# Tennesseans in the Civil War 8th Grade

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Nathan Bedford Forrest

Essential Question: What role did Nathan Bedford Forrest play in the Civil War?

Confederate General Nathan Bedford Forrest proved such a menace to Federal forces throughout the Civil War that Union General William T. Sherman stated that it would be wise to “follow Forrest to the death, if it cost 10,000 lives and breaks the Treasury.”¹ While Sherman referred to Forrest as “the very devil,” another word that is consistently used to describe the military career of Nathan Bedford Forrest is “genius.” One historian has written, “Military observers at the time and later concluded that Forrest was a natural military genius.”² Even Sherman, sworn enemy of Forrest, admitted that the Confederate General possessed a “genius for strategy that was original and to me, incomprehensible.”³ During the war, Forrest was renowned for his daring and his courage. He had twenty-nine horses shot out from under him and was himself wounded several times. Nevertheless, he won successes against Union armies, usually larger than his own, in battle after battle.

Forrest was born the eldest of eleven children to a blacksmith named William Forrest and Mariam Beck in Marshall County, Tennessee on July 13, 1821. After the death of his father and up to his mother’s remarriage, Forrest supported the family himself. Afterward, he went to Texas, returned to Tennessee, and married Mary Montgomery in 1845. In 1857, Forrest made a fortune in Memphis selling land and slaves. He was running a profitable plantation when the war broke out in 1861.⁴

When Tennessee voted to leave the Union that June, Forrest sided with his home state. A skilled horseman, Forrest enlisted as a private in a cavalry regiment. As he was well-known in Memphis, a handful of his friends petitioned Tennessee Governor Isham Harris to commission Forrest as an officer. Forrest was quickly made a colonel and permitted to form his own cavalry regiment.

Forrest quickly developed a fast-paced, aggressive style of fighting battles that would become his trademark. He aimed to keep Union forces in one place with a frontal assault and then rapidly attack both sides at once. Forrest himself led the charges and engaged in hand-to-hand combat on several occasions. When Union forces under Ulysses S. Grant besieged Fort Donelson on the Cumberland River, Forrest grew impatient with his commanding officers who

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³ Ibid., 263.
⁴ Ibid., 262.
had decided to surrender. Disgusted with their admission of defeat, Forrest led his regiment on a late-night breakout through enemy lines. Days later, when Nashville surrendered, Forrest secured the Confederate rear guard as the army retreated into Mississippi.⁵

Forrest played an important role in the Battle of Shiloh. He led a number of cavalry charges to slow down the advancing Union troops on the second day of battle. Following Shiloh, Forrest remained in west Tennessee to attack Grant’s supply lines. After the Battle of Chickamauga, Forrest urged Bragg to attack the Union before they could reach Chattanooga. His advice was ignored and Forrest obtained an independent command in west Tennessee.⁶

The most controversial events of Forrest’s military career occurred on April 1864 when Forrest attacked Fort Pillow outside of Memphis. The fort was garrisoned by African American soldiers and Tennessee unionists. Approximately half of the 600 men in the fort were killed. Many of these men were killed as they attempted to surrender. 67% of the dead were members of the U.S. Colored Troops⁷. Whether Forrest ordered the killings or lost control of his men remains unclear. The Fort Pillow Massacre was widely publicized in the North.

Forrest took part in a number of other major battles including the Battle of Franklin on November 30, 1864. Following the Confederate defeat at Nashville, Forrest once again slowed down the Union advance so that the Confederates could retreat. Forrest ultimately surrendered in May of 1865.⁸ Following the war, Forrest once again gained fame as the first Grand Wizard of the Ku Klux Klan. Forrest traveled throughout the South promoting the Klan along with his railroad ventures. Forrest returned to Memphis where he died on October 29, 1877.

