

THE JACKSON PURCHASE
And
THE END OF THE NEUTRALITY POLICY
In KENTUCKY

BY JACK CALBERT

Brescia College, Owensboro, Kentucky

Kentucky's Jackson Purchase region was once part of a great Chickasaw Indian land tract enclosed by the present day Tennessee-Mississippi state line, the Tennessee River, the Ohio River, and the Mississippi River. It was secured to Kentucky in 1819 by her Governor, Isaac Shelby, and by General Andrew Jackson. In that year the Governor and the General concluded a treaty with the Chickasaw Indians which extinguished the latter's rights in the area. The upper part of the tract was turned over to Kentucky, out of which seven counties were formed, and the great remainder was incorporated into Tennessee.¹

Located at the western extremity of the state and hemmed in among western Tennessee, Southeastern Missouri, and that portion of Illinois known as "Egypt," the Kentucky part of the Purchase sat astride the intersection of four major river systems—the Tennessee, Cumberland, Ohio, and Mississippi—and, thus, lay in the very midst of the river trade between the North and South. Also, it became a great tobacco growing section and, hence, a heavy slaveholding area, ranking evenly with the Bluegrass section of the state in this respect.² The Jackson Purchase, however, remained substantially an annex to the state of Kentucky. The character and sympathies of its people, to a large extent, were alien from the rest of the state. Drawn to the Democracy of their region's namesake, and lying closer to its seat in Nashville, than to their own political capital, Frankfort, which had long been held in the clutches of Whiggery, the people often hoped in the years prior to 1861 that they might join with the remainder of the Purchase in Tennessee to "form a state whose government would be more immediately identified with their own interests."³ This long standing desire of the Purchase to secede from the state of Kentucky played a most important part in influencing the decision Kentucky made in 1861 in regard to the question of the Union.

In 1861, Kentucky sentiment for the Confederacy increased in the southwestern portion of the state, until in the Purchase area almost the entire population was in full support of the South.⁴ Southern Demo-

crat John C. Breckinridge had carried the section by a large majority in the presidential election of 1860,⁵ and, once disunion threatened, the people made no hesitation in choosing the side of the Confederacy. Impatient with the Frankfort government, which in mid-Spring of 1861 was wavering between North and South, the Purchasers in May, 1861, held a convention at Mayfield in which the proposition to secede from Kentucky was earnestly discussed and recommended.⁶ While this plan of secession did not carry, in a special election for Congressmen held in June, 1861, nine weeks after Sumter, the tobacco-growing First Congressional District, that is, the Jackson Purchase, elected the only States' Rights or secessionist Congressional candidate from the entire state. Running as a Democrat in a district where the Democratic party had since 1826 commanded overwhelming majorities, the incumbent, Henry C. Burnett, was re-elected to office by four-sevenths of the total vote cast.⁷

Secessionist feeling in the Purchase grew throughout the summer of 1861. A "Great Peace Meeting" held on August 26, 1861, at the Murray court house, Calloway County, reaffirmed the support of the Purchase for Kentucky's pro-Southern Senators John C. Breckinridge and Lazarus W. Powell as well as of their own Congressman, Henry Burnett. After denouncing the current war being waged against the secessionists, the meeting announced the determination of the Purchase people "never to be shot or bayoneted into a love of the Union in violation of the Constitution."⁸ Such decisiveness of opinion put the whole Purchase on edge and made conditions ripe for trouble. A special report of John M. Johnson, sent to the Purchase by Governor Beriah Magoffin to examine conditions there, stated that there was a "great uneasiness" felt throughout the border counties, many people having removed their families from the area. This fear of an impending crisis, it was stated, had resulted in the practice of wearing arms, and it was feared that the whole situation would "lead to violence towards those of opposite opinions."⁹

The two main population centers in the Purchase in 1861 were the towns of Paducah and Columbus. Columbus in 1860 had a population of some 963 persons. It was located on the Mississippi River eighteen miles below Cairo, Illinois, forty-seven miles below Paducah on the Ohio, and forty-five miles above Island No. 10. It was the northern terminus of the Mobile and Ohio Railroad. The bluff overhanging the city commanded the Mississippi River for five miles.¹⁰ Thus, it can be seen that Columbus occupied a most advantageous commercial and military position, and, hence, came to be considered by the Confederate military authorities sitting across the state line in Union City, Tennessee, as the northern key to the control of the Mississippi.¹¹

The citizens of Columbus for their part were ready to oblige the Confederates in whatever way they could. They had been in full sympathy with the South from the very beginning of the war. As early as April 22, 1861, they had invited Jefferson Davis to occupy their town as well as to seize Cairo, Illinois.¹² The town's mayor, B. W. Sharpe, was in complicity with Confederate General Gideon J. Pillow in Union City. On June 1, 1861, Sharpe informed Pillow by letter that the citizens of Columbus were "preparing to mount heavy guns and to collect military stores,"¹³ obviously in preparation for full-fledged support of the Southern cause. Thus, on June 24, 1861, General Simon B. Buckner, in charge of a militia group of the Kentucky State Guards, determined to move. He ordered six companies of troops to Columbus, under General Lloyd Tilghman, in order to protect Kentucky's neutrality there. So strong was Southern sentiment in that place, however, that very soon afterwards General Tilghman, a native Paducahian, passed over the Tennessee line and cast his fortunes with the Confederate cause.¹⁴

