

INCIDENTS IN THE LIFE OF
FRANK WOLFORD
COLONEL OF THE
FIRST KENTUCKY UNION CAVALRY

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Incidents in the Life of Frank Wolford

Colonel Frank Wolford fought to save the Union and after the Civil War he worked to save the South. He was a lion in battle and a giant in debate.

Few things pleased Colonel Wolford as much as speaking in public. In fact, so inordinate was his pleasure in forensics that he often spoke for three or four hours. Equally fond was he of praying in public, to which laudable function was transferred his penchant for lengthiness.

One hot Sunday morning in July at the Baptist Church in Liberty, he had been called upon to pray and was getting well under way when the village drunkard, one Raul, who had aroused himself from a Saturday night's alcoholic slumber, staggered into the church. The derelict very respectfully refrained from sitting during the prayer, which proved to be interminable.

Minutes passed; a sermon was preached in the prayer, while the luckless Raul reeled dizzily to and fro. Suddenly, without warning, there was a keen peal of thunder, and simultaneously Colonel Wolford uttered an A-men. Poor Raul was heard to mutter: "The Lord sure had the turtle hold on him; if it hadn't thundered, he never would have stopped."¹

Unlike Colonel Wolford, thunder excites no trepidation on my part; however, I do dread brickbats. My talk, therefore, will be presented with some consideration in mind of the evils of verbosity. In candor, however, it must be said that my intention is

¹This story was related to me by Mr. George Stone, of Danville, Kentucky, August 22, 1935. During the late seventies, Mr. Stone was a law partner of Colonel Wolford at Liberty, Kentucky.

to present a few facts of Colonel Wolford's career, his appearance, his characteristics, and some of the outstanding incidents of his life.

Frank Lane Wolford was born in Adair County, Kentucky, September 2, 1817, of Irish and of Scotch lineage.² His father, John, a very intelligent man, was a surveyor and school teacher.³ Young Wolford received an average frontier education—perhaps a bit above the average for his locality. Having become well grounded in “the three Rs,” he took up the study of law, serving principally as his own instructor, and was admitted to the bar in Casey County, at Liberty, to which place John Wolford with his numerous children and wife had moved in 1825.

Frank Wolford served as a private in the famous Second Kentucky Regiment during the Mexican War. At the Battle of Buena Vista two of his officers, Colonel W. R. McKee and Lieutenant Colonel Henry Clay, Jr., were killed and he, although wounded, risked his life to bear the body of young “Harry” Clay from the field.⁴

By 1860 Frank Wolford had established a reputation of being one of the best criminal lawyers in the Green River Country.⁵ At the outbreak of the

²Interview with Mrs. Nancy Wolford Barbee, of Columbia, Kentucky, a daughter of Colonel Wolford, July 29, 1935.

³Interview with Mrs. Barbee, July 29. See also L. B. Cox, “History of Education in Casey County,” a master's thesis, University of Kentucky, 1932, page 61. See also “Proceedings of the Kentucky State Bar Association,” 1921, an article by Judge Rollin Hurt, of Columbia, Kentucky, on the life of Colonel Wolford entitled “Some Great Lawyers of Kentucky,” pages 124-149. See page 130.

⁴“The Louisville Courier-Journal,” August 2, 1895, contains a sketch of Colonel Wolford's life by “Savoyard” (Eugene Newman.)

⁵“Proceedings of the Kentucky State Bar Association,” 1921, page 127.

Civil War, however, he cast aside his legal work and recruited the First Kentucky Union Regiment, a cavalry organization,⁶ and served as its Colonel until the spring of 1864, when he was dishonorably dismissed from the army for criticizing President Lincoln in a public address. That year, 1864, Colonel Wolford ran on the Democratic ticket for elector to strengthen General George B. McClellan in his race for the Presidency, doing more, perhaps, than any other man in the campaign in Kentucky.⁷

In 1865 he was sent from the Casey-Russell District to the State Legislature, where he played an active part in securing the repeal of the Expatriation Laws, which had been passed during the bitter struggle between the States.⁸ Wolford, in 1867, was appointed by Governor Stevenson, of Kentucky, to the office of Adjutant General. The duties of that position at that particular time were strenuous in the extreme: Guerillas were still terrorizing the land; and the Regulators, who had risen to exterminate lawlessness, had become as terrible as the Guerillas themselves.⁹

From 1871 until 1879 the "Old Warrior" practiced

⁶Eastham Tarrant, "History of the First Kentucky Cavalry" (R. H. Carothers, Louisville, Kentucky, 503 pages, 1894), page 8 et seq.

⁷"Lexington Observer and Reporter," July 2, August 10, and September 24, 1864. Also "The Louisville Daily Journal," September 30, October 1, and October 3, 1864. See also "The Cincinnati Daily Gazette," November 17, 1864.

⁸"The Louisville Daily Journal," December 4, 1865. Also "Daily Kentucky Yeoman," Frankfort, December 13, 1865. Also "Journal of The House of Representatives of the Commonwealth of Kentucky," 1865, pages 75-77.

