Murfreesboro and Rutherford County, located in the center of Tennessee, became a major Civil War battleground from the summer of 1862 to late 1864. Union troops occupied the historic Rutherford County Courthouse on the Murfreesboro Square in the spring of 1862. That summer, Confederate Col. Nathan B. Forrest attacked and overwhelmed the garrison during the Battle of Murfreesboro, which helped to make Forrest’s reputation as a cavalry commander.

During the winter of 1862, Murfreesboro was Confederate Gen. Braxton Bragg’s headquarters. Confederate President Jefferson Davis stayed at the Oaklands Mansion in town in December and visited the troops. Later that month, Gen. John Hunt Morgan married Murfreesboro resident Mattie Ready in a downtown ceremony.

The Battle of Stones River (Dec. 31, 1862-Jan. 2, 1863), the largest and most significant Civil War battle waged to that point in Middle Tennessee, was fought in Murfreesboro. Stones River National Battlefield interprets this major event. After the battle, Union troops occupied the town for the remainder of the war. Federal troops, assisted by African American contrabands, constructed Fortress Rosecrans as a major base for the march to Chattanooga and later to Atlanta. Union officers also organized a local regiment of U.S. Colored Troops, a story told at the Bradley Academy Museum and Cultural Center.

Throughout 1863 and 1864 Confederate spies were active in the area. The Sam Davis Home in Smyrna tells the story of one of the Coleman Scouts. In December 1864, when Forrest again attacked Federal forces at Murfreesboro in the Battle of the Cedars, Union Gen. Robert Milroy repulsed it, and the county remained firmly in Federal control.