Paducah was located on the Ohio River fifty miles above Cairo, Illinois, and immediately below the mouth of the Tennessee River. It possessed connections with all the Southern railroads. Prior to the opening of the war it had been "the most important place of business on the lower Ohio."¹⁵ Throughout the summer of 1861, however, it would appear that the city even outdid its prewar commercial record. It became a focus for a funnel through which material and supplies were shot southward by rail and water. With the blockading of the Mississippi River at Cairo by the Federal forces, and later with the closing of the Louisville and Nashville Railroad between Louisville and Nashville, Paducah became the main outlet and inlet for all trade southward, since all trade switched to the Tennessee and Cumberland rivers.¹⁶

Paducah during the summer of 1861 was often referred to as "the Charleston of Kentucky," being located within the Purchase which was dubbed "the South Carolina of Kentucky."¹⁷ Immediately after the fall of Fort Sumter, Paducah had taken on a definite secessionist attitude and had soon sent most of her young men off to the Confederate service.¹⁸ General Lloyd Tilghman, of Paducah, and the city's "greatest soldier," took many Paducah State Guards with him into the Confederacy when he resigned his post at Columbus in June of 1861.¹⁹ In that same month Southern sympathies proved so strong in the city that in the Presbyterian Church "only ten out of a congregation of one hundred and fifty could be found to support the Union."²⁰ Relations between the townfolk and their Northern neighbors, who patrolled the Ohio River in gunboats and made forays up the Tennessee and Cumberland rivers, became steadily worse as the summer wore on. Events finally

reached a semi-climax on August 22, 1861, in the widely publicized and rather ridiculous incident wherein a Federal gunboat steamed into Paducah and cut loose from the docks the *W. B. Terry*, a boat which was claimed to belong to the Confederates. The crew of the *Terry* and a "mob" of Paducah citizens then retaliated by seizing the *Samuel Orr*, a boat belonging to the citizens of Evansville, Indiana. It was made off with down the Tennessee River. Two persons were wounded in the gunshot fracas that accompanied the seizure. The Federal invaders left the city in a state of consternation,²¹ only to return some two weeks later to occupy it.

The Confederate forces in western Tennessee sat idle throughout most of the summer of 1861. The duty of watching and opposing the progress of the Union armies from Cairo, Illinois, southward had been assigned them. Owing to the neutrality policy in Kentucky, however, all action on their part was necessarily at a standstill.²² In May, 1861, the commanding Confederate General, Gideon J. Pillow, had drawn President Jefferson Davis' attention to the dangers existing for the Confederacy in the Mississippi Valley between Cairo and Memphis. While proceeding to fortify Memphis, Pillow at the same time prophesied to Davis that the Federal forces would make an effort "to effect a lodgment at Columbus, fortify that place, and, with a strong invading column, turn my works, attack them in reverse, crush my supporting force, capture the guns, and open the river."²³ The Federals, he maintained, would meet with success in this plan since the flat area of Tennessee lying to the north of Memphis was unfavorable for any type of Confederate fortifications.²⁴

Thus, General Pillow soon came to have an obsession for fortifying the bluffs at Columbus. By the middle of May, 1861, he had asked Governor Magoffin of Kentucky for permission to occupy that town, saying that "If he should withhold his consent, my present impression is that I shall go forward and occupy the work upon the ground of its necessity for protecting Tennessee."²⁵ Pillow was temporarily dissuaded in a move of this type, however, by Kentucky's General Buckner who met with him in Union City, Tennessee, to impress upon him the seriousness of the move. It was at this time that Governor Magoffin realized that a dangerous situation was developing in western Kentucky. He therefore sent the six companies of troops, above mentioned, to Columbus in an attempt to maintain the state's neutrality.²⁶

Late in the summer of 1861, Leonidas Polk, formerly an Episcopal Bishop, but now a General of the Confederacy, arrived to take command in western Tennessee. Immediately he began overseeing the construction of certain defenses being erected along the Mississippi river

north of Memphis. These defenses were meant to ward off a threatened attack of the Federal gunboats. General Polk, however, came to Pillow's conclusion concerning this country. Both banks of the river along Tennessee, Arkansas, and the southeastern tip of Missouri were extremely low and flat. They rose so little above the level of the water that it was impossible to find anywhere a position from which guns could command the river, except for some low sandy islands which had grown up piecemeal during past floods. General Pillow had already begun the construction of fortifications on one of these, Island No. 10, located just below the Kentucky-Tennessee line. This position, however, was quite unsatisfactory in that it was subject to inundation. If the river happened to be in flood stage, Federal gunboats would be able to sweep down from Cairo past the fortifications and then could land their troops anywhere in northwestern Tennessee. Hence, Polk's eyes, like Pillow's, were drawn to the Columbus bluffs which possessed an apparent military value.²⁷

General Polk determined to occupy Columbus if the opportunity presented itself. As has been noted, the people of Columbus would not have been averse to such action, and General Polk knew this. Furthermore, he saw that Kentucky was gradually slipping into Unionism. The June Congressional and the August General Assembly elections both were won by Unionist candidates by considerable majorities. Thus, as a first step toward occupation, General Polk sent General Pillow in late August, 1861, with a force to occupy New Madrid, Missouri, located on the Mississippi river opposite Kentucky.²⁸ Then, on September 1, 1861, he asked Governor Magoffin exactly what the real intentions of the Southern party in Kentucky were, saying "I think it is of the greatest consequence . . . to the Southern cause in Kentucky . . . that I should be ahead of the enemy in occupying Columbus and Paducah."²⁹

