

Timeline

Kentucky Campaign

1862

November 1861 -- Henry Halleck is appointed as commander of the Missouri Department, including vast territories west of the Appalachian Mountains.

June 1862 -- Braxton Bragg, 45, a Mexican War veteran, relieves P.T.G. Beauregard as commander of the largest and most prominent of the western Confederate armies following Beauregard's unauthorized sick leave after Corinth. Bragg's corps commanders are William Hardee and Leonidas Polk, who also serves as Bragg's second-in-command. Another Confederate column is led by another Mexican War veteran, Kirby Smith, who ostensibly is supposed to lend his support to Bragg.

July 11-- In the aftermath of McClellan's retreat to Harrison's Landing on the James River, and when the Federal administration realized it needs an actual General-in-Chief, Halleck is summoned to Washington to take McClellan's place as commander over all Union armies.

Halleck's old Western command is divided and with part given to Don Carlos Buell commanding the reconstituted Department of Ohio that includes a portion of Tennessee as well as those portions of Alabama and Georgia that happened to be under Federal control. George H. Thomas, the most prominent Southern born officer – other than the by-then retired Winfield Scott -- remaining with the Union army, becomes Buell's principle subordinate.

Buell's army is divided into nine divisions organized into three wings, commanded from left to right by Alexander McD. McCook, C.C. Gilbert, and Thomas Crittenden. (Wings and corps were interchangeable terms, especially in the early years of the war. Corps commands required Congressional approval and in lieu of such authorizations army commanders would organize their divisions into "wings" in order to streamline their chains of command.)

July 23 -- Confederate troops under Braxton Bragg advance from their base at Tupelo, Mississippi, toward Chattanooga, Tennessee.

August --- The opposing armies engage in a contest of maneuvering. To the west, Bragg, with Buell cautiously following, continues his massive flanking movement from Tupelo to Mobile.

August 21 -- From Mobile Bragg transports his army by rail to Chattanooga where he flanks both Grant and more importantly Buell in Nashville. In Chattanooga Bragg and Smith confer about their joint plans for invading Kentucky, hopefully all the way to Louisville.

August 30 -- Kirby Smith overruns the Federal garrison of mostly raw recruits at Richmond, Kentucky, scoring the most lopsided Confederate victory in the Civil War. Within another week Smith advances to ten miles of Cincinnati, Ohio, before the Ohio governor manages to muster 20,000 volunteers to defuse that threat.

September 3 -- Kirby Smith occupies Frankfort, Kentucky.

September 7 -- Union forces occupy Bowling Green, Kentucky.

September 8 -- Col. John T. Wilder, an Indiana hard-nosed, aggressive railroad and coal mining businessman, arrives to take command at Munfordville, Kentucky, where the Louisville & Nashville Railroad crosses over the Green River. This Federal post is defended only by a 4,000 garrison that had been quickly assembled from various sources.

September 10 -- Bragg's entire army has crossed the Cumberland River. By that time Buell also starts moving five of his eight divisions northward toward Bowling Green, leaving Thomas with three divisions in Nashville.

September 12 -- Bragg marches into Glasgow, Kentucky, where the four Rebel divisions rest for two days, their first break since leaving Chattanooga seventeen days earlier. At Glasgow Bragg is located between Smith, to the east, and Buell, thirty miles to the west.

September 14 -- Early in the morning Chambers, one of Smith's brigade commanders with sixteen hundred men, launches an assault – which Bragg later described as being “unauthorized and injudicious” -- against Wilder whose fortifications, along with some short rounds from Rebel artillery, stalled Chalmers' assault. Soon after these Rebel attacks are repulsed – the Union suffers 37 casualties while the Confederates suffer 288 – Chalmers has the audacity to issue yet another demand for surrender. Again Wilder sees no reason to accede.

September 15-- In order to salvage something from the situation, Bragg begins to move his entire army toward Munfordville where it arrives the next day.

September 17 -- Paradoxically the same day Antietam results in the bloodiest day in American military history, Wilder begins to haggle about the details and finer points of a surrender. These negotiations -- designed to accomplish surrender without bloodshed -- last until late into the night. At one point the Munfordville negotiators agree Wilder's men would march north to the Ohio River after surrendering.

Buell continues to advance cautiously, not arriving at Dripping Springs, nineteen miles by road from Cave City. Buell's failure to move aggressively enough to have rescued the Munfordville garrison becomes a source of public scorn in Northern newspapers

September 18 -- Wilder and his 3,500 men -- 600 of whom never had been armed!! – are allowed to march south, being able to join later Buell.

September 21 -- Bragg pivots his troops toward Bardstown, Kentucky, intending to join his army with Kirby Smith's. This allows Buell to push on toward Louisville.

Union forces retake Munfordville.

September 30 -- Bragg makes a logical but controversial and unpopular decision to veer away from Louisville, instead starting eastward toward Frankford, Kentucky's capital in the center of the state. Bragg intend to take a political tact by installing a new Confederate governor for Kentucky.

September 25 -- Bragg no longer being in his front, Buell force-marches his army the rest of the way toward Louisville, with his lead elements arriving this date.

September 27-- Buell arrives by river boat to find himself in an uproar over his command.

September 29 -- Washington sends a telegram directing Thomas to replace Buell as commander, but to almost everyone's surprise and amazement Thomas refuses, claiming it would be improper for him to take command on such short notice before the army was to start its march south toward Bragg.

October 2 -- Buell departs Louisville with 70,000 men, including two divisions of raw, undisciplined recruits, together with a seventeen hundred wagon train that occupied seventeen miles of road and three brigades of cavalry.

