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Discovering Together Kentucky's Civil War History

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Kentucky's Civil War: Battle of Sacramento

Historical Marker #523 commemorates the Battle of Sacramento in McLean County.

On Dec. 28, 1861, nearly 300 Confederate cavalry led by Nathan Bedford Forrest attacked about 200 Union horsemen near Sacramento. The battle was Forrest's first substantial victory and began his career as the Confederate "Wizard of the Saddle."

The Southerners were scouting near the town when a local teenage girl warned them that Union troops were nearby. Ready for a fight, Forrest advanced and attacked the 3rd Kentucky Union Cavalry.

Forrest grabbed a rifle and fired the first shot of the battle. A sharp skirmish erupted, and the Union horsemen were chased toward Sacramento. Forrest later called the running fight "a promiscuous saber slaughter" that left "their bleeding and wounded strewn along the whole route."

Confederate Brig. Gen.Charles Clark called it "one of the most brilliant and successful cavalry engagements which the present war has witnessed." Several dozen Union and Confederate troops were killed and wounded, and the battle foreshadowed Forrest's career as an able cavalry commander.

Photo: Confederate cavalryman Nathan Bedford Forrest had his first significant victory at the Battle of Sacramento, Ky. From the collections of the Kentucky Historical Society.

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