Governor Magoffin, although felt by many to be a secessionist, favored no Southern invasion of Kentucky. On August 24, 1861, he had written Jefferson Davis concerning the collection of troops along the southern border of Kentucky. He asked assurances that the Confederate Government would "continue to respect and observe the position indicated as assumed by Kentucky."³⁰ President Davis replied on August 28 that the Confederacy neither intended nor desired to disturb the neutrality of Kentucky. The assemblage of troops to which Governor Magoffin referred had no other object than to repel a lawless invasion of Tennessee by Federal forces "should their Government seek to approach it through Kentucky, without respect for its position of neutrality."³¹ Such apprehensions, maintained Davis, were not groundless in view of the recent course of Federal action in Maryland, Missouri,

and "more recently in Kentucky itself."³² In connection with this last point, Davis made it clear that the Confederacy would not unconditionally guarantee a respect for the neutrality of Kentucky. The Confederacy, he stated, would continue to respect the neutrality of Kentucky only so long "as her people will maintain it themselves."³³ Hence, Kentucky could expect the Confederacy to respect her neutral position only so long as she forced the Union to respect it. Events occurring to the north of her in Illinois made this condition a difficult one.

The city of Cairo, Illinois, in 1861 was a rat-infested, low-lying, puny river town located at the junction of the Ohio and Mississippi rivers. It had been occupied by Federal troops on April 25 of that year in order to protect it against a threatening Southern invasion. Cairo, located further south than any other Union city, possessed a strong Southern sentiment stemming out of its dependence on the river trade between North and South. It was actually a Southern city within a Northern state, but the Illinois state authorities and Federal troops had stifled effectively all opposition to the Union. The city had been converted into a great military post against which the Confederates had no corresponding foothold on the Mississippi River. It was a center for the concentration of men and the equipping of gunboats, expeditions down the Mississippi and up the Ohio being fitted out there.³⁴

The Federal troops sitting in Cairo throughout the summer of 1861 grew restless with the stalemate in the war brought about by the neutrality of Kentucky. The troops were eager to fight and to get at the disloyal Purchase district of Kentucky. Thus, they occasionally made forays across into Kentucky. In early June they crossed over and dispersed a camp of Kentuckians at Elliott's Mills.³⁵ A little later, they threatened an invasion of the state in order to observe more closely the enemy in Tennessee. One spokesman noted that neutrality "would go up" after the August elections for the General Assembly.³⁶

Northern public opinion assumed that the beginning of serious hostilities in the area was only a matter of time. The Governors of the states of the Old Northwest met and by memorial and delegation urged the Lincoln administration to make the Ohio line of defense secure by moving forward and occupying advance posts in Kentucky and Tennessee.³⁷ In late August, General Polk had aggravated the situation further by moving up and occupying New Madrid, Missouri, causing the Federal authorities to strengthen the Cairo garrison.³⁸ The battle lines were being drawn, and while the officials in Washington were keeping close tab on the situation,³⁹ the Federal commanders in the West were preparing plans for action.

In late August, 1861, General John C. Fremont, embroiled in the thorny and fluid Missouri situation, decided to get out of one mess by opening up another. As Federal commander in Missouri, he was responsible for the whole situation developing along the Mississippi and Ohio rivers in the area about Cairo. Spurred on by Northern public sentiment, and infuriated by the Paducah *Terry-Orr* incident of August 22, he by late August, 1861, was advocating to Brigadier-General Lorenzo Thomas, Adjutant-General of the United States Army, that Kentucky be involved in military operations.⁴⁰ Then, in early September, as the situation below Cairo was rapidly disintegrating, Fremont sent a telegram to Lincoln stating that

The War Vessels of the enemy are all steel plated mounting heavy guns, better armed faster and larger than ours. Their Officers are all of the U.S. Navy, whilst our Officers can not hold their ground after the first fire; there can be no other result than our capture; there is a very urgent want in Cairo of heavy canons [*sic*]. . . . The enemy is beginning to occupy the coast of Kentucky Hyckman [*sic*] Paducah . . .⁴¹

This situation showed, Fremont concluded, that the time had come to have command extended to Kentucky.⁴² On September 5, 1861, Fremont informed Lincoln, quite correctly, of the impending Confederate occupation of Columbus.⁴³

Ulysses S. Grant arrived in Cairo on September 4, 1861. He had been a general for less than a month, and the command of the Cairo garrison was his third assignment in that capacity.⁴⁴ As early as May, 1861, he had become convinced that General Pillow and the Confederates were planning an attack on Cairo,⁴⁵ and once put in command of that post he lost no time in thinking up a plan of action to put the Union on the offensive and the Confederacy on the defensive in the area below Cairo. He saw that it was imperative that the Union secure control of the Cumberland and Tennessee rivers at the earliest possible moment, since the Cumberland offered a clear highway to Nashville, Tennessee, and the Tennessee offered one all the way to Mississippi and Alabama.⁴⁶ Also, he saw that the control of the Mississippi River below Cairo was vital to any invasion of the South, since control of it would split the Confederacy in twain, leaving the two parcels with no communication between them, and, hence, at the mercy of any Federal troops invading via the rivers. Thus, when conditions in western Kentucky reached their climax in early September, 1861, Grant was not at a loss as to what he should do to advance the Union cause.

