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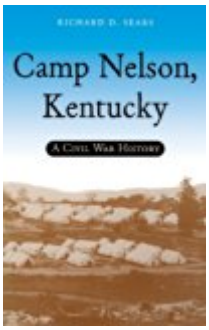
Richard D. Sears. *Camp Nelson, Kentucky: A Civil War History.* Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky, 2002. lxxxiii + 401 pp. $45.00, cloth, ISBN 978-0-8131-2246-5.



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Few locations illustrate the military, social, and philosophical progress of the Civil War as well as Camp Nelson, Kentucky. When the United States Army initially considered establishing a major supply depot in central Kentucky, it did so in order to reinforce the lengthy and cumbersome supply lines that plagued the Federal movement south. By the time the depot was constructed, however, the purpose of the war had changed from the cause of union, to that of emancipation. With this change, the Union army began enlisting black men, and Camp Nelson transitioned into a training center with a humanitarian purpose. Aside from the soldiers who trained there, thousands of former slaves made the journey out of the seceded states to the post where the federal government made their freedom a matter of national record.

From the first days of the Civil War, President Abraham Lincoln considered the liberation of Unionist eastern Tennessee a top priority of his administration. Throughout late 1861 and 1862, the Union army sought to gain control of the Cumberland Gap, through which soldiers could move into that contested part of the Confederacy. Various difficulties prevented the Federal Army from taking and holding the position for any extended period, and by 1863, with the Union cause gaining momentum, Lincoln again sought entrée into eastern Tennessee. Remembering his difficulties with General Don Carlos Buell during the first months of the war over the region's liberation, Lincoln appointed a man in March 1863, whom he trusted to command the Department of the Ohio. General Ambrose Burnside's main goal would be to move on eastern Tennessee.

During the first two years of the Civil War, federal forces in Kentucky learned that taking and holding the Gap from the north was a very difficult proposition. Due to the northeasterly-southwesterly striation of the mountains, the position was infinitely easier to supply from the south rather than the north. London, Kentucky, the closest depot north of the Tennessee border was separated from the Gap by numerous perpendicular lines of mountains. With eastern Tennessee as its major goal, the Department of the Ohio found itself without a path into the region. In an effort to

secure a convenient route and to further reinforce the Union army's successful movements into parts of Tennessee, Burnside quickly established Camp Nelson on the northern bank of the Kentucky River in Jessamine County. One important byproduct of its location would be the protection of the Lexington-Danville Pike, a major route southward to Tennessee, and the important Hickman Bridge that crossed the river nearby. Richard Sears describes the location as "a hub, really a perfectly central spot" (p. xxiii).

Construction formally began during the summer of 1863, but was briefly interrupted by Confederate Colonel John Hunt Morgan's raid in July. Meanwhile, Burnside, who had gotten the job because of his devotion to Lincoln's policies, threw himself into organizing an invasion of eastern Tennessee. Initially ready to move in early June, his advance halted before it began when his Ninth Corps shifted southward to Vicksburg, Mississippi, where General Ulysses Grant had the river city besieged. With Vicksburg's capitulation in early July, the Ninth Corps returned to Kentucky. Unfortunately and unexpectedly, the fit force that Burnside had sent downriver returned in poor shape. Having spent much of the summer in Cincinnati, Burnside traveled to Kentucky in mid August to find the 8,000-man force reduced by wounds, fevers, and other ailments to barely 6,000 weary and straggling soldiers.

Not wishing to waste an opportunity, Burnside left Camp Nelson on 16 August with a force of nearly 15,000, including those who had recently seen Vicksburg. Although he expected that the still unfinished depot would struggle supplying his advancing force, Burnside could not imagine the difficulties that lay ahead of him. By the time he reached the Kentucky mountains, his supply line was stretched to more than 200 miles and his supply of available horses exhausted. Not long afterward, heavy fall rains began to turn the already poor mountain roads into bogs. Because of the distance between the depot and his army, the lack of horses and mules, and the poor condition of the roads, the men and remaining animals soon began to suffer from a want of food. Sears records numerous descriptions of the suffering of human and animal alike during the late summer and fall of 1863.

While Burnside's campaign on Knoxville and the Cumberland Gap proved ultimately successful, little of the credit can be placed on the role of Camp Nelson. Located perfectly for the defense of central Kentucky and movement into middle Tennessee, it was too far from the mountains to make its expected impact on the campaign. With the Federal war effort in the West moving deep into Tennessee, Mississippi, Alabama, and even Georgia by 1864, the depot's importance shifted away from the strategic to the political and social.

Apart from its service as a supply depot, Camp Nelson also became a training camp for refugees from eastern Tennessee. Throughout the course of the war, the training mission would continue, but with fundamental adjustments. When Lincoln chose to authorize the enlistment of black men into the Union army, training became its principal purpose. Although Kentuckians had initially reacted tepidly to Lincoln's call, after a two-year hesitation, recruitment officers at Camp Nelson began enlisting black soldiers in June 1864. The camp quickly became the largest black recruiting center in Kentucky and the third largest in the nation as black men converged on the depot to become soldiers. Of those men who trained there that summer and fall, many would make up the Fifth United States Colored Troops and would fight and die in the battle at Saltville, Virginia, and during the massacre that followed.

With this history of Camp Nelson, Richard D. Sears comes full circle. He has spent his career studying Kentucky's relationship with slavery, antislavery, and evangelicalism. The Reverend John G. Fee provides one of the many intellectual links between Sears' works. Fee, an abolitionist missionary who established schools at Camp Nelson

and at Berea, Kentucky, figures prominently in several of the authors' books. Indeed, Richard Sears has established himself as a leading expert on Kentucky's Civil War experience.

Although Sears' Camp Nelson story is compelling and one of which historians should be aware, the focus of his study appears misleading. By entitling the work, ***Camp Nelson, Kentucky: A Civil War History***, Sears suggests to the reader that his work is a narrative, rather than a documentary history. On the other hand, his pulling together hundreds of primary documents between two covers makes an important contribution to the study of Kentucky' s role in the Civil War and will give students and scholars another easily accessible primary source from which to work. Despite the documentary nature of the book, the author does effectively narrate that Camp Nelson experience in an introduction that exceeds sixty pages.

In ***Camp Nelson, Kentucky***, readers will find a well-written and judiciously edited combination of narrative and documentary history. While the book may not easily lend itself to classroom use, its contribution will be made within the scholarly community and should make an impact on future studies of Civil War Kentucky.