

Pea Ridge

National Military Park
Arkansas

National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior



Fighting rages around Elkhorn Tavern in *On the Battery*, by Andy Thomas. ©ANDY THOMAS. COURTESY MAZE CREEK STUDIO

The Battle That Saved Missouri for the Union

Keeping Missouri in the Union was a prime objective of the Federal government during the first year of the Civil War. It was the reason that the Battle of Wilson's Creek was fought near Springfield, Mo., in August 1861, and it was one of the reasons for the battle at Pea Ridge in March 1862.

The Pea Ridge Campaign began on Christmas Day, 1861, with the appointment of Brig. Gen. Samuel R. Curtis to command the Federal Southwestern District of Missouri. Curtis's main objective was to drive the Confederate and pro-Confederate forces from the state. By mid-February 1862 he and his troops had chased their main opponents, Maj. Gen. Sterling Price and the pro-Confederate Missouri State Guard, into Arkansas.

In the Boston Mountains south of Fayetteville, Price joined forces with Brig. Gen. Ben McCulloch's Confederates. There on March 4 Maj. Gen. Earl Van Dorn took command of this combined 16,000-man army and led it north, intending to strike into Missouri and capture St. Louis. But Curtis's 10,500 Feder-

als were dug in across his path on the bluffs above Little Sugar Creek, not far from Elkhorn Tavern and nearby Elkhorn Mountain (part of the larger Pea Ridge plateau).

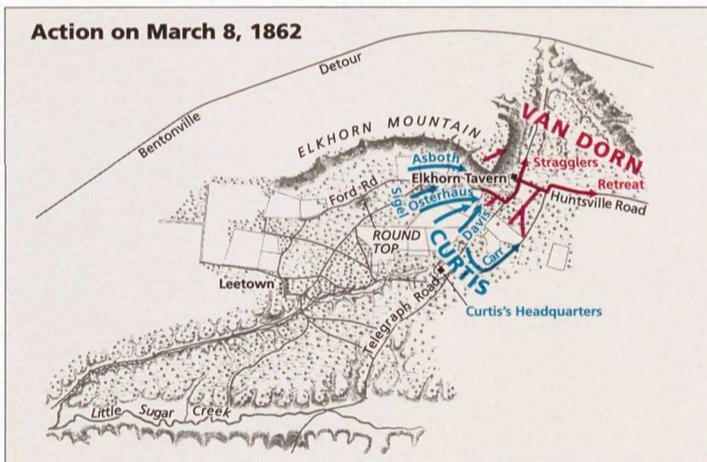
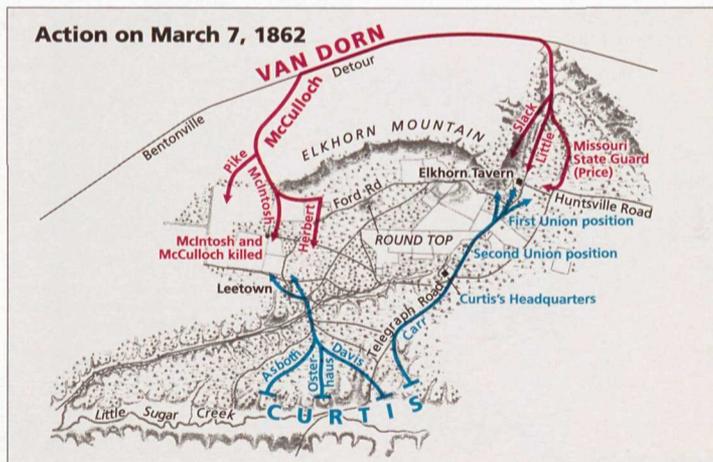
Van Dorn knew that a frontal assault against Curtis's troops would be suicidal, so he swung north to come in behind them. He planned to strike at dawn on March 7, but his troops, hungry, cold, and weary from a difficult three-day march, arrived hours behind schedule. McCulloch's troops fell so far behind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

As McCulloch's troops, including two regiments of Cherokee Indians under Brig. Gen. Albert Pike, were engaged in this maneuver, they ran into intensive fire near Leetown that killed McCulloch and Brig. Gen. James McIntosh and led to the capture of the

ranking colonel. With their command structure practically destroyed, McCulloch's men scattered from the field.

