



The Wizard of the Saddle: The Battle over the Life and Legacy of Nathan Bedford Forrest

Charles River Editors

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*Includes pictures of Forrest and important people, places, and events.

*Includes a lengthy bibliography for further reading.

“I got there first with the most men.” – Nathan Bedford Forrest

Despite the fact that the Civil War was fought nearly 150 years ago, it remains a polarizing topic for the country to this day. And nowhere is this more evident than in the life and legacy of Confederate Lieutenant General Nathan Bedford Forrest, the war’s most controversial soldier.

When the war broke out, Forrest enlisted in the army and was instructed to raise a battalion of cavalry. A self-made man with no formal military training, Forrest spent the entire war fighting in the Western theater, becoming the only individual in the war to rise from the rank of Private to Lieutenant General. By the end of the war, Forrest was known throughout the South as the “Wizard of the Saddle,” and anecdotes of his prowess in battle were legendary. In addition to being injured multiple times in battle, Forrest has been credited with having killed 30 Union soldiers in combat and having 29 horses shot out from under him. Northerners weren’t the only ones who felt his wrath; Forrest famously feuded with several commanding officers and notoriously killed an artillery commander in his unit after a verbal confrontation spiraled out of control.

History has properly accorded Forrest his place as one of the most courageous soldiers of the Civil War, and Forrest attained a number of command successes in the Western theater of the war. But Forrest was also at the head of Confederate troops accused of massacring a Union garrison comprised mostly of black soldiers at Fort Pillow, and he was also a prominent slave trader, an overt racist, and likely a leader of the Ku Klux Klan after the Civil War. When he died in 1877, in part due to various war wounds, he was the nation’s most notorious unreconstructed rebel. Ashdown and Caudill, authors of *The Myth of Nathan Bedford Forrest*, write that the story of Forrest “embraces violence, race, realism, sectionalism, politics, reconciliation, and repentance.”

With these characteristics, it has proven almost impossible for any American to have a neutral view of Forrest, and it has been even harder to ignore him. Subsequently, Forrest’s image has vacillated from celebrated to reviled, sometimes both at the same time, over the last 150 years, as the numerous and notable aspects of Forrest’s life and legacy were considered by different people at different times.

The Wizard of the Saddle: The Battle over the Life and Legacy of Nathan Bedford Forrest traces his life and Civil War record in the first part, detailing both his wild successes and his biggest controversies. The second part looks at how Forrest’s legacy has been interpreted in the North and South since the end of the war, and how it fits within the context of Civil War memory and historiography as a whole, showing how Americans’ opinions of Forrest have changed over time in conjunction with how the war and its aftermath were viewed. Along with pictures of Forrest and other important people, places and events in his life, you will learn about the Wizard of the Saddle like you never have before, in no time at all.

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