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⁷ Ibid, 321.
⁸ Ibid, 321.
William G. “Parson” Brownlow

*Essential Question: What role did William Brownlow play in the Civil War?*

William Gannaway "Parson" Brownlow (1805-1877) was an influential East Tennessee minister, journalist, and governor. On the eve of the Civil War, his newspaper, popularly known as Brownlow's *Whig*, reached nearly eleven thousand subscribers across the nation. The Parson was a prominent spokesperson for the Whig Party and a staunch defender of the Union during the United States Civil War.

Born the son of poor farmers in 1805, William Brownlow was orphaned at the age of 11. In 1825, having tried his hand at farming and carpentry, he had a religious experience at a camp meeting and entered into a career as a circuit riding minister in the Holston Conference. After 10 years riding through the mountains preaching to all who would listen, Parson Brownlow married Eliza O'Brien and settled down to work for her father in the family iron mill at Elizabethton. Soon the former preacher, who had proved to be a forceful speaker and writer, was approached by members of the local Whig Party to edit their failing newspaper, the *Republican and Manufacturer's Record*. Parson Brownlow accepted the offer. Parson Brownlow became, because of his wit, venom, and violent writing style, one of the most noted or notorious journalists in American history. The *Republican and Manufacturer's Record*, after name changes and moves to Jonesboro and Knoxville became known as Brownlow's *Whig*, the most famous newspaper in Tennessee.

With the coming of secession, Brownlow found himself a major force in the attempt to preserve the Union. In East Tennessee, 69% of voters opposed secession in the statewide referendum of June 1861 even as 86% of voters elsewhere supported secession. Brownlow was a spokesman and leader for the strongly pro-Union inhabitants of East Tennessee.

Brownlow and many of his supporters were pro-slavery (he himself owned slaves used as servants at various times), but were willing to consider abolishing slavery if necessary to save the Union. With the *Whig* as his platform, Brownlow put all his effort into attacking secession and the people who supported it with his usual exaggerated insults. Despite his efforts, Tennessee joined the Confederacy in July, 1861. Losing the immediate argument with the secessionists did not silence him; Brownlow continued to use his paper to denounce the Confederacy and its leaders without restraint. At last, exasperated by his abuse and facing a rebellion in East Tennessee generated by Brownlow's venomous words, the Confederate authorities in Knoxville arrested him and ultimately expelled him from the South.

Exile did not end Brownlow's war with the Confederacy. Due to the publicity generated by his resistance and arrest in Tennessee, he found himself a hero to the North and used this newfound fame as a weapon against the South. He lectured across the North, urging the reconquering of the seceding states. Brownlow’s message reached even more people through *Parson Brownlow's Book*, which used vivid language to tell the story of his resistance to the Confederacy.
With the war's end, Parson Brownlow and his fellow East Tennessee Unionists formed a state government with Brownlow as governor. Publicly, as governor, his attitude was one of revenge upon the Confederates, though privately his attitude was charitable and forgiving toward individuals. However, most Tennesseans disliked Brownlow's plans for revenge; they wanted to forgive and forget. Brownlow pushed Tennessee to ratify the Fourteenth Amendment in 1866 which allowed Tennessee fully rejoin the Union. Brownlow's actions in aiding African Americans to gain the right to vote drew the ire of the Ku Klux Klan. Brownlow's efforts to crush the Ku Klux Klan were largely ineffective. The group grew in power and influence following Brownlow's departure from governorship in 1868. Brownlow tried to improve Tennessee's financial situation by supporting the sale of government bonds to rebuild railroads damaged in the war. Unfortunately, Brownlow’s reputation was damaged by his allies who took advantage of Brownlow’s poor health to steal state funds. Brownlow was elected to the Senate in 1868, where he accomplished little due to his poor health. After his service in the Senate, Brownlow returned to East Tennessee, where he remained popular. Parson Brownlow died after years of illness in 1877.
David Farragut

*Essential Question: What role did David Farragut play in the Civil War?*

On July 26, 1866, David Glasgow Farragut was named the first full admiral in American history. He was honored for a career in the navy that spanned over fifty years. One historian wrote that Farragut was similar to Ulysses S. Grant in that “he possessed great force of character rather than a subtle intellect.”9 It was for his service during the Civil War, however, that Farragut earned his most recognition and praise.