Attacking east of Elkhorn Mountain, Van Dorn and Price fared better. 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. A two-hour artillery barrage crippled the Confederate line and a concerted infantry attack broke their defenses. Realizing that his ammunition was running low, Van Dorn ordered his troops to withdraw. The battle of Pea Ridge was over, and most of the Union and Confederate troops moved east of the Mississippi to fight in other campaigns. Missouri remained in the Union and politically neutral throughout the war, although it provided men and supplies to both sides.



The Commanders

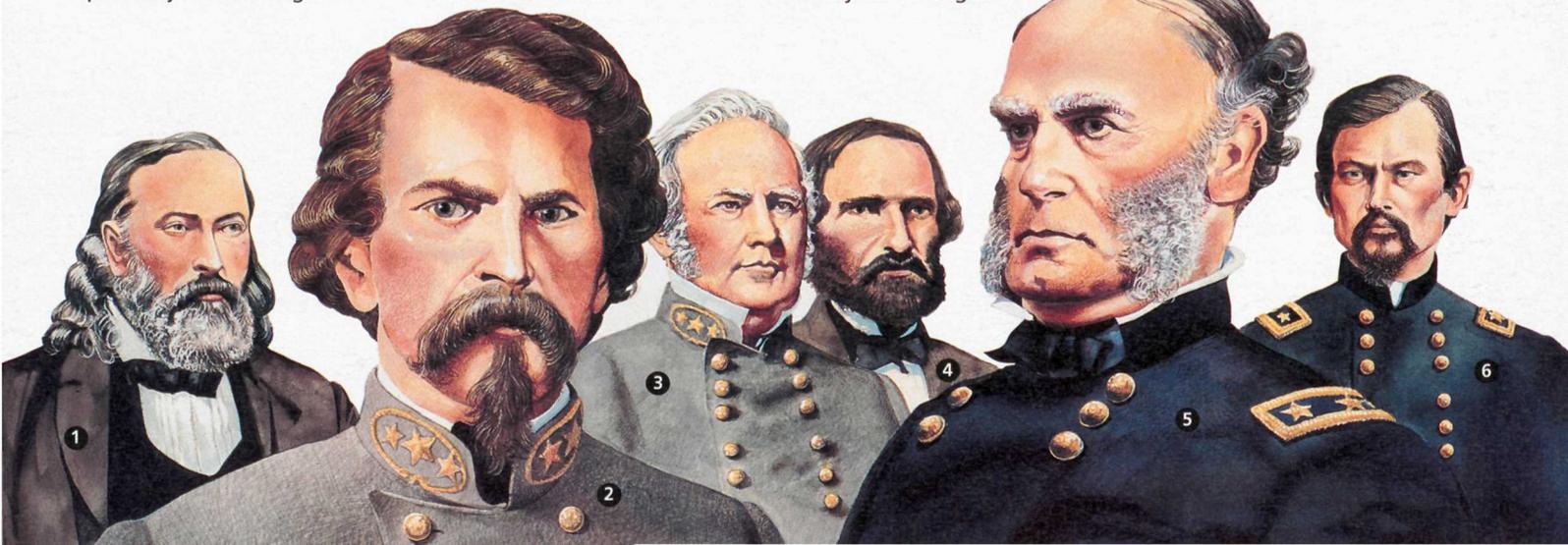
Brig. Gen. Albert Pike 1 commanded the Confederate Indians who fought at Pea Ridge. Maj. Gen. Earl Van Dorn 2 was not impressed by their performance and refused to acknowledge Pike in his official report. Maj. Gen. Sterling Price 3

and Brig. Gen. Ben McCulloch 4 had teamed up once before, at Wilson's Creek. Their relationship was stormy, 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 NPS / HAROLD SMELCER



Touring Pea Ridge Battlefield

Stop first at the visitor center, which contains a theater, bookstore, and small museum. From the parking area at the visitor center, follow the arrows to Telegraph Road. This road was built in 1838, linking Springfield, Mo., and Fort Smith, Ark. Turn left on Telegraph Road and proceed to tour stop 1.

