



# Life of Lieutenant-General Nathan Bedford Forrest (Annotated)

*John Allan Wyeth*

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A well researched and written biography that reads more like an “Adventure Novel.” Nathan Bedford Forrest was one of the greatest, if not The Greatest, general of the Civil War. Poorly educated, and with no military training at all, he enlisted in the Confederate Army in 1861 as a Private. Due to his natural leadership ability, his almost instant understanding of strategy and tactics, and his courage in battle, he was soon promoted to the rank of General, and to Lieutenant-General by the end of the war.

His military operations caused great problems and fear for the Union Army, and as the fear grew, hatred was added to it. Edwin M. Stanton, President Lincoln's famous War Secretary, worried that Forrest would fall on Grant, and cause all forms of hardship.

General William T. Sherman was so afraid of General Forrest that he early in 1864 deemed not his defeat or capture but the death of Forrest so essential to the success of the Union cause that, as he wrote then, “It must be done, if it costs ten thousand lives and breaks the Treasury,” and in case the “wily fox could not be killed or crippled he must be kept busy where he was.” To Sherman, the unlettered soldier was the chief source of his anxiety, the most dreaded obstacle to his success in the great strategic game he was playing with the immortal Johnston, from Dalton to Atlanta. “Keep Forrest away from me, and I will attend to Johnston and cut the Confederacy in two.”

After the capture of Fort Pillow, “an impregnable fort,” staffed with both white and negro troops, which took Forrest twenty minutes to accomplish, he was accused by the Northern press of a massacre. This was later investigated and disproved, but persisted in the press. After the war he was also accused of starting and being a member of the Ku-Klux, created to counteract and hold in some sort of check the insolence of the Loyal League and other similar negro organizations and the unscrupulous greed of the carpetbaggers. He denied being associated with this organization, and any association was never proven. But since “The victors write the history,” and it is accepted that “The first victim of history is ‘Truth’,” these accusations persisted so that in current history books, they are written as “facts.”

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