

July 14, 1864

The battle opened in the early morning as part of Forrest's men dashed on foot toward the Federal position. For 3 hours parts of Forrest's troops attacked and fell back. After an early afternoon lull in the fighting the Southerners tried again. And again blazing Federal rifle and cannon fire drove them back. That night they made a final, unsuccessful attack.

July 15

Although the Federals had repulsed Forrest's men and had suffered far fewer losses than the Confederates, Smith was alarmed. His men had little but coffee and worm-infested hardtack to eat. The sun was taking its toll: dozens were dropping from heat exhaustion. The ammunition supply, Smith reported, was distressingly low. On the morning of the 15th he left his own and the captured Confederate wounded, marched

4 miles north, and camped. Again Forrest's men attacked. And the Federals, in a swirling, confused fight, drove them off. The next day Smith's men took up their march to La Grange. The Confederates followed cautiously for 2 days, but without venturing another major attack.

Neither side could claim complete victory. Lee and Forrest could say that the Union forces had turned back after the battle. However, the Confederates had not fought with their usual skill. Forrest's soldiers "went in by piecemeal and were slaughtered by wholesale," a Confederate officer wrote years later. The attacks, Smith reported, "were gallantly made, but without order, organization, or skill."

Temporarily, the railroad was safe. Smith had not followed Forrest to the death but he had held a leg for a time. Sherman gave him credit for that and sent him out to fight Forrest again in August. And again he kept Forrest away from the railroad.

In September, Forrest rode into Tennessee. His men saw hard service, but it had no effect on the outcome of the war. The leg no longer needed holding. Sherman had marched beyond Atlanta and beyond the railroad. He was marching through Georgia—the skinning was all but done.

Why a Tupelo National Battlefield Site?

No battlefield deserves commemoration merely to provide a public spectacle of high adventure or a morbid one of sudden death.

The Battle of Tupelo had its share of gallantry and shattered bodies. These are rightfully part of its story, as is its importance to the dying Confederacy and to a United States growing in power. But equally important is our tribute to the soldiers who fought here for causes they believed right.

The Site

Tupelo National Battlefield Site, a 1-acre tract, was established by an act of Congress on February 21, 1929. It is located near the place where the Confederate line was formed to attack the Union position. The battlefield site is within the city limits of Tupelo, Miss., on State Route 6 about a mile west of its intersection with U.S. 45.

About Your Visit

The site is open daily, but there are no National Park Service employees on duty. A marker, with maps and texts, affords a

graphic explanation of the battle. You are invited to visit the site and to register at the field desk. Additional information may be obtained from the Superintendent, Natchez Trace Parkway, Tupelo, Miss.

Related Areas

Other areas in the National Park System which commemorate the battles in the Western Campaigns of the Civil War are: Fort Donelson, Shiloh, and Stones River National Military Parks, Tenn.; Chickamauga and Chattanooga National Military Park, Ga.-Tenn.; Vicksburg National Military Park and Brices Cross Roads National Battlefield Site, Miss.; and Kennesaw Mountain National Battlefield Park, Ga.

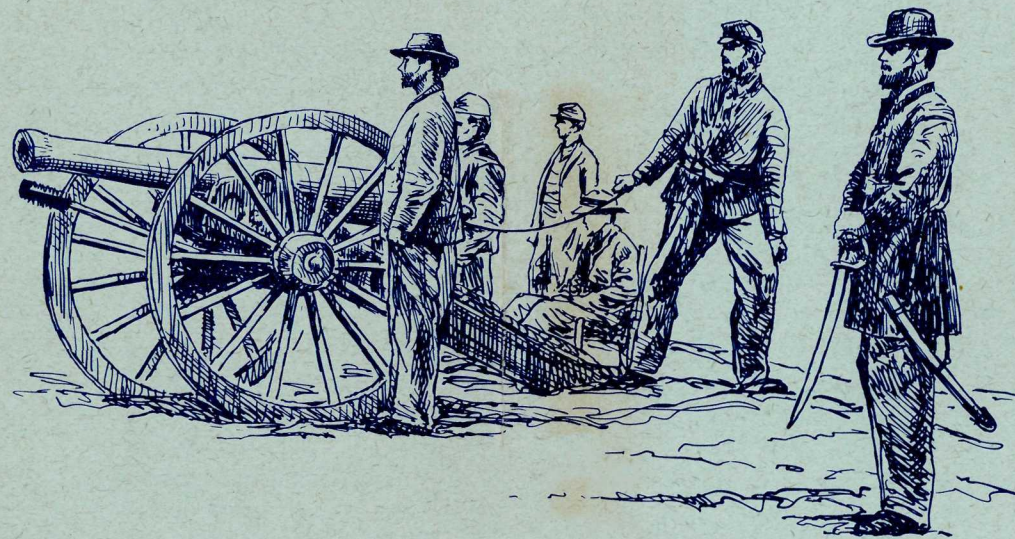
Administration

Tupelo National Battlefield Site is administered by the National Park Service, U.S. Department of the Interior. The Superintendent of Natchez Trace Parkway, Tupelo, Miss., is in charge of the area.