1 Trail of Tears The shallow depressions in front of you are remnants of the original Telegraph Road traveled by thousands of Cherokees and other American Indians in the winter of 1838–39 during their forced removal from their homelands. It was then called Wire Road because of the telegraph lines that lined the road and linked the nation. It was the route of the Butterfield Overland Stage line from 1857–61. Both armies used the road during the Pea Ridge Campaign.

2 General Curtis' Headquarters Site The Union commander, Samuel R. Curtis, located his headquarters in this vicinity just before the battle. Curtis believed that any Confederate attack would come two miles south of here against his fortified line along the bluffs overlooking Little Sugar Creek. From this spot Curtis orchestrated the movements of his army.

3 Leetown This small village stood a short distance southwest of the parking lot. During the battle the wounded of both sides were brought here, where buildings and tents served as hospitals. All visible evidence of the village is gone.

4 Leetown Battlefield 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.

5 Armies Collide Pea Ridge was the only major Civil War battle in which Indian troops participated. Two regiments of Cherokees, about 1,000 men, fought for the Confederate army and routed two companies of Union cavalry. Union cannon fire eventually forced them to take cover in the woods. The



Elk horns attached to the roof gave the tavern its name.

Cherokee regiments were held in reserve throughout the remainder of the battle.

6 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.

7 East Overlook Here, about 150 yards down the path, is the best view of the battlefield in the park. Wayside exhibits in the shelter explain the fighting that took place in the fields below.

8 Elkhorn Tavern The tavern, described as a place of "abundant good cheer," served travelers on the Telegraph Road before the war came to Arkansas. General Curtis used the tavern as part of his supply base until Confederates captured and occupied it early in the afternoon of March 7. They turned it into a field hospital caring for both Union and Confederate wounded. Union troops retook the tavern on March 8 after routing the Confederate forces from the field. The Federals used the tavern as a military telegraph station until Confederate guerrillas burned it in 1863. The present building is a reconstruction.

9 Confederate Sunset At dusk on March 7, Confederates charged across this field in an attempt to smash the regrouped Union troops. Devastating musket and artillery fire drove the Confederates back into the woods. That night both sides regrouped for the next day's battle. The guns in this field mark the battle lines of the morning of March 8.

10 Federal Line 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 The time-eroded Federal trenches still exist on the bluff above Little Sugar Creek, 0.6 mile from U.S. 62.

About Your Visit

The park, 10 miles northeast of Rogers, Ark., is open 8 am to 5 pm daily except Thanksgiving, December 25, and January 1. The tour road closes at 4:30 pm. The park may close for hazardous ice or snow conditions. A picnic area is at tour stop 1. No camping is permitted in the park; you can camp at Beaver Lake, 10 miles away.

Regulations Hunting, disturbing wildlife, and removing relics are prohibited. So are roller skating, roller blading, skate boarding, and kite flying and all competitive sports games like football, soccer, volleyball, and softball. Pets must be leashed. Cars must stay on the tour road. Service animals welcome.

Firearms Firearms are not allowed in federal facilities. For firearms regulations ask at the visitor center or check the park website.

Safety Please exercise caution. Poisonous plants are common, and rattlesnakes and copperheads live here. Do not climb on cannon, monuments, fences, bluffs, or trees. Stay alert to weather conditions.

More Information

Pea Ridge National Military Park
15930 Highway 62, Garfield, AR 72732
479-451-8122
www.nps.gov/peri

Pea Ridge is one of over 390 parks in the National Park System. To learn more about national parks and National Park Service programs in America's communities, visit www.nps.gov.

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