

"INTO AFRICA":
KIRBY SMITH AND BRAXTON BRAGG'S
INVASION OF KENTUCKY

GARY DONALDSON

Braxton Bragg's invasion of Kentucky in the fall of 1862 and Robert E. Lee's invasion of Maryland at the same time are often seen as an effort by Jefferson Davis and the Confederate military commanders in Richmond to coordinate a two-part invasion of the North. This conclusion is often based on similarities between the two campaigns, the most obvious being that both were conducted at the same time and both ended with generally the same result — inconclusive battles at Perryville and Antietam, followed by Confederate retreats. However, there is little evidence that Bragg's invasion was part of any coordinated effort. Bragg's objective was to move against Federal forces in central Tennessee, not Kentucky, with the ultimate goal of liberating Nashville. The plan for what became known as Bragg's invasion of Kentucky was conceived by General Edmund Kirby Smith, a departmental commander in east Tennessee, who brashly initiated the invasion from Knoxville on his own accord with much of Bragg's army and only silent support from Davis. Bragg was forced to follow with the remainder of his army as the principal Union force in the west chased Kirby Smith into Kentucky. It was not the stuff of great military strategy.

Kirby Smith rose to the position of commander of the Department of East Tennessee as a result of Jefferson Davis's reorganization of the Confederate departmental system. Several new departments were created out of this reorganization, and the reshuffling opened doors for a few young officers. Kirby Smith had risen rapidly through the Confederate ranks and was a prime candidate for a command position in this new system. On 25 September 1861, he was ordered to Knoxville where he estab-

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Battles and Leaders of the Civil War

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1 The standard biography of Kirby Smith is Joseph H. Parks, *General Edmund Kirby Smith, CSA* (Baton Rouge, 1954), see 155. See also Jonathan Withers to A. S. Johnston, 25 February 1862, *The War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies* (126 vols.; Washington, 1880-1901), Ser. I, Vol. VII, 908. Hereafter cited as *OR*.

2 Parks, *Kirby Smith*, 136-37. See also, Dunbar Rowland, *Jefferson Davis Constitutionalist: His Letters, Papers and Speeches* (10 vols.; Jackson Mississippi, 1926), IV, 493. For an account of Kirby Smith's activities at Manassas, see Douglas Southall Freeman, *Lee's Lieutenants, a Study in Command* (3 vols.; New York, 1942), I, 83-84.



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A Floridian and West Point graduate who had spent most of his active duty in the southwest, Kirby Smith was only thirty-seven when he took his new post. He was an ambitious man who saw himself as destined for greatness, a man, who, with the right opportunities, could be a great leader of men. He was also a religious man, reluctantly choosing the hectic regimented way of the military over the quiet life of a clergyman. Tall, balding, and bearded, Kirby Smith looked like a general.

Kirby Smith's new command ranged along a defensive line from Cumberland Gap in southeast Kentucky through Knoxville to Chattanooga. His main objective was to hold the line against a Federal encroachment into Georgia and the southeast. But there were problems. The command was weak and vulnerable. His fighting force, the Army of East Tennessee, was sorely inadequate and incapable of meeting its tasks. Kirby Smith had about 10,000 men, most of whom were listed in his reports as badly armed or even unarmed.³ It was not an army poised to repel invaders. It certainly was not an army preparing to invade Kentucky.

Moving across northern Alabama toward Kirby Smith was a Federal army of 24,000 under General Don Carlos Buell. Buell had been told by his superiors in Washington that Kirby Smith's force was vulnerable: "By moving on Chattanooga [you] are on a direct line to Atlanta. Smith must abandon East Tennessee or be captured."⁴ By 29 June Buell was at Huntsville, Alabama, threatening Chattanooga. Buell's superiors were correct; Kirby Smith's force was too weak to defend against the Federal move.

In addition to Buell, Kirby Smith had to deal with a Federal force under General George Morgan that was pushing hard at the northern perimeter of his department near Cumberland Gap. Outnumbered three to one, Kirby Smith found it impossible to deal with this two-pronged attack. He wrote his superiors: "The

³ *OR*. Ser. I, Vol. X, pt. 2, 476.

⁴ W. H. Halleck to Buell, 11 June 1862, *ibid.*, Vol. XVI, pt. 2, 9. See also *ibid.*, pt. 1, 24, 30.

force from middle Tennessee acting in concert with that on the Kentucky line places me in an unfavorable situation. To concentrate at either . . . involves the abandonment of Cumberland Gap or Chattanooga." After repeated attempts to defend both places, Kirby Smith resolved to abandon Cumberland Gap in favor of the more strategically important railroad lines at Chattanooga, a temporary solution at best.⁵ If something were not done quickly to hold the line against Buell, Georgia might fall to the Federals. Kirby Smith began wiring for reinforcements.

The new commander of the Department of the West, General Braxton Bragg, a craggy, by-the-book soldier who had earned fame at the Battle of Buena Vista, heard the call and responded by sending a few reinforcements. But Kirby Smith needed more. He told Bragg that "an immediate re-enforcement of at least two brigades is necessary" to insure the defense of Chattanooga and east Tennessee.⁶ Bragg responded again. In June, he sent a brigade under General John P. McCown, and later that month he forwarded a second brigade under General Henry Heth.⁷ The outlook for the defense of Chattanooga looked brighter.

But Kirby Smith's army, even reinforced, was no match for Buell's 24,000 man force. If he were to keep the Federals out of Georgia, he would need more. Throughout July, Kirby Smith continued to press Richmond for more help from Bragg arguing that Buell's force is "overwhelming [and] cannot be resisted except by Bragg's cooperation."⁸ Bragg apparently agreed, but he would have to move swiftly to check the Federal advance. In an unprecedented effort at the mass movement of troops and supplies, Bragg employed the southern railway system to transport 25,000 men in around 20 days from Tupelo, Mississippi, to Buell's front

⁵ Kirby Smith to T. A. Washington, 6 June 1862, *ibid.*, Vol. X, pt. 2, 596-97.

⁶ Kirby Smith to Bragg, 20 June 1862, *ibid.*, Vol. XVI, pt. 2, 695; *ibid.*, pt. 1, 35.

