

# The Battle of Pea Ridge

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January and early February, 1862 was a busy period for Brigadier General Samuel R. Curtis, recently appointed commander of the Army of the Southwest. At both the Rolla railhead and the advance base at Lebanon, Missouri, the Union build up was rushed. As soon as he had completed preparations, Curtis planned to employ his army to drive the pro-Secessionist forces out of southwestern Missouri.

On February 10, Curtis led his army out of Lebanon. Forging rapidly ahead, the Federals closed in on Springfield. The Northerners entered Springfield on the morning of the 13th, only to find that Major General Sterling Price's Missourians had evacuated the principal city of the Ozarks. After pausing less than one day, Curtis pressed on after the retreating Rebels. Unable to group his troops for a stand in Missouri, Price retired into northwestern Arkansas. Soon after crossing the border, Price's troops rendezvoused with Brigadier General Benjamin McCulloch's command. Unable to agree on a joint plan of action the two Confederate leaders and their troops retired into the fastnesses of the rugged Boston Mountains.

Curtis decided against following the Rebels any deeper into Arkansas. The rapid advance had stretched his supply line to the breaking point. Supplies were getting short. The Army of the Southwest was in need of reinforcements, men and matériel. Curtis called a halt. To subsist and forage his army, Curtis dispersed his army in a wide front in northwestern Arkansas.

In the meantime, the recently appointed Confederate commander of the Trans-Mississippi District, Major General Earl Van Dorn, decided to take charge of operations in northwest Arkansas. Leaving his headquarters at Pocahontas, Arkansas, Van Dorn started for the Boston Mountains. Reaching the army camps on March 3, Van Dorn took charge. The next day, he put his "Army of the West" into motion. Van Dorn planned to strike Curtis before he could regroup his troops.

On the 5th, Curtis learned of the Confederates' approach. Orders were issued for the Army of the Southwest to concentrate behind Little Sugar Creek. The Rebel vanguard on March 6 overtook part of Brigadier General Franz Sigel's command as it was evacuating Bentonville. A running fight ensued. Sigel's troops fought their way through several roadblocks and reached Little Sugar Creek. Van Dorn had failed to defeat Curtis' army in detail. The stage was set now for the climatic battle which would decide the fate of Missouri and possibly the Union.

## PART I

Satisfied that Sigel's rear guard which was covering the Union withdrawal from Bentonville had escaped, General

Van Dorn halted his army at Camp Stephens late on the afternoon of March 6. As soon as the pickets were posted, orders were issued for the troops to fall out. Fires were kindled. Since there was snow on the ground and a cold north wind blowing, the soldiers huddled around the roaring fires. The lucky ones who still had some corn left in their knapsacks, parched it in the ashes.<sup>1</sup>

Others like Sergeant W. Kinney of the 3d Louisiana were not so fortunate. The sergeant recalled that it was almost dark, when he and his comrades stopped. They were "almost frozen and starved, having only one biscuit for breakfast that morning, and no prospect of supper. We built fires, and sat around them waiting for the wagons to arrive."<sup>2</sup>

When the Confederates halted, General Price's vanguard bivouacked on the north side of Little Sugar Creek about four miles west of the strong position taken up by General Curtis' Army of the Southwest. During the afternoon, Van Dorn's column had been strengthened by the arrival of Brigadier General Albert Pike's brigade—two regiments of Cherokee Mounted Rifles and a squadron of Texas cavalymen.

In response to Van Dorn's call for reinforcements, Pike had left Cantonment Davis in the Indian Territory on February 28. The general had been accompanied by Captain Otis G. Welch's squadron of Texans (who were assigned to the 1st Regiment of Choctaw and Chickasaw Mounted Rifles) and the 1st Creek Regiment. Since the Indians had not been paid, Pike had a difficult time persuading them to take the field. He was only able to do so by telling them that they would receive their money by the time the column forded the Illinois River. From Cantonment Davis, the general proceeded to Park Hill. Here, he paused for a day waiting for the rest of the Choctaw and Chickasaw Mounted Rifles to join him.

In the meantime, a courier reached Pike's headquarters late on March 3 with an urgent message from General Van Dorn. Pike was informed that the Army of the West was in motion, and he was to join it near Fayetteville by the evening

<sup>1</sup> Ephraim McD. Anderson, *Memoirs, Historical and Personal; Including the Campaigns of the First Missouri Confederate Brigade* (St. Louis, 1868), 166.

<sup>2</sup> W. H. Tunnard, *A Southern Record, The History of the Third Regiment Louisiana Infantry* (Baton Rouge, 1866), 136.

of March 4. This message caused Pike to shake his head. He knew it would be impossible for him to keep the projected rendezvous. Calling for Colonel Douglas H. Cooper, his second in command, Pike told him to take charge of the column and march into northwestern Arkansas. Pike, accompanied by Welch's squadron, would push on and pick up the two regiments of Cherokee Mounted Rifles.<sup>3</sup>

Passing through Evansville and Cincinnati, Pike reached the Cherokee line on the 4th, where he overtook Colonel Stand Watie's 1st Regiment of Cherokee Mounted Rifles. (Watie and Colonel John Drew [who commanded the 2d Regiment of Cherokee Mounted Rifles], acting in accordance with instructions from Van Dorn's headquarters on the 3d, had taken the field without waiting for Pike.) Undoubtedly, Pike was miffed by this breach in military etiquette.

Nightfall on the 5th found Pike's command camped at Freschlag's Mill. Colonel Cooper's column had lagged far behind. On March 6, Pike reached Smith's Mill, where he overtook Drew's regiment. During the afternoon, Pike's troopers fell in behind General McCulloch's infantry. As a result of circumstances beyond his control, Pike had joined the army 48 hours later than Van Dorn had intended. In addition, approximately one-half his effective force under Colonel Cooper was a good two day's march farther back along the road from the Indian Territory.<sup>4</sup>

The arrival of Pike's brigade increased Van Dorn's striking force to about 16,000 effectives. Since the soldiers of the Army of the West had left their camps deep in the Boston Mountains three days before, the officers had pushed them hard. Many of the infantrymen were fagged out. When Van Dorn discussed the situation with his officers and scouts, they told him that Curtis' Little Sugar Creek line was very formidable. A frontal attack could result in a bloody repulse. Van Dorn determined to see if it were possible to maneuver the Federals out of their earthworks. The general knew that two of his generals (Benjamin McCulloch and James McIntosh)

<sup>3</sup> *The War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies* (69 vols. and index; Washington, 1880-1900), Series I, Vol. VIII, 286-287, 764. (Cites hereafter as *O. R.*)

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 287, 764.

had spent many months in Benton County. He summoned them to a staff meeting.<sup>5</sup>

From these two officers, Van Dorn learned that near Camp Stephens a road branched off to the left from the road ascending the Little Sugar Creek bottom. This road, known as the Bentonville Detour, passed north of Pea Ridge and joined the Telegraph road several miles north of Elkhorn Tavern. Thus, by making a march of ten miles, Van Dorn would be able to avoid a costly frontal attack. Upon reaching the Telegraph road, Van Dorn's gain would be two-fold: Not only would he have turned Curtis' position, but he would be astride the communication line which linked Curtis' Army of the Southwest with its supply depots at Springfield and Rolla, Missouri. If the Confederates could hold this position, the Federals would face annihilation.<sup>6</sup>

There were certain hazards inherent in the Confederates' plan of attack. To be successful, it required