

# Cumberland Gap

## **NARRATIVE**

After the capture of Knoxville. Maj. Gen. Ambrose Burnside (Dept. of the Ohio) sent James M. Shackelford's mounted brigade ahead to secure Cumberland Gap. On September 7th, Shackelford demanded Frazer surrender the garrison, which Frazer declined. Through September 7-8 Shackelford's force took Frazer's outer line of rifle pits. The next day, Col. John DeCourcy demanded the garrison surrender. Frazer declined again but called a council of war with his officers. Frazer ultimately decided to hold out, and later that afternoon, DeCourcy's force probed the Southern defenses on the northern side. Finally, on September 9, Burnside arrived at the Gap with Col. Samuel A. Gilbert's brigade. Frazer, hearing Burnside was in the gap, believed the ruse that the Federal forces in front of him were much larger than they were and decided to surrender. About 2,000 men, including Frazer, surrendered, however, 100-300 Confederates escaped through the northern approaches along the Harlan Road and made their way into southwestern Virginia. (Excerpt from American Battlefield Trust)

## **HISTORICAL THEMES**

Controlling Resources, Crucible for Leadership, Guerilla Warfare, Transformation in Warfare, Influence on Campaign  
*(This battlefield site appears as a Principal as well as a Study Battlefield by the CWSAC and was subsequently assessed by TCWPA)*

## **COUNTY:**

Claiborne

## **DATE:**

9/7-10/1863

## **GEO COORDINATES:**

36.6041° N,  
83.6737°W

## **PRESERVATION**

### **OPPORTUNITY INDEX:**

HIGH

## **CONFEDERATE UNITS:**

5<sup>th</sup> Brigade Army of  
Tennessee

## **UNION UNITS:**

23<sup>rd</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> Corps  
Dept. of the Ohio

**EXPLANATION OF ATTACHMENTS/VIDEO:**

Maps and reports from Official Records

**LINKS FOR FURTHER INFORMATION:** N/A



September 7, 1863 - September 10, 1863 - Operations about and capture of Cumberland Gap; negotiating the Confederate capitulation  
No circumstantial reports filed.

Excerpt from Itinerary of the Twenty-third Army Corps, August 1-September 30, 1863.

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September 9.-Rebels at Cumberland Gap, under Gen. Frazer, surrender 2,300 men, 12 pieces of artillery, including Gen. Frazer and staff.

OR, Ser. I, Vol. 30, pt. II, p. 578. HDQRS. DEPARTMENT OF THE CUMBERLAND, September 10, 1863.

Maj.-Gen. THOMAS, Comdg. Fourteenth Army Corps:

We received a dispatch from Burnside to-day, informing us that his operations for the liberation of East Tennessee have resulted in the capture of 3 locomotives and 20 cars; also 2,000 prisoners and 14 pieces of artillery at Cumberland Gap. They surrendered unconditionally.

Very respectfully,

J. P. DROUILLARD, Capt. and Aide-de-Camp.

OR, Ser. I, Vol. 30, pt. III, p. 508. HDQRS. U. S. MIL. TELEGRAPH, DIV., OF THE MISSISSIPPI, Louisville,

Ky., October 4, 1863.

Col. ANSON STAGER, Gen. Superintendent U. S. Military Telegraph:

COL.: I have the honor to submit herewith my report for the fiscal year ending June 30, 1864:

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In the summer and autumn of 1863 we followed Maj.-Gen. Burnside's army into East Tennessee, through Cumberland Gap, keeping up with the same as long as our material lasted, when the work was considerably delayed for want of material which had been ordered from Col. Stager, but which he was unable to obtain in sufficient time to keep us supplied. Notwithstanding these drawbacks and the mountainous country through which we worked, we reached Cumberland Gap almost as soon as it was evacuated by the enemy, and from thence extended the line through to Knoxville via Strawberry Plains.

OR, Ser. I, Vol. 52, pt. I, pp. 482-483. Correspondence relating to the surrender of Confederate forces at Cumberland Gap, September 9, 1863. HDQRS. U. S. FORCES,

In front of Cumberland Gap, September 7, 1863.

Gen. FRAZER, Comdg. Confederate Forces, Cumberland Gap:

GEN.: You are surrounded by my forces. In order to save the effusion of blood and the unnecessary loss of life, I demand the unconditional surrender of yourself and command by 3 o'clock, instant.

