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# UA37/37 The Year 1861 in Brief Review of American Civil War with Emphasis on Kentucky

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THE YEAR 1861 IN BRIEF REVIEW OF AMERICAN  
CIVIL WAR WITH EMPHASIS ON KENTUCKY

The brief summary of leading events in 1861, the opening year of the terrible crisis which befell the United States, attempts only to bring them in their sequence with little of detail. It is important to note that all through the bitter campaign for president in the summer of 1860, Southern leaders repeatedly warned that should Abraham Lincoln be elected, the South would secede. South Carolina made good this threat and seceded December 20, 1860. Before the end of January, 1861, Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi, and Texas followed suit. The die was cast more certainly than when Ceasar crossed the Rubicon and the most terrible Civil War in Modern History began.

The seven, all cotton states, which had seceded, sent delegates to a convention assembled at Montgomery, Alabama, on February 8. It adopted a provisional constitution and organized the Confederacy. A provisional congress was organized, which chose Jefferson Davis of Mississippi as President, and Alexander H. Stephens of Georgia as Vice-President. The Southern leaders ignored largely every other issue except slavery in their denunciations of policies that they felt the North had imposed upon them. These leaders knew that three-fourths of the population of the seceded states did not own slaves; however, they reasoned rightly that the fear of freed negroes everywhere in their midst, would induce the non-slave holding population of the seceded states to be loyal to secession movement. Soon after the fall of Fort Sumpter, South Carolina, on April 14, four other states, Arkansas, Tennessee, North Carolina and Virginia seceded, now a total of eleven.

At Washington there was faltering timidity, and a do-nothing policy on the part of the out-going Buchanan administration. It had been legally advised by high authority, that while secession was illegal, the executive part of the national government was powerless to prevent it. The eyes of the country were

on Abraham Lincoln when he was ushered in as president on March 4. What he would do was fairly well understood from his Inaugural address which affirmed what he had for several years asserted, that while he believed slavery as an institution was wrong, he had no intention of interfering where it was legally accepted in many states, but was very explicit, as was the platform of the Republican party that had elected him, that there must be no more extension of the slave system into free territory of the United States. It should be noted that when the first call for troops came soon after the southern attack on Fort Sumpter, Lincoln emphatically asserted the troops must save the Union, and he omitted argument on other issues.

In Kentucky, the governor, Beriah Magoffin of Mercer County, was a strong Southern sympathizer, but did try to hold the state neutral as between North and South, which for much of 1861, was the policy of most leading citizens of all parties. He turned down Lincoln's first call for troops after the fall of Fort Sumpter very curtly, but at the same time, denied help very mildly to the South's similar call. As the year advanced, it became clear that holding Kentucky neutral was chimerical and unreal, and both sides began to establish camps for enlistment and even invasion.

The regular legislature of Kentucky met in short sessions three times in the first half of the year still dreaming about neutrality; factionalism and quarrels between the two houses prevented any real constructive legislation from passing. However, the last session, before it adjourned for the results of the regular August elections, did vote money to arm the state against outside attack, both Union and Confederate. The enlisting and organization of the Home Guards greatly helped the rapidly growing Union sentiment, which was much aided because it was encouraged by the national administration at Washington. It is easily understood that President Lincoln did not want to lose Kentucky.

Due to the political and sectional disputes, a special election was held for members of Congress on June 20. The rivalry and bitter feeling in Kentucky was intense, but there was really only one issue; is the candidate for the Union or the Confederacy? The Union side elected nine out of ten congressmen the state was allotted then. The Union forces had a majority of 55,000, which was well distributed over the state. Only the first district comprising the extreme Western part of the state, voted for dis-Union. However, the Confederacy had been successful in the capture of Fort Sumpter in April; also, it won the first battle of Bull Run in July. These victories greatly encouraged the South.

The regular election for state officials which is held in November now, was then held in August. Again, as in June, when congressmen were chosen by a special election, Union sentiment was predominant, stronger than ever, and seventy-six members of the hundred, which the state constitution then as now allotted for its house of representatives, were pro-Union. In the state senate consisting of thirty-eight members, only one-half of the membership was chosen then, but the new senate had twenty-seven for the Union, all very disheartening to the South.

Simon Bolivar Buckner, born in Hart County in 1821, was appointed to West Point Academy in 1840 and was graduated with high honor in 1844. Governor Magoffin had appointed him as state adjutant-general; as such, he completely reorganized the state militia, had it in such good condition that the pro-Unionist charged him with having made the best possible contribution to the Confederacy. In July he resigned his position in Kentucky; in August, he was offered for the second time, a position in the Union army. As between the offer as a brigadier-general by both the Union and Confederacy, he chose the latter and received his commission in early September.

On September 10, General Albert Sydney Johnston, now a full general in the Confederate army, himself a Kentuckian and West Pointer, was assigned to

Tennessee and Kentucky. A few days later he decided to seize Bowling Green, then regarded as the most strategic point to guard Nashville. The town had about 2500 population, had the main line of the L & N railroad, river transportation, and a turnpike. It should be stated that the railroad branch line to Memphis was in operation only as far as Clarksville. General Johnston had declared that the occupation of Bowling Green was necessary as "an act of self-defense rendered by the action of the government of Kentucky and by the evidence of intended movements of the Federal forces." This makes plain what General Johnston thought of Kentucky neutrality. He arrived in October and established headquarters in the Samuel D. Blackburn house at the corner of 10th and Adams Streets.