⁷ Davis to Kirby Smith, 25 June 1862, *ibid.*, pt. 2, 707; *ibid.*, 710.

⁸ Kirby Smith to Davis, 14 July 1862, *ibid.*, 726-27; Kirby Smith to Cooper, 19 July 1862. *ibid.*, 729.

at Chattanooga — via Mobile, Alabama.⁹ Buell found himself outflanked by an army that only days earlier was reported to be some 150 miles to his rear. Kirby Smith was understandably exuberant. Now reinforced to nearly 35,000 men, he told his wife that he was prepared to “carry the war into Africa.”¹⁰

But it was Kentucky that the South wanted. Kentucky had disappointed the Confederate government when it refused to secede in 1861. The decision denied the South a defense line on the Ohio River and left Kentucky in Federal hands. To some, Kentucky was an occupied southern state held in bondage by the North. More than once, occupying Confederate generals tried to coax Kentucky into the southern camp, but their calls were barely heard. Even though some 25,000 to 40,000 Kentuckians did join the Confederate army, the number was always a disappointment to Confederate authorities.¹¹ In addition, Kentucky was a rich land, a seemingly untapped source of men, money, supplies, and food. A liberating southern army, many thought, could pluck this ripe and bountiful fruit for the Confederate cause.

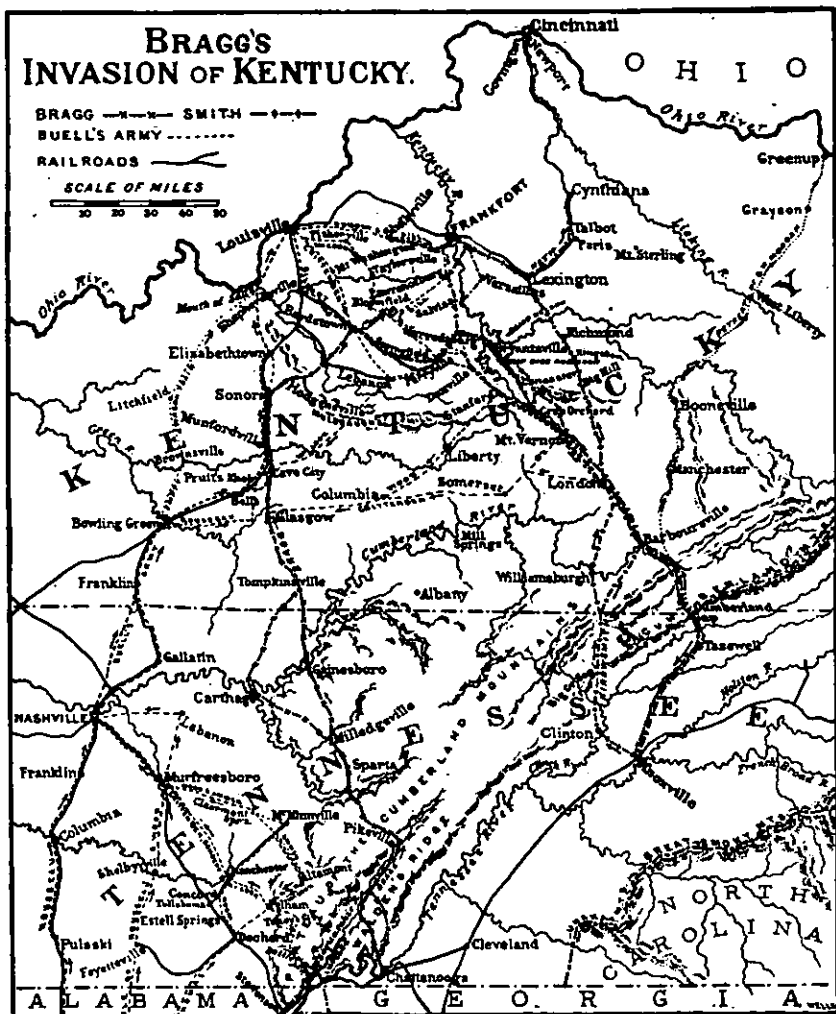
Davis agreed. He refused to believe that Kentucky did not support the South. Kentucky was like Tennessee, he thought, a pro-southern state held captive, waiting patiently for a southern army to bring freedom.¹² Consequently, he was receptive to any scheme to liberate either state. When Kirby Smith asked to deliver Kentucky from its bondage, Davis was eager for the opportunity.

⁹ For an account of Bragg's journey to east Tennessee, see Robert C. Black, III, *Railroads of the Confederacy* (Chapel Hill, 1952), 182.

¹⁰ Kirby Smith to wife, 2 July 1862, Kirby Smith Papers (Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, North Carolina).

¹¹ Among those who tried to persuade Kentuckians to join the Confederacy were General Simon Bolivar Buckner, General Albert Sidney Johnston, General John C. Breckinridge, General Felix Zollicoffer, and General John C. Crittenden. See *OR.*, Ser. I, Vol. IV, 411-12, 413-14, 420; *ibid.*, Vol. VII, 787; *ibid.*, Vol. LII, pt. 2, 250-52. See also, Frank M. Moore, ed., *Rebellion Record: A Diary of American Events with Documents, Narratives, Illustrative Incidents, Poetry, Etc.* (11 vols.; New York, 1861-68), III, 257 and Arndt Stickles, *Simon Bolivar Buckner: Borderland Knight* (Chapel Hill, 1940), 70-91.