David Glasgow Farragut was born James Glasgow Farragut in Campbell’s Station, Tennessee, an area near Knoxville, on July 5, 1801. After his birth, he was taken to New Orleans, where he was adopted by Commodore David Porter. The story goes that Porter’s elderly father, himself once a master sailor in the U.S. Navy under George Washington, was fishing and collapsed with sunstroke. Farragut’s father found him and took him to the Farragut home, where the family cared for the dying Porter until the end. In order to repay the tenderness of the Farragut family, Commodore Porter adopted young James and became his guardian.

James began service in the navy with his new father when he was only nine years old. In the War of 1812, James served with Porter in a sea battle with two British ships off the coast of Chile. A gunner on their ship, the *Essex*, was struck by a cannonball and fell against the young Farragut, pushing him backward through an open hatch. Farragut struck his head and received the only wound he would ever receive during his naval career. In recognition of the battle, he changed his name to David, in honor of his adopted father.10

Afterward, David Farragut’s journeys took him to Europe and the Gulf of Mexico. During the Mexican War, he served as captain of the sloop *Saratoga*. At the outbreak of the Civil War, Farragut awaited orders in Norfolk, Virginia. As a southerner, he had to decide whether to fight for the land of his birth or for the government he flourished under. In the end, Farragut believed President Abraham Lincoln was justified in his military actions against the southern rebels. Therefore, Farragut decided to remain a U.S. naval officer. When heckled by southern leaders who tried to get him to renege and join the Confederacy, Farragut responded, “Mind what I tell you: You fellows will catch the devil before you get through with this business.”11 After a short time at desk duty, Farragut was assigned to oversee the West Gulf Blockade Squadron and their operations in the Gulf of Mexico.12

During the spring of 1862, Farragut received orders which laid out a plan for his fleet to travel up the Mississippi River and aid Union armies in their attempt to control the river and cut the Confederacy in half. One of the keys to the success of the operation was for Farragut to capture the port of New Orleans.

The battle for the largest city in the South began in April, 1862. Against heavy resistance, Farragut steamed his ships up the river, taking cannon fire from all sides. Confederates pushed flaming rafts into the river to set Union ships ablaze. The rebels fired from incomplete ironclads still moored to their docks. None of this stopped Farragut and his fleet. They passed the river defenses, defeated them from the north, and sailed triumphantly into the city.

With New Orleans in Union hands, Farragut took his fleet up and won the river capturing cities and frustrating Confederates. The only city he failed to capture was Vicksburg, along the final Confederate stronghold on the Mississippi. His accomplishments on the Mississippi earned Farragut a promotion to the rank of rear admiral. In March 1863, Farragut again sailed for Vicksburg to blockade the town. With the help of Grant’s forces on the other side of the fortress, the town fell on July 4.

Farragut’s next mission consisted of shutting down Confederate blockade runners. To do this, Farragut had to capture rebel ports that harbored such runners. The first harbor targeted was Mobile. Attempting to mimic his success in New Orleans, Farragut tried to run the gauntlet of Mobile’s defenses. Instead of cruising through, however, the Union navy encountered Confederate water mines, called torpedoes. Several Union ships were lost due to the mines, and with the whole operation in chaos, Farragut delivered order for which he is remembered. He strapped himself to the rigging of his flagship, the Hartford, and shouted the memorable phrase, “Damn the torpedoes. Full steam ahead.” His ships finally passed through, and Mobile surrendered. After the capture of Mobile, Farragut was promoted to vice admiral.14

In 1865, Farragut was one of the first Union officers to enter Richmond after its fall. After the war, Farragut settled in New York, where the government awarded him $50,000 to buy a home. To commemorate his lifelong service to the navy, he was given the rank of full admiral in 1866. He was the first American to hold such rank. The newly-minted full admiral went on a European goodwill tour. In 1870, while inspecting a naval yard in New Hampshire, Farragut died after suffering a heart attack.

