

Pea Ridge

NATIONAL MILITARY PARK • ARKANSAS

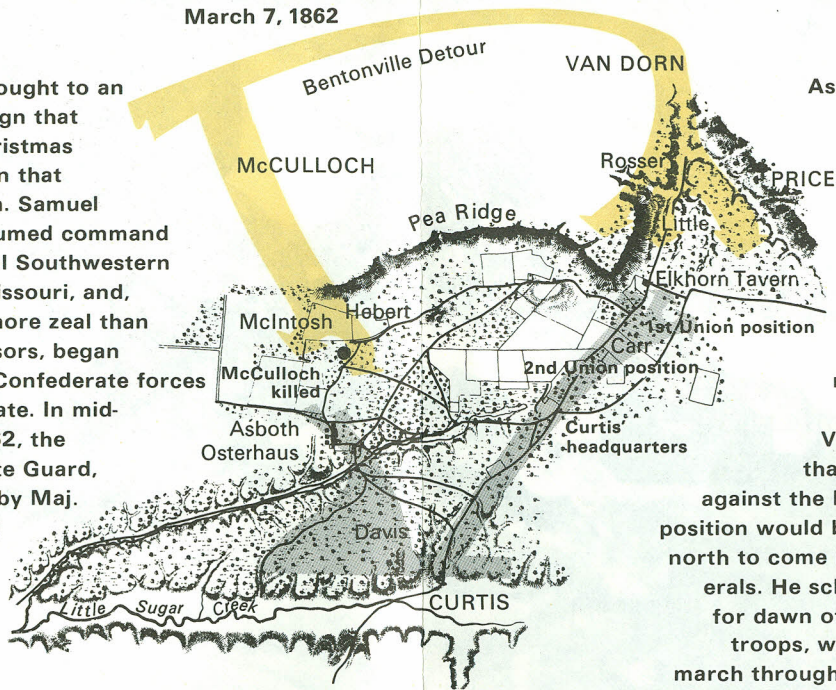
Pea Ridge—the battle that saved Missouri for the Union—was a strange battle: one that saw Southern troops attacking from the north, and soldiers from Arkansas and Texas fighting alongside French-speaking Louisianans and Indian regiments serving under their own officers. Moreover, the Missouri State Guardsmen who fought for the Southern cause were not yet officially in the Confederate service. The Union soldiers came from Missouri, Iowa, Illinois, Indiana, and Ohio. And many spoke German as their first language.



March 7, 1862

Pea Ridge brought to an end a campaign that began on Christmas Day, 1861. On that day Brig. Gen. Samuel R. Curtis assumed command of the Federal Southwestern District of Missouri, and, acting with more zeal than his predecessors, began pushing pro-Confederate forces out of the State. In mid-February 1862, the Missouri State Guard, commanded by Maj. Gen. Sterling Price, crossed into Arkansas.

In the Boston Mountains, south of Fayetteville, the Guardsmen joined forces with Brig. Gen. Ben McCulloch's Confederates. There, Maj. Gen. Earl Van Dorn took command of the combined force of 16,000 and on March 4 headed northward, intending to strike into Missouri. His goal: St. Louis. But between that city and Van Dorn stood Curtis with 10,500 English- and German-speaking soldiers.



As Van Dorn marched, Curtis' men were digging in on the bluffs overlooking Little Sugar Creek, not far from Elkhorn Tavern and nearby Pea Ridge.

Van Dorn, realizing that a frontal assault against the Little Sugar Creek position would be suicidal, swung north to come in behind the Federals. He scheduled his attack for dawn of March 7, but his troops, weary from a 3-day march through difficult country, arrived hours behind schedule. The delay gave Curtis enough time to pull his men away from Little Sugar Creek, face about, and prepare to receive the assault in the open.

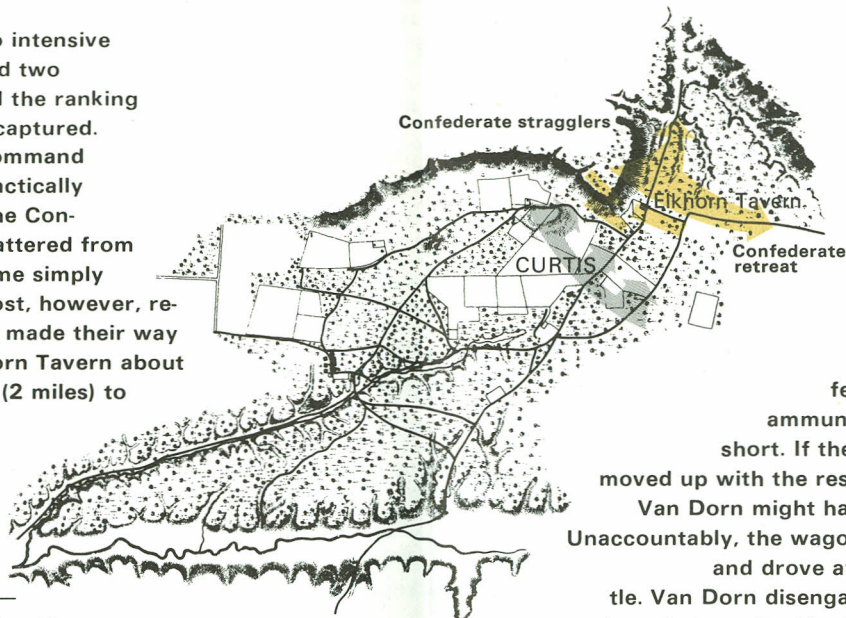
To make up for lost time, Van Dorn decided not to consolidate his force and to launch a two-pronged assault. From west of Pea Ridge and the Round Top, his men drove down upon the village of Leetown.