I am, general, very respectfully,

J. M. SHACKELFORD, Brig.-Gen., Comdg. HDQRS., Cumberland Gap, September 7, 1863. Brig.-Gen. SHACKELFORD, Comdg. U. S. Forces:

GEN.: I have just received your note of to-day demanding the unconditional surrender of myself and forces. In reply I have simply to state that I must decline acceding thereto.

I am, general, very respectfully,

Jno. W. FRAZER, Brig.-Gen.

HDQRS., Cumberland Gap, September 8, 1863.

Brig. Gen. J. M. SHACKELFORD, Comdg. U. S. Forces near Cumberland Gap:

GEN.: A flag of truce is just in from Col. De Courcy, commanding United States forces on Kentucky side the gap, and I ask you to suspend any demonstrations until the same is terminated, of which you shall have immediate notice.

I am, general, very respectfully,

Jno. W. FRAZER, Brig.-Gen.

SEPTEMBER 8, 1863.

Gen. FRAZER, Comdg. Confederate Forces, Cumberland Gap:

SIR: I have the honor to request you to surrender yourself and all the troops under your command, unconditionally. The gap is now completely invested, and a short or a protracted resistance on your part will only cause a useless and, therefore, cruel loss of life. You may rest assured that if you deem it your duty for the above reasons to surrender to my forces, I shall likewise deem it my duty to see that yourself and all your command are treated with due respect and consideration.

I have the honor to be, sir, your obedient servant,

JOHN F. DE COURCY, Col., Comdg. U. S. Forces North of Cumberland Gap. HDQRS., Cumberland Gap, September 8, 1863.

Brig. Gen. J. M. SHACKELFORD, Comdg. U. S. Forces near Cumberland Gap:

GEN.: Your second demand for an unconditional surrender of myself and forces of this date is received. In answer I would say that I have no cause to change my decision of yesterday, and consequently decline the proposition.

I am, general, very respectfully,

Jno. W. FRAZER, Brig.-Gen.

HDQRS.,

Cumberland Gap, September 8, 1863. Col. JOHN F. DE COURCY, Comdg. U. S. Forces, Kentucky Side:

COL.: Your demand for an unconditional surrender of myself and forces is just received. I would state that a similar demand has been made on two consecutive days by Brig.-Gen. Shackelford, on Tennessee side, both of which I at once declined. I would further state that it is customary in matters of this kind to know the number demanding surrender, which I ask of you to furnish. I would also ask in connection with the above that some time may be fixed for a definite answer, say 12 m. tomorrow, as none was stated in your communication.

I am, colonel, very respectfully,

Jno. W. FRAZER, Brig.-Gen.

Gen. FRAZER,

Comdg. Confederate Forces, Cumberland [Gap]:

SIR: I should not have the slightest hesitation in stating to you (as you appear to request) the number of troops under my immediate command, but cannot comply with your request for reasons arising out of considerations other than those connected with your defense of the gap. I once more assure you that in asking you to surrender, I was and am actuated by pure motives of common humanity, and I do firmly and really believe that your defense of the gap, however bravely and scientifically it may be conducted, will and must have only one result. I honor and respect above all men a brave and good soldier, and have ever and shall endeavor

to treat in that honorable mode which such a soldier merits; and for this reason, if for no other, I feel anxious to spare nothing which may prevent a cruel and totally needless effusion of blood. You may have remarked that I did not allow my artillery to reply to yours this day. I shall place tomorrow some of it in position, but will not open fire before 12 o'clock, as you have requested. I hope, however, that long before that hour you will have surrendered. Should you agree to do so please report tomorrow to me by meeting me on the Harlan road, sending at the same time another flag of truce on the road you met mine on to-day.

I have the honor to be, sir, your obedient servant, JOHN F. DE COURCY, Col. Comdg. U. S. Forces. HDQRS., Cumberland Gap, September 8, 1863.

Gen. J. M. SHACKELFORD, Comdg. U. S. Forces, &c.:

GEN.: I very much regret that a movement of cavalry followed your flag of truce sent in this instant. This may be susceptible of perfect explanation, and I would be pleased it should; but such movements in future cannot be considered other than hostile, and must be met in like manner.