⁹E. Milton Coulter, "The Civil War and Readjustment in Kentucky" (University of North Carolina Press, Chapel Hill, N. C., 468 pages, 1926) page 359. Also "Annual Cyclopaedia," 1870, page 427.

law at Liberty, and during the latter year moved to Columbia, in Adair County, where he continued to pursue his profession. In 1882 at the Democratic Convention Colonel Wolford's name was unsuccessfully, though eloquently, presented by his friend Colonel Thomas B. Hill, of Stanford, for the nomination for the office of Clerk of the Court of Appeals of Kentucky.¹⁰ In the State Legislature that same year, however, the Democrats, feeling that the party owed a debt to Colonel Wolford, carved out what became known as the Old Eleventh District, in order that he might be sent to Congress. He was elected Congressman in 1882 and re-elected in 1884. His death occurred on August 2, 1895, at Columbia, where he was buried.

Physically, Frank Wolford was a powerful man, but not graceful. He was perhaps 5 feet 10 inches tall. He had a powerful chest, a short, large neck, a thick, long body, and comparatively short, sturdy legs. His was not a handsome figure. His head was wide and high, unusually high and wide behind and above the ears,¹¹ and was crowned by a thick suit of crisp black hair, which, as the years passed, became iron grey. His nose was a huge beak; his mouth, unusually wide and perfectly firm, was supported by a powerful chin.

But the most unusual of all his features was his very clear and very grey eyes. They were sharp and

¹⁰"The Courier-Journal," Louisville, January 12, 1882.

¹¹Interview with Judge Rollin Hurt, of Columbia, Kentucky, September 14, 1935. Both Judge Hurt and his brother, Mr. Lucien Hurt, were personal friends of Colonel Wolford while he resided at Columbia. Both kindly imparted to me a large amount of information concerning the career of Colonel Wolford.

hawk-like, fairly glowing with perceptible fire, and, like those of Marius, "could pierce a corselet or gaze an eagle blind."¹² Usually, however, there was a twinkle in them, accompanied by a facial expression of mild amusement which extended to the corners of his mouth. The quick twinkle and the amused expression softened somewhat his ruggedness and grimness. One receives the impression of unlimited strength upon studying a picture of Colonel Wofford; he sees not only physical strength but also unusual mental and moral strength. Strength—superb strength—seems to have been the key to his character.

One hesitates to attempt an analysis of Wofford's character because he was not only a man of marked individuality but also a man made up of contradictions. He was one of the most original and unique characters, perhaps, that the State has produced. He did not aspire to be any other body than himself. He was a diamond in the rough, and just a little different from all other diamonds.¹³ His manner of speech was broad, archaic, and provincial. "Hit" for it, "sot" for sit and set, "fetch" for carry, "thar" for there, and a dropping of the final "g"; these were a part of his means of expressions.¹⁴ Yet, occasionally, his diction in speaking and writing was as pure and poetic as Lincoln's Gettysburg Address.

¹²"The Courier-Journal," August 3, 1895. Also interview the writer had with Mr. John Gabehart at Liberty, Kentucky, June 26, 1935. Mr. Gabehart, age ninety-two, is one of the few surviving members of "Wofford's Cavalry."

¹³"Adair County News," September 25, 1918, contains a sketch of Colonel Wofford's life by the late Judge Herschel C. Baker, of Columbia, who knew Colonel Wofford intimately.

¹⁴"Proceedings of the Kentucky State Bar Association, 1921, page 129.

Sartorially, Wolford was extremely odd. Perhaps never in his life did he wear a suit which could be called a fit, nor did he care. His clothes always gave one the impression of having been thrown at him, they catching and hanging on to his frame as best they could.¹⁵ Nor were regulation uniforms to his taste. At the Battle of Mill Springs "he rode the frame work of an ugly roan horse, wore an old red hat, homespun brown jeans coat, and his face had been undefiled by water or razor for some time."¹⁶ His taste in foods was simple: his favorite dish being, as he told a friend, "drapped dumplings and biled hen."¹⁷ And simple and temperate, too, were his habits; he never swore nor drank, nor smoked or chewed tobacco.¹⁸

In his home Colonel Wolford was an odd mixture of the ideal and the ridiculous. He was twice married—the first wife having died before the War between the States—and was the father of eleven children, to whom, it is said, he was always kind, loving and generous.¹⁹ Particularly noble was his deep love for his white-haired little mother, "Aunt Mahalie."

Often late at night when unable to sleep he would rise, dress himself, and walk across the town, Liberty, to see her. She always recognized his footsteps and neither the infirmities of age nor the ravages of disease

¹⁵"Ibid.," page 128.

¹⁶Tarrant, "First Kentucky Cavalry," page 61.

¹⁷"Proceedings of the Kentucky State Bar Association," 1921, page 132.

¹⁸Interview with Judge Rollin Hurt, at Columbia, July 29, 1935. Colonel Wolford, according to Judge Hurt, was at times a public advocate in the cause of temperance—temperance as applied to the use of intoxicating beverages.

¹⁹Interviews with Judge Rollin Hurt, Mr. Lucien Hurt, and Mrs. Nancy Wolford Barbee, at Columbia, in July, August, and September, 1935.

could diminish the eagerness of her welcome.²⁰ The rugged old soldier, however, was not domesticated in the sense in which modern husbands are: If he chanced to buy a bushel or two of new potatoes, he might dump them into the parlor or the front hall. One of his greatest pleasures was derived from taking his old straight razor to the front yard, and there, under the shade of a fine tree, enjoying a good shave.²¹

Kindness to his neighbors was one of Wolford's characteristics. This story has been told: There was to be held a few miles from Liberty a big social function and a large number of the citizens of Casey County had planned to attend. Wolford's wife, Betsy, eager for the occasion to arrive, had cooked the food in advance, and her new side-saddle was in readiness. The morning of the big day came. A neighbor, a poverty-stricken woman, having procured in some way a horse, appeared at the Wolford house and requested the use of the saddle. Mrs. Wolford was torn between two desires. The Colonel came along, saw the poor neighbor and, patting his wife, said, "Let her have it, Betsy. You can go any time, and she can't."²²

²⁰Interview with Mr. Lucien Hurt, at Columbia, Kentucky, July 29, 1935.