In late August, 1861, General Fremont caused to be set in motion a series of military movements in Missouri, saying that it was intended, "in connection with all these movements, to occupy Columbus, Ken-

tucky, as soon as possible." ⁴⁷ In accord with this plan, General Grant on September 2 placed a force in occupation of Belmont, Missouri, a small village on the Mississippi River opposite Columbus, Kentucky. ⁴⁸ Meanwhile, the Federal forces in Illinois opposite Paducah made demonstrations threatening that city. ⁴⁹

In executing the order to occupy Belmont, the Federal gunboats sent to that place extended their reconnaissance down the Mississippi to a point around Hickman, Kentucky. Here, to their surprise, they found that the Confederate army had advanced into Kentucky and had set up camp at Hickman. Its tents extended for half a mile upon the shore fronting the river. Secession flags bedecked the place. Later, while returning up the river to Cairo, the Federal gunboats were fired on by the party in control of the guns at Columbus. ⁵⁰ General Polk had finally made his move and had beaten the North in grabbing a crucial western Kentucky position.

The populace of Columbus received General Polk and his army in open arms. They had long been keeping him informed of Federal movements about Cairo ⁵¹ and had only recently turned over some of their arms to the Confederate encampment at Union City. ⁵² They now recounted to Polk how they had feared for themselves and their property under the threat of Federal invasion, for they had heard of the outrages committed across the river in Missouri by Northern soldiers against defenseless persons. They maintained that the Federals had been threatening their city with two gunboats, had been throwing bombs into their town "in the very midst almost of shrinking, affrighted women," had crossed the river and dispersed a company of citizens drilling near Columbus, and had disembarked from a gunboat and torn down a Confederate flag.

Aside from these outrages, they explained to Polk how they were being forced to pay, under the neutrality policy of Kentucky, a Federal tax for the purpose of carrying on the war against the South. Moreover, they pointed out that the commercial life of the city had been ruined by the Federal blockade of the river. The populace, thus, wished General Polk "a cordial welcome." ⁵³ General Polk then issued a proclamation in which he justified his occupation of the town, saying that it was necessary in the face of obvious Federal military preparations in Missouri designed to seize the place. He took pleasing note of the welcome given the Confederate troops, assuring the people that their property and rights would be protected. ⁵⁴

General Grant heard of Polk's move from a scout of General Fremont on the day after he had assumed command in Cairo. ⁵⁵ He determined to seize Paducah at once, for he took the statements Fremont

had been making in the last few weeks in regard to Kentucky at their face value, that is, that it was intended to seize Columbus "as soon as possible."⁵⁶ Since Columbus had now gone over to Polk, there was no time to lose in grabbing Paducah before it too was taken. The Federal invasion machinery was set in motion. Grant telegraphed Fremont of his intentions, saying that he was taking steps to be in advance of the enemy in securing Paducah.⁵⁷ Boats were steamed up in Cairo for the transportation of troops to Paducah. As Fremont sent no word to prevent the departure, the whole expedition left around midnight of the night of September 5, 1861, arriving before Paducah around daylight of the next day.⁵⁸

When General Grant entered the city, he found it bedecked in secessionist flags in expectation of a force sent by Polk from Columbus. This force was said to be only 16 miles off and 3,800 strong.⁵⁹ Indeed, it had marched as far as Mayfield, to which point General Tilghman and his staff had fled; they had been present in the city as Grant approached it.⁶⁰ Grant's 1,600 troops took quiet possession of the railroad depot, where Grant found large quantities of rations, leather, food-stuffs, ammunitions, and clothing marked for shipment southward to the Confederate army. Also occupied was the telegraph office, an act of little value since the departing Confederates had cut all wires leading into the town. All shipments of goods between Cairo and Paducah were ordered stopped.⁶¹ Thus, General Grant effectively closed in one swoop the Tennessee River and the Paducah railway as a Southern importation route.

Polk in occupying Columbus had committed the first overt act in the Purchase. Justifying his action to the Frankfort government was, thus, his immediate task. On September 9, 1861, he informed Governor Magoffin that a military necessity had compelled him to occupy Columbus. He could not have sat back and allowed the Federal forces to have taken a position so important to the defense of western Tennessee. That they intended to do this, he maintained, was clear from their occupation of Belmont two days previous to his occupation of Columbus. He pointed out that it was in keeping with the wishes of the Columbus citizenry that he was in their city. He stated, however, that he was prepared to withdraw from the town provided that the Federal troops leave Paducah and the Purchase simultaneously, with a guarantee, which he would give reciprocally for the Confederate government, that they should not enter or occupy any part of Kentucky in the future.⁶²

Polk next dashed off a justification for his action to the state legislature, taking entirely the wrong bent by pointing out to the legislators Kentucky's violations of her own neutrality policy. The state had, Polk contended, allowed the Paducah seizure of the *W. B. Terry*, which belonged to Confederate citizens. She had allowed the cutting of timber from her forests for the building of Union gunboats. She had allowed the establishment of Union army recruiting stations within her borders. Her representatives in Congress had voted supplies of men and money to carry on a war against the Confederacy. Thus, what Polk did in justifying his action at Columbus was to expose the fallacy of the doctrine of neutrality, for it was impossible for a state to be neutral and remain within the Union. In presenting the issue so clearly, he was to play directly into the hands of the Union party within the state.⁶³

