

# Pea Ridge

National Military Park  
Arkansas  
National Park Service  
U.S. Department of the Interior

## Official Map and Guide



## The Battle That Saved Missouri For the Union

Control of Missouri was a prime objective of both Union and Confederate forces during the first year of the Civil War. It was the reason the Battle of Wilson's Creek was fought near Springfield, Mo., in August 1861, and it was one of the reasons for the clash at Pea Ridge in March 1862.

The Battle of Pea Ridge marked the end of a campaign that began on Christmas Day, 1861, with the appointment of Brig. Gen. Samuel R. Curtis to head the Federal Southwestern District of Missouri. Acting with more zeal than his predecessors, Curtis began pushing Confederate and pro-Confederate forces out of the State. By mid-February 1862, he and his troops had chased their main opponents, Maj. Gen. Sterling Price and the Missouri State Guard, into Arkansas.

In the Boston Mountains south of Fayetteville, Price joined forces with Brig. Gen. Ben McCulloch's Confederates. There Maj. Gen. Earl Van Dorn took command of this combined 16,000-man force and on March 4 headed it northward, intending to strike into

Missouri and capture St. Louis. But dug in across his path on the bluffs overlooking Little Sugar Creek, not far from Elkhorn Tavern and nearby Pea Ridge, were Curtis' 10,500 Federals.

Van Dorn knew that a frontal assault against Curtis' troops would be suicidal, so he swung north to come in behind them. He planned to strike at dawn on March 7, but his troops, weary from a difficult three-day march, arrived hours behind schedule. This gave Curtis time to pull his men away from Little Sugar Creek, face about, and prepare to receive the assault.

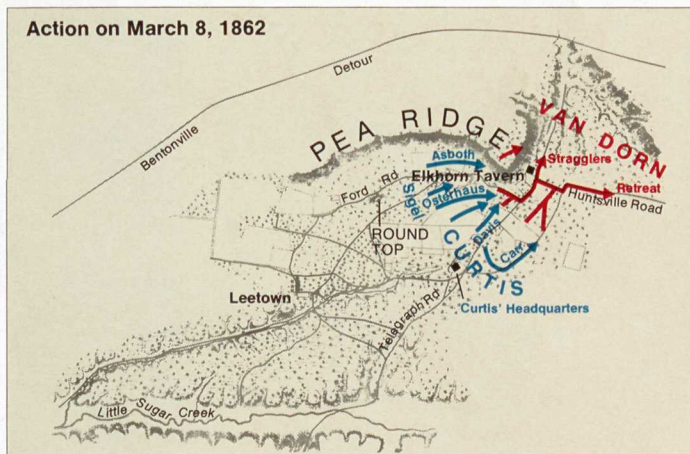
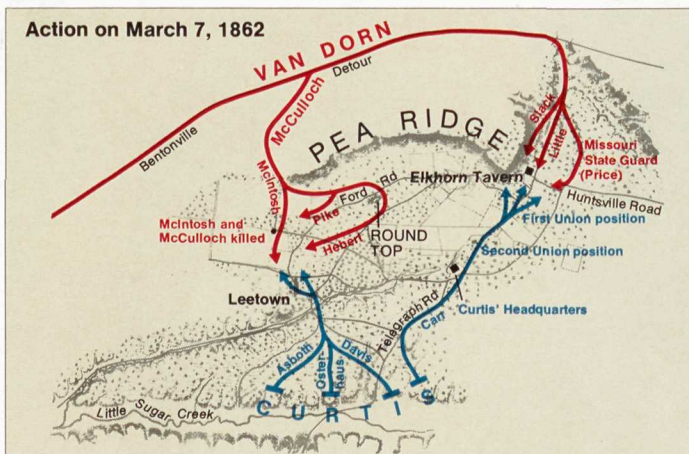
Van Dorn now decided to launch a two-pronged assault, hoping to catch Curtis in the middle. First, he sent McCulloch's troops, including two regiments of Cherokee Indians under Brig. Gen. Albert Pike, west of Pea Ridge and the Round Top to drive down upon the village of Leetown. They ran into an intensive fire that resulted in the deaths of McCulloch and Gen. James McIntosh and the capture of the ranking colonel. With their

command structure practically destroyed, McCulloch's men scattered from the field.