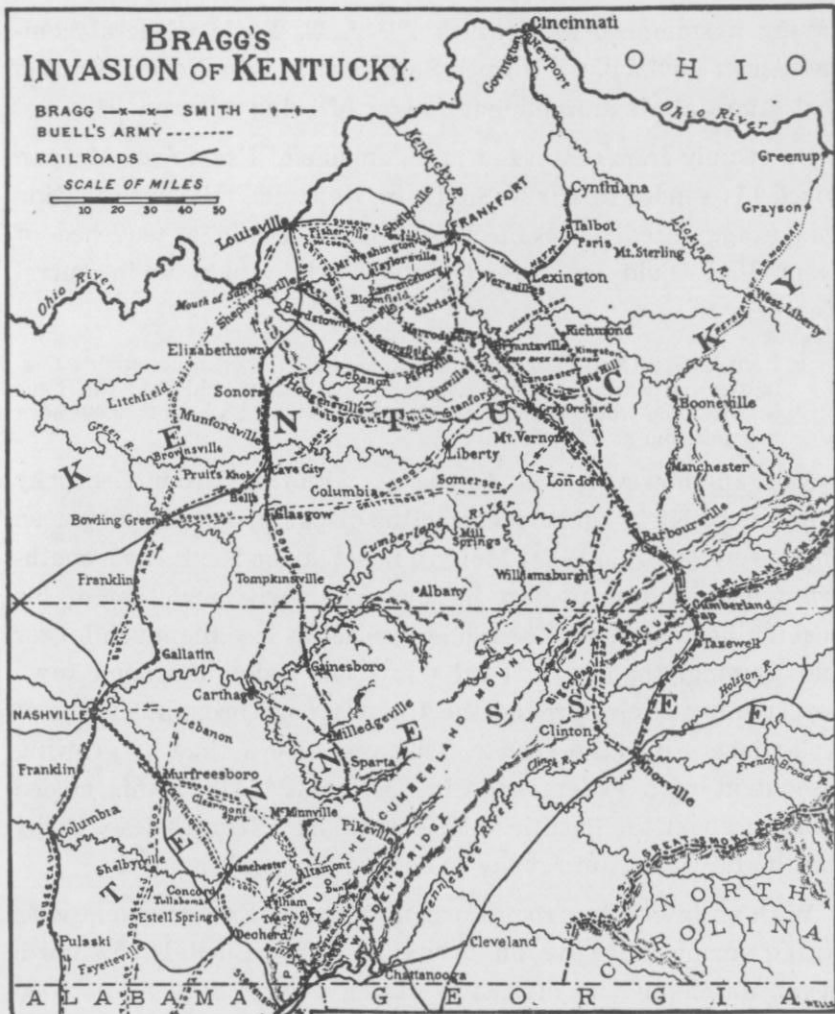
¹² Rowland, *Davis*, V, 313.



The Bragg-Smith Kentucky Campaign

Battles and Leaders of the Civil War

In the summer of 1862, Davis sent the flamboyant John Hunt Morgan into Kentucky to disrupt enemy supply lines and to test Union strength. Was Kentucky ripe for the picking? Morgan's celebrated raid found a weak, nearly undefended Kentucky. In just ten days, he and nine hundred men stormed their way across the state, disrupting Buell's supply lines and scattering garrisons of Union troops. Lincoln wrote Henry Halleck that "they are



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having a stampede in Kentucky.”¹³ J. T. Boyle, Federal commander at Louisville, informed Secretary of War Edwin Stanton that “the state is in imminent danger of being overrun.”¹⁴

On 16 July from only a few miles outside of Frankfort, Morgan wired his report to Kirby Smith in Knoxville. His information was exaggerated, even incorrect, but it began a sequence of events that would soon bring two great armies to battle in central Kentucky:

I am here with a force sufficient to hold all the country outside Lexington and Frankfort. These places are garrisoned chiefly with Home Guards. The whole country can be secured, and 25,000 or 30,000 men will join you at once.¹⁵

Morgan, however, was forced to withdraw from Kentucky even before Kirby Smith received the dispatch, and he had gotten only a few recruits. What Morgan mistook for Kentucky's southern sympathy was in part his own popularity and that of his dashing horsemen, who consistently held at bay the much larger and seemingly hapless Federal army. The vision of a home town boy running circles around the Union troops brought droves of well-wishers into the streets. This was also a time of growing discontent with Federal rule in Kentucky.¹⁶ All of this misled Morgan about the loyalties of Kentuckians. Nevertheless, Kirby Smith and Davis were ready to believe Morgan's analysis.

With an invitation from Morgan to invade Kentucky and with Bragg's army about to reduce the threat from Buell, Kirby Smith began developing an offensive strategy. On 6 July he notified Bragg that he was preparing to move against the Federal troops at Cumberland Gap.¹⁷ The next day, he informed General Carter Stevenson, the commander of his forces near the Gap, that if

13 Lincoln to Halleck, 13 July 1862, *OR.*, Ser. I, Vol. XVI, pt. 1, 738.

14 J. T. Boyle to E. M. Stanton, 19 July 1862, *ibid.*, 741.

15 John Hunt Morgan to Kirby Smith, 16 July 1862, *ibid.*, pt. 2, 733-34.

16 Major causes of discontent were Federal arrests of southern sympathizers and rumors of emancipation which caused bad feelings even among unionists. Also, there was discontent with Federal military interference in local elections. See E. Merton Coulter, *Civil War and Readjustment in Kentucky* (Chapel Hill, 1926), 151-52, 155, 156-65.

17 Kirby Smith to Bragg, 6 July 1862, *OR.*, Ser. I, Vol. XVI, pt. 2, 723.

the movement against George Morgan proved successful there might be a further advance into Kentucky, an astounding statement considering some 50,000 Federal troops were pressing his lines at Chattanooga and Cumberland Gap.¹⁸ Two weeks later Bragg's army began filtering into the railroad station at Chattanooga, and it looked as though Buell would be checked. On 24 July Kirby Smith wrote Bragg of his delight at the turn of events: "I will cheerfully place my command under your orders."¹⁹ But on the same day, he again wrote Stevenson to prepare for an invasion of Kentucky.²⁰ With Buell under control, Kentucky became Kirby Smith's new objective.