The Confederate war offices in Richmond were in turmoil throughout the day of September 4, 1861. On hearing of Pillow's move to Hickman, Secretary of War L. P. Walker instructed Polk to order his "prompt withdrawal from Kentucky."⁶⁴ Walker also asked for an explanation of the movement.⁶⁵ Polk appealed his case to President Davis, saying that Federal soldiers had seated themselves "with cannon and entrenched lines opposite the town of Columbus . . . making such demonstrations as left no doubt upon the minds of any of their intention to seize and forcibly possess" the town.⁶⁶ Therefore, Polk continued, he had resolved to give the protection requested by the Columbus citizenry as well as "to prevent in time the occupation by the enemy of a point so necessary to the security of Western Tennessee."⁶⁷ It was his intention, concluded Polk, "to continue to occupy and keep this position."⁶⁸ Davis telegraphed back that "The necessity justifies the action,"⁶⁹ later explaining to the Confederate Congress that the step "was justified not only by the necessities of self-defense on the part of the Confederate States, but also by a desire to aid the people of Kentucky."⁷⁰

Governor Isham G. Harris of Tennessee was another principal figure involved in the debate among Richmond, Frankfort, and Polk over the Columbus occupation. Harris informed Polk on September 4, 1861, that he considered the whole thing "unfortunate as the President and myself are pledged to respect the neutrality of Kentucky." The Tennessee Governor asked that the troops "be withdrawn instantly, unless their presence there is an absolute necessity."⁷¹ To Frankfort he sent three commissioners to explain to Governor Magoffin his position and to express the hope that the Confederates would withdraw.⁷² He also informed the Kentucky General Assembly that "The Confederate troops that landed at Hickman last night did so without my knowledge or consent; and I am confident, also without the consent of the President

[Davis]." ⁷³ President Davis, however, as has been noted, was in the process of siding with Polk. The appeal for withdrawal which Harris shortly made to Secretary of War Walker and to Davis, thus, had no effect. Davis finally replied and justified the occupation by saying that everything "must give way" to the security of Tennessee and other parts of the Confederacy.⁷⁴ Polk, when protested to by Harris, gave largely the same reasons for the occupation that he had given Davis and the Kentucky officials.⁷⁵

As the September, 1861, crisis gripped the state, spreading from west to east, it tore the neutrality policy to shreds. In Louisville, the first two weeks of September saw a vicious running debate between the city's two leading newspapers, the *Morning Courier*, the secessionist paper, and the *Daily Journal*, the Unionist one. The *Courier* proclaimed the whole mess in the Purchase to be the result of a plot conceived by certain Federal army officers and the Unionist members of the General Assembly. It was planned, the *Courier* maintained, that the Federals would seize both Paducah and Columbus, while the General Assembly would sanction the move, overriding Governor Magoffin's veto. Desperate as this move was, the Federals had decided on it owing to the great amount of war cargo leaving Paducah for the South. The scheme was finally wrecked in the very nick of time by Polk's occupation of Columbus. As proof of its charge the *Courier* republished an article appearing in the September 5, 1861, issue of the *Chicago Times*, "an Administration war paper," in which this plan was revealed to the Northern public by that newspaper's Cairo correspondent.⁷⁶

The *Journal*, reflecting a growing tide of opinion in Kentucky, called for the immediate expulsion of the Confederates from the state. It maintained that "In the history of the world, no page records a more unprovoked assault upon a people . . . than the invasion of Kentucky by the Right Reverend Generalissimo Polk and that martinet, Gideon J. Pillow."⁷⁷ If the Confederates refused to withdraw then they would be given "as red a war as mortal eyes ever beheld."⁷⁸ Such a war would not cause the secession of Kentucky, as the disunionists hoped for, but would produce a Union patriotism in Kentucky which would "not be broken up in the face of this threat."⁷⁹

The Magoffin administration, filled with Southern sympathizers, was firmly committed to the policy of neutrality, since by September, 1861, it was apparent that the state could not be swung into secession. Hence, Governor Magoffin was greatly distressed over the threat presented to neutrality by the Purchase invasions. General S. B. Buckner

of the State Guards favored a Confederate withdrawal, and so informed the Confederate authorities. He promised that if they would order a withdrawal he could "rally thousands of neutrality Union men to expel the Federals."⁸⁰

Meanwhile, in the legislature, a nasty situation was developing for the administration, which was accused by some of being in complicity with Polk, Pillow, and Davis in the occupation of Columbus. General Buckner, it was said, had been in Richmond during the first days of September proposing to the Confederate authorities certain Kentucky military movements "in advance of the action of her Governor."⁸¹ On September 3 the Richmond government was said to have promised him countenance and assistance in the scheme. Before Buckner returned to Kentucky, Polk had invaded the state.⁸²

The General Assembly had convened September 2 and had at that time reaffirmed the neutrality policy pursued since the previous May.⁸³ When the news of the Columbus occupation reached Frankfort, a special committee of the legislature was formed which notified Polk that the people of Kentucky were "profoundly astonished that such an act should have been committed by the Confederates, and especially that they should have been the first to do so with an equipped and regularly organized army."⁸⁴ They asked that he withdraw immediately.⁸⁵ Polk's answer justified his position by reciting to the legislators a long list of Kentucky's violations of her own neutrality policy.⁸⁶ Polk stated that "We are here, therefore, not by choice but by necessity" and set forth his promise to withdraw if the Federals would.⁸⁷ The Senate in the meanwhile had sent two of its members to the Purchase to investigate the situation first-hand.⁸⁸

Events moved quickly. A few hours after the news of General Polk's move reached Frankfort, it became known that Confederate General Felix K. Zollicoffer had invaded southeastern Kentucky near Cumberland Gap.⁸⁹ The legislature promptly ordered that the flag of the United States be hoisted on the capitol. The Union attitude of the General Assembly was, thus, clearly brought out as the Confederacy encroached upon the state's borders. The Southern cause was lost in Kentucky.