²¹Interview with Mr. W. S. Stone and Mr. O. P. Bowman at Liberty, September 11, 1935. Both gentlemen knew Colonel Wolford while he resided at Liberty. They related to me a number of anecdotes relative to Colonel Wolford's oddities.

²²Mr. Lucien Hurt related another story to me to illustrate Colonel Wolford's generosity. According to Mr. Hurt, Mrs. Wolford early one cold winter evening chanced to go to the back of the house, in Columbia, and while there discovered someone in the act of stealing firewood. She hurried to the living room and notified Colonel Wolford. The Colonel sympathetically remarked that anyone who would come out to steal wood on such a bitter-cold night certainly must be in dire need of something with which to keep himself and his family warm. The thief, therefore, was not molested.

Financially, Frank Wolford was not successful. Although for years he was the leading criminal lawyer of the Green River Country²³ and might have become wealthy, he had, at the time of his death, practically no property.²⁴ Extreme leniency in the matter of collections is probably the explanation. If his clients had money, they could pay him if they wished to do so; if they did not pay, Wolford seldom troubled them. On the other hand if he had money, his obligations were discharged promptly; if he had none, he appears never to have been troubled, nor were most of his creditors.²⁵

Possessing a fine Irish sense of humor, Colonel Wolford kept it in readiness for every occasion; even the Civil War did not diminish it. Soon after the outbreak of that conflict, while his regiment was on the march southward, an hysterical wife, whose husband had enlisted shortly before, rushed to Wolford, and amid sobs begged that her "man" not be taken away, tragically wailing that he might be killed in battle. With a twinkle, the Colonel bade her not to worry,

²³"Proceedings of the Kentucky State Bar Association," 1921, page 127. Also "The Courier-Journal," August 3, 1895.

²⁴Interview, September 9, 1935, with Mr. William A. Coffee, of Columbia, the lawyer who appraised the property left by Colonel Wolford at the time of the Colonel's death. Mr. Coffee is now (1935) Commonwealth's Attorney of the district in which Adair County is located. The circuit court records, county court records, and deed books of both Casey and Adair counties were studied in the search for material bearing upon the career of Colonel Wolford. A casual glance at these records is enough to convince one of Wolford's lack of business acumen, perhaps also his lack of interest in business affairs.

²⁵"Proceedings of the Kentucky State Bar Association," 1921, page 131. Judge Hurt's statement relative to the lack of concern of Wolford's creditors did not hold good in every instance, as the case of Thomas F. Barber vs. Frank Wolford indicates. See Casey County Circuit Court Records.

saying that he, being a widower, would gladly return and marry her if her husband happened to be killed.²⁶ Other traits of his character were an unusual degree of bravery and an admirable magnanimity, both of which traits will be illustrated further along.

Colonel Wolford's most notable public services took place during the stirring periods of Civil War and Readjustment. I shall attempt, therefore, to present a few of the incidents of those times in which he played a prominent part. The first of these incidents was at the Battle of Lebanon, Tennessee, fought May 5, 1862. This battle was for the most part fought between Kentuckians: General John H. Morgan's gray cavaliers of the Bluegrass and Frank L. Wolford's blue knights of the Green River.²⁷

General Morgan and his men, who slept in Lebanon on the night of the fourth, were taken almost completely by surprise at 4 o'clock in the morning of May 5 by Wolford's swift-moving cavalry column.²⁸ Through a driving rain Lieutenant Colonel Silas Adams led the Federal advance, entering Lebanon from the south by way of the Murfreesboro Pike. He and his company galloped by General Morgan's pickets and plunged through a few sleepy Confederate companies, hastily forming on the north side of the town square. Colonel Wolford leading the main Union

²⁶Tarrant, "First Kentucky Cavalry," page 35.

²⁷Tarrant, pages 81-92. See also Basil W. Duke, "History of Morgan's Cavalry," (Miami Printing and Publishing Company, Cincinnati, Ohio, 578 pages, 1867), pages 159-163.

²⁸Tarrant, page 83. The Union force which attacked General Morgan at Lebanon, Tennessee, consisted of detachments of three regiments under the command of Brigadier General Ebenezer Dumont. These detachments were from the First Kentucky under Colonel Frank Wolford; the Seventh Pennsylvania under Major John Wynkoop, and the Fourth Kentucky under Colonel Green Clay Smith.

column entered the town also by the Murfreesboro Pike, but before reaching the town square his right flank was struck by an irritating fire from a college building situated on an eminence to his right. Placing himself at the head of one or two hundred men he charged the college grounds, surrounded the building, and captured a number of prisoners.²⁹

The rain had ceased, but the atmosphere was heavy, and the smoke from the guns hovered low, and, after a short time of firing little could be seen except flashes from the muzzles of guns. The din was terrible. Amid the crack of rifles, the report of pistols, and the clatter of hoofs on the hard wet streets, could be heard the hoarse shouts of fighting men and, at times, the shrill shrieks of frightened women and children in the houses.³⁰

Colonel Wolford, after taking the college building, rode with the main column into the public square and faced a withering fire from the main body of General Morgan's men, who, by this time, were ready for battle. From the buildings about the square, especially from the hotel on the northwest corner of the square, an irregular though rapid cross-fire was poured into the First Kentucky's column. Near the hotel, Wolford was heard giving orders, and bullets rained about him as if he had been singled out for slaughter; he was struck in the left side just above the hip, the bullet inflicting a dangerous wound.³¹ Seemingly scarcely conscious of the rapid flow of blood, he

²⁹Duke, "Morgan's Cavalry," page 160. Tarrant, "First Kentucky Cavalry," page 84.