I am, general, very respectfully,

Jno. W. FRAZER, Brig.-Gen.

HDQRS. U. S. FORCES, In front of Cumberland Gap, September 8, 1863.

Brig. Gen. JOHN W. FRAZER, Comdg. Confederate Forces, Cumberland Gap:

GEN.: Yours of this date, complaining of a movement of cavalry following my flag of truce sent in this instant, has just been received. It was not a movement of cavalry, as you supposed, but pickets detailed to relieve others. I was not aware that the picket was en route for the station until it had nearly reached it. I at once dispatched an orderly to stop them. He did not overtake them until they reached the station. It was no purpose on my part to violate the rule; on the contrary, I regretted the movement of the pickets at that time.

I am, general, very respectfully,

J. M. SHACKELFORD, Brig.-Gen., Comdg.

HDQRS. U. S. FORCES, In front of Cumberland Gap, September 8, 1863.

Brig. Gen. JOHN W. FRAZER, Comdg. Confederate Forces, Cumberland Gap:

GEN.: I again, in order to save the unnecessary loss of human life, demand an unconditional surrender of yourself and your command in the gap. You have until 3 p. m., instant, to decide the proposition.

I am, general, very respectfully,

J. M. SHACKELFORD, Brig.-Gen., Comdg.

HDQRS. U. S. FORCES, In front of Cumberland Gap, September 8, 1863.

Brig. Gen. JOHN W. FRAZER, Comdg. Confederate Forces, Cumberland Gap:

GEN.: Yours of this evening informing me that a flag of truce has just been received by you from Col. De Courcy, commanding United States forces on Kentucky side the gap, and asking a suspension of demonstrations until the same is terminated, of which you will give me immediate notice, has just been received. I will comply with your request.

I am, general, very respectfully,

J. M. SHACKELFORD, Brig.-Gen., Comdg. SEPTEMBER 9, 1863.

Gen. FRAZER, Comdg. Confederate Forces, Cumberland Gap:

SIR: It is now 12. 30 [p.] m., and I shall not open fire until 2 p. m. unless before that time you shall have struck all your flags and hoisted in their stead the white flags in token of surrender. I deem this further hour and a half which I grant for a suspension of hostilities as sufficient time to enable you to have received Gen. Burnside's decision.

I have the honor to be, sir, your obedient servant,

JOHN F. DE COURCY, Col., Comdg. U. S. Forces North of the Gap.

HDQRS. U. S. FORCES, In front of Cumberland Gap, September 9, 1863.

Brig. Gen. JOHN W. FRAZER, Comdg. Confederate Forces, Cumberland Gap:

GEN.: On last evening I agreed to suspend demonstrations until a flag of truce, then pending between Col. De Courcy, on the Kentucky side of the mountain, and yourself had terminated. I supposed, of course, that I would received notice from you last night some time of the termination of the interview. Judging from your promptness in replying to my flags I apprehend that there has been some mistake in the matter, and send on for explanation of the delay. The troops you may have seen moving this morning are troops that have just arrived, and I have ordered them, in compliance with the agreement, to halt and remain until I hear from you.

I am, general, very respectfully,

J. M. SHACKELFORD, Brig.-Gen., Comdg.

SEPTEMBER 9, 1863.

Gen. FRAZER, Comdg. Confederate Forces, Cumberland Gap:

SIR: I regret that you should deem improper my action in the matter of placing guns in position, and when you reflect that I did not reply to your fire yesterday when I might have done so, and that you asked for a prolongation of time, which I did not require, but granted from motives of courtesy to you and humanity to both sides, I cannot feel that I have acted improperly, or in any way contrary to the usages of modern warfare, particularly in respect to fortified and completely invested positions, such as your present one in Cumberland Gap. I shall consider you, if you so wish it, as being perfectly at liberty to open fire whenever you like. I shall still, however, keep to my promise and give you time until 12 m. to consider the terms I offered you, and as I received news last night of additional forces coming up to us

this morning, you will be compelled to see before many hours that in accepting my terms you would be only doing that which, under the circumstances, is proper and humane, in a common-sense point of view, and strictly in accordance with military custom in like cases.