On September 11, 1861, the Kentucky House of Representatives refused by a vote of 29 to 68 to pass a resolution demanding the removal from the state of both the Federal and Confederate troops.⁹⁰ It then proceeded, after much private deliberation, by a vote of 71 to 26 in the House, and 25 to 8 in the Senate, to resolve "That Governor Magoffin be instructed to inform those concerned that Kentucky expects the Confederate or Tennessee troops to be withdrawn from her soil unconditionally."⁹¹ Governor Magoffin immediately vetoed the resolution, but

the legislators just as quickly passed it over his veto.⁹² The General Assembly then waited a week for the Confederates to leave, and when such leave was not forthcoming proceeded to take measures to compel them to do so.⁹³ On September 18, 1861, a series of resolutions passed the legislature which effectively declared the state for the North. Provisions were made for the expulsion of the Confederates. A volunteer expulsion force was to be raised by United States Army General Robert Anderson of Fort Sumter fame and a native Kentuckian. All Kentuckians were called on to co-operate in this undertaking, including Governor Magoffin, who was instructed to put the state militia under the command of General Thomas L. Crittenden.⁹⁴ Governor Magoffin vetoed the resolutions on the grounds that the envisaged military set-up took away his rights as commander-in-chief.⁹⁵ The General Assembly overrode the veto by a vote of 69 to 21 in the House and 24 to 10 in the Senate.⁹⁶ Magoffin then had no choice but to issue a proclamation in accordance with the General Assembly mandate.⁹⁷ Federal troops would shortly swarm into the state, which had been opened to them by the General Assembly. Kentucky had declared herself an active supporter of the Federal government and had, in fact, declared war on the Southern Confederacy. Neutrality had died with Columbus.

The neutrality policy pursued by Kentucky from May to September, 1861, in regard to the American civil conflict then raging, was something curious to her own historical and geographical position.⁹⁸ It was, in fact, in view of her past, the natural course that she should follow—the middle role of compromiser between North and South. It proved to be, in view of her close Southern ties, a substitute for secession. She could never have actually seceded, for her geographic position left her exposed too greatly to an invasion by thousands of Northern troops. Yet Kentucky was never at heart for secession: while she vigorously opposed the Lincoln administration, she could not see wrecking the precious Union simply because a group contrary to her interests had temporarily come into control of the government. Thus, neutrality also served as a cloak for Unionism.

The Federal government had wisely understood the neutrality of Kentucky. Lincoln had told General Buckner early in the war that as long as there were roads around Kentucky to reach the rebellion, "it was his purpose to leave her unmolested. . . ." ⁹⁹ Thus, Kentucky was lulled into a sense of security behind her neutrality, and Lincoln gained the time he so badly needed.¹⁰⁰ The Union forces restrained themselves from any overt act in Kentucky; in the meantime they educated the people in Unionism under the cloak of neutrality.

By September, 1861, Kentucky had broken her own neutrality. The

June, 1861, Congressional elections indicated that the people did not want secession. The August, 1861, elections for the General Assembly turned the legislative branch of the state government over to the Unionists. These newly-elected legislators considered themselves to be definitely instructed, by the vote which had given them control of the General Assembly, to declare for the Union once the state's neutrality had been violated by Polk.¹⁰¹ Hence, Polk's occupation of Columbus was "almost as deplorable for the southern cause in Kentucky as the firing at Sumter was for that cause in the northern states."¹⁰² The decision of the Frankfort legislature to declare for the North was, thus, precipitated by events in the Purchase. Here native Southern sentiment, Northern intrigues, and Confederate military commanders ended the Kentucky neutrality policy.

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FOOTNOTES

- ¹ J. H. Battle, W. H. Perrin, and G. C. Kniffin, *Kentucky. A History of the State . . . and Its Subsequent Development* (Louisville and Chicago, 1885), part II, pp. 3-6.
- ² Carl Russell Fish, "The Decision of the Ohio Valley," *Annual Report of the American Historical Association for the Year 1910*, p. 157.
- ³ Battle, Perrin, and Kniffin, *Kentucky*, part II, p. 7.
- ⁴ *Ibid.*, part I, p. 353.
- ⁵ Fish, "Ohio Valley," p. 162.
- ⁶ Battle, Perrin, and Kniffin, *Kentucky*, part II, p. 7.
- ⁷ Horace Greeley, *The American Conflict: A History of the Great Rebellion . . . to the Close of the War for the Union* (Hartford, 1869), I, p. 609; Zachariah Frederich Smith, *The History of Kentucky* (Louisville, 1895), p. 602.
- ⁸ *Louisville Morning Courier*, September 7, 1861, p. 1.
- ⁹ *Ibid.*, September 6, 1861, p. 2.
- ¹⁰ Battle, Perrin, and Kniffin, *Kentucky*, part II, p. 71; *The American Annual Cyclopaedia and Register of Important Events of the Year 1861* (New York, 1862), p. 103.

