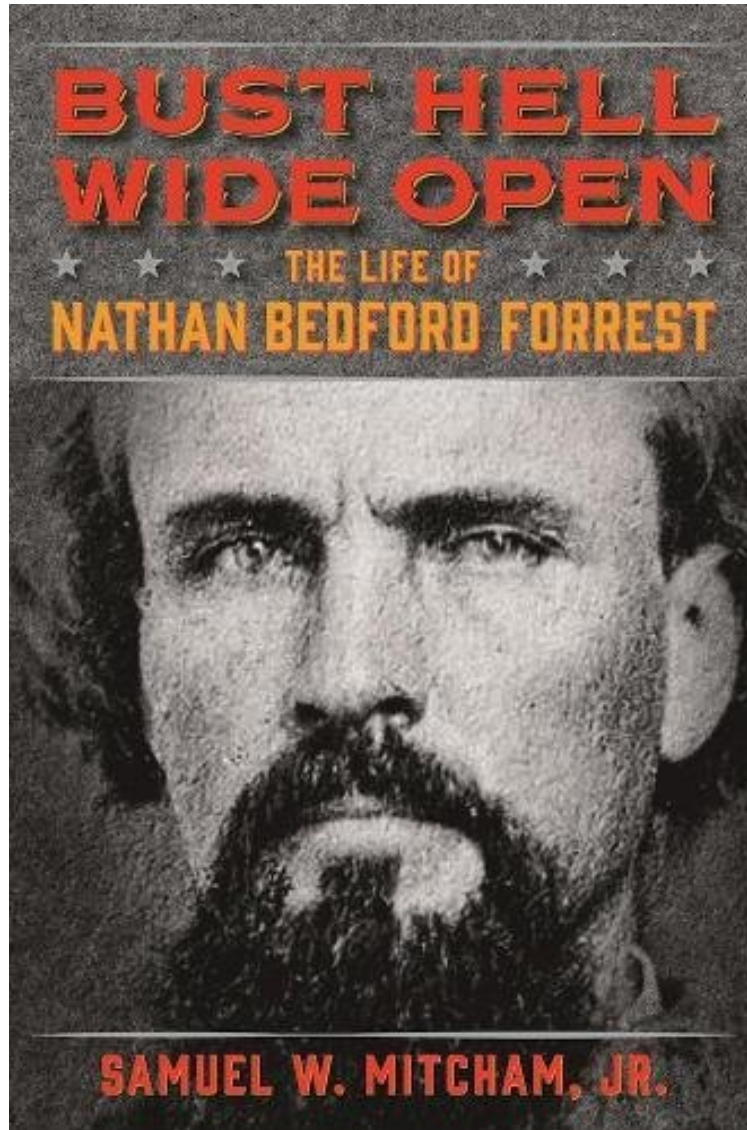


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Bust Hell Wide Open: The Life of Nathan Bedford Forrest

Samuel W. Mitcham

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At fourteen he became the head of his impoverished family, responsible for feeding eleven on the rough American frontier. By thirty-nine he had established himself as a successful plantation owner worth over \$1 million. And at forty years old, Nathan Bedford Forrest enlisted in a Tennessee cavalry regiment—and became a controversial Civil War legend. The legacy of General Nathan Bedford Forrest is deeply divisive. Best known for being accused of war crimes at the Battle of Fort Pillow and for his role as first Grand Wizard of the Ku Klux Klan—an organization he later denounced—Forrest has often been studied as a military figure, but never before studied as a fascinating individual who wrestled with the complex issues of his violent times. *Bust Hell Wide Open* is a comprehensive portrait of Nathan Bedford Forrest as a man: his achievements, failings, reflections, and regrets.

From the Inside Flap Some called him “the wizard of the saddle.” Union General William Tecumseh Sherman damned him as “that devil Forrest.” Confederate Commander Robert E. Lee said he was the greatest military genius of the war. This giant of a man—six foot two, two hundred and ten pounds—was Nathan Bedford Forrest, a general who killed no less than thirty men in man to man combat in the Civil War. He also hunted down a panther when he was fifteen, fought a gunfight in what was then the Western frontier, and amassed a business fortune, which he spent on his troops, after growing up on a ramshackle farm—responsible, as a teenager, for the well-being of his widowed mother and nine siblings. Gallant, tough, chivalrous, Forrest was the epitome of a Confederate cavalryman, but without the polish and education of a Virginia aristocrat. He was also controversial—in his own time and ours: charged with losing control of his men and allowing a massacre to happen at Fort Pillow and serving as the first elected leader of the Ku Klux Klan (a group he later helped to disband and disavow). There have been other biographies of Forrest, but none like this one by Professor Samuel W. Mitcham, which taps all the latest scholarship while approaching Forrest not just as a celebrated general whose campaigns are studied to this day, but as a man in full, a man raised and shaped by the Tennessee frontier, with a conscience sharpened by his devoutly Christian wife. Forrest said he would “bust hell wide open” rather than surrender to the Federals during the siege of Fort Donelson. In Samuel W. Mitcham, Forrest has found the perfect biographer to capture his defiant and courageous spirit.