Bragg and Kirby Smith finally met to discuss strategy on 1 August in Chattanooga. However, their topic was not Kentucky. The discussion centered on Bragg's first objective, middle Tennessee. The plan was for Bragg to move against Buell while Kirby Smith invested George Morgan at Cumberland Gap. Only after the liberation of Nashville would the two forces consider a move into Kentucky.²¹ However, Kirby Smith had other ideas. On 9 August, after discovering that George Morgan was preparing for a long siege, Kirby Smith wrote Bragg that if "a speedy reduction of the Gap [is] an impractical thing . . . a move direct to Lexington, Ky., would effectually invest Morgan, and would be attended with other most brilliant results."²² Three days later, Bragg agreed; but the first objective would still be middle Tennessee.²³

Kirby Smith began to campaign for his plan. He wrote Davis that now "is the time to strike at Kentucky." He dubbed the plan the "true policy," and added that he hoped to "permanently

18 E. Cunningham (Kirby Smith's aide-de-camp) to Stevenson, 6 July 1862, *ibid.*, 724.

19 Kirby Smith to Bragg, 24 July 1862, *ibid.*, 734-35.

20 H. L. Clay (Kirby Smith's assistant adjutant general) to Stevenson, 24 July 1862, *ibid.*, 733-34.

21 Kirby Smith, "Kentucky Campaign Notes," Kirby Smith Papers; Bragg to Cooper, 1 August 1862, *OR.*, Ser. I, Vol. XVI, pt. 2, 741.

22 Kirby Smith to Bragg, 9 August 1862, *ibid.*, 748.

23 Bragg to Kirby Smith, 12 August 1862, *ibid.*, 754-55.

occupy Kentucky."²⁴ Kirby Smith knew of Davis's yearning to bring Kentucky into the Confederacy, and he played on that emotion well. Later, after the invasion had failed miserably, Davis admitted his ignorance of the Kentucky situation: "The expectations that the Kentuckians would rise *en masse* . . . alone justified an advance into that state. . . . That expectation has been sadly disappointing."²⁵

All of this placed Bragg in an awkward position. If Kirby Smith decided to take the Army of East Tennessee (which included a large part of Bragg's army) into Kentucky, Bragg would be left with only 27,000 men to face Buell's army of some 50,000. It was Kirby Smith who was in position to decide the fate of the campaign; Bragg had lost the initiative. By the second week in August, Bragg's supply trains had still not completed their long overland journey from Tupelo, and Bragg wanted the campaign to get underway before Buell anticipated Kirby Smith's move and reinforced Morgan at Cumberland Gap. So, on 12 August, Bragg turned loose of the few reins he still had on Kirby Smith and the invasion of Kentucky began. Bragg, however, thought as late as 15 August that Kirby Smith's objective was still Cumberland Gap.²⁶

The Army of East Tennessee moved out of Knoxville on 14 August. It skirted Cumberland Gap and marched into southeastern Kentucky. Kirby Smith led the two main divisions commanded by generals Patrick Cleburne and T. J. Churchill. At a strength of 6,000, this force passed through Rogers Gap. Henry Heth and General Danville Leadbetter moved their brigades through Big Creek Gap. A third unit led by Stevenson advanced to Morgan's front at Cumberland Gap.²⁷ Cavalry in advance of the main force brushed aside a small band of Federal militiamen at London, Kentucky, and entered Barbourville on 18 August,

²⁴ Kirby Smith to Davis, 11 August 1862, *ibid.*, 752-53.

²⁵ Rowland, *Davis*, V, 356.

²⁶ Bragg to Kirby Smith, 12 August 1862, *OR.*, Ser. I, Vol. XVI, pt. 2, 754-55; Bragg to Kirby Smith, 15 August 1862, *ibid.*, 758-59.

²⁷ Kirby Smith to Bragg, 13 August 1862, *ibid.*, 755; Kirby Smith, "Kentucky Campaign Notes," Kirby Smith Papers.

only hours ahead of the main force. Kirby Smith arrived two days later. The first move had been swift and decisive. Kirby Smith waited at Barbourville for Bragg to act.²⁸

Kirby Smith was proud of the march across the mountains. His men had moved swiftly around the Federals at Cumberland Gap and onto the eastern rim of the Bluegrass. He considered himself a conqueror. To his wife, he described the march as a herculean undertaking, a task "rivaling the passage of the Alps." He compared himself to the Spanish conquistador Hernando Cortez: "I have burnt my ships behind me and thrown myself boldly into the enemy's country. The result may be brilliant . . . and if successful will be considered a stroke of inspiration and genius." He also likened his actions to those of Moses: "Like the Egyptians of old," God has "hardened [the enemy's] hearts & blinded their eyes to make their destruction more complete." "I care not what the world may say," he went on, "I am not ambitious."²⁹ The words sounded triumphant, but the situation was uncertain at best. The area around Barbourville lacked sufficient forage to sustain his troops longer than George Morgan could maintain his own army at Cumberland Gap. "Smith cannot possibly remain three weeks in my rear," Morgan wrote Buell. "I can hold this place five weeks with my present command."³⁰

Two days after he arrived in Barbourville, Kirby Smith wrote Bragg that foraging in southeast Kentucky was so bad that his only alternatives were to retreat to Chattanooga for supplies or advance toward Lexington for them. His decision was easy. "The former course," he continued, "will be too disastrous to our cause in Kentucky for me to think of doing so for a moment. I have therefore decided to advance as soon as possible upon Lexington."³¹ The next day, he informed Davis of his plans, calling his strategy for an advance into Kentucky "the lesser of two evils."³²

28 *Ibid.*

29 *Ibid.*, 21, 23, 24, 25 August 1862, Kirby Smith Papers.

30 G. Morgan to Buell, 16 August 1862, *OR.*, Ser. I, Vol. XVI, pt. 2, 352.

31 Kirby Smith to Bragg, 20 August 1862, *ibid.*, 766-67.

32 Kirby Smith to Davis, 21 August 1862, *ibid.*, 768-69.

Bragg was being maneuvered into invading Kentucky. Kirby Smith, on his way to Lexington with a sizeable part of Bragg's army, had left Bragg too weak to deal with Buell. If Bragg failed to move quickly, Kirby Smith might be pinched between Buell's army and whatever federal forces were forming on the Ohio River. Unlike Kirby Smith, Bragg had no choices; he would have to keep his army between Buell and Kirby Smith which meant launching an invasion of Kentucky.