- 11 Thomas P. Kettell, *History of the Great Rebellion . . . from Official Sources* (Cincinnati, 1863), I, pp. 310-311.
- 12 A. J. Barry and others to Davis, April 22, 1861, *The War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies* (Washington, 1880-1901), I, 52, part 2, pp. 61-62.
- 13 Benson J. Lossing, *The Pictorial Field Book of the Civil War in the United States of America* (Hartford, 1874), II, 72n.
- 14 Smith, *Kentucky*, p. 603.
- 15 *Annual Cyclopaedia*, p. 561.
- 16 *Ibid.*, pp. 561-562.
- 17 Battle, Perrin, and Kniffin, *Kentucky*, part II, p. 7.
- 18 *Ibid.*, part II, pp. 81-82; Fred G. Neuman, *Story of Paducah* (Paducah, Kentucky, 1920), p. 37.
- 19 Neuman, *Paducah*, pp. 38, 41; Elizabeth Shelby Kinkead, *A History of Kentucky* (New York, Cincinnati, and Chicago, c1896), p. 177.
- 20 A. B. McElroy to R. J. Breckinridge, June 12, 1861, in E. Merton Coulter, *The Civil War and Readjustment in Kentucky* (Chapel Hill and London, 1926), p. 106n.
- 21 *Courier*, September 6, 1861, p. 2; August 22, 1861, Reports on the Capture of the Steamer W. B. Terry and Samuel Orr, at Paducah, Ky., *O. R.*, I, pp. 4, 176-178.
- 22 John G. Nicolay and John Hay, *Abraham Lincoln* (New York, 1890), IV, p. 203.
- 23 John G. Nicolay, *The Outbreak of Rebellion* (New York, 1882), pp. 133-134.
- 24 *Ibid.*
- 25 *Ibid.*
- 26 The Frankfort government also for a time considered fortifying Paducah against the Federals in Cairo, but the plan failed. Coulter, *Civil War*, p. 107.
- 27 Edward Conrad Smith, *The Borderland in the Civil War* (New York, 1927), p. 295.
- 28 *Ibid.*
- 29 Polk to Magoffin, Sept. 1, 1861, *O. R.*, I, pp. 4, 179.
- 30 Jefferson Davis, *The Rise and Fall of the Confederate Government* (New York, 1961), p. 194.
- 31 *Ibid.*, pp. 194-195.
- 32 *Ibid.*
- 33 *Ibid.*
- 34 Smith, *Borderland*, p. 138; *Annual Cyclopaedia*, p. 91.
- 35 June 8, 1861. *Rebellion Record*, I, pp. 94, 95 in Coulter, *Civil War*, p. 107.
- 36 C. Wickliffe to Polk, August 6, 1861, *O. R.*, I, pp. 4, 381 in Coulter, *Civil War*, p. 107.
- 37 Hay and Nicolay, *Lincoln*, IV, p. 401.
- 38 *Annual Cyclopaedia*, p. 91.
- 39 Kenneth P. Williams, *Lincoln Finds A General* (New York, 1952), III, p. 54.
- 40 Fremont to Thomas, August 25, 1861, *O. R.*, I, pp. 4, 177.
- 41 Roy P. Basler, ed., *The Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln* (New Brunswick, N. J., 1953), IV, p. 510.
- 42 Lincoln sent the communication to General Winfield Scott. Scott's reply has not been located. *Ibid.*
- 43 Fremont to Lincoln, September 5, 1861, *O. R.*, I, pp. 3, 141.
- 44 Bruce Catton, *Grant Moves South* (Boston and Toronto, c1960), p. 46.
- 45 Jesse G. Cramer, ed., *Letters of Ulysses S. Grant to his Father and his Youngest Sister 1857-78* (New York and London, 1912), p. 37.
- 46 Catton, *Grant*, p. 48.
- 47 Fremont to Grant, August 28, 1861, *O. R.*, I, pp. 3, 141-142.
- 48 *Courier*, September 6, 1861, p. 4; Coulter, *Civil War*, p. 108.
- 49 Julian A. C. Chandler and others, *The South in the Building of the Nation* (Richmond, Virginia, c1909), I, p. 291.
- 50 *Courier*, September 5, 1861, p. 1; Rodgers to Fremont, September 4, 1861, *O. R.*, I, pp. 3, 152.
- 51 Chas. E. Taylor to Polk, August 7, 1861, *O. R.*, I, pp. 4, 383.
- 52 *Louisville Daily Journal*, September 6, 1861, p. 2.
- 53 George C. Taylor and others to Polk, September 5, 1861, *O. R.*, I, pp. 4, 181-184.
- 54 *Papers, Acts, and Resolutions of the Kentucky Legislature, relating to the Existing War, Session of 1861* (Frankfort, 1861), pp. 4-5.
- 55 Ulysses S. Grant, *Personal Memoirs of U. S. Grant* (New York, 1885), I, pp. 264-265.