As per the order of General Johnston, General Buckner on September 18, entered Bowling Green after a march from Munfordville with a small army of raw recruits, some cavalry, mostly infantry. He established himself in what was then called by the Confederacy the Central Division of Kentucky. He set up his headquarters in the home of John Younglove, a prominent citizen. This home was located on State Street, between Eleventh and Twelfth, on the left side as one leaves Park Row and faces West-ward. General Buckner at once made an address to the people explaining why he came with an armed force. Likewise, he wrote to Governor Magoffin promising to leave the city if the Federal troops would leave the state at places they had invaded at that time. It should be noted here that Confederate troops had in early September seized Columbus and Hickman in Western Kentucky; General Grant for the Union had siezed Paducah on September 6; General Zollicoffer had on September 14 established a Confederate fort at Cumberland Ford in Eastern Kentucky.

It will be of interest to give an approximate estimate at the end of 1861, of the enlistment of both Union and Confederate soldiers in Kentucky. Both sides maintained that the response to volunteering of men of military age was unsatisfactory, but the Official War Records state that 26,872 men had enlisted

in Kentucky Union regiments. A report made in February, 1862, by the Confederate Secretary of War, shows that only 7,950 men from Kentucky had by that date joined the Confederate army. These figures bear evidence of the proponderate Union sentiment as stated above, but it should be noted that even if these figures are accurate, they do not fully state the case. There is abundant evidence that throughout the year many hundreds of Kentuckians enlisted in the regiments of border states, true of both pro-Union and pro-Confederate partisans who are not counted in either of the above reports.

For several weeks after the arrival of General Buckner in Bowling Green, he spent his time foraging, recruiting in neighboring counties, in seizing control of the operation of the railroad, and in destroying bridges. By a specific order from General Johnston, he destroyed the fine new bridge across Green River at Munfordville; a task he did not relish doing, but realized it must be done to aid in holding Union forces north of the river. About this time, February 8, 1862, General Buckner reported to the Confederate War Office at Richmond he now had an effective army of 6000 men at Bowling Green.

Nothing has been said about the press of the state. Prior to the August election, the press had not been molested about its utterances or circulation. After the election and its Union victory, the legislature began to regulate the press. In Louisville the paper that most ably supported the Southern cause was the Courier; also in Louisville, the Journal edited by the able George D. Prentice, who had loyally supported neutrality, had now become the leading Union paper in the state, indeed rated as the ablest defender of the Union cause south of the Ohio River. He violently, almost daily, attacked the Southerners in Kentucky and elsewhere; no other critic ever lambasted such leaders as Buckner, Breckinridge, and General Morgan as he did. The Union forces in the latter part of the year decided the legislature should now regulate the press, and the Louisville Courier was among the first to be suspended. One of its editors, Reuben Durrett, was arrested and imprisoned;

another editor, W. N. Haldeman fled to Bowling Green. There while the Confederate army was in control, Haldeman set up a miniature press and issued the Courier.

Toward the end of the year, no paper could circulate in the state if it was thought dangerous to the Union. Union camps for enlistment became plentiful, the Union flag was by legislative decree, to fly over the state buildings, and other laws to strengthen the cause were rapidly passed. The press supported the legislature loyally. Many of the bills passed and presented to Governor Magoffin, were quickly vetoed but were quickly passed over the veto and became laws. Under threat of impeachment, the governor had at least to pretend he was enforcing the laws of the state. In the midst of this confusion and turmoil, there was held in the Odd Fellows Hall in Russellville, a meeting called the Sovereignty Convention. It solemnly declared, for example, that they would resent by armed force the payment of taxes to support the Lincoln Legislature as they called it. After the passage of a number of "laws" many of which were fantastic under the circumstances, it adjourned in November. It had decreed that Bowling Green should be the Capital of Kentucky, because of the protection of the Confederate army there. Among its many passed "laws" was one that established a legislative council with the power to choose state officials when needed. For governor, George W. Johnson was chosen, and he with other appointed state officials of his group, proclaimed themselves to be the true Kentucky state government. The Union press ridiculed the whole proceeding without restraint. Governor Magoffin, beside his troubles with a Union legislature, had to deny that "Governor" Johnson and associates had any legal authority whatever in the commonwealth. By the end of the first year of the war, all anti-Union papers had been suppressed and Confederate camps got very little mail from anywhere.

The Confederate government at Richmond admitted Kentucky as a state, it was allotted ten congressmen, and two senators. The new Confederate state government was practically inoperative from the beginning and never gained any authority or power.

The year 1861, facing a crisis that threatened the existence of the republic itself, dragged to an uncertain, tumultuous close. Fortunately, only one event occurred which threatened serious foreign entanglement, the so-called Trent affair. Two Confederate envoys, Messrs. Mason and Slidell, were sent to England ostensibly to get help for their cause. They boarded a British unarmed mail steamer at Havana in November. Soon after their sailing Captain Charles Wilkes commanding the San Jacinto stopped the Trent on the high sea, removed the envoys and sent them to Boston. The British press was infuriated; the American Union press extolled Captain Wilkes. Through the good grace and aid of Prince Albert, husband of Queen Victoria, and the common sense of the Lincoln administration, the whole matter was amicably settled the day after Christmas. The envoys were free to go on their way unmolested. Captain Wilkes had violated international law.

No decisive battles had as yet been fought, but both sides of our divided country, were grimly determined to begin action over a much more extensive area at the beginning of the new year, 1862.

Written by: Arndt M. Stickles  
Jackson, Mississippi  
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