March 8, 1862

They ran into intensive fire that killed two generals, and the ranking colonel was captured. With their command structure practically destroyed, the Confederates scattered from the field. Some simply deserted. Most, however, regrouped and made their way toward Elkhorn Tavern about 3 kilometers (2 miles) to the east.

The other prong of the attack—Price's Missourians—fared considerably better. Attacking east of the ridge, they slowly but steadily pushed the Federals back until, at nightfall, they held Elkhorn Tavern and the crucial Telegraph and Huntsville Roads. During the night the survivors of the Leetown fight joined them.

On the morning of March 8 Curtis counterattacked in the tavern area. His massed artillery severely



punished the Confederates and his concerted infantry and cavalry attacks began to crumple their defenses. Still, the Confederates held. But ammunition was running short. If the wagon train had moved up with the reserve ammunition, Van Dorn might have seized victory. Unaccountably, the wagons turned around and drove away from the battle. Van Dorn disengaged and marched eastward, down the Huntsville Road, away from Elkhorn Tavern. A few hundred stragglers pushed their way down Telegraph Road, and the Federals, believing them to be the main force, pursued them, allowing the bulk of Van Dorn's column to continue an orderly retreat. The battle of Pea Ridge was over. Missouri was safe in Union hands, and most of the Union and Confederate troops moved east of the Mississippi to fight in other campaigns.

A TOUR OF THE PARK

After stopping at the visitor center, follow the arrows from the parking area to the Old Telegraph Road. This road is more than 150 years old. In 1858, the Butterfield Overland Mail Company routed its stage coaches over it to Fort Smith and then westward to California. The road received its name in 1860, when a telegraph line was strung along it. The road was used before the Battle of Pea Ridge by both Confederate and Union armies.

1. General Curtis Headquarters Site

Union Gen. Samuel R. Curtis located his headquarters in this vicinity just before the Battle of Pea Ridge. The Federal Army was entrenched along the bluffs overlooking Little Sugar Creek about 3 kilometers (2 miles) south of here. Gen. Curtis believed that any Confederate attack would come from the South against his fortified line. Events, however, did not develop as Curtis anticipated, and he nearly lost his army.

2. Winton Spring

In 1862, the Ruddick family lived on the hill overlooking this spring. The house you see now dates from the early 1900's and probably stands on the site of the old Ruddick cottage. Union troops drew water from the springs.

3. Leetown

A short distance to the left of this road is the site of a small hamlet called Leetown. Except for a few grave markers, the village is now gone. In 1862 the villagers learned much of the terrors of war while the battle raged around them for 2 days.

4. Leetown Battlefield

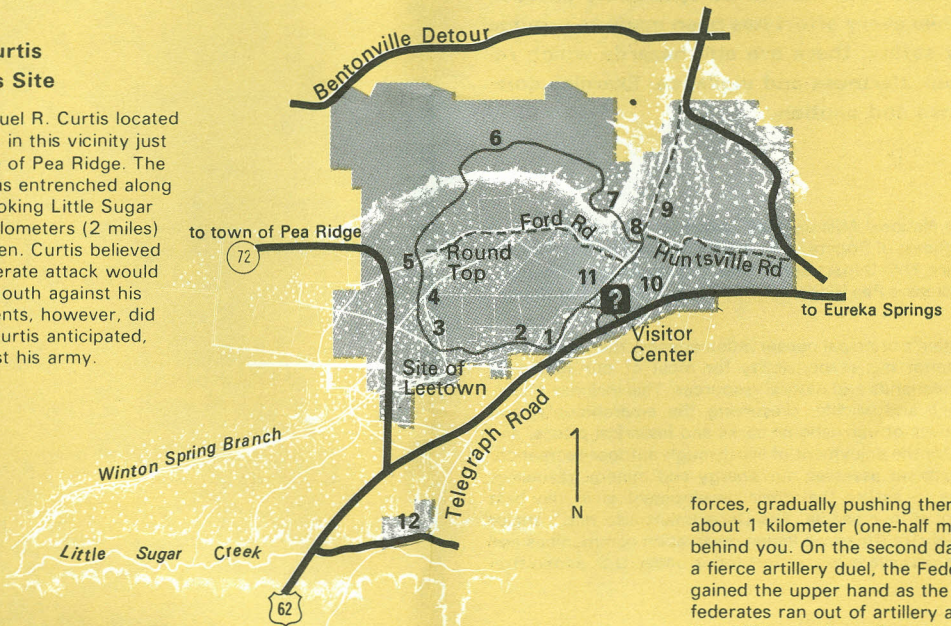
The thunder of cannon fire and the crash of musketry filled the air in these fields and woods in 1862. Smoke, confusion, and the mingled shouts and curses of the struggling soldiers added to the frenzied scene. Union artillery and supporting infantry were formed along the south fence line of this field. Confederate troops pressing their attack through the woods north of this field and across Round Top to your right front, failed to defeat their opponents. Two Confederate commanders, Gen. Ben McCulloch and Gen. James McIntosh, were killed near the north boundaries of this field as they urged their troops into battle. After the death or capture of their leaders, the Confederates withdrew to the north and east to Elkhorn Tavern.