³⁰"The Louisville Daily Journal," May 14, 1862, an article by Kirkwood.

³¹Tarrant, "First Kentucky Cavalry," page 85.

ordered his men back to reload and reform, and immediately again charged the square.

Reeling from the dash, Colonel Wolford saw a line formed a short distance to the north and rode to give orders. That line, although partly blue-clad, was Confederate. He rode into the arms of Captain Frank Leathers, who immediately claimed him as his prisoner. Upon learning the identity of his captive, the joyous Leathers shouted, "This is glory enough for one day."³² General Morgan appeared upon the scene and offered Colonel Wolford a parole, but Wolford refused, saying that he preferred to take his chances on being rescued by his own men.

By this time the Federal troopers had cut off all exits from Lebanon, excepting the road leading to Carthage on the Cumberland River. Morgan, with a small remnant of his badly beaten squadron, galloped into this road, closely followed by Wolford's "Wild Riders."³³ The badly wounded and almost exhausted Colonel Wolford was pressed into the fleeing column near General Morgan, and a desperate flight and chase was begun. One of the prisoners, W. H. Honnell, chaplain to Wolford's Cavalry, later commented: "We were on the wildest race a soldier ever experienced. Sometimes we would jump clear over a fallen horse, and horses would sometimes shy around a man on hands and knees struggling to escape from the road."

Colonel Wolford, steadily becoming weaker from the loss of blood, fell behind Morgan's fleeing troops and was soon overtaken by two of his own officers. Mr. Honnell describes the scene when Wolford was

³²"Ibid.," page 87.

³³Duke, "Morgan's Cavalry," page 161.

overtaken: "He sat on his horse urging Captains Carter and Fishback to leave him and press to the capture of Morgan, whom he pointed out in the distance, before he could cross the river. The blood was dripping from his wound into the road as he offered to take care of himself till they could make the dash" ³⁴

General Morgan with twenty of his men seized a skiff at the Cumberland's edge, and crossed the river to safety. Colonel Wolford, too weak to sit a horse longer, was placed in a buggy and taken back to Lebanon. That night his men celebrated a victory. That same night Morgan and the remnant of his squadron sat in defeat at Rome, Tennessee; the great Raider shed tears; it was his first defeat. ³⁵

Astride Kentucky steeds, Morgan and Wolford, through the summer and fall of 1862, played the glamorous game of war over the fertile fields of Central Kentucky and Middle Tennessee—played it as romantically and chivalrously as did ever Coeur de Lion and Saladin in the days of the Crusades. ³⁶ They met for the last time, face to face, north of the Ohio in the summer of 1863, at the end of one of the boldest

³⁴Tarrant, "First Kentucky Cavalry," page 88.

³⁵Howard Swiggett, "The Rebel Raider," a life of General John H. Morgan. (The Bobbs-Merrill Company, Indianapolis, Indiana, 341 pages, 1934), page 56.

³⁶Judge Herschel C. Baker, in the "Adair County News," issue of September 25, 1918, tells this story relative to the friendliness between Morgan and Wolford: The two cavalry leaders were raiding and scouting in Southern Kentucky, along the Cumberland River. A number of Colonel Wolford's men had been captured by General Morgan's troopers. It so happened that Morgan did not wish to be encumbered by the prisoners, but was in dire need of salt. Wolford needed all of his soldiers, but had an abundance of salt. A trade was agreed upon: salt for soldiers.

raids and perhaps the grimmest pursuits in the history of cavalry warfare.

The great raid began about the first of July. By the time General Morgan and his squadron reached Lebanon, Kentucky, on July 5, Colonel Wolford and the First Kentucky, having been stationed at Jamestown and Columbia, took up the chase.³⁷ Day after day, under a scorching mid-summer sun, through Southern Indiana, through Southern Ohio, the indomitable "Old Warrior" galloped, twenty-one hours a day, always at the head of his dust-covered column.

The daring grey raiders paused before bewildered Cincinnati; some of them counceled that the city be captured and burned unless safe passage across the Ohio be vouched, but Morgan refused, saying that Wolford was too close in pursuit, and continued the flight.³⁸ On both sides, horses fell from sheer exhaustion, and men, addled from weariness, dropped from their saddles and slept in the dust by the road. Morgan galloped on. Wolford—his saddle soaked with blood from the unhealed wound in his side—

³⁷Tarrant, "First Kentucky Cavalry," page 174.