The other prong of the attack fared considerably better. Attacking east of Pea Ridge, Price's Missourians 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 McCulloch's 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. By mid-morning, however, Van Dorn realized that his ammunition was running short and ordered his troops to withdraw. The battle of Pea Ridge was over. Missouri was in Union hands, and most of the Union and Confederate troops moved east of the Mississippi to fight in other campaigns.

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**The Commanders**  
Brig. Gen. Albert Pike 1 commanded the Confederate Indians who fought at Pea Ridge. Their performance in the battle, however, failed to impress Confederate commander Maj. Gen. Earl Van Dorn 2, who refused to

acknowledge Pike in his official report.  
Van Dorn's other two subordinate commanders,

Maj. Gen. Sterling Price 3 and Brig. Gen. Ben McCulloch 4, had teamed up once before, at Wilson's Creek, but their relationship was a stormy one,

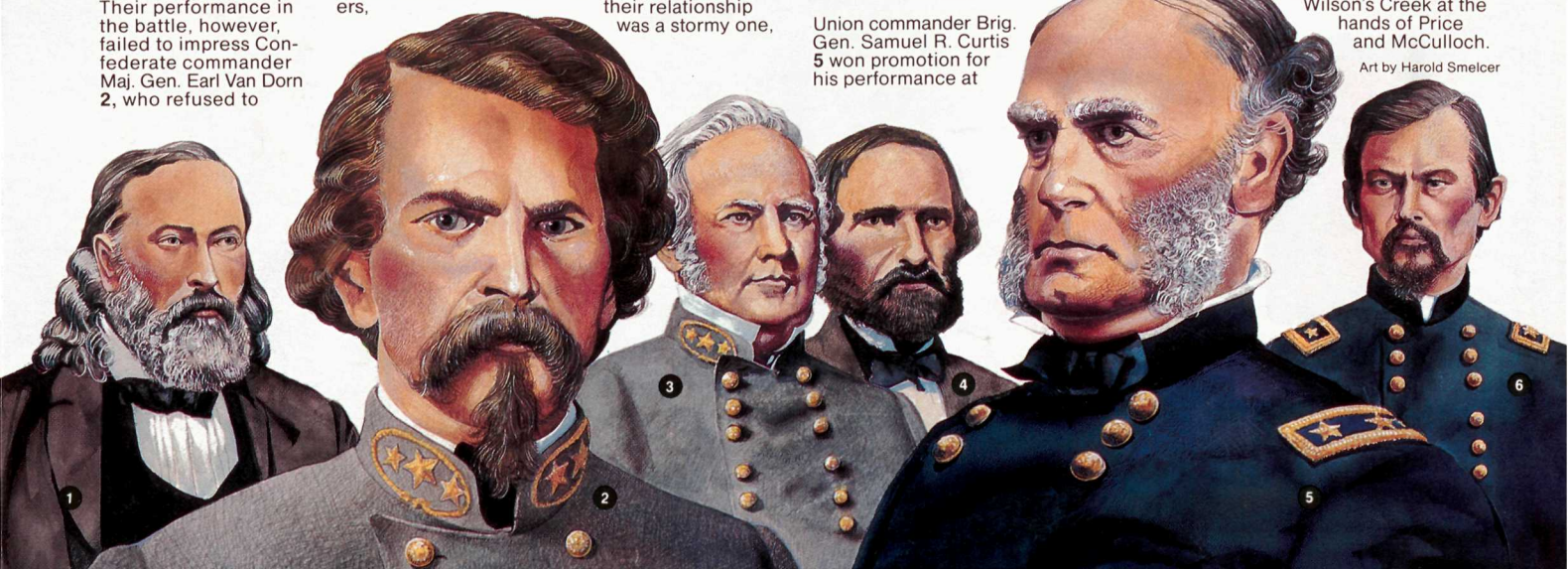
mainly because of McCulloch's indifference to Missouri's fate and his low opinion of Price's State Guard.