Bragg finally got his army in marching order on 28 August and began moving slowly from Chattanooga toward Sparta, Tennessee, between Buell and Kirby Smith. From Sparta, Bragg moved into Kentucky toward Glasgow where he could intersect the Bardstown Pike and drive northeast into the Bluegrass region to a junction with Kirby Smith. Buell responded on 7 September by moving out of Nashville toward Bowling Green. Kirby Smith's plan had brought to bear the forces of the west.

The revised plan, as Bragg and Kirby Smith refined it in dispatches, called for their two armies to join somewhere in the Bluegrass and crush Buell as he retreated toward the Ohio River to protect his supply lines. While Buell was occupied in Kentucky, Confederate forces in Mississippi under General Earl Van Dorn would move into middle Tennessee and capture Nashville. The result would be Confederate control of central Kentucky and central Tennessee.³³ In conjunction with Lee's invasion of Maryland in the east, the plan had the potential for putting the Federals on the defensive — at least temporarily.

But by 25 August Kirby Smith began to lose his nerve. He saw his situation in Kentucky as less than advantageous. He wrote Bragg that:

should [the people of Kentucky] fail to [support me] . . . my position will be a very precarious one and . . . very soon I shall have to fall back; also if I should meet with resistance too great to be overcome this side of the Kentucky [River] I shall have to [retreat] under the circumstances of great difficulty.³⁴

³³ Bragg to Kirby Smith, 10 August 1862, *ibid.*, 748-49; Kirby Smith, "Kentucky Campaign Notes," Kirby Smith Papers.

³⁴ Kirby Smith to Bragg, 24 August 1862, *OR.*, Ser. I, Vol. XVI, pt. 2, 775-76.

On the same day, he headed north out of Barbourville toward the Bluegrass and Lexington. Two days earlier, the First Louisiana Cavalry, commanded by Colonel John Scott, had engaged and scattered a small Federal force just south of Richmond at Big Hill. The greatest reward of that small victory was a captured Union dispatch revealing growing Federal strength near Richmond. The Army of East Tennessee was about to meet its first real resistance.³⁵

Kirby Smith was encouraged that the Federals planned to make a stand near Richmond because he had feared a Federal withdrawal to the bluffs of the Kentucky River where a small army, dug in and fortified, might stop his advance.³⁶ At the same time, he had not expected to encounter resistance so soon. His men were tired, and much of his army had been left behind to guard the slow-moving trains. He was not ready for a fight.³⁷ However, Scott reported from the field that the force at Richmond "could be scattered to the winds by one third their numbers if the move is made at once."³⁸ Kirby Smith took the advice. He pushed on through the eastern Kentucky mountains, bypassed Crab Orchard, and began the exhausting ascent of Big Hill. On 29 August his weary troops descended into the Bluegrass ten miles from Richmond.

That same afternoon, Scott skirmished aggressively with Federal pickets along the Richmond road, and at one point his men were driven back upon Cleburne's infantry. That night, Kirby Smith devised his plans for the next day. Cleburne, the most aggressive of his commanders, would lead the attack. Churchill would follow. Kirby Smith wrote his wife that the troops "are rapidly collecting from Indiana, Ill. — and Ohio,

35 Kirby Smith, "Kentucky Campaign Notes," Kirby Smith Papers; *OR.*, Ser. I, Vol. XVI, pt. 1, 886; Kirby Smith to Bragg, 24 August 1862, *ibid.*, pt. 2, 775-76.

36 Paul F. Hammond, "The Campaign of General E. Kirby Smith in Kentucky in 1862," *Southern Historical Society Papers*, IX (1881), No. 2, 250.

37 James L. Morrison, Jr., "The Memoirs of Henry Heth," *Civil War History*, 7 (January 1962): 21.

38 J. S. Scott to Kirby Smith, 24 August 1862, *OR.*, Ser. I, Vol. XVI, pt. 1, 886-87.

but they are new levies and we do not fear the result. We shall move tomorrow."³⁹

At Richmond, poised for a stand against the Confederates, General Mahon D. Manson waited with 7,000 raw recruits described by their commander as "scarcely three weeks from the corn fields and thrashing floors of Indiana."⁴⁰ Manson saw only two ways of dealing with the invaders: "allow the enemy to attack me in my camp or . . . advance and meet him."⁴¹ Apparently, he did not consider retreating to a more advantageous position; he would fight. But Manson's commander, General William Nelson, headquartered in Lexington, had other ideas on how to handle Kirby Smith. He sent a message to Manson to retreat toward Lancaster. There Nelson planned to join his troops and take command. He then rode to Lancaster on the morning of 30 August. When he arrived and found no armies, he rushed on to Richmond.⁴²

The morning of 30 August was described by an observer as "warm, clear and beautiful. No brighter sun ever scattered the mists of early day."⁴³ But the warmth of the sun was soon replaced by the heat of cannon fire. Kirby Smith reached the battlefield at about 8:00 a.m. The Federal force straddled Richmond Pike, its artillery near its center. Facing them on the right was Cleburne's division. Churchill was to the left. The Federals attacked first by trying to turn the Confederate right flank. Cleburne was wounded in the first assault. In his place, General Preston Smith broke the attack and eventually drove the Federals from the field.⁴⁴

39 Kirby Smith to wife, 25 August 1862, Kirby Smith Papers; P. Cleburne to Kirby Smith, 1 September 1862, *OR.*, Ser. I, Vol. XVI, pt. 1, 944-45.

40 *Ibid.*, 911. Manson reported that "the regiments had never had a battalion drill and knew not what a line of battle was." *ibid.*, 914. The Richmond [Virginia] *Dispatch*, 11 September 1862, reported: "the officers [were] as green as the men, [and] unable to give intelligent commands." See also, Nashville *Dispatch*, 4 September 1862.

41 *OR.*, Ser. I, Vol. XVI, pt. 1, 911.

42 Nelson to H. G. Wright, 31 August 1862, *ibid.*, pt. 2, 467.

43 Hammond, "The Campaign of Kirby Smith," No. 2, 250.

44 *Ibid.*, 250; Kirby Smith, "Kentucky Campaign Notes," Kirby Smith Papers; *OR.*, Ser. I, Vol. XVI, pt. 1, 947.

