

Battle of Mill Springs, Kentucky **<http://civilwar150.longwood.edu>**

On January 15, 1862, the U.S. Senate confirmed President Lincoln's appointment of Edwin Stanton as secretary of war, replacing Simon Cameron, who had become embroiled in controversy over corruption charges. The new secretary proved to be one of Lincoln's strongest cabinet members, and one who played a major role in organizing the Union armies for their ultimate victory.

The other major news of the week was the battle of Mill Springs, Kentucky, also known as Logan's Crossroads. This Union victory resulted in the abandonment of the eastern end of the Confederate defense line in Kentucky. Coupled with Ulysses S. Grant's capture of Forts Henry and Donelson the following month it brought about the Confederate loss of southern Kentucky and much of Tennessee.

In the Fall of 1861, Confederate forces under General Albert Sidney Johnston established a defensive line in southern Kentucky and northern Tennessee, anchored on the western end at Columbus on the Mississippi River, and including positions at Forts Henry and Donelson and Bowling Green before terminating at Cumberland Gap. Brigadier General Felix Zollicoffer's troops guarded the eastern portion of the line near Cumberland Gap, and in November he established a position near Mill Springs on the Cumberland River in eastern Kentucky.

Meanwhile, Union General George Thomas, a Virginia-born Regular Army officer who had remained loyal to the Union after the secession of his native state, commanded a division at

Lebanon, Kentucky. In early January 1862 he advanced a portion of his force towards Zollicoffer's position, though bad weather and poor roads slowed the movement. By the

seventeenth he had reached Logan's Crossroads, where he established a defensive position while awaiting reinforcements.

Early on the morning of January 19, Confederate forces under Zollicoffer and Brigadier General William Carroll attacked Thomas' position. As the southern troops threatened the Union left, Federal reinforcements arrived to bolster Thomas' line. The Confederates then struck the center of the Union line, but Thomas soon launched a counterattack. In the confused fighting that followed, Zollicoffer mistook a Union unit for one of his own and, upon approaching it, was shot from his horse and killed. The northern attack soon routed the Confederates, who retreated back to their position near Beech Grove.

Thomas advanced and bombarded the Confederates, who were now commanded by General George B. Crittenden. That night the southerners retreated across the Cumberland River, leaving behind much of their heavy equipment and supplies. Thomas moved to Mill Springs and then Cumberland Gap, securing much of southeast Kentucky for the Union and contributing to subsequent Federal advances into Tennessee. Mill Springs was the first major campaign of Thomas' Civil War career, and launched him into greater prominence. His greatest achievement would take place the following year when he protected the Union retreat after the battle of Chickamauga, for which he became famous as the "Rock of Chickamauga."