

The Cannonball



Story of the Cannonball

(A story as related by Annie Nourse, Elizabethtown ~ Oct. 1932)

During the Civil War (date not know by me). Gen. John Morgan was encamped on the hill beyond the Cemetery. The Union men occupied the town and Morgan cannonaded it; several balls hit the mark; one went through the wall of the house now owned by Maggie Martin; another through the open front door of Ms. Alfred Brown's residence and one into the second-story wall of the building which stood where the one now occupied by Lex's drug store stands. The courthouse was then the old one in the north-west corner of the Square.

Many years after (1887) a fire destroyed that entire block and the cannonball fell with the wall. I, always a "collector", asked Mr. Cresap and Mr. Montgomery, owners of the building, to give me the ball, they both kindly consented. I then told the boys about it, that I would give .25 cents to the one who would find it and bring it to me. A lively scramble instantly ensued in the pile of hot bricks. I left them digging and went on home (all this the morning after the fire). In the afternoon a man brought it out to me and demanded \$5.00 for it. I told him it was already mine. After some hesitation he decided to leave it for .50 cents, which I gave him. Many years after it had adorned my cabinet along with other historic balls (not cannon), I restored it to the bank and they had it placed in the same spot, as near as possible.

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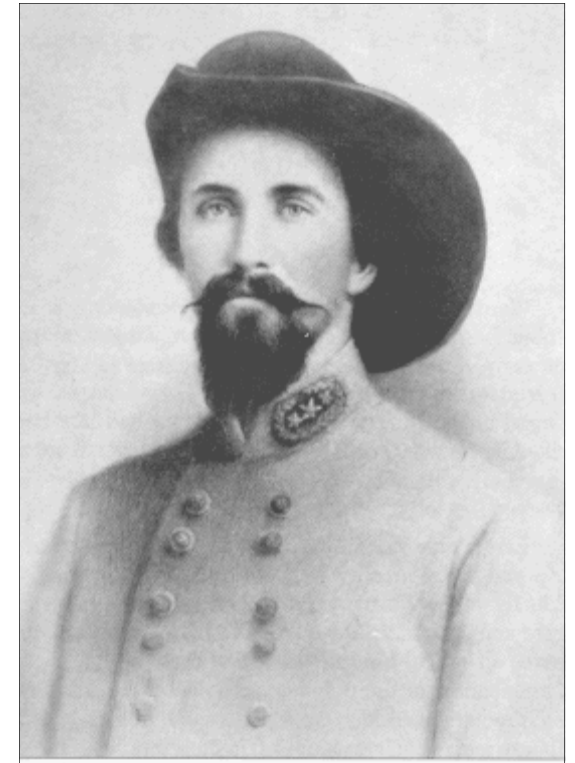
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The Civil War in Elizabethtown, Kentucky



John Hunt Morgan's
Christmas Raid
1862
and
The Cannonball

The Battle

The only “battle” in Elizabethtown took place on December 27, 1862. At that time the Civil War was not going well for the Confederacy. Kentucky had been abandoned, Union troops occupied Nashville, and the Union supply line via the Louisville and Nashville Railroad was wide open.

Confederate General John Hunt Morgan determined to embark on a mission to disrupt the flow of material from the North. His objective was the destruction of the immense trestles which carried the L & N Railroad over deep gorges along Muldraugh Hill just north of Elizabethtown.

To accomplish his mission, he departed Alexandria, Tennessee, on December 22, 1862, with some 3,500 troops. They made their way northward, arriving in the vicinity of Upton in Hardin County on December 26. After almost one day in the Upton area, during which his troops neutralized the Union defenses at the railroad bridges over Bacon Creek and Nolin River, Morgan moved his forces northward once more and camped that night (Dec. 26) a few miles south of Elizabethtown.

On the morning of December 27, Morgan and his men marched up the Louisville and Nashville Turnpike (now US Hwy 31W) and arrived at the south edge of Elizabethtown. After an exchange of messages with the Union commander in the town (Lt. Col. Harry Smith), during which each side demanded the surrender of the other,

Morgan made preparations to overcome the opposition in the town.

He stationed an artillery battery (two 12-pound howitzers and two 6-pound guns) atop Cemetery Hill, and one 3-inch Parrot gun on the Louisville and Nashville Turnpike, poised to fire into the downtown area. As soon as Smith’s final message declining to surrender was received, firing commenced. Confederate infantry troops advanced into the downtown area under the cover of artillery fire.

Three Union stockades were under construction for the defense of Elizabethtown but were not finished. Smith, therefore, had ordered his troops (652 men of the 91st Illinois Volunteer Infantry Regiment) to take positions in the brick buildings around and near the courthouse square.

The raiders began to enter the town, going up and down the streets. Finally, after a little more than an hour, white flags appeared at various windows. The troops had surrendered without the knowledge or consent of Col. Smith.

Accounts of what transpired later that afternoon in Elizabethtown vary widely, depending upon the sentiments of the various writers. One strongly pro-Union account reported widespread looting, some even by Morgan himself. Other accounts give details of Morgan establishing a headquarters and receiving calls not only from old friends, but also from those who had heard of him and wanted to see the “Rebel Raider”. ■



The Trail

The Elizabethtown Civil War Trail commences at the intersection of the Louisville and Nashville Rail Road with the Louisville and Nashville Turnpike. Both of these were major thoroughfares between the two cities, and, as strange as it may seem, they cross at right angles in downtown Elizabethtown.

Cemetery Hill is visible to the south over the top of nearby buildings, and the courthouse square is almost equidistant to the north. The Parrot gun was nearby on the Turnpike.

Within view of the trailhead, a short distance along the path, the railroad crosses Valley Creek. The wooden bridge at that point was a popular target for Confederate raiders. All traces of the nearby Union stockade have been obliterated by flooding over the years.

The trail continues along a level plain for 0.5 mile, passing the confluence of Valley and Buffalo creeks. After crossing E. Poplar street and the bridge over Buffalo Creek, the path begins to ascend as it moves away from the creek bank. Then the earthworks of Union Camp Haycraft come into view on the right.

One may visualize the area to the left across the creek as being devoid of buildings and vegetation, often covered with tents, affording a clear view of the railroad.

Camp Haycraft was often used as a bivouac area for the many Union troops passing through the area.