Union commander Brig. Gen. Samuel R. Curtis 5 won promotion for his performance at

Pea Ridge. So did Curtis' second in command, German-born

Brig. Gen. Franz Sigel 6, who saw the Federal victory at Pea Ridge as sweet revenge for his earlier defeat at Wilson's Creek at the hands of Price and McCulloch.

Art by Harold Smelcer



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## Touring Pea Ridge Battlefield

After stopping at the visitor center, follow the arrows from the parking area to the old Telegraph Road. The road got its name in 1860 when a telegraph line was strung along it. In 1858, the Butterfield Overland Mail Company routed its stage coaches over this road to Fort Smith and points west.

**1 General Curtis' Headquarters Site** The Union commander located his headquarters in this vicinity just before the battle. His troops were entrenched along the bluffs overlooking Little Sugar Creek about two miles south of here. Curtis believed that any Confederate attack would come from the South against his fortified line. Events proved him wrong, however, and he nearly lost his army.

**2 Winton Spring** Union troops drew water from here. At the time of the battle, the Ruddick family, onetime owners of Elkhorn Tavern, lived on the hill above the spring. The house there now dates to the early 1900s and probably stands on the site of the old Ruddick cottage.

**3 Leetown Site** The small hamlet of Leetown once stood a short distance to the left of this road. All visible evidence of the village is now gone. In 1862 the villagers learned much of the terrors of war while the battle raged around them for two days.

**4 Leetown Battlefield** The thunder of cannon, the crash of musketry, and the mingled shouts and curses of struggling soldiers filled the air in these fields and woods in 1862. The Confederate attack through the woods north of this field and across Round Top to your right front failed to defeat the Federals formed up along the south fence line. Two Confederate generals, Ben McCulloch and James McIntosh, were killed near the north boundaries of this field.

**5 Indians at Pea Ridge** Pea Ridge was the only major Civil War 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. 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.



Elkhorn Tavern. Courtesy David Roth, *Blue & Gray Magazine*.

**6 West Overlook** From here the Boston Mountains are visible on the horizon to your front. Bentonville, Ark., from which the Confederates advanced to Pea Ridge, is 14 miles to your right.

**7 East Overlook** Here, about 150 yards down the gravel path, is the best view of the battlefield in the park. Maps and a recorded message in the shelter tell, in detail, about the fighting that took place in the fields below.

**8 Elkhorn Tavern** A landmark in this area for many years, the original building (which burned down shortly after the battle) was the center of fighting that marked the start and the finish of the Battle of Pea Ridge. The present structure was built after the battle on the original foundations.

**9 Fighting at Elkhorn Tavern** The Confederates made their first assault on Union forces from the Telegraph Road north of the tavern and gradually pushed them back about one-half mile behind you. On the second day, after a fierce artillery duel, the Confederates ran out of ammunition, forcing General Van Dorn to withdraw. The Federals pursued several hundred stragglers down the Telegraph Road believing them to be the main force, thus allowing the bulk of Van Dorn's column to escape eastward over the Huntsville Road. Wayside exhibits and a recorded message here help to explain the fighting in this area.

**10 Confederate Artillery** The guns here mark the position of Tull's Missouri Battery on the morning of March 8. It and other Confederate batteries returned the fire from the Union line  $\frac{1}{4}$  mile to the south.

**11 Federal Artillery** The Union artillery massed here on the morning of March 8 finally drove the Confederates from around Elkhorn Tavern. The Federal line extended from the guns on the hill to your right to a point almost directly behind the visitor center.

From here, return to U.S. 62 (at the park entrance), turn right, and drive 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, 0.6 mile from U.S. 62, the time-eroded Federal earthworks still stand. A trail leads from the parking lot to the crest of the bluff.

## About Your Visit

The visitor center is open daily from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. Nearby 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, 10 miles away. Federal regulations prohibit hunting, disturbing wildlife, and removing relics.

**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. Poison oak and poison ivy are common and rattlesnakes and copperheads may occasionally be found in the park. Exercise common sense and caution. Do not climb on cannons, monuments, fences, bluffs, or trees.

**Administration** Pea Ridge National Military Park, which is 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.

Pea Ridge National Military Park is a unit of the National Park System, which consists of more than 340 parks representing important examples of our country's natural and cultural inheritance.

