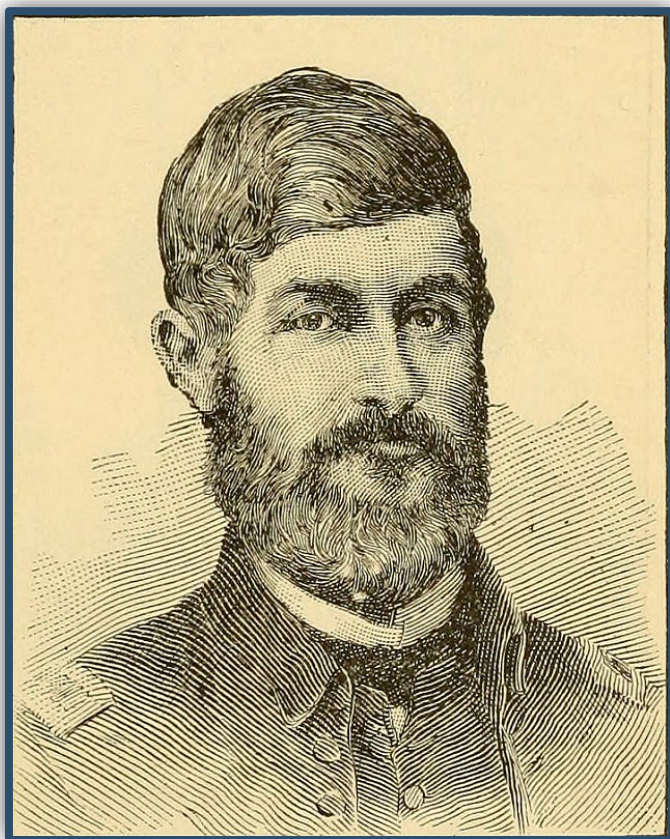


The Civil War Governors' Kentucky



Robert Buffum

PTSD destroys war hero

The term “post-traumatic stress disorder” did not exist in the 1860s, but the condition did. “Soldier’s heart,” as it was called back then, likely caused Robert Buffum to drunkenly threaten a **Louisville** shopkeeper and steal a pair of boots. His sentence: three years in the Kentucky state penitentiary.

Buffum, however, was no ordinary thief. He was the nation’s third Medal of Honor recipient and a former Confederate POW. The U.S. secretary of war and others wanted his release. Gov. Thomas Bramlette reluctantly pardoned him and he returned to his home state of Massachusetts.

“Soldier’s heart” continued to plague Buffum. Eventually, he killed a friend’s father and was convicted of murder.

“By my service to my country I have been made a pauper, a lunatic and a criminal ...,” Buffum said. Despite it all, he gladly would serve his country again, Buffum added. The former hero’s story ended tragically when he committed suicide.

An online exhibit of Buffum’s story is at
<http://discovery.civilwargovernors.org/exhibits/show/where-i-now-stand/intro>.