Manson's forces withdrew one mile and re-formed on a high position near the small town of Rogersville. Hidden from view, the Union right surprised Churchill's division, and the confederate line wavered under intense fire. But Kirby Smith reported that "Churchill's voice rang out . . . steadying his men and ordering [a] charge. The enemy was broken."⁴⁵ Manson later reported that his forces were "compelled to fall back and retreat in confusion."⁴⁶ At 12:30 p.m., nearly five hours after the battle began, Manson finally received Nelson's order not to engage the enemy.⁴⁷ About an hour later, Nelson himself arrived on the battlefield and began a futile attempt to rally his retreating forces. He reportedly resorted to such drastic measures as striking his own soldiers over the head with his sword.⁴⁸

Confident that victory was his, Kirby Smith ordered Scott's cavalry to the Federal rear in anticipation of a mass retreat. At 5:00 p.m., he carried out a general charge that drove the enemy through their own camp and eventually through Richmond into Scott's hands on the other side. Over four thousand Federal soldiers were captured, including both Manson and Nelson.⁴⁹ "The havoc was frightful," the *Nashville Dispatch* reported; Federal troops "threw down their arms and surrendered in crowds."⁵⁰ Kirby Smith recorded what seemed to be true; the fruits of victory were his: "All [of] Kentucky to the Ohio [is] at our feet."⁵¹

After a day's rest, Kirby Smith's men moved north toward Lexington where a strong Union force could be expected to defend the heart of the Bluegrass. Kirby Smith had lost all com-

45 Kirby Smith, "Kentucky Campaign Notes," Kirby Smith Papers.

46 *OR.*, Ser. I, Vol. XVI, pt. 1, 913.

47 *Ibid.*, 913.

48 J. B. McCullah to R. J. White, 10 March 1878, cited in the Richmond [Kentucky] *Daily Register*, 1 December 1867. Nelson is often credited with using only the flat side of his sword. See Thomas D. Clark, *A History of Kentucky* (Lexington, 1937), 458.

49 *OR.*, Ser. I, Vol. XVI, pt. 1, 909, 914.

50 *Nashville Dispatch*, 14 September 1862. In fact, Nelson was able to escape. See also, Kirby Smith, "Kentucky Campaign Notes," Kirby Smith Papers.

51 *Ibid.*

munications with Bragg, and it was entirely possible that a large portion of Buell's army had split from the main force and was waiting at Lexington. He approached the town with caution.⁵² As Kirby Smith expected, a Federal force had taken position on the Kentucky River bluffs, but, surprisingly, they scattered as the Confederates approached. Kirby Smith renamed his army the Army of Kentucky and entered Lexington in triumph on 2 September. The next day Scott and his men rode to Frankfort and raised the only flag they had, the banner of the First Louisiana Cavalry, over Kentucky's Capitol; the conquest of central Kentucky was complete.⁵³ A few days later, when news of Kirby Smith's successes finally reached Richmond, Virginia, the *Dispatch* proclaimed: "We think we may safely say that the day of Kentucky's deliverance from the hateful thrall of the abolition despotism has brightly dawned."⁵⁴

Kirby Smith had accomplished his objective, so he waited for Bragg and the rendezvous that would bring together a large Confederate force against Buell to destroy Federal resistance in the west. He dispersed his army throughout the Bluegrass and began the slow process of occupying land and gathering supplies. John Hunt Morgan joined him, and reports indicated that Humphrey Marshall with 3,000 men was moving in from western Virginia with more support. Kirby Smith waited.

Meanwhile, to the southwest, Bragg and Buell continued jostling for position as the two great armies moved north into central Kentucky. They avoided each other near Bowling Green, and then again at Munfordville where Bragg wasted three days capturing a small Federal garrison. His procrastination allowed Buell to advance from Bowling Green, and on 19 September it appeared that the two armies would fight it out along the Green River. But Bragg, low on rations and outnumbered, marched east to Bardstown and the rendezvous with Kirby Smith. Buell

52 Hammond, "The Campaign of Kirby Smith," No. 3, 293.

53 *Ibid.*, 289, 291; Richmond [Virginia] *Dispatch*, 11 September 1862.

54 *Ibid.*, 8 September 1862.

marched into Louisville unopposed.⁵⁵

There were many reasons for Bragg and Kirby Smith to invade Kentucky, but recruits alone could make the invasion worth the effort. But when the Confederates entered Lexington on 2 September, one soldier noticed something unusual about those who turned out to greet the conquering army: "The crowds . . . were composed for the most part of women and children. The men . . . held aloof . . . closely in their homes."⁵⁶ Kirby Smith wrote to Bragg two weeks later that recruiting had been disappointing: "The Kentuckians are slow and backward in rallying to our standard. Their hearts are evidently with us, but their blue grass and fat [cattle] are against us."⁵⁷ He tried to explain the problem to his wife: "I see their magnificent estates their fat cattle & fine stock [and] I can understand their fears & hesitancy — they have so much to lose."⁵⁸

By the time Bragg reached Bardstown it was also evident to him that recruiting was well below expectations. On 2 September he wrote the adjutant general at Richmond: "We have so far received no accession to this army. General Smith has secured about a brigade — not half our losses by casualties of different kinds. Unless a change occurs soon we must abandon the garden spot of Kentucky to its cupidity."⁵⁹ After the campaign, Bragg wrote his wife of the recruiting problems he and Kirby Smith encountered in Kentucky; he also explained how important recruiting was to the campaign: "Why then should I stay with my brave southern men to fight for cowards who skulked about in the dark to say to us 'we are with you, only whip these fellows out of the our country, and let us now see you can protect us, and

55 For the campaigns of Bragg and Buell, three of the best sources are: Grady McWhinney, *Braxton Bragg and the Confederate Defeat* (New York, 1969); Archer Jones, *Confederate Strategy from Shiloh to Vicksburg* (Baton Rouge, 1961); Thomas L. Connelly, *Army of the Heartland* (Baton Rouge, 1967).