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14 Davis, “Farragut, David Glasgow,” 684.
# Tennesseans in the Civil War

Read the text for each of the Tennesseans listed in the graphic organizer below. Summarize the key facts for each person.

<table>
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### Tennesseans in the Civil War Key

*Read the text for each of the Tennesseans listed in the graphic organizer below. Summarize the key facts for each person. Answers will vary*

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<td>Soldier</td>
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<td><strong>Key Fact 1</strong></td>
<td>Slave trader and planter before the Civil War</td>
<td>Used his <em>Knoxville Whig and Rebel Ventilator</em> newspaper to argue against secession.</td>
<td>Remained loyal to Union though he was born in Tennessee</td>
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<td><strong>Key Fact 2</strong></td>
<td>Daring cavalry officer; fought at Fort Donelson, Shiloh, Chickamauga, Franklin and Nashville</td>
<td>Was exiled from Tennessee by Confederates; went of speaking tour of the North and wrote book about his resistance to Confederacy</td>
<td>Captured New Orleans in 1862</td>
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<td><strong>Key Fact 3</strong></td>
<td>Was in command during Fort Pillow Massacre in April 1864. 200 African-American troops were killed; most were killed after they tried to surrender. Forrest was not punished for the events.</td>
<td>Became governor after the war; publically sought to punish former Confederates</td>
<td>Captured Mobile, base for blockade runners. Shouted famous order “Damn the torpedoes! Full speed ahead!”</td>
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Nathan Bedford Forrest Primary Sources

The following sources are available from the Tennessee State Library and Archives. Click on the link and then chose the download option at the upper right to download a copy.

Handwritten recruitment flyer from Confederate General Nathan Bedford Forrest

Transcription

Photograph of Forrest

Fort Pillow Massacre

Pension application for Forrest ex-slave

Presidential pardon for N.B. Forrest
Brownlow’s Departure Editorial

This issue of the Whig must necessarily be the last for some time to come; I am unable to say how long. The Confederate authorities have determined upon my arrest and I am to be indicted before the grand jury of the Confederate court which commenced its session in Nashville on Monday last. I would have awaited the indictment and arrest before announcing the remarkable event to the word but as I only publish a weekly paper my hurried removal to Nashville would deprive me of the privilege of saying to my subscribers what is alike due to myself and them. I have the fact of my indictment and consequent arrest having been agreed upon for this week from distinguished citizens, legislators and lawyers at Nashville of both parties. Gentlemen of high positions and members of the secession party say that the indictment will be made because of "some treasonable articles in late numbers of the Whig". I have produced these two "treasonable articles" on the first page of this issue that the unbiased people of the country may "read, mark, learn and inwardly digest" the treason. They relate to the culpable remissness of these Knoxville leaders in failing to volunteer in the cause of the Confederacy. According to the usages of the court as heretofore established I presume I could go free by taking the oath these authorities are administering to other Union men; but my settled purpose is not to do any such thing. I can doubtless be allowed my personal liberty by entering into bonds to keep the peace and to demean myself toward the leaders of secession in Knoxville who have been seeking to have me assassinated all summer and fall as they desire me to do; for this is really the import of the thing and one of the leading objects sought to be attained. Although I could give a bond for my good behavior for $100,000 signed by fifty as good men as the country affords I shall obstinately refuse to do even that; and if such a bond be drawn up and signed by others I will render it null and void be refusing to sign it. In default of both I except to go to jail and I am ready to start upon one moment's warning. Not only so but there I am prepared to lie in solitary confinement until I waste away because of imprisonment or die from old age. Stimulated by a consciousness of innocent uprightness I will submit to imprisonment for life or die at the end of a rope before I will make any humiliating concession to any power on earth. I have committed no offense. I have not shouldered arms against the Confederate Government or the State or encouraged others to do so. I have discouraged rebellion publicly and privately. I have not assumed a hostile attitude toward the civil or military authorities of this new government. But I have committed grave and I really fear unpardonable offenses. I have refused to make war upon the Government of the United States; I have refused to publish to the word false and exaggerated accounts of the several engagements had between the contending armies; I have refused to write out and publish false versions of the origin of this was and of the breaking up of the best government the world ever knew; and all this I will continue to do if it cost me my life; nay, when I agree to do such things may a righteous God palsy my right arm and may the earth open and close in upon me forever.
The real object of my arrest and contemplated imprisonment is to dry up, break down, silence and destroy the last and only Union paper left in the eleven seceded States and thereby to keep from the people of East Tennessee the facts which are daily transpiring in the country. After the Hon. Jeff. Davis had stated in Richmond in a conversation relative to my paper that he would not live in a government that did not tolerate freedom of the press—after the judges, attorneys, jurors and all other filling positions of honor or trust under the "permanent Constitution" which guarantees freedom of the press—and after the entire press of the South had come down in thunder tones upon the Federal Government for suppressing the Louisville Courier and the New York Day-Book and other secession journals—I did except the utmost liberty to be allowed to one small sheet whose errors could be combated by the entire Southern press. It is not enough that my paper has been denied a circulation through the ordinary channels of conveyance in the country but it must be discontinued altogether or its editor must write and select only such articles as meet the approval of a pack of scoundrels in Knoxville when their superiors in all the qualities that adorn human nature are in the penitentiary of our State. And this is the boasted liberty of the press in the Southern Confederacy.