³⁸"Lexington Observer and Reporter," April 6, 1864. In this issue is quoted an article from "The Louisville Daily Journal," written by Kirkwood. It describes a council of war held by General Morgan and his officers as they approached Cincinnati in July, 1863. Kirkwood states: "A pause follows the daring proposition [to set fire to Cincinnati if safe passage is not guaranteed across the Ohio River]. General Morgan breaks the stillness by saying: 'D-n me, it won't do! I know Wolford too well. We halted at Lebanon, Tennessee, and he charged into our column at day break and killed, wounded, and captured nearly all my men. He will be on us again before we can burn the city or cross the Ohio, and we must push forward at once and avoid all obstruction in the front.'" Kirkwood states that General Morgan's squadron feared Colonel Wolford more than any other of its pursuers.

pressed on in pursuit.³⁹ At last when endurance seemed no longer possible, Federal volunteers were called for. Doughty Old Wolford continued to lead his thin but gallant column in pursuit of the gallant foe.

The day came when General Morgan realized that further flight and resistance were humanly impossible. He stopped and sought Colonel Wolford, whom he considered the most magnanimous of the Union officers; wished to surrender to him as he was most likely to grant generous terms.⁴⁰ The "Old Meat-Axe," as Wolford was called, could not be found. He did appear later, however, in the full flower of knightliness. He prevented his superior officer from inflicting insults on the captured Raider, and in gratitude Morgan presented Wolford with the beautiful silver spurs which had been given him by Lexington admirers.⁴¹ Later, after escorting Morgan and his officers from Salinville back to Wellsville, Ohio, Wolford left them at the hotel to eat. Before leaving them he said: "Gentlemen, you are my guests. This hotel, together with its bar, cigar stand, and other accessories, is at your service and at my expense. Do not go off the square in front of the hotel."⁴²

One of the most notable episodes in the life of Colonel Wolford was his controversy with President Lincoln during the summer of 1864. It was the result

³⁹Tarrant, "First Kentucky Cavalry," pages 181-188. Duke, "Morgan's Cavalry," pages 252-254.

⁴⁰Duke, "Morgan's Cavalry," page 457.

⁴¹Tarrant, "First Kentucky Cavalry," pages 187, 188. When General Morgan surrendered his horse and sword, he, by request, handed them over to Colonel Wolford.

⁴²Swiggett, "Rebel Raider," page 152.

of a speech delivered on March 10 in Lexington, Kentucky. Early in March, following his brilliant actions in the campaign around Knoxville, Tennessee, the "Old Warrior" was invited to receive, at Melodian Hall, the gift of a jeweled saber, sash, pistols and spurs—tokens of appreciation—from admiring Kentucky Union sympathizers. The award was made Thursday, March 10, 1864, in the presence of a large audience of distinguished people, including Governor Thomas E. Bramlette.⁴³

Colonel Wolford rose to accept the gift, and, the mood for speech being strong upon him, took occasion to deliver an address of more than an hour's duration, some say three hours. He reviewed the trend of affairs in Kentucky since the autumn of 1861. He charged Mr. Lincoln with "wantonly trampling upon the Constitution and crushing under the iron heel of military power the rights guaranteed by that instrument." He charged the President with violating his solemn pledge that he had repeatedly enunciated at the commencement of his administration as to the purposes of the war. He charged the President, further, with a "violation of the rules of civilized warfare in the indiscriminate, widespread ruin which he was sowing broadcast throughout the South." And, finally, he bitterly resented the recruiting of Negro soldiers.⁴⁴

The effort, although a long one for a speech of acceptance, received the most respectful attention and

⁴³"The Louisville Daily Journal," March 14, 1864.

⁴⁴"Lexington Observer and Reporter," March 12, 1864. The quotations are from this newspaper's report of Wolford's speech. If this extemporaneous speech was ever published in full, I failed to find a copy.

at times brought forth tumultuous applause. The leading newspapers of the state, such as **The Louisville Daily Journal** and **The Lexington Observer and Reporter**, expressed admiration for the fearless address, and there is perhaps little doubt but that Wolford's opinions represented those of the majority of his fellow Kentuckians.⁴⁵ However, because of his speech, Wolford, a few days later, was dishonorably discharged from the Union Army by order of President Lincoln.⁴⁶

If the candid "old Warrior" had not been the most popular man in Kentucky immediately after the Lexington speech, he, in all probability, achieved that distinction following President Lincoln's order of dismissal.⁴⁷ Everywhere he chanced to go, curious crowds flocked to see and hear him and to do him honor. At Louisville, for example, a friend took him to the theatre. The two occupied a box. Colonel Wolford received more attention than did the actors on the stage.⁴⁸

Politics and forum were now open to him, and in both he took delight. Thousands of people throughout the State had been suffering at the hands of what they termed "Union Military Tyrants and Dictators." Indignation and wrath had been smoldering in their breasts since 1861. They needed a leader who was aggressive, masterful, and unafraid, as well as popular,

⁴⁵E. Merton Coulter, "The Civil War and Readjustment in Kentucky," page 173 et seq.

⁴⁶"Lexington Observer and Reporter," April 6, 1864.

⁴⁷See "The Louisville Daily Journal" and "Lexington Observer and Reporter" for April and May, 1864. See also "The Louisville Daily Journal," Editorial Section, October 19, 1864.

⁴⁸"Lexington Observer and Reporter," March 19, 1864.

and one who loved the Union. Such a man they found in Colonel Wolford.

