stood up and asked, "Who are you?". Polk responded, "I'm General Polk, and praise sir, who are you".
The commanding officer replied, "I'm Lieutenant Colonel Squire Keith of the 22nd Indiana and, who sir, once again, are you?".
Being a former Episcopal bishop, I doubt Polk was a poker player, but, honestly, he should have been, because he bluffed his way out of this one.
Polk retorted "Well, you're sure to find out!".
Polk rode down along the Union line telling everybody put their weapons down and to stand to attention.
Polk then rode back to the Confederate lines and said to the commanding officer, Colonel Liddel, "Colonel, every mother's son of them are Yankees, open fire". After firing 3 volleys in just 90 seconds two-thirds of the 365 men of the 22nd Indiana would fall dead or wounded at the Dixville crossroads.
Colonel Liddle with this victory saw the main objective of the Dixville Crossroads and wanted to push forward and capture it. Polk, after his near-death experience, wanted nothing more to

do with it and turned to Liddle and said “I want no more night fighting…” Thus, having pushed all the way to the goal line, darkness and General Polk ended the day’s fighting. The possibility of a significant Confederate victory slipped away.

According to historian Kenneth Noe, only after dark did Bragg realize that he had taken on Buell’s entire army at Perryville. Bragg was reckless in engaging the much larger Union forces without understanding who or what he was facing… Only incompetence on Buell’s side prevented this battle from becoming a disaster for the South. Meanwhile, Buell’s decision not to commit his full force cost the North an opportunity for a decisive victory in this theatre. At a regimental reunion 20 years later, an Ohio Colonel bemoaned: “What soldier under Buell will forget the horrible affair at Perryville, where 30,000 men stood idly by to see and hear the needless slaughter in McCook’s unaided, neglected and even abandoned command, without firing a shot or moving a step in its relief?”



Taken from Steve A ‘02 Kentucky Campaign of 1862 Confederate Invasion of Kentucky’



For its size, Perryville was a bloody affair… the federals sustained over 4,200 casualties, whilst the Confederates lost 3,400 men. Essentially that was 1500 men an hour, one of the worst ‘per hour casualty rates’ of the entire war. A few days after the battle, Bragg, who had been in the thick of it at Shiloh, wrote “for the time engaged it was the severest and most desperately contested engagement within my knowledge”.

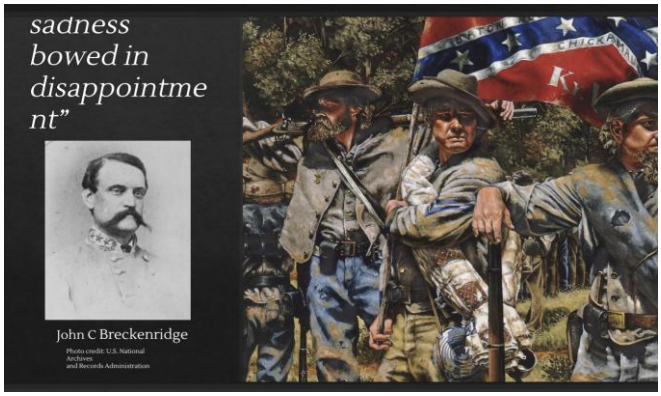
Despite his subordinates wanting to stay and fight, the following day, Bragg retreated to Harrodsburg where he linked up with Kirby Smith, finally uniting both armies. This cleared the way for Buell to continue his advance, cutting the Confederate supply lines. So, despite Perryville being a tactical Confederate victory, it would ultimately be a strategic Northern victory.

Recognising that his supply lines would soon be cut, Bragg retreated to Camp Dick Robertson on October 11. After arriving, Bragg’s mood darkened as he reflected on how the federals had outmanoeuvred him and wrecked his campaign… a campaign that had begun with great optimism. Bragg was scathing of the citizens of the bluegrass state who failed to rally, referring to them as “cowards who dwelt in the dark”. He began to despise all things Kentucky and wanted a quick exit... Bragg’s erratic mood and volatile temperament may indicate symptoms of a man suffering from what modern psychiatrists would describe as manic depression.

Bragg had not completely lost his mind… the Confederate supply situation was worrisome. Camp Dick Robertson only had about 4 days’ worth of supplies for 45,000 men. The weather was turning, making moving supplies and ammunition from Tennessee impossible. Faced with starvation and the looming threat of Buell’s pursuit, Bragg decided to abandon Kentucky on 13 October. The decision to retreat was unpopular among his subordinates. With Kirby Smith’s army, there was a growing sense that the Confederates might yet confront Buell in a more decisive engagement. Smith criticised Bragg as cowardly for not doing so.