Mission 66

Mission 66 is a program designed to be completed by 1966 which will assure the maximum protection of the scenic, scientific, wilderness, and historic resources of the National Park System in such ways and by such means as will make them available for the use and enjoyment of present and future generations.

TUPELO NATIONAL BATTLEFIELD SITE



United States Department of the Interior

Stewart L. Udall, *Secretary*

National Park Service, Conrad L. Wirth, *Director*



MISSISSIPPI

Tupelo NATIONAL BATTLEFIELD SITE

Here, in Mississippi, Federal forces fought to protect Sherman's supply line in middle Tennessee—250 miles away.

TODAY, viewing this peaceful site, it is difficult to realize that once it was the scene of a hard-fought battle. Symbols on the map near the monument can, at best, indicate the movements and actions of the men who were engaged in this struggle; they cannot convey the reality that these were men such as we.

As in many other battles, the men who fought at Tupelo battled not only the enemy, but fatigue, heat, and thirst.

War in the West, 1864

As far as Sherman was concerned, the fighting in Mississippi in early 1864 had only one purpose: to protect the railroad which brought food and ammunition from Louisville, through Nashville and Chattanooga, to his army.

By spring, 1864, Grant had planned a new kind of warfare—one which would evolve into what the 20th century has referred to as "total war." For the first time all Union armies worked together. From the West, Sherman drove into Georgia, battled the large Confederate army there, and destroyed anything which might feed, clothe, or arm Southern soldiers. In the east, Grant pounded Lee's powerful army, never relenting until Lee's exhausted soldiers surrendered.

The National Park System, of which this area is a unit, is dedicated to conserving the scenic, scientific, and historic heritage of the United States for the benefit and inspiration of its people.

Elsewhere smaller Union commands prevented scattered Southern forces from annoying Grant and Sherman. Lincoln liked the plan, and remembering his rabbit-hunting days, summed it up in a homely phrase: "Those not skinning can hold a leg."

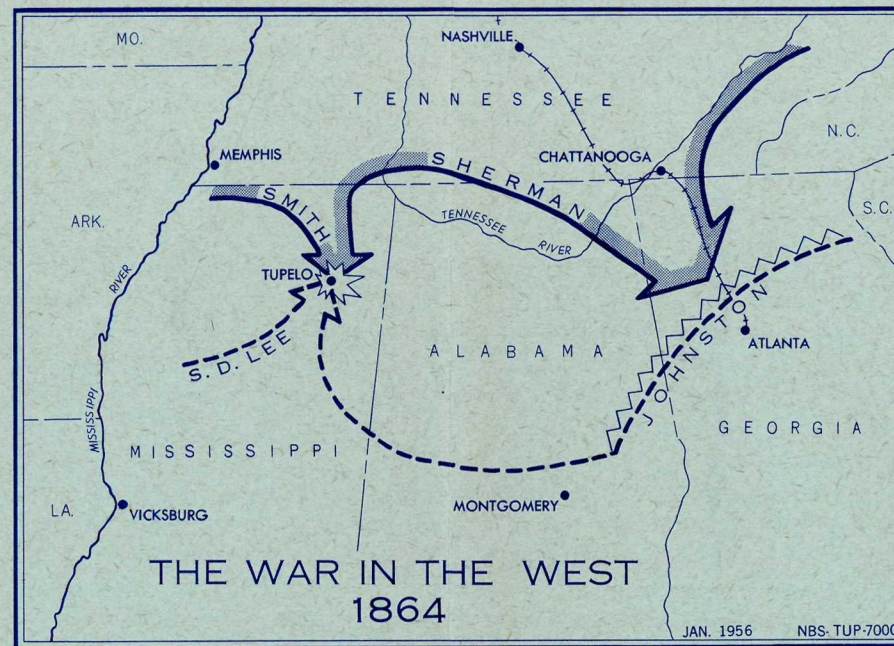
"Those Not Skinning . . ."