Although before the War he had been a Whig and a Know-Nothing successively, he now became a Democrat. Fusing together conservative Union men, conservative Democrats, and Southern-sympathizing Democrats on the issues of the "Constitutional Liberty, Opposition to Negro Recruiting, and to Lincoln Tyranny," Colonel Wolford revived the split and weakened Democratic party in the State, inspired it with new hope, and gave it a determined belligerency. In this he was vigorously aided by both **The Louisville Journal** and **The Lexington Observer and Reporter**. His eloquent voice and persuasive power were everywhere in demand, and crowds listened for hours without tiring, drowning almost his every sentence with thunderous applause.⁴⁹

The Radical Federal military leaders of the State, realizing with dismay his powerful effect on the hustings, determined to silence him by means of

⁴⁹"Lexington Observer and Reporter," April 6, 1864; also April 13 and 23, 1864. Also, "The Louisville Daily Journal," October 3 and 7, 1864. In an interview with Mr. George Stone, at Danville, August 22, 1864, this venerable and interesting gentleman related a rare anecdote relative to Colonel Wolford's "long-windedness." The gist of the story is to this effect: When a young man, in 1864, Mr. Stone attended a "Wolford speaking" at Somerset, Kentucky. The occasion was an all-day politics-picnic affair. The ladies of the neighborhood brought baskets filled with country provisions to satisfy the hunger of the throng, and the gentlemen brought bottles and jugs of beverages to quench any thirst which might arise. Colonel Wolford mounted the platform about ten o'clock in the morning and began his speech. At noon he halted the address that the people might appease their appetites. Toward two in the afternoon, the loquacious and eloquent Wolford continued his speech, amid rapturous applause. Mr. Stone said that when the sun was dipping to meet the western horizon he, although fascinated by the masterly address, was obliged to leave the enrapt throng, who did not appear, in the least, to have grown weary during the hours of spellbinding oratory.

arrests, and to base their charges on criticisms of the Federal administration which would be made in the course of his speeches.⁵⁰ On Monday, June 27, following a speaking campaign in the Green River counties, he was arrested at Lebanon, by order of General Stephen T. Burbridge, Military Head of Kentucky, and sent under guard to Washington, D. C., for trial before the Judge Advocate.⁵¹ Soon after reaching the Capitol, however, he was ordered back to Louisville for a trial, being given a parole by President Lincoln before leaving Washington—a parole that merely relieved him from being jailed.

While waiting trial at Louisville Colonel Wolford received from President Lincoln, through his Attorney General James Speed, another parole under which all charges would be dismissed if he expressed no further opposition to Negro enlistments. The old champion of Liberty under the Constitution, now realizing that the authorities had no intention of giving him a trial, refused to accept the new parole upon such basis. His letter of refusal to President Lincoln contains, among other things, a powerful defense of the individual's liberty under the Constitution. A few lines from that letter as printed in some of the newspapers, are quoted here:

"I have frankly to say that I cannot bargain for my liberty and exercise of my rights as a freeman on any such terms. I have committed no crime. I have

⁵⁰"The Louisville Daily Journal," October 1, 1864. Colonel Wolford, exasperated by the actions of the Union leaders of the State, wrote in this issue: "If they do not intend to give me a trial, I hope, for the sake of common decency, if not for the sake of justice, that they will let me alone."

⁵¹"Ibid.," Friday, September 16, 1864.

broken no law of my country or of my State. I have not violated any military order or any of the usages of war. . . . You, Mr. President, if you will excuse the bluntness of a soldier, by an excess of arbitrary power have caused me to be arrested and held in confinement contrary to law—not for the good of our common country but to increase the chances of your election to the Presidency. . . . You ask me to stultify myself by signing a pledge whereby I shall virtually admit your right to arrest me, and virtually support you in deterring other men from criticizing the policy of your administration. . . . No Sir, much as I love liberty, I shall fester in a prison or die on a gibbet, before I will agree to any terms that will not abandon all charges against me and fully acknowledge my innocence.”⁵²

Receiving no reply to his animated letter, Wolford, after waiting in Louisville a few days, decided that he was under no further obligation to Mr. Lincoln and again took the stump in the interest of General McClellan’s candidacy for the presidency. The final arrest of Wolford was made at his home in Liberty a few days after the fact was known that the Democrats had carried Kentucky overwhelmingly. This final arrest again was ordered by General

⁵²“Ibid.,” Friday, September 16, and October 1, 1864. Also “Lexington Observer and Reporter,” September 21, 1864. It appears likely that Wolford’s Lincoln correspondence is among the Lincoln papers presented to The Library of Congress by Robert Lincoln. These manuscripts, as requested by the donor, are not to be open for public perusal until about 1945 and therefore I am unable to quote from the original documents.

Burbridge⁵³ and made by a squad of soldiers who, with great secrecy, spirited Wolford away to Covington, where he was incarcerated in a "filthy dungeon."⁵⁴

His friends could not learn where he was confined; nor was he permitted to send his old friend, Joshua F. Bell, a letter requesting legal aid. Finally, United States Senator, Lazarus W. Powell, of Kentucky, introduced a resolution in the Senate, calling upon the President to disclose the place of imprisonment, and give the reason for detention.⁵⁵ The result was that Colonel Wolford was released by order of President Lincoln, who had not been aware that General Burbridge had ordered the arrest.⁵⁶ And thus this controversy, caused by the violent passions engendered by the War, came to a close.