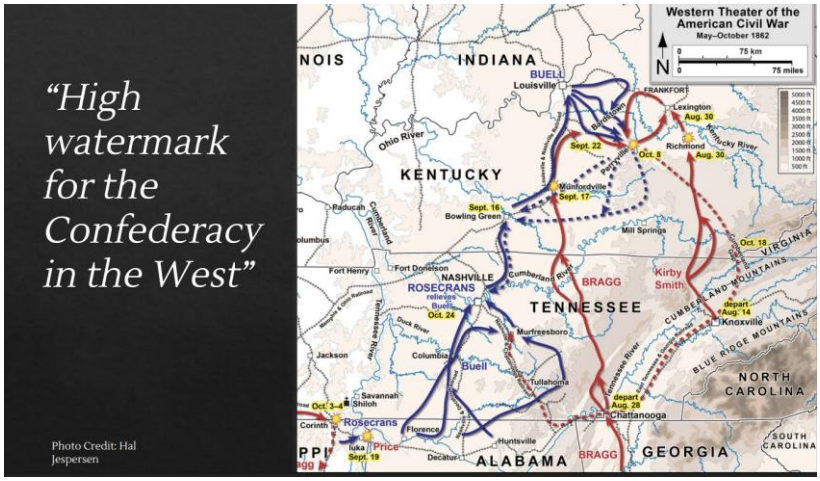
Yet… this is ironic… as it was Smith who had refused to join Bragg earlier in the campaign when it mattered most. Ignoring the wishes of

his men, Bragg's army marched out from Camp Dick Robertson back to Knoxville… By Halloween, the Confederates had returned to Tennessee.

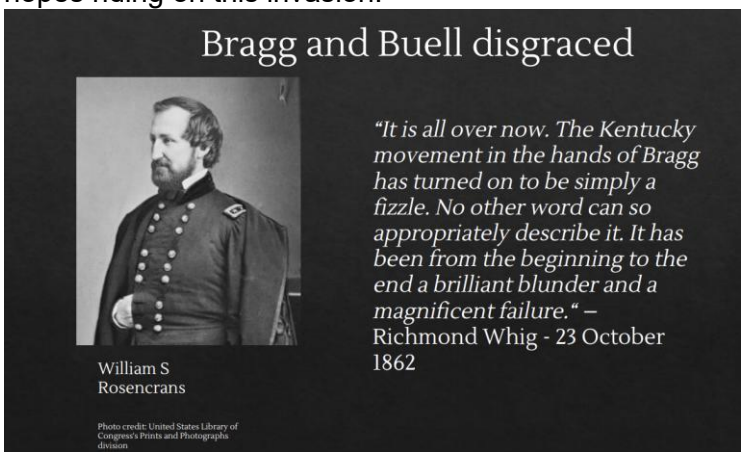


The decision to leave the bluegrass state was heartbreaking for the Kentuckians. John Hunt Morgan, with his small cavalry force, lingered outside Lexington, fighting a futile effort to delay the Federal reoccupation of his hometown.
None felt the loss more keenly than John C. Breckinridge's famed Orphan Brigade. The Orphan Brigade was the largest Confederate Brigade made up of Kentuckians.
By mid-October, these Kentuckians were finally on their way to join Bragg, having been away from their home state since the previous February... With each passing day, the anticipation grew as they marched north from Knoxville… On 16 October, the Orphans camped on the state border having the mountains of Kentucky in view.
The next morning, as they prepared to step once more onto their home soil, orders arrived that Breckinridge was to turn south. Bragg was retreating. Former veteran Ed Thompson captured the mood writing "With sadness bowed in disappointment, these Kentuckians took one last look at their state in the distance, and turned their faces southward, never to return to the Bluegrass State for the remainder of the war…."
We should never forget there were a lot of hopes riding on this invasion.

In the aftermath of Perryville, Bragg attempted to reframe the Kentucky campaign as a successful raid. He pointed to the material gains claiming the capture of "thirty-five cannon, sixteen thousand stand of arms, millions of rounds of ammunition, thousands of horses, mules and wagons." Yet… such accounting did little to reassure the Confederate public… The Richmond Whig dismissed the whole affair as a "miserable fizzle."
Within the army, confidence in Bragg began to fracture. A number of senior officers, disillusioned by the last two months, wrote privately to Richmond questioning Bragg's leadership. Perryville marked the beginning of an open mutiny, one that would erupt fully a year later after Chickamauga.
Buell meanwhile, received little credit for thwarting the Confederates' audacious operation. The failure to commit his full strength at Perryville, along with his slow pursuit of Bragg afterwards robbed the Union of a decisive victory. As you can imagine, this fuelled frustration in Washington. On 24 October, Buell was removed from command and replaced by William Rosecrans, fresh from his victory at Corinth.



