

**John Hunt Morgan**  
**<http://civilwar150.longwood.edu>**

On July 4, 1862 a southern cavalry brigade left Knoxville, Tennessee and began a three-week raid into Kentucky. The audacity of the raid would match or exceed that of J.E.B. Stuart's ride around George McClellan's army a month earlier and added to the reputation of the brigade's commander, Colonel John Hunt Morgan.

In early July 1862, while the Army of the Potomac in the East was on its heels after the Seven Days Battles, Union armies in the West were continuing to make progress and move slowly southward. The Confederates needed a boost in morale and if possible a boost in their numbers. Confederate leaders hoped to find a way to encourage the many southern supporters in the border state of Kentucky to rise up and come to the aid of the Confederate war effort. Morgan's 1862 raid was partly an effort to harass Union forces, partly an effort to gain intelligence and partly an effort to enlist support within Kentucky.

Morgan was a Mexican war veteran who had become a Confederate colonel and leader of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Kentucky Cavalry regiment. His men had fought well at Shiloh and he gave hope to those who hoped more gallant men from Kentucky would join the cause. Morgan was not a graduate of the military academy and was less bound by established rules than many West Pointers. He decided early in the war that the days of mass cavalry charges were over and treated his men as mounted infantry, using their horses to allow him to fight on the ground of his choosing.

During his 1862 Kentucky raid, Morgan used his tactical skills to move far behind the Union lines, always leaving one spot before enemy forces could concentrate against him. Morgan also made use of the telegraph to cause chaos. He brought along an experienced

telegraph operator named George Ellsworth who would intercept real messages and send false ones during the trip.

The raid caused panic in Kentucky and martial law was declared in Lexington. Wherever they passed, Kentuckians came out to watch and many to cheer for the raiders. They met little military resistance, destroying Union property and capturing prisoners and supplies while they moved. By July 17, Morgan's men had defeated a force of 500 Union home guards and captured Cynthiana, only about 50 miles from Cincinnati, Ohio.

A Richmond headline declared "Three Cheers for Morgan!" as delighted southerners everywhere kept up with his exploits. In Washington, Abraham Lincoln fired off a message to Henry Halleck, overall commander of Union forces in the West: "They are having a stampede in Kentucky. Please look to it!"

Halleck sent 3,000 men riding after the raiders but Morgan stayed one step ahead of them and made it safely back to Tennessee. In addition to lifting Confederate spirits, a quartermaster estimated that the raid had caused a loss in Union property of almost ten million dollars. Confederate generals were so encouraged by the reception Morgan had received by Kentucky natives that they began to plan an offensive for the fall that would possibly regain the state and its potential soldiers for the Confederacy. Morgan would be promoted to brigadier general and would lead an even more daring raid into Union territory during the following year.