I have the honor to be, sir, your obedient servant,

JOHN F. DE COURCY, Comdg. U. S. Forces North Side Gap. HDQRS. ARMY OF THE OHIO, September 9, 1863.

Brig.-Gen. FRAZER, Comdg. Confederate Forces, Cumberland Gap:

GEN.: As ample time has been given for negotiation, you will be kind enough to dismiss at once from your lines our flags of truce from both sides of the gap and cease communication with any of the United States forces excepting through myself, as none other will be considered valid. At the same time, with the view of avoiding the effusion of blood, I beg to state that I have a force present with me sufficient, in all human probability, to carry your position, and should your reply not be satisfactory shall commence operations with a view of assaulting your position at such points and with such forces as I may deem proper, immediately on the return of the officer carrying this note, who has permission to remain one hour at your pickets.

I am, general, very respectfully, your obedient servant,

A. E. BURNSIDE, Maj.-Gen., Comdg., &c.

[P. S. ]—Maj. Van Buren, aide-de-camp on my staff, will be the bearer hereof.

HDQRS., Cumberland Gap, September 9, 1863.

Maj. Gen. AMBROSE E. BURNSIDE, Comdg. U. S. Forces, near Cumberland Gap:

GEN.: As my communications with Gen. Shackelford and Col. De Courcy will show, I intended contesting the position, but will now surrender on condition that the officers and men of my command be released on parole.

I am, general, very respectfully, Jno. W. FRAZER, Brig.-Gen. [Indorsement.]

The answer to this is lost. It stated that he (Gen. B[urnside]) would willingly parole the command, but that according to the cartel this arrangement could only be made with generals commanding independent forces in the field, and closed by again demanding surrender, with assurances of kind treatment to the command.

C. W. FRAZER, Assistant Adjutant-Gen.

HDQRS. ARMY OF THE OHIO, September 9, 1863.

Brig.-Gen. FRAZER, Comdg. Confederate Forces, Cumberland Gap:

GEN.: By direction of the commanding general, I have the honor to inform you that he will meet you directly to receive the surrender of your command. He also instructs me to assure you that every privilege shall be granted to yourself and command that the usages of war will permit.

I have the honor to be, general very respectfully, your obedient servant,

LEWIS RICHMOND, Assistant Adjutant-Gen.

OR, Ser. I, Vol. 30, pt. II, pp. 617-622.



## LEGEND OF TERMS:

Historical themes: Topics and subject matter that characterize the battlefield including Control of Tennessee's Resources, Crucible for Leadership, Guerilla Warfare, Transformation in Warfare, Enslaved People, and Influence on Campaign. Sites are identified that exhibit themes at moderate to high levels, and some sites may contain one or more Historical Themes.

Preservation Opportunity Index (POI): A rating assigned for each battlefield to indicate relative opportunity and potential for successful site preservation. The Index is generated by a model that evaluates ratings assigned for site significance, condition, risk of loss, protection potential, and opportunities for interpretation. Based upon the POI values for each region in Tennessee (West, Middle, East), sites are indicated as having High, Medium, or Low opportunity.

Geo Coordinates: General/central location of the battlefield area per latitude and longitude coordinates utilized in Google Earth

## DO YOU HAVE INFORMATION ON A BATTLE SITE?

Please email us at [info@tcwpa.org](mailto:info@tcwpa.org) and we will reach out to you soon. If you have copies of documents or photos to share, you can include those. If you want to discuss by phone, we will schedule that too.

## HELP US COLLECT INFORMATION TO PRESERVE THESE BATTLEFIELDS

TCWPA's Statewide Preservation Plan team captains are recruiting volunteers to help gather information about many of the lesser-known sites with hopes of verifying the condition of each site and identifying opportunities for preservation and interpretation.

If you are interested in helping, please contact TCWPA at [info@tcwpa.org](mailto:info@tcwpa.org) .

TCWPA will not publish nor release any confidential information, or the name of the contributor, unless you request to be recognized.

Thank you!

The logo for the Tennessee Civil War Preservation Association (TCWPA) is displayed in a light blue, lowercase, sans-serif font. It is positioned in the lower-left corner of a dark blue banner that features a background image of a Civil War-era cannon.

tcwpa

Have Information on a Civil  
War Battlesite?

Contact our team at [info@tcwpa.org](mailto:info@tcwpa.org)