

ESSENTIAL CIVIL WAR CURRICULUM

The Battle of Mill Springs, Kentucky

By Stuart W. Sanders

Resources

If you can read only one book

Author	Title. City: Publisher, Year.
Sanders, Stuart W.	<i>The Battle of Mill Springs, Kentucky</i> . Charleston, SC: The History Press, 2013.

Books and Articles

Author	Title. City: Publisher, Year. “Title,” in <i>Journal</i> ##, no. # (Date): #.
Brent, J. A.	<i>The Patriots and Guerrillas of East Tennessee and Kentucky. The sufferings of the patriots. Also the experience of the author as an officer in the Union army.</i> New York: J.A. Brents, 1863.
Grebner, Constantin and Frederic Tarutmann, trans.	<i>We Were the Ninth: A History of the Ninth Regiment, Ohio Volunteer Infantry, April 17, 1861, to June 7, 1864.</i> Kent, OH & London, England: Kent State University Press, 1987.
Hafendorfer, Kenneth A.	<i>Mill Springs: Campaign and Battle of Mill Springs, Kentucky.</i> Louisville, KY: KH Press, 2001.
Hancock, R. R.	<i>Hancock’s Diary, Or, A History of the Second Tennessee Confederate Cavalry.</i> Nashville, TN: Brandon Printing Company, 1887.
Keil, F. W.	<i>Thirty-Fifth Ohio: A Narrative of Service from August, 1861 to 1864.</i> Fort Wayne, IN: Archer, Housh & Co., Book Printers, 1894.

Kelly, R. M.	“Holding Kentucky for the Union,” in Robert Underwood Johnson and Clarence Clough Buel, eds., <i>Battles and Leaders of the Civil War. Being for the Most Part Contributions by Union and Confederate Officers. Based Upon “The Century War Series”</i> , 4 vols. (New York: The Century Co. 1884-1888), based on “The Century War Series” in <i>The Century Magazine</i> , November 1884 to November 1887, 1:373.
McMurray, W. J.	<i>History of the Twentieth Tennessee Regiment Volunteer Infantry, C.S.A.</i> Nashville, TN: The Publication Committee, 1904.
Myers, Raymond E.	<i>The Zollie Tree: General Felix K. Zollicoffer and the Battle of Mill Springs.</i> Louisville, KY: The Filson Club, 1964.
Shaw, James Birney	<i>History of the Tenth Regiment, Indiana Volunteer Infantry.</i> Lafayette, IN: n.p., 1912.
Tarrant, Eastham	<i>The Wild Riders of the 1st Kentucky Cavalry.</i> Louisville, KY: Published by a Committee of the Regiment and Press of R.H. Carothers, 1894.
Worsham. W. J.	<i>The Old Nineteenth Tennessee Regiment, C.S.A.</i> Knoxville, TN: Press of Paragon Printing Company, 1902.

Organizations

Organization Name	Description, Contact information including address, email
Mill Springs National Monument	The Visitor Center and Museum for the Mill Springs National Monument is located at 020 West Highway 80, Nancy, Kentucky 42544. Their website is: https://www.nps.gov/misp/index.htm

Web Resources

URL	Name and description
https://www.battlefields.org/visit/battlefields/mill-springs-battlefield	Mill Springs Battlefield at the American Battlefield Trust.
https://www.battlefields.org/learn/civil-war/battles/mill-springs	Battle of Mill Springs at the American Battlefield Trust.
https://explorekyhistory.ky.gov/items/show/24	Sanders, Stuart W. "Battle of Mill Springs," at ExploreKYHistory, Kentucky Historical Society.
https://www.historynet.com/steamboat-retreat-mill-springs-battle/	Sanders, Stuart W. "How a Steamboat Saved a Confederate Army," at HistoryNet.com (June 22, 2023).
https://nkytribune.com/2019/11/sanders-mill-springs-battlefield-worthy-of-national-monument-status-has-positive-impact-on-region/	Sanders, Stuart W. "Mill Springs Battlefield worthy of National Monument status; has positive impact on region," in <i>Northern Kentucky Tribune</i> (November 5, 2019).
https://emergingcivilwar.com/2022/02/17/rain-flintlocks-doom-rebel-attack-at-mill-springs/	Sanders, Stuart W. "Rain, Flintlocks Doom Rebel Attack at Mill Springs," <i>Emerging Civil War</i> (February 17, 2022).
https://www.nps.gov/misp/battle-of-mill-springs.htm	"The Battle of Mill Springs," National Park Service.

Other Sources

Scholars

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Topic Précis

In late 1861, it was unclear if Kentucky would remain with the Union or join the fledgling Confederacy. As a divided, proslavery border state, Kentucky proclaimed neutrality during the first five months of the war. That stance ended, however, when northern and southern troops moved into the commonwealth. The Confederates entered Kentucky first in November, led by General Felix Zollicoffer, establishing a camp at Mill Springs on the Cumberland River. When Confederate General George Crittenden arrived to take over from Zollicoffer he moved the Confederate forces across the Cumberland River to Beech Grove. Union forces under General George Thomas had advanced into the state reaching Logan's Crossroads on January 17, 1862. Crittenden determined to attack Thomas before Union reinforcements could arrive. The Confederates set out at midnight January 18 marching in steady rain, bitter cold and muddy roads. The Confederate plan was to deploy on both sides of Mill Springs Road and advance towards the Union forces. The conditions on the difficult march had slowed and separated the Confederates so that when they struck Union pickets at daylight, 6:30 a.m. January 19, they began entering the battle in a piecemeal fashion. As news of the fighting spread Union units rushed to bolster the initial line of cavalry pickets and infantry. Poor visibility in the fog and rain hindered movements and led to lulls in the battle. The Union troops had the advantage of a defensive battle and the Confederate troops, armed in those early days of the war with flintlock muskets rather than rifles, found that the rain prevented many from being able to fire at all. In the confusion Union Colonel Speed Fry and nearsighted Confederate General Zollicoffer thought they saw their own regiments firing on each other and riding to investigate, encountered each other, assuming they were addressing an officer on their own side. When a Confederate officer who was not confused appeared and fired on Fry, killing his horse, Fry pulled a pistol and shot Zollicoffer dead. Union General George Thomas arrived on the field shortly after this incident and sent nearly his entire army into the fighting. This coordinated advance broke the Confederate line and the southerners retreated back to their camp at Beech Grove, ten miles away. That night the Confederates crossed the river and escaped, abandoning a mass of materiel in their camp, and retreating to Gainesboro Tennessee. With 4,400 and 5,500 men engaged respectively, the Union army lost 39 killed and 207 wounded, while the Confederates suffered 125 killed, 308 wounded, and 95 missing. The Federal victory at Mill Springs broke the right flank of the Confederate defensive line that crossed southern Kentucky. It also led to a series of Union advances at Fort Henry, Fort Donelson and Nashville, driving the Confederates from Kentucky and resolving the issue of whether the state would remain in the Union. The Battle of Mill Springs was a small battle of great consequence. The Union victory there touched off a chain of events that spiraled Confederate hopes west of the Appalachian Mountains downward and showed the divided nation that the Civil War would be a long struggle.