During the summer of 1865, Colonel Wolford made the race on the Democratic ticket for the State Legislature from the Casey-Russell District. The main issue of the campaign was amnesty, especially amnesty for the Kentucky Confederates. The mag-

⁵³In an open letter written by Lieutenant Governor Richard T. Jacob to the Reverend Dr. Robert J. Breckinridge and published in "The Louisville Daily Journal," November 3, 1864, Lieutenant Governor Jacob accuses Dr. Breckinridge of inspiring the arrests of Colonel Wolford. The following is an excerpt from that letter: "You (Dr. Breckinridge) in common with a few other blood-thirsty but cowardly Jacobins, hounded on the military to arrest Colonel Wolford and myself. No, Sir, it was not your fault that arrests were delayed. Colonel Wolford was arrested! The noble old patriot who is worth ten times ten million such men as you!" Lieutenant Governor Jacob's pen does not become less vitriolic as the letter continues.

⁵⁴"The War of the Rebellion, A Compilation of The Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies," published by the Government Printing Office, Washington, 1898. The reference here is to Series I, Vol. 39, Part 3, page 726.

⁵⁵"Adair County News," June 20, 1906.

⁵⁶"Official Records," Series I, Vol. 45, Part I, page 994.

nanimous "Old Warrior", although he had received seven wounds at the hands of Confederate soldiers, championed amnesty with his entire zeal. He fought against apparently insurmountable difficulties. The District was overwhelmingly Union in sentiment, had furnished few soldiers to the Confederacy, and was not inclined to forgive the loss of scores of its sons who had fallen in battle.⁵⁷

Wolford's opponent was Colonel Silas Adams, who had succeeded him as Colonel of the First Kentucky Regiment. Colonel Adams was an impressive figure, a handsome, dashing, brave, eloquent, and unusually popular man. He opposed general amnesty, thereby representing what seemed to be the sentiment of the District.

On the Saturday preceding the election a joint debate was held between the two candidates at Liberty. A huge and excited crowd was present, including a large number of ex-Federal soldiers, most of whom had served under both Wolford and Adams.⁵⁸ Colonel Adams spoke first. During the course of his speech he turned to his opponent, and propounded the following question:

"Colonel Wolford, you claim to be for complete and unconditional amnesty for unrepentant Rebels. Now, Sir, no dodging; tell the people if you are willing to discharge that arch-traitor, Jeff Davis, from his prison quarters at Fortress Monroe?"

"I'll answer you, Colonel Adams, when your time is up," said Wolford rising.

⁵⁷"Proceedings of the Kentucky State Bar Association," 1921, page 137.

⁵⁸"Ibid.," pages 138, 139.

"I want an answer now," roared Adams.

Shuffling to the front of the platform, Colonel Wolford is reported to have delivered this brief speech:

"Fellow citizens, I was at Buena Vista. I saw the battle lost and victory in the grasp of the brutal accursed foe. I saw the favorite son of Harry of the West, and my Colonel, weltering in his blood. I saw death, or captivity worse than death, in store for every surviving Kentuckian on that gory field. Everything seemed hopeless, when a Mississippi regiment, with Jefferson Davis at its head, appeared on the scene. I see him now as he was then—the incarnation of battle, a thunderbolt of war, the apotheosis of victory, the avatar of rescue. He turned the tide; he snatched victory from defeat; his heroic hand wrote the words Buena Vista in letters of everlasting glory on our proud escutcheon. I greeted him then and there as my hero, my countryman, my brother, and my rescuer. He is no less so this day, and I would strike the shackles from his aged limbs and make him as free as the vital air of heaven and clothe him with every right I enjoy, had I the power."⁵⁹

Although the men attending the debate apparently were strongly Union in feeling, they could not resist the fascination of such sublime courage, of such superb sportsmanship, and of such clever eloquence. They sent the "Old Warrior" to the Legislature.

The Legislature convened at Frankfort early in December, 1865, and the Representatives immediately turned their attention to the question of amnesty.

⁵⁹This speech is quoted from an undated newspaper clipping which Mrs. Barbee, of Columbia, showed to the writer.

During the War an excited and punitive Legislature had passed a series of measures known as Expatriation Laws, which deprived Kentucky soldiers in the Confederate army and navy of their State citizenship. These Kentuckians had returned to their native state during the summer of 1865 to find that they, politically, were outcasts. Amnesty in Kentucky, therefore, would mean repealing the Expatriation Laws.

Perhaps the most colorful description of the occasion of the voting to repeal these measures in the State Legislature is found in a speech delivered by the Honorable Thomas B. Hill in January, 1882. That address, because it deals principally with the activities of Colonel Wolford, is here freely paraphrased and quoted:

Robert Davis, Representative from Bourbon County, the young son of United States Senator Garret Davis, had brought forward the bill to repeal the Expatriation Laws. This bill was opposed in a powerful address by "the leader of the house, who was justly regarded as one of the finest orators of his day."

It was thought that a majority in the Legislature was opposed to repeal, and "trepidation and fear hung like a cloud over the proudest homes of Kentucky." It was known, however, that Wolford favored Davis's bill and that he would make the closing argument; "it was known that the most splendid soldier that Kentucky had furnished to the Union cause would speak for the men whom he had often faced in the 'perilous edge of battle,' and at whose hands he had received the honorable and un-

healed wounds he still bore on his person."