While Buell is still leaving Louisville, Hardee and Polk, Bragg's chief subordinates, began to evacuate their corps from Bardstown, falling back toward Harrodsburg, approximately thirty miles due east, where Bragg wants to achieve a concentration of forces.

October 4 -- Bragg arranges for the installation of a Confederate appointed governor in Frankfort. In anticipation of a celebrated and gala event, large crowds gather in Frankfort to witness and to be part of the installation of a Confederate government in what originally was supposed to have been a neutral and slaveholding state. No sooner has the Confederate governor been "inaugurated" when the rumble of approaching Federal artillery can be heard. These sounds quickly cause the new governor and his entourage to flee into exile, never to emerge again in Frankfort.

The Rebels complete their withdrawal from Bardstown but instead of moving directly to Harrodsburg, Hardee detours his corps through Perryville to try to find badly needed water.

October 6 -- Bragg meets personally with Smith in Harrodsburg, south of Frankfort. Bragg wants to consolidate those two Southern armies but ultimately

Smith is not able to set aside his own ambitions. Instead he insists his army remain in the relative comfort of Lexington, arguing they could concentrate their armies if need be. At this point the Confederates were split 25 miles apart with 20,000 soldiers in Perryville and 22,000 under Smith in Versailles.

The Federals occupy Bardstown.

October 7 -- On another miserably hot day, McCook stops eight miles short of Perryville while Crittenden – who, also looking for water elsewhere, has taken circuitous route – was ten miles away. During the course of the day Buell – now riding with Gilbert’s column – was chastising some soldiers who had broken ranks to forage. One of the soldiers grabs the bridle of Buell’s horse causing the animal to spook and fall backward over Buell. Buell’s injuries are serious enough to confine him to an ambulance or his headquarters at the Dorsey house, four miles from the front, for the next several days, grossly impairing his mobility and ability to command from the saddle.

October 8 -- At approximately 2:30 p.m. the Rebels launch a frontal attack along the entire length of McCook’s front catching the unsuspecting Bluecoats almost completely off guard. McCook’s left, composed mostly by the new, untried recruits, quickly found itself in the dire straits, in danger of being routed, which would precipitate an entire collapse of the Union defense. Before Union reinforcements can arrive, the Confederate attack pushes the Union left flank back about a mile while also capturing fifteen Federal guns.

October 9 -- Thomas tells Crittenden to “Have your different divisions ready to attack at daylight.” When Buell had heard no sounds or other reports of combat from Crittenden’s area by 8:00 a.m., three hours after daylight, Buell sent his chief-of-staff to learn why no attack had been launched. Crittenden’s response was that his orders had been to be ready to attack, which he was. Since he had received no orders to actually attack, no attack had been launched! Buell ordered Crittenden to attack immediately, which Crittenden did only to discover Bragg was gone, having withdrawn from the lines prior to beginning to retreat during the night.

October 10 -- Buell orders Gilbert to follow Bragg directly northeast to Harrodsburg while Crittenden would march east toward Danville, hopefully to head off Bragg's retreat.

October 11 -- Blue coated cavalry discover the Rebels have vacated the lines at Harrodsburg, abandoning twelve hundred sick and wounded. The Confederates had gotten across Dick's (or Dix) River before also burning all the bridges over the Salt River.

October 12 -- The Rebels, now Smith as well as Bragg, have crossed Dick's River to form a new line of battle near Camp Dick Robinson, a position Buell considers to be virtually impregnable. To counteract the Confederate advantage of position Buell plans a southward flanking movement to try to get to the Confederate rear, conceivably interdicting any retreat.

October 13 -- Buell takes all day supervising careful and cautious movements only to learn that Bragg -- upon learning of the Federals' approaching columns -- has stolen another march by leaving for the Cumberland Gap at 1:00 that morning. Bragg enters Crab Orchard.

October 14 -- Buell enters Crab Orchard the same day when Bragg makes it to Mount Vernon, less than five miles further down the Wilderness Road.

October 15 -- Bragg's Confederates cross Rockcastle River where they encounter hostile civilians with Unionist leanings. However, the dual pursuits against Bragg's column are also over for all intents and purposes. Four miles from Mount Vernon two of Crittenden's divisions enter a deep gorge in which the retreating Rebels had felled several trees, making the gorge impassible

October 19 --Although the Federals capture some stragglers and wagons, the main body of Confederates is beyond reach, especially after Bragg's army pass through Cumberland Gap on October 20, followed by Smith's army two days later. In two weeks Buell's pursuit has progressed a mere sixty five miles!

Buell reveals his true inclinations when after a litany of excuses he notifies General in Chief Henry Halleck in Washington that he intends to, "... direct my main force by the most direct route to Nashville."

October 23 -- After Halleck has directed Buell "to proceed to and occupy East Tennessee with all possible dispatch," in an act of rank insubordination Buell orders his army return to Nashville. Buell was relieved as a result of this insubordination, thus for all intents and purposes stymieing the Civil War career of a general who not so long ago had been considered one of the North's best commanders.

Aftermath -- Neither commander had any reason to take pride in his command accomplishments; each commander was reliably able to conjure up excuses to avoid taking advantage of opportunities to inflict serious injury to the other. Essentially both sides ended approximately where they had begun with little of any strategic value being accomplished. In other words, the Confederates lost their bid to capture Kentucky but control of Tennessee had yet to be settled.

The latter part of Bragg's Kentucky campaign coincided with Robert Lee's raid into Maryland, a raid that culminated with Lee's retreat from Antietam. Lee's army suffered more casualties with less accomplished in material results that had Bragg's army. Additionally Lee's Maryland campaign had accomplished nothing of any strategic importance for the Confederacy. Yet while Lee was being treated as a hero, Bragg was greeted with harsh criticism from a wide range of sources from within and without his army.

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