I shall in no degree feel humbled by being cast into prison whenever it is the will and pleasure of this august Government to put me there; but on the contrary I shall feel proud of my confinement. I shall go to jail as John Rogers went to the stake—for my principles. I shall go because I have failed to recognize the hand of God in the work of breaking up the American Government and the inauguration of the most wicked, cruel, unnatural and uncalled-for war ever recorded in history. I go because I have refused to laud to the skies the acts of tyranny, usurpation and oppression inflicted upon the people of East Tennessee for their devotion to the Constitution and laws of the Government handed down to them by their fathers and the liberties secured to them by a war of seven long years of gloom, poverty and trial. I repeat I am proud of my position and of my principles and shall leave them to my children as a legacy far more valuable than a princely fortune had I had latter to bestow.

With me life has lost some of its energy; having passed six annual posts on the western slope of half a century something of the fire of youth is exhausted; but I stand forth with the eloquence and energy or right to sustain and stimulate me in the maintenance of my principles. I am encouraged to firmness when I look back to the fate of Him "whose power was righteousness" while the infuriated mob cried out, "Crucify him! Crucify him!"

I owe to my numerous list of subscribes the filling out of their respective terms for which they have made advance payments and if circumstances ever place it in my power to discharge these obligations I will do it most certainly. But if I am denied the liberty of doing so they must regard their small losses as so many contributions to the cause in which I have fallen. I feel that I can with confidence rely upon the magnanimity and forbearance of my patrons under this state of things. They will bear me witness that I have held out as long as I am allowed to and that I have yielded to a military despotism that I could not avert the horrors of or successfully oppose.

I will say in conclusion for I am not allowed the privilege to write that they of this country have been unaccustomed to such wrongs; they can yet scarcely realize them. They are astounded for
the time being with the quick succession of outrages that have come upon them and they stand
horror-stricken like men expecting ruin and annihilation. I may not live to see the day but
thousands of my readers will when the people of this once prosperous country will see that they
are marching by "double-quick time" from freedom to bondage. They will then take wanton
outrages upon right and liberty full in the face and my prediction is that they will "stir the stones
of Rome to rise and mutiny".

Wrongs less wanton and outrageous precipitated the French revolution. Citizens cast into
dungeons without charges of crime against them and without the formalities of a trial by jury;
private property confiscated at the beck of those in power; the press humbled, muzzled and
suppressed or prostituted to serve the ends of tyranny. The crimes of Louis XVI. fell short of all
this and yet he lost his head. The people of this country down-trodden and oppressed still have
the resolution of their illustrious forefathers, who asserted their rights at Lexington and Bunker
Hill.