That day came; it was bitter cold. The Representative chamber was filled from "base to dome." It was a notable audience, the equal of which Kentucky has seldom known. "The proudest homes of the Commonwealth were there represented. The proudest of her matrons, whose sons were outcasts, the most beautiful of her maidens, whose brothers and sweet-hearts were under the ban of that law, were there in full radiance of that beauty which not even the rigors of that day could diminish."

Sons of Clay, of Crittenden, of Marshall, of Breckinridge—"names that had carried the fame of Kentucky around the world as the home of eloquence, of courage, of genius"—were there, all "anxious, silent, foreboding." In the midst of that audience sat the rugged form of Wolford. All eyes were turned on him. He arose in his place, and, supporting himself by his desk, he began his oration. His theme was somewhat as follows:

"The Southern soldiers were the children of Kentucky—the common mother of us all—they were his brothers; they were entitled, not by grace, but by heritage and by right, to every privilege which he enjoyed."

For hours he dwelt upon this grand theme. "For hours he thrilled and swayed the bosoms of that audience as the storm-king sways the bosom of the ocean. It was indeed a storm in which the Speaker's gavel and threats of clearing the hall were unnoticed and unheard. It was, in truth, a whirlwind of eloquence and patriotism, which again and again swept to their

feet that vast audience in a tempest of plaudits and tears, and which swept forever from the statute books every vestige of the laws which had restricted the rights or stigmatized the honor of the Southern Kentucky Soldier From that day to this there has been no bad blood between the Federal and the Southern Soldier of Kentucky."⁶⁰

Another incident, and I shall close this short sketch of Colonel Wolford. It is an incident that illustrates Colonel Wolford's tactics and his effectiveness in a political "rough and tumble." As in war a soldier sometimes pushes his cap into view to draw the fire of the enemy, so Wolford in debate often adopted a similar strategem. He would present a harmless issue to try his adversary and to amuse his audience; in other words, he often would use a misstatement as a decoy.⁶¹

On one occasion he practiced this scheme upon General Speed S. Fry, of Danville, Kentucky. The General was sent to Casey County soon after the Civil War to fill some political engagements, and he and Colonel Wolford met in joint debate. General Fry spoke first, waving the "bloody shirt" vigorously and bitterly indicting the "rebels" for attempting to destroy the Union.

Wolford arose immediately after General Fry had concluded his speech. He described, in his unique way, the cruelty practiced by the Radicals, Carpetbaggers and Scalawags on the helpless South follow-

⁶⁰"The Courier-Journal," January 12, 1882. See also "Daily Kentucky Yoeman," December 13, 1865. Also "Journal of the House of Representatives of the Commonwealth of Kentucky," 1865, pages 75-77.

⁶¹Interview with Judge Rollin Hurt at Columbia, July 29, 1935.

ing the War. He severely abused them for hanging Robert E. Lee and Jefferson Davis.

Fry listened for a while in amazement, and at last, being unable to keep his seat longer, rose and denied that Lee and Davis had been hanged.

Wolford remarked that it was not the first time he had heard the statement denied; that it was the way of Republican speakers to deny all the cruelty of which they had been guilty in the South. He said that he was not in the habit of making statements which could not be substantiated, and that, fortunately, there were persons in the audience who were eyewitnesses to the facts. He further stated that he would ask them to stand up and say whether or not it was true. Knowing every man in the audience by his first name, Wolford had little difficulty in getting response. In fact, the audience was delighted with the trend of the debate.⁶²

Pointing to the left he said: "You, Jim, were a soldier; state whether or not you were present at that time." Jim promptly testified that he was "thar" and it was a fact that both Lee and Davis were hanged.

Then to another; "And what do you know about it, John?" Said he: "It's the God's truth, Colonel, I was right thar, and saw'm when they tied the rope."⁶³ One after another gave testimony to the same effect, while the audience roared with laughter. And then a man appearing by his staggering to be considerably inebriated reeled down the aisle and in stentorian tones shouted: "Yes, General Fry, G-d d-n you, don't

⁶²"Adair County News," October 9, 1918.

⁶³"Ibid."

deny it; I was thar and seed you when you done it.”⁶⁴

It was more than General Fry could endure. He stalked from the platform, and in righteous indignation turned his back upon the crowd and left the country.⁶⁵

Death came to Colonel Frank L. Wolford, August 2, 1895. The funeral services were held in the Court House at Columbia, Adair County. Judge James Garnett, Sr., and Governor Proctor Knott, also Colonel Silas Adams (his enemy in politics and often at the bar, but withall his dearest friend) were the funeral orators.

Colonel Adams, who made the last address, was deeply moved, and spoke with difficulty. He told of the saddle incident, quoting Colonel Wolford's words: "Let her have it, Betsy, you can go any time, and she can't." Then paused; resuming he said: "He was the bravest man I have every known . . . I loved him as I have loved no other man."⁶⁶

Rugged, plain, Old Wolford who had bled for the Union, pled for the South, and lived his eventful life for men and for principles, was laid to rest in the beautiful Green River Country, where the summer air is perfumed by the scent of pennyroyal, and the hush is broken by the notes of birds singing amid the hickories and redbuds.

⁶⁴"Proceedings of the Kentucky State Bar Association," 1921, page 142. Judge Hurt's account of the debate differs somewhat from that of Judge Herschel C. Baker, in the "Adair County News." The last quotation is from Judge Hurt's paper.

⁶⁵"Adair County News," October 9, 1918.

⁶⁶Interview with Mr. Lucien Hurt, at Columbia, Kentucky, July 29, 1935.