WE'RE JOINING THE METRIC WORLD

The National Park Service is introducing metric measurements in its publications to help Americans become acquainted with the metric system and to improve interpretation for park visitors from other nations.

ABOUT YOUR VISIT

Near the visitor center, open daily from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. with extended hours during the summer, is a picnic area with tables, fireplaces, and a water fountain. No camping is permitted in the park, but facilities are available at Beaver Reservoir, 16 Kilometers (10 miles) away. Federal regulations prohibit hunting, disturbing wildlife, and removing relics.



5. The Indians at Pea Ridge

Pea Ridge was the Civil War's only major battle in which Indian troops were used. One thousand Cherokees from Indian Territory (now Oklahoma) cast their lot with the Confederates in this battle. The Indians participated in a successful charge against a three-gun Union artillery battery that had fired on them from the field to your left. Many of the Indians, never having seen artillery before, referred to the captured cannon as "shooting wagons." Soon afterward, however, cannon fire from Union batteries crashed into the Indian ranks and so demoralized them that they took cover in the woods and their further participation in the battle was limited to scouting and patrolling.

6. Pea Ridge—West Overlook

From this point you can see the Boston Mountains on the horizon to your front. Bentonville, Ark., from which the Confederates advanced to Pea Ridge is 22.5 kilometers (14 miles) to your right.

7. Pea Ridge—East Overlook

About 140 meters (150 yards) down the gravel path is the best view of the battlefield in the park. From that point you can see approximately 60 percent of the field. A recorded message in the shelter at the overlook will tell you, in detail, about the campaign.

8. Elkhorn Tavern

A landmark in this area for many years, the original building was the center of fighting that marked the start and the finish of the Battle of Pea Ridge. From the Telegraph Road north of the tavern, the Confederates made their first assault on Union

forces, gradually pushing them back about 1 kilometer (one-half mile) behind you. On the second day, after a fierce artillery duel, the Federals gained the upper hand as the Confederates ran out of artillery ammunition. With no other alternative, General Van Dorn withdrew most of his troops over the Huntsville Road eastward from the tavern, thus ending the Battle of Pea Ridge.

9. Fighting at Elkhorn Tavern

About 90 meters (100 yards) from the tavern, along the old Telegraph Road, are displays explaining the fighting in the area.

10. Confederate Artillery

Tull's Missouri battery held this portion of the Confederate line during the morning of March 8. It, and other Confederate batteries, returned the fire from the Union line 0.5 kilometer (0.25 mile) to the south.

11. Federal Artillery

On the morning of March 8, Union artillery massed on this line in a desperate attempt to drive the Confederates from the vicinity of Elkhorn Tavern. This line extended from the guns on the hill to your right to a point almost directly behind the visitor center. Under fire of these guns, the Confederates withdrew from the field about 10 a.m.

From here, return to U.S. 62 (at the park entrance), turn right, and drive 4.5 kilometers (2.8 miles) west to where a sign will direct you to the Union entrenchments above Little Sugar Creek.

12. Little Sugar Creek Trenches

On the bluff above Little Sugar Creek, 1 kilometer (0.6 mile) from U.S. 62, the washed down earthworks built by Federal soldiers still stand. A trail leads from the parking lot to the crest of the bluff.

FOR YOUR SAFETY

Do not allow your visit to be spoiled by an accident. While every effort has been made to provide for your safety, there are still hazards which require your alertness and vigilance. Exercise common sense and caution.

Pea Ridge National Military Park, which is 16 kilometers (10 miles) northeast of Rogers, Ark., is administered by the National Park Service, U.S. Department of the Interior. A superintendent, whose address is Pea Ridge, AR 72751, is in immediate charge.

As the Nation's principal conservation agency, the Department of the Interior has responsibility for most of our nationally owned public lands and natural resources. This includes fostering our fish and wildlife, preserving the environmental and cultural values of our national parks and historical places, and providing for the enjoyment of life through outdoor recreation. The Department assesses our energy and mineral resources and works to assure that their development is in the best interests of all our people. The Department also has a major responsibility for American Indian reservation communities and for people who live in Island Territories under U.S. administration.

National Park Service

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