- ⁵⁶ Williams, *Lincoln*, III, pp. 53-54.
- ⁵⁷ Grant, *Memoirs*, I, p. 265.
- ⁵⁸ *Ibid.*
- ⁵⁹ Neuman, *Paducah*, pp. 39-40; Greeley, *American Conflict*, I, pp. 612-613; *Annual Cyclopaedia*, p. 400.
- ⁶⁰ Kettell, *Great Rebellion*, I, p. 311; Grant to Fremont, September 6, 1861, *O. R.*, I, pp. 4, 197.
- ⁶¹ *Courier*, September 11, 1861, p. 4, September 12, 1861, p. 4; Robert A. Campbell, *The Rebellion Register: A History of the Civil War in America* (Indianapolis, 1867), p. 191.
- ⁶² *Existing War*, p. 4.
- ⁶³ Smith, *Borderland*, p. 298.
- ⁶⁴ Walker to Polk, September 4, 1861, *O. R.*, I, pp. 4, 180-181.
- ⁶⁵ *Ibid.*
- ⁶⁶ Polk to Davis, September 4, 1861, *O. R.*, I, pp. 4, 181.
- ⁶⁷ *Ibid.*
- ⁶⁸ *Ibid.*
- ⁶⁹ Davis to Polk, September 4, 1861, *O. R.*, I, pp. 4, 181.
- ⁷⁰ Richardson, *Messages and Papers of the Confederacy*, I, p. 137. Message to Congress, November 18, 1861, in Coulter, *Civil War*, p. 109. Davis and Polk never gave up in justifying the invasion. The question was discussed throughout the month of September in their correspondence. Polk said at one point that as soon as the Confederacy had won a few battles in the area, Kentucky would abandon her position of neutrality and would secede. Davis himself held that the Confederacy could not permit "the indeterminate quantities, the political elements" to control its action in cases of military necessity, even though he told Governor Harris of Tennessee that he was willing to withdraw the troops if it could be safely done since this would be in accord with his "declared policy of respect for the neutrality of Kentucky." Davis to Harris, September 13, 1861, Polk to Davis, September 14, 1861, Davis to Polk, September 15, 1861, *O. R.*, I, pp. 4, 188, 190-191.
- ⁷¹ Harris to Polk, September 4, 1861, *O. R.*, I, pp. 4, 180.
- ⁷² Harris to Davis, September 13, 1861, *O. R.*, I, pp. 4, 189-190.
- ⁷³ Greeley, *American Conflict*, I, 612; *Annual Cyclopaedia*, p. 399.
- ⁷⁴ Davis to Harris, September 13, 1861, *O. R.*, I, pp. 4, 190.
- ⁷⁵ Polk to Harris, September 4, 1861, *O. R.*, I, pp. 4, 180.
- ⁷⁶ September 10, 1861, pp. 1, 2; September 14, 1861, p. 2. As a way out of the whole mess, and knowing now that the state could not be swung for the South, the *Courier* maintained that the General Assembly should demand that the forces of both parties be withdrawn from the Purchase. September 10, 1861, p. 2.
- ⁷⁷ September 10, 1861, p. 2.
- ⁷⁸ September 7, 1861, p. 2.
- ⁷⁹ September 7, 1861, p. 2. General Polk's suggestion that both Federal and Confederate troops withdraw simultaneously, with a guarantee by each that neither would occupy the state in the future, was denounced as a highhanded move on Polk's part not worthy of consideration. September 13, 1861, p. 2.
- ⁸⁰ Buckner to S. Cooper, September 13, 1861, *O. R.*, I, pp. 4, 189-190.
- ⁸¹ Nicolay and Hay, *Lincoln*, V, p. 43.
- ⁸² *Ibid.*
- ⁸³ *Journal*, September 7, 1861, p. 2.
- ⁸⁴ John M. Johnston to Polk, September 9, 1861, *O. R.*, I, pp. 4, 185.
- ⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 186.
- ⁸⁶ See p. 215 above.
- ⁸⁷ Polk to John M. Johnston, September 9, 1861, *O. R.*, I, pp. 4, 187.
- ⁸⁸ *Courier*, September 9, 1861, p. 1.
- ⁸⁹ Nathaniel S. Shaler, *Kentucky. A Pioneer Commonwealth* (Boston and New York, 1885), p. 250.
- ⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 252.
- ⁹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 251; *Existing War*, pp. 6-7.
- ⁹² Shaler, *Kentucky*, p. 251; Kinkead, *Kentucky*, p. 175.
- ⁹³ That the Confederate military authorities were actually the ones who made the decision to remain in Kentucky is indicated in the following note of General Albert Sidney Johnston, who on September 10, 1861, assumed command over Polk. Said Johnston: "The legislature of Kentucky has required the prompt removal of all Confederate forces from her soil, and the governor of Kentucky has issued his proclamation to that

effect. The troops *will not* be withdrawn. It is not possible to withdraw them now from Columbus in the west, and from Cumberland Ford in the east without opening the frontiers of Tennessee and the Mississippi River to the enemy, and this is regarded as essential to our present line of defense as well as to any future operations." Johnston to Davis, September 16, 1861, *O. R.*, I, pp. 4, 193.

⁹⁴ *Existing War*, pp. 7-9.

⁹⁵ Coulter, *Civil War*, p. 115.

⁹⁶ *Existing War*, p. 9.

⁹⁷ *Annual Cyclopaedia*, p. 400.

⁹⁸ Coulter, *Civil War*, chapters 1-6, repeatedly makes many of the points which I summarize here.

⁹⁹ Robert McNutt McElroy, *Kentucky in the Nation's History* (New York, 1909), p. 536.

¹⁰⁰ Coulter, *Civil War*, p. 100.

¹⁰¹ McElroy, *Kentucky*, pp. 541-542. This is not to say that a large minority of Kentuckians in 1861 did not wish to join the Confederacy. The simple fact is, however, that in September, 1861, the majority had decided for the Union.

¹⁰² Mary Scrugham, "The Peaceable Americans of 1860-1861," *Studies in History, Economics, and Public Law*, XCVI, No. 3, p. 121.

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