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Kentucky's Civil War: The Battle of Augusta

Historical Marker #501 commemorates the Battle of Augusta, Ky. Although smaller than most battles fought that year, this action changed the course of a major military campaign.

When Confederate armies invaded Kentucky in 1862, Confederate Col. Basil Duke's 2nd Kentucky Cavalry moved on Augusta. Duke hoped to disperse Unionist militia there before crossing the Ohio River and moving on Cincinnati.

On Sept. 27, after driving off some Union gunboats, Duke's horsemen rode into town, expecting a quick surrender. Instead, residents mounted a stiff defense and met the Confederates with a hail of gunfire. Ultimately, hand-to-hand fighting erupted as the rebels forced their way into homes and businesses.

Duke wrote, "The hand-to-hand fighting in the houses . . . was the fiercest and hottest I ever saw. I witnessed in some of them the floors piled with corpses and blood trickling down the stairways."

Although the Confederates eventually forced the militia to surrender, the number of Southern casualties made Duke abandon his plans of taking the war onto Northern soil. Therefore, the citizens' stand at Augusta kept the Confederate invasion confined to Kentucky in 1862.

Photo: A post-war image of the Ohio River at Augusta. From the collections of the Kentucky Historical Society.

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