

Pea Ridge

National Military Park
Arkansas

National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior

Official Map and Guide



Fighting rages around Elkhorn Tavern, in *On the Battery*, by Andy Thomas. Courtesy Maze Creek Studio.

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 north-

ward, 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 Elkhorn Mountain (part of the larger Pea Ridge plateau), were Curtis's 10,500 Federals.

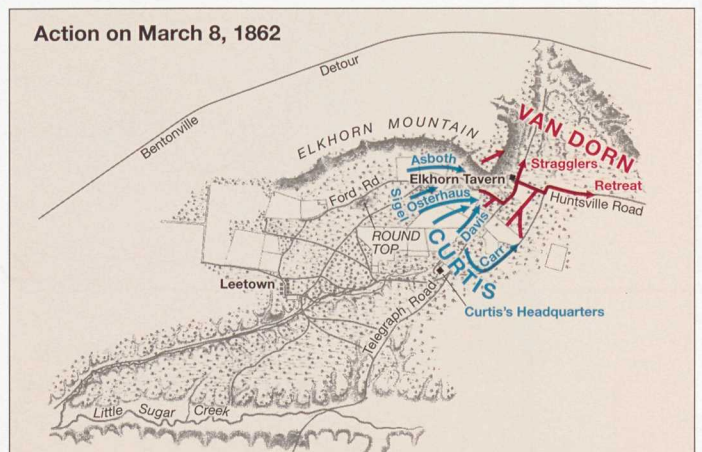
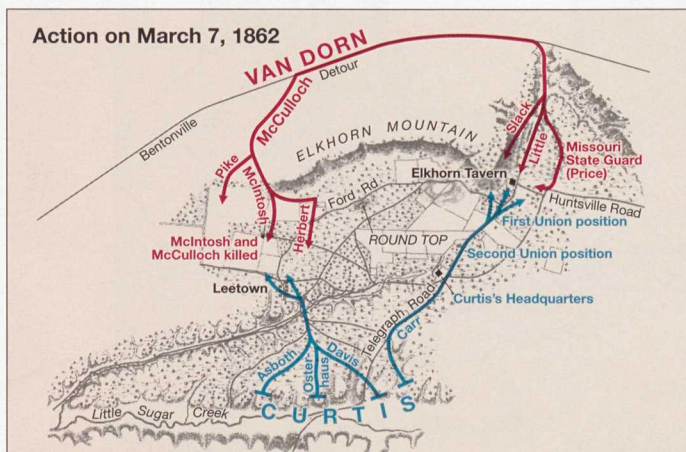
Van Dorn knew that a frontal assault against Curtis's troops would be suicidal, so he swung north to come in behind them. He planned to strike at dawn on March 7, but his troops, hungry, cold, and weary from a difficult three-day march, arrived hours behind schedule. McCulloch's troops fell so far behind that Van Dorn decided to temporarily divide his army. McCulloch was ordered to retrace his steps around the west end of Elkhorn Mountain, then turn east to rejoin Van Dorn near Elkhorn Tavern. These delays gave Curtis time to face about and prepare to receive the assault.

McCulloch's troops, including two regiments of Cherokee Indians under Brig. Gen. Albert Pike, marched west of Elkhorn Mountain and the Round Top. 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 Elkhorn Mountain, 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 damaged the Confederate line 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.



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 two other 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

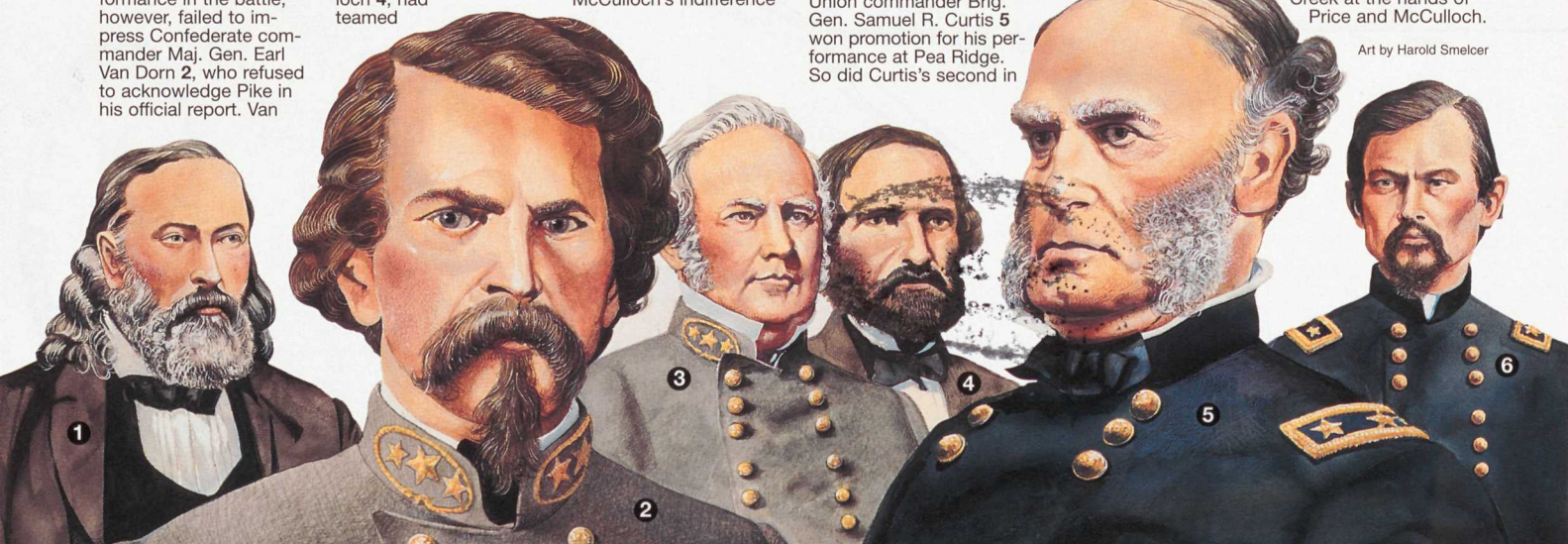
to Missouri's fate and his low opinion of Price's State Guard.

