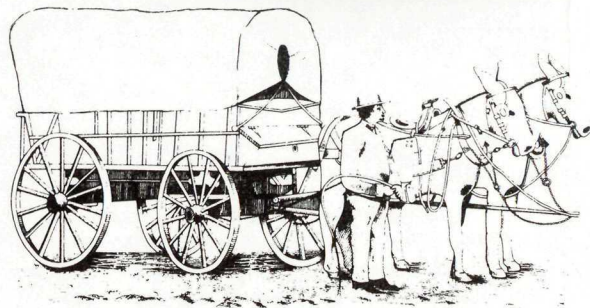


brices cross roads tupelo



In the second half of 1863 Union armies won important victories at Vicksburg, Gettysburg, and Chattanooga. Four of the 11 Confederate States were completely in Union hands. The strong positions Union armies held all around the Confederacy were further strengthened when Lincoln unified all the various commands and named Ulysses Grant supreme commander on March 9, 1864. Grant took command of the Army of the Potomac and placed William T. Sherman in charge of the western armies. This coordination of the Union war effort resulted in two great armies poised for the simultaneous invasion of the South.

The Battle of Brices Cross Roads

The Union plan for war in the west was to bisect the South east of the Mississippi with Sherman's army working out of Chattanooga and Nashville. His task was to destroy the Confederate Army led by Joseph E. Johnston, occupy Atlanta, and if possible, go on to Savannah and Charleston. From May to September, Sherman fought doggedly through northern Georgia, finally forcing, with the aid of a change in the Confederate command, the evacuation of Atlanta.

Early in the Atlanta campaign, the Confederate high command had considered the possibility of attacking from Mississippi Sherman's vulnerable supply line—the one-track railroad from Nashville to Chattanooga. Late in May, Gen. Stephen D. Lee, who commanded the Department of Alabama, Mississippi, and East Louisiana, directed Gen. Nathan Bedford Forrest, an unschooled farmboy

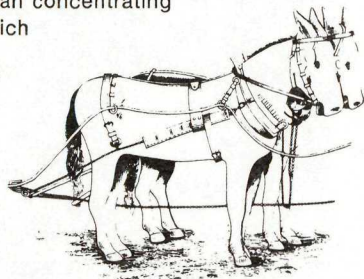
who had become a millionaire before he was 40 and had risen from private to major general, to strike Sherman's line of communications in middle Tennessee. Forrest had distinguished himself by his ability to move fast and fight hard. He lacked formal training in military science, but he acted on the simple maxim that in warfare it was all-important to get to the decisive point of the battle first with the most men. Gifted with daring and inspirational leadership, he had an uncanny ability to carry into execution his theory of successful warfare. So on June 1 Forrest put his columns in motion at Tupelo, Miss., and three days later was in Russellville, Ala., a day's march from the Tennessee River.

Sherman knew that his supply line was vulnerable and therefore charged Gen. Samuel D. Sturgis to move out of Memphis into northern Mississippi and hold Forrest there. Alerted by Lee of Sturgis' moves, Forrest hurried back to Tupelo.

Forrest began concentrating his forces, which numbered approximately 3,500 men, along the railroad between Guntown, Baldwin, and Booneville.

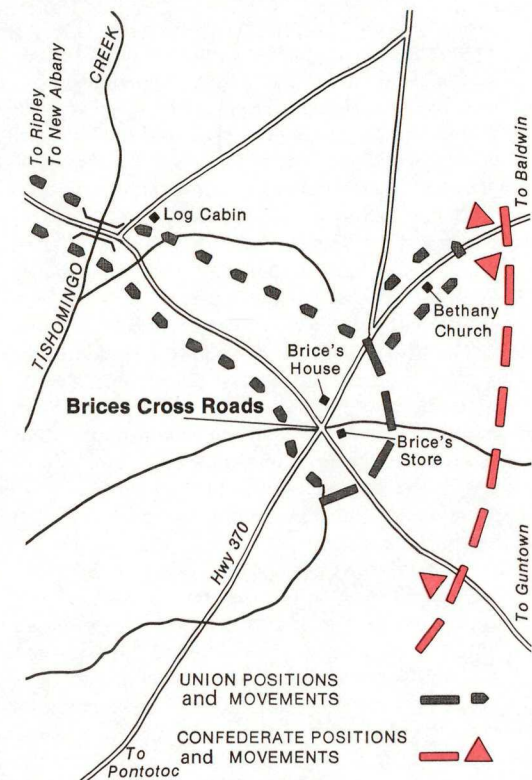
On the evening of June 9, he knew from his scouts that Sturgis, with about 8,100 men, was in camp at Stubbs Farm 13 to 16 kilometers (8 to 10 miles) from Brices Cross Roads. Both armies marched at dawn.

Forrest, who had scouted his enemy well, planned to attack at Brices. But Sturgis' cavalry reached and passed the crossroads before the Confederates got there. Forrest, approaching along the Baldwin Road, met the Union patrols about 1.5 kilometers (1 mile) east of Brices. The Confederates checked the Union advance and by noon, with rapid reinforcement, were attacking vigorously. The Union forces, called up on the



double, were exhausted from the march along the muddy roads made almost impassable by torrential rains the night before. Many never even crossed Tishomingo Creek.

Forrest pressed his attack and by midafternoon pushed the Union lines back to the crossroads. Sturgis began a careful withdrawal. But at Tishomingo Creek bridge there was trouble when a wagon overturned as the Federals recrossed the stream. Some 8 miles up the road, as they crossed the treacherous Hatchie River bottom, many of the soldiers panicked and the retreat became a rout. Most of the artillery and wagon train were abandoned, and, in the wild flight to Memphis, more than 1,500 Federals were captured.



Students and critics of military tactics agree that the engagement was characterized by the hardest kind of fighting and was a brilliant tactical victory for Forrest. Despite this, the battle at Brices Cross Roads did not bring relief to the Confederacy. Sherman, on this and other occasions, forestalled any attack on the Nashville-Chattanooga railroad by sending small commands into northern Mississippi. Assured of adequate reinforcements and supplies, he won the Atlanta and later campaigns which made the collapse of the Confederacy inevitable.

VISITING THE BATTLEFIELD

Brices Cross Roads National Battlefield Site is located about 10 kilometers (6 miles) west of Baldwyn on Miss. 370. The park consists of only a small piece of land, but from it much of the scene of action is within view. There are no facilities or personnel at Brices, but park interpreters at the Tupelo visitor center of the Natchez Trace Parkway can answer your questions.

This type of wagon, with a six-mule team, was commonly used by both sides during the war. A Union supply wagon turned over on the Tishomingo Creek bridge blocking the crossing.