56 Hammond, "The Campaign of Kirby Smith," No. 3, 292.

57 Kirby Smith to Bragg, 18 September 1862, *OR.*, Ser. I, Vol. XVI, pt. 2, 846.

58 Kirby Smith to wife, 16 September 1862, Kirby Smith Papers.

59 Bragg to Cooper, 25 September 1862, *OR.*, Ser. I, Vol. XVI, pt. 2, 876.

we will join you.'"⁶⁰ The 25,000 or 30,000 men that John Hunt Morgan promised back in July turned out to be wishful thinking. The failure to raise recruits was the most disappointing aspect of the Kentucky campaign and the main reason for its failure.

While waiting on Bragg to order a concentration of the two forces, Kirby Smith spent most of September taking military control of the Bluegrass. He sent Danville Leadbetter to scatter a small Federal force at Lebanon and then to occupy Frankfort. Captain Robert McFarland was sent to Cumberland Gap to keep an eye on George Morgan. Scott went west to watch for a possible surprise attack from Buell. John Hunt Morgan and Preston Smith were placed under Heth's command for a diversionary move toward Cincinnati to keep the Federal forces there from reinforcing Buell.⁶¹

When Bragg reached Bardstown, he called for the two armies to combine in preparation for an attack. But Kirby Smith was interested in other things. He argued that his position in the Bluegrass was too important to relinquish and pointed out that George Morgan had abandoned Cumberland Gap and was retreating toward Lexington. He complained to Humphrey Marshall:

General Bragg writes me that he is marching upon Louisville, and that he wishes me to co-operate with him in an attack of that place. Of course if he wishes it I shall do so, but I have represented to him the exposed condition in which I shall have to leave this rich section, with an enemy toward Cincinnati and another toward the Gap.⁶²

So instead of following through on the plan that he devised and

⁶⁰ Bragg to wife, 9 November 1862, (Special Collections, University of Kentucky," *The Register of the Kentucky Historical Society*, 79 (January

⁶¹ Jonothan Pegram (Kirby Smith's chief-of-staff) to Scott, 4 September 1862, *OR.*, Ser. I, Vol. XVI, pt. 2, 796; Pegram to Leadbetter, 6 September 1862, *ibid.*, 799; H. P. Pratt (Kirby Smith's acting assistant adjutant general) to Preston Smith, 9 September 1862, *ibid.*, 805; Pegram to McFarland, 10 September 1862, *ibid.*, 807; Pegram to Leadbetter, 11 September 1862, *ibid.*, 812; Pegram to John Hunt Morgan, 11 September 1862, *ibid.*, 813; Morrison, "Heth," 22.

⁶² Kirby Smith to Humphrey Marshall, 11 September 1862, *OR.*, Ser. I, Vol. XVI, pt. 2, 859; Kirby Smith to Marshall, 18 September 1862, *ibid.*, 846; Kirby Smith to Bragg, 19 September 1862, *ibid.*, 850; Kirby Smith to Bragg, 21 September 1862, *ibid.*, 861.

maneuvered Bragg into initiating, Kirby Smith moved his troops to the east to Mt. Sterling to head off George Morgan.

Kirby Smith arrived at Mt. Sterling on 25 September, ready to engage Morgan. But Morgan's men were not spoiling for a fight. Cut off from their supply lines, they were on the verge of starvation; Morgan wanted only to escape north across the Ohio River. Kirby Smith sent John Hunt Morgan to Irvine to begin delaying tactics to soften up the Federals before the fight. But the Federal Morgan was aware that Kirby Smith lay in wait at Mt. Sterling and escaped along an old Indian trail from Manchester toward Booneville. Along that route, the two Morgans met and skirmished several times, but the Confederates were no match for the larger Union force. George Morgan maintained his northeasterly route away from Kirby Smith and crossed the Ohio River at Greenup on 3 October.⁶³ Kirby Smith's army remained at Mt. Sterling over sixty miles away completely out of touch with Bragg. In a last desperate attempt to fill their ranks with Kentuckians, Bragg and Kirby Smith met at Frankfort on 3 October to install a new Confederate governor of Kentucky — with the power to impose a conscription order forcing all men of military age in the state to join the Confederates.⁶⁴

But Buell had other plans for the Confederate invaders. He enlarged his army in Louisville to 60,000 men and quickly moved toward Bragg's army at Bardstown. Bragg knew that Buell was up to something, and throughout the inauguration day he kept in touch with his commanders at Bardstown. But the inaugural ceremony became a Confederate embarrassment when Federal

63 George W. Morgan, "Cumberland Gap," Robert U. Johnson and Clarence C. Buell, eds., *Battles and Leaders of the Civil War, Being for the Most Part Contributed by Union and Confederate Officers*, (4 vols.; New York, 1884-88), III, 68-69; *OR.*, Ser. I, Vol. XVI, pt. 1, 994-95.

64 For an account of this installation ceremony, see Lowell Harrison, "George W. Johnson and Richard Hawes: The Governors of Confederate Kentucky," *The Register of the Kentucky Historical Society*, 79 (January 1981): 32-35. Hawes had come into Kentucky with Kirby Smith. He had been lieutenant governor and had taken the oath of office as governor after George W. Johnson was killed at Shiloh. He and his provisional government had been in exile from Kentucky since the beginning of the war.

troops under Colonel Joshua Sill in advance of Buell's army opened fire on the revellers from across the Kentucky River. Bragg ordered Kirby Smith to move his army to Versailles and rushed back to his own force at Bardstown.⁶⁵

On 7 October Bragg ordered a concentration of forces at Versailles where he expected to meet Buell in a great battle for Kentucky.⁶⁶ However, General William Hardee, one of Bragg's corps commanders, reported being pressed hard near the small town of Perryville, south of Harrodsburg. Bragg ordered his main force to Perryville to relieve Hardee, and from there he expected to move on to Versailles and the junction with Kirby Smith. On 8 October, Bragg rode to Perryville to survey the situation. Realizing that he was before the main body of Buell's army, he decided to attack. The Confederate army held its own through the day at Perryville, but that night, when captured information revealed the size of the force before him, (a full one-third of Buell's army had not moved into position) Bragg decided to retreat to Harrodsburg. The next day, Buell readied his now-consolidated army for the big fight, but the enemy was gone.⁶⁷

During all these events, Kirby Smith had become confused. He had concentrated his army near Lawrenceburg expecting to meet the main Federal force there. On 7 October he was informed that an enemy force of 20,000 was crossing the river at Frankfort. He wrote Bragg that he would attack that force, then move into position to aid in the main attack against Buell.⁶⁸ On 9 October, the day after the Battle of Perryville, Kirby Smith engaged Sill at the Battle of Dry Ridge and lost.⁶⁹ The man responsible for

65 *OR.*, Ser. I, Vol. XVI, pt. 1, 1091; Kirby Smith, "Kentucky Campaign Notes," Kirby Smith Papers; Hammond, "The Campaign of Kirby Smith," No. 4, 458-59; Harrison, "Johnson and Hawes," 32-35.

