

Kentucky's Civil War: Columbus



Historical Marker #528 at Columbus-Belmont State Park in Hickman County discusses Columbus's role during the Civil War.

In early September 1861, Confederate Gen. Leonidas Polk took Columbus. An important strategic location because of the Mississippi River and the presence of the Mobile & Ohio

Railroad, Polk fortified the area and placed a large chain across the river to block Union gunboats. Because of the chain and the fortifications placed on the river bluffs, Columbus was called the "Gibraltar of the West."

Because of Polk's presence at Columbus, Union Gen. U. S. Grant took Paducah. In early November, Grant was directed to occupy Belmont, Mo., across the Mississippi River from Columbus. On Nov. 7, Grant attacked Confederate troops at Belmont, which Polk reinforced from the Kentucky side of the river. Each army lost about 600 men, and the Confederates retained control of Belmont.

When Union forces eventually moved into Tennessee, the Confederate position at Columbus became outflanked, forcing the rebels to withdraw in March 1862. Union troops quickly moved in and held Columbus for the remainder of the war.

The site is now interpreted at Columbus-Belmont State Park

Photo: Anchor and chain at Columbus. From the collections of the Kentucky Historical Society.