Union commander Brig. Gen. Samuel R. Curtis 5 won promotion for his performance at Pea Ridge. So did Curtis's 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 the Park

After stopping at the visitor center, follow the arrows from the parking area to the Old Telegraph Road. Built in 1828 between Springfield, Mo., and Fayetteville, Ark., the road was part of the Trail of Tears that saw thousands of Cherokees and other American Indians forcibly relocated from their homes in Georgia and the Carolinas to Indian Territory in present-day Oklahoma. In 1858, the road became part of the Butterfield Overland Mail route to California. In 1860, a telegraph wire was strung along it.

1 General Curtis's 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 Leetown Site The small hamlet of Leetown once stood a short distance southwest of the parking lot. All visible evidence of the village is now gone. During the battles the wounded of both sides were taken to Leetown, where buildings and tents served as hospitals.

3 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 the tour road to the east failed to defeat the Federals deployed along the south fence line. Two Confederate generals, Ben McCulloch and James McIntosh, were killed near the north boundaries of this field.

4 Indians at Pea Ridge Pea Ridge was the first Civil War battle in which Indian troops participated. Two regiments of Cherokees, about 1,000 men, fought here in the Confederate army. The Indians routed two companies of Union cavalry, then joined victorious Confederate cavalymen who had captured three Union cannon. Soon, Union cannon fire forced them to take cover in the woods. The Cherokee regiments were held in reserve throughout the remainder of the battle.



Elkhorn Tavern

5 West Overlook From here the Boston Mountains are visible on the southern horizon. Bentonville, Ark., from which the Confederates advanced to Pea Ridge, is 14 miles to the west.

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

7 Elkhorn Tavern A landmark in this area for many years, the tavern was near the center of fighting on both days of the battle. The original tavern was burned by guerrillas after the battle, then rebuilt after the war. The existing building is a reconstruction.

8 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.

9 Confederate Artillery The guns here mark the Confederate battle line on the morning of March 8. From this position, Confederate batteries returned the fire from the Union line one-quarter mile to the south.

10 Federal Artillery Union artillery deployed here on the morning of March 8. Their fire forced the Confederates to withdraw from the tavern area. The Federal line extended from present-day U.S. 62 to the south to beyond the bare open hill to the northwest.

11 Little Sugar Creek Trenches On the bluff above Little Sugar Creek, 0.6 mile from U.S. 62, the time-eroded Federal trenches still stand. This site is currently inaccessible and is closed to visitors.

About Your Visit

The park, including the visitor center, is open daily from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. The tour road closes at 4:30 p.m. The park is closed on January 1, Thanksgiving, and December 25. Entering the park on these days is prohibited. The park may also close when ice or snow makes driving hazardous. A picnic area is near the visitor center. No camping is permitted in the park, but facilities are available at Beaver Lake, ten miles away. Federal regulations prohibit hunting, disturbing wildlife, and removing relics. Pets are permitted in the park, but they must be on a leash. Roller skating, roller blading, skate boarding, and kite flying are prohibited, as are all types of competitive sports games such as football, soccer, volleyball, and softball.

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 that require your alertness and vigilance. Poisonous plants 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. Be aware of weather conditions.

Administration Pea Ridge National Military Park, ten miles northeast of Rogers, Ark., is administered by the National Park Service, U.S. Department of the Interior. Contact: Superintendent, Pea Ridge National Military Park, P.O. Box 700, Pea Ridge, AR 72751; 501-451-8122; www.nps.gov/peri on the Internet.

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