Exchanging with proud satisfaction the editorial chair and the sweet endearments of home a cell
in the prison or the lot of an exile,
I have the honor to be, &c.,
WILLIAM G. BROWNLOW, Editor of the Knoxville Whig.

OR, Ser. II, Vol. 1, pp. 912-914. Note 1

Source: “October 26, 1861 - Departure editorial by William G. Brownlow” Civil War
Murder Will Out by William G. Brownlow

This article appeared in the May 25, 1861 edition of the Knoxville Whig. It describes a plan to arrest Brownlow and other Unionists following the succession vote in June.

A secret of some importance has been cautiously communicated to this city from Alabama by a man not likely to be deceived. The same facts in substance have been intrusted to a most estimate individual here under the solemn injunction of secrecy for a specified time. There are now three other gentlemen besides ourselves and they are men of high positions who know the facts and have the evidence of them. This stupendous and appalling conspiracy amounts to this: Johnson, Nelson, Baxter, Temple, Trigg, Maynard, Brownlow and George W. Bridges are to be arrested after the election in June by a military force and taken in irons to Montgomery and either punished for treason or held as hostages to guarantee the quiet surrender of the Union men of East Tennessee.

The facts of his conspiracy against the rights of America citizens together with the names of those concerned in urging it on, all, will be left in the hands of reliable, bold an fearless men who will make them public at the proper time. The thousands of Union men of East Tennessee devoted to principle and to the rights and liberties of those who fall at the hands of these conspirators will be expected to avenge their wrongs. Let the railroad on which Union citizens of East Tennessee are conveyed to Montgomery in irons be eternally and hopelessly destroyed. Let the property of the men concerned be consumed and let their lives pay the forfeit and the names will be given. Let the fires of patriotic vengeance be built upon the Union altars of the whole land and let them go out where these conspirators live like the fires from the Lord that consumed Nadab and Abihu, the two sons of Aaron, for presumption less sacrilegious. If we are incarcerated at Montgomery or executed there or even elsewhere all the consolation we want is to know that our partisan friends have visited upon our persecutors, certain secession leaders, a most horrible vengeance. Let it be done, East Tennesseans, though the gates of hell be forced and the heavens be made to fall.

In disclosing this bold and deep-laid plot against the liberties of freemen we have not intended a sensation article. Some may smile at its alleged senseless absurdity but we are not alone in putting forth these facts. We most solemnly implore our friends throughout East Tennessee as they regard our welfare and as they cherish principles for which we are likely battling not to molest any person or property in advance of an attack upon any of us but to hold themselves in readiness for action, action. As yet the conspiracy is only partially revealed, the murder partly out; the mask will be taken off in due time. We are not in possession of the names of any confederates and abettors outside of the limits of East Tennessee though some have been closeted with East Tennesseans and the details of their plans agreed upon. Again in the name of everything sacred we ask for ourselves and those threatened with us that no more shall be made by our friends toward injuring the person or property of any living man or existing corporation until further developments are made; and then let every brave man act and let all act together. Thanks be to God for the vigilance of some true men and for their promptness in making
communications. A Union man of high character who will disguise himself and travel hundreds of miles at his own expense to serve true men to him personally unknown deserves to be immortalized and to live forever.

OR, Ser. II, Vol. 1, pp. 911-912

David Farragut Primary Sources

The following sources are available at the Library of Congress. Click on the title to download a larger version.

Admiral David Glasgow Farragut

Lashed to the shrouds--Farragut passing the forts at Mobile, in his flagship Hartford

David G. Farragut to Abraham Lincoln, Wednesday, November 16, 1864 (Reply to Lincoln's November 6 dispatch

Map showing the defenses of the Mississippi below New Orleans and Farragut's attack 24 April 1862.