One of the enduring ironies of the Kentucky campaign is that neither commander emerged unscathed.



After October 1862, the dream of a Confederate Kentucky was dead forever... Aside from isolated cavalry raids, the Confederates never again invaded the bluegrass state. For 10 weeks, in the Summer of 1862, when combined with Robert E Lee's invasion of Maryland, a Confederate Kentucky seemed to lie tantalisingly within reach undoing much of the Union's hard-fought gains over the last year. The failure for Bragg and Smith to cooperate in any meaningful way, combined with Buell's

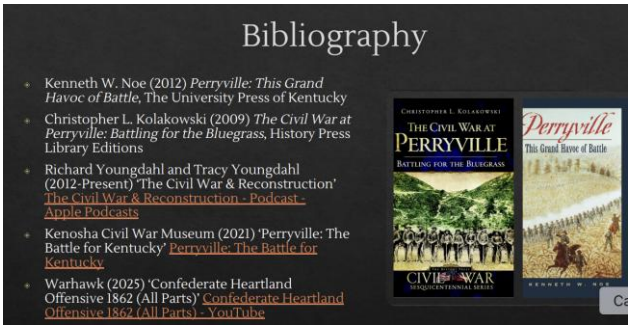
manoeuvre from Louisville, ultimately doomed the invasion.
The Battle of Perryville, the largest and bloodiest battle to ever take place in the bluegrass state, ensured Kentucky remained in the Union. In the following months, the focus of the war in the West would shift to central Tennessee and both armies received new names, the Army of the Ohio became the Army of the Cumberland, whilst Bragg's Army of the Mississippi was renamed the Army of Tennessee.
Although the Confederates would have several more opportunities for success in the West… their prospects would never again be so bright as during the 1862 Kentucky campaign. Seen in that light, the Battle of Perryville has been described by Historian Kenneth Noe as the "high watermark for the Confederacy in the Western Theatre". In his book, the Battle Cry of Freedom, historian James McPherson even compares Perryville's importance to Antietam in preventing European intervention in the conflict.
Despite its significance, this campaign and the final battle remains one of the most understudied aspects of the Civil War… Kenneth Noe observed, "in some ways, a cultural 'acoustic shadow' far outlived the actual atmospheric event of 8 October 1862."



Overshadowed by events in the Eastern Theatre and the fierce national debate surrounding the Emancipation Proclamation, Perryville, gradually faded from public memory and slipped into historiographical neglect… Noe further elaborates that later historians largely maintained this status quo: to the South, Perryville was a tragic defeat; to the North, a missed opportunity… Indeed, even our own Round Table committee chose to bypass Perryville in favour of the war's more famous battles! If historians have spent 160 years overlooking Perryville, we evidently saw no reason to stop…
Humour aside… I would argue that this academic neglect has allowed the very history of Kentucky to be distorted by proponents of the Lost Cause. Around 100,000 Kentuckians fought for the Union, compared with roughly 40,000 for the Confederacy. Yet, in the decades that followed, Southern literature and popular culture have frequently recast Kentucky as Confederate in spirit, if not in law. During reconstruction, Kentucky experienced a strong political shift toward Confederate sympathy, electing several ex-Confederate officers to the governorship.
Echoes of that narrative persist in public memory, as Kentucky honours three confederate holidays.
The distortion is visible on the landscape itself. Kentucky is home to more than sixty monuments to Confederate soldiers, but fewer than ten honour the overwhelming majority and sacrifice for those who fought for the Union.



The Battle of Perryville reminds us that Kentucky's story was not Confederate… it was contested, divided, and yet… ultimately Union. Fittingly, just days after the battle, the Autumn rains finally broke, ending that the terrible drought that had overshadowed the entire campaign… Many Kentuckians saw in those rains a sign of divine providence, that the long-uncertain fate of their state had, at last… been decided.



Call for short talks
Our short ten-minute presentations on a particular battle or person have been a great success in revealing the depth of talent within our group.

Please do not hesitate to volunteer to myself or John Morrison on a topic of your choice, be it short or long.

Ian McIntyre