In the spring of 1864, as Sherman moved toward Atlanta, he found a leg which badly needed holding: Nathan Bedford Forrest's Confederate cavalry in eastern Mississippi. Sherman wanted Forrest kept away from the railroad. The simplest way to keep him away was to attack him in Mississippi.

"Follow Him to the Death"

Sherman recognized Forrest as a hard-riding, dangerous opponent. "There will be no peace . . . until Forrest is dead," he wrote. "Follow him to the death," he ordered, "if it cost 10,000 lives and breaks the Treasury."

Already Northern troops had tried three times to destroy Forrest's little army. They had failed. Their last attempt, in June at Brices Cross Roads, ended with Forrest's jubilant troopers chasing Gen. S. D. Sturgis' Union soldiers 40 miles.



"Let Them Try Their Hand"

Forrest, Sherman wrote, had "whipped Sturgis fair and square, and now I will put against him A. J. Smith and Mower, and let them try their hand."

On July 5, 1864, Smith moved south from La Grange, Tenn., with 24 cannon and more than 14,000 men—a number almost equal to the population of present-day Tupelo. The dust-choked column of marching men and animals was nearly 15 miles long. With Smith went Gen. Joseph A. Mower—"a young and game officer," Sherman called him. He commanded about half of Smith's force. Fighting small battles, Smith marched toward Tupelo.

Lee and Forrest

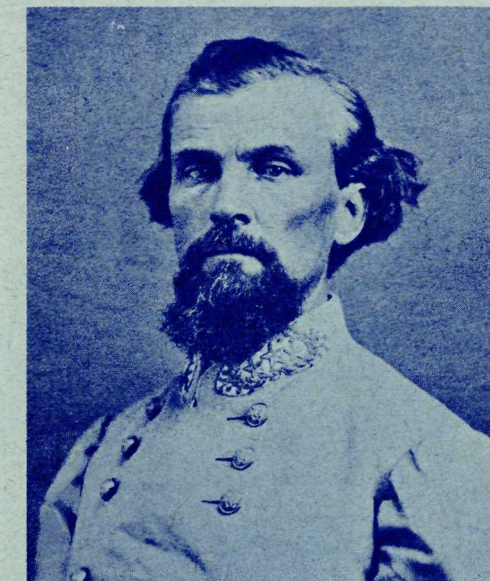
Forrest was the unschooled farmboy who had become a millionaire before he was 40 and had risen from Confederate private to

major general. He and his commander, West Point-trained Gen. Stephen D. Lee, were ready to fight.

Stephen Dill Lee, later a distinguished college president, commanded all Confederate forces in Alabama, Mississippi, and eastern Louisiana. He relied upon Forrest to protect the rich prairie section of eastern Mississippi. Forrest had protected the prairie, as shattered Federal regiments and hundreds of Union dead from earlier battles proved. His mounted riflemen had fought Smith's men almost from the time they marched into Mississippi. And now, with Smith's Federals swinging toward Tupelo, he hurried up with his main force to attack the long Union column. The Northern soldiers beat off the attacks and marched on, reaching Harrisburg about dark, July 13. At the little village, now within the Tupelo city limits, they camped, awaiting certain attack the next day.



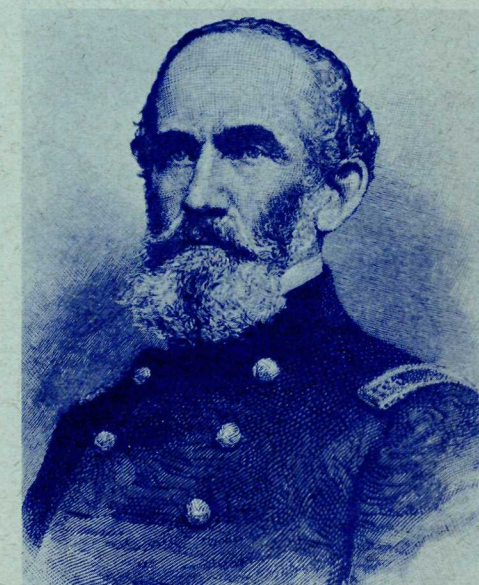
Gen. William T. Sherman.



Gen. Nathan B. Forrest.
Courtesy Library of Congress.

Lee had been unable to bring with him any troops. Consequently, Forrest's 9,400 horsemen would have to fight Smith without

help. Lee offered Forrest the command. Forrest declined, saying that Lee, the senior officer, should lead.



Gen. Andrew J. Smith.



Gen. Stephen D. Lee.
Courtesy Library of Congress.