66 Bragg to Leonidas Polk, 7 October 1862, *OR.*, Ser. I, Vol. XVI, pt. 1, 1096.

67 The standard work on the Battle of Perryville is Hambleton Tapp, "The Battle of Perryville, 1862," *The Filson Club History Quarterly*, 9 (July 1935): 158-81. See also McWhinney, *Bragg*; and Connelly, *Army of the Heartland*.

68 Kirby Smith to Bragg, 7 October 1862, *OR.*, Ser. I, Vol. XVI, pt. 2, 920; Hammond, "The Campaign of Kirby Smith," No. 5, 70-71.

69 *OR.*, Ser. I, Vol. XVI, pt. 1, 1134-36; Kirby Smith to Bragg, 9 October 1862, *ibid.*, pt. 2, 927-28.

bringing two of the Civil War's greatest armies to battle found himself out of the main event.

Kirby Smith marched his army to Harrodsburg where he finally joined Bragg's army on 10 October. There Bragg halted and turned, as if preparing to fight, but he chose instead to retire before the superior Federal force. After the war, Kirby Smith wrote that he had forced Bragg into turning at Harrodsburg. "For God's sake, General," Kirby Smith reported he had said, "let us fight here." Bragg reportedly replied, "I will do it, sir. Select your position, put your men in line of battle and I will countermarch my column."⁷⁰ Bragg faced a superior force deep in enemy territory; it was hardly an advantageous position. More likely, he formed into battle line to protect his flanks and guard his supplies that were supposedly stored at Bryantsville, east of Harrodsburg. When Bragg and Kirby Smith reached Bryantsville they found that orders to gather supplies there had not been carried out; only four days' rations had been collected.⁷¹ With this final blow, Bragg decided to leave Kentucky and fight Buell at another time and place. Kirby Smith's demoralized army retreated to Knoxville via Big Hill and Cumberland Gap. They arrived in late October with nothing to show for their efforts except that George Morgan had been driven from Cumberland Gap.

After the war, Kirby Smith blamed Bragg for the failure of the campaign. He criticized Bragg for not fighting near Bowling Green, at Munfordville, and finally at Harrodsburg. He also believed that Bragg was guilty of allowing Buell to enter Louisville, for being misinformed of the enemy's location prior to the Battle of Perryville, and for leaving Kentucky in the face of an "inferior force largely made up of new levies."⁷² Bragg chose not to answer the charges.

70 Kirby Smith, "Kentucky Campaign Notes," Kirby Smith Papers.

71 *OR.*, Ser. I, Vol. XVI, pt. 1, 1087, 1092-93; Hammond, "The Campaign of Kirby Smith," No. 5, 74.

72 Kirby Smith, "Kentucky Campaign Notes," Kirby Smith Papers. See also, Kirby Smith to J. Stoddard Johnston, 31 October 1866, J. Stoddard

Historians of the campaign have also been willing to allow Kirby Smith to escape much of the blame for the campaign's failure. Thomas L. Connelly in his superb *Army of the Heartland* sees Kirby Smith as uncooperative and too independent to come to Bragg's assistance. But ultimately, Connelly points his finger at Davis and his vague departmental system that kept Bragg from exerting authority over Kirby Smith.⁷³ Bragg's biographer Grady McWhinney also blames Davis for allowing the command to be divided; it was "one of the President's biggest military errors."⁷⁴ Lowell Harrison, another astute observer of the Civil War in Kentucky, blames Bragg for never insisting on a clear delineation of authority.⁷⁵

Certainly Bragg and Davis were both at fault. Bragg, as commander in the west, should have insisted on cooperation from Kirby Smith, and Davis certainly confused the issue by establishing a command system that did not clearly delineate authority and then by suggesting that the two generals simply cooperate. However, Kirby Smith should bear the real blame for the Confederate failure in Kentucky. He was more than merely uncooperative. He forced Bragg into invading Kentucky by leaving him with an army too small to fight Buell. And when the two Confederate armies finally reached their destination in the Bluegrass, Kirby Smith skirted Bragg's order for consolidation by complaining that he had more important things to do. In the end, Bragg had to fight alone.

Following the Kentucky campaign, Bragg moved on to Murfreesboro three months later, still trying to free middle Tennessee. Kirby Smith refused to cooperate with Bragg at first in that campaign, and only under direct orders from Davis did he aid

Johnston Papers (manuscript department, The Filson Club Louisville); *OR.*, Ser. I, Vol. XXII, pt. 2, 737; Jefferson Davis to Kirby Smith, 29 October 1862, Kirby Smith Papers.

⁷³ Connelly, *Army of the Heartland*, 219, 236, 242.

⁷⁴ McWhinney, *Bragg*, 334.

⁷⁵ Lowell Harrison, "The Civil War in Kentucky: Some Persistent Questions," *The Register of the Kentucky Historical Society*, 75 (January 1978): 10-13.

Bragg at all. Kirby Smith's unwillingness to cooperate with Bragg (a Davis favorite in this period) may have caused the president to assign Kirby Smith to the Trans-Mississippi command in Texas and Louisiana in the summer of 1863, far away from the center of the Confederate war effort. Kirby Smith is probably best known in Civil War history as the last Confederate commander to surrender a main force at the war's end. That occurred on 2 June 1865, nearly two full months after Appomattox. Simon Bolivar Buckner, a Kentuckian who rode with Bragg in 1862, delivered the surrender orders to Kirby Smith on that day.