**Robert Woolfolk**

**Versus**

**Federal Brigadier General Charles Ferguson Smith,**

*Federal and Confederate Military Operations On and Along the Lower Ohio River, 1861-65: The War on the Land, 1861-65:*

The context cited above treats the military repression of Kentucky civilians. This repression would grow, becoming a primary component of Federal war policy as pro-Southern Kentuckians refused to be conciliated as Federal troops occupied their counties. An early Paducah altercation between a noted pro-Southern citizen and the military commander of Paducah, an incident which took place in the Tilghman-Woolfolk House, highlights this political-military conflict during the earliest days of Federal military occupation in Kentucky. The incident bears significance because it played a role in preventing one of history's intriguing "might-have-beens," the delayed replacement of Brigadier General Ulysses S. Grant by Brigadier General Charles F. Smith as the commander of operations moving up the Tennessee River.

After the departure of the Tilghman family in June, 1861, Robert Woolfolk's family occupied the house. The Woolfolks were strongly pro-Southern and as luck would have it, their newly occupied house was located immediately across the street from the Federal garrison commander, Brig. Gen. Charles Ferguson Smith. The Federal forces first occupied Paducah on September 5, 1861. As the occupying force was increased, Smith was placed in command and he occupied a building on Kentucky Street for his headquarters.

For whatever reason, Woolfolk determined sometime in early December, 1861, to flaunt his politics in the face of Gen. Smith and he raised the Confederate flag from the front of his house at731 Kentucky Avenue. Brig. Gen. Lew Wallace, was assigned to Smith's command and he later penned a description of the resulting incident:

" I happened one day to be with General Smith at his house. Captain Newsham, his assistant adjutant-general, came into the room and reported a mob at Mr. Woolfolk's across the street. The general told him to go and disperse it. Presently an orderly appeared, and said it was the Eleventh Indiana, with others of the Second Brigade, taking a secession flag from Woolfolk's house. General Smith grew excited.

"How's this?" he asked, sharply.

I assured him, I knew nothing about the affair, but would see about it and report.

I reached the scene in time to find Captain Kneffler, my adjutant-general, at fisticuffs with Newsham.

With some trouble I separated them. Newsham was pursued with clubs and stones. After rescuing him again, I returned to Woolfolk's just as the stars and stripes supplanted the stars and bars on his house. From a post at the front gate, I ordered everybody off to his quarters. They went cheering; where upon I returned to General Smith and reported. His excitement had increased in the meantime. In all his years of service such a thing, he said, had not happened to him. He would make an example of the officers engaged in it. I ventured to suggest the number whom he would have to arrest nearly the whole brigade and, dwelling upon Woolfolk's imprudence, and the natural indignation of the men, I finally got the old soldier calmed down"

General Smith was condemned by the Northern press for his action in the Woolfolk incident. It was evidence of a weaker strain of patriotism which was not acceptable in a general officer. Incidents such as this allowed General Grant to advance while Smith was held back, taking orders from Grant who was his subordinate before the war. Smith's fortunes rose the next spring when he was credited with forcing the surrender of Fort Donelson in February1862 by leading his division in acritical assault. It was he who advised Gen. Grant that "unconditional surrender" was the only acceptable demand to be made of the Confederate garrison. Grant was relieved from command on March 21, 1862 because of his drinking and Smith was his replacement. Fate mortally injured Gen. Smith when he cut his shin on a rusty nail in a boat and he died April 25 1862. Grant resumed command and became a national legend (*Faust, p. 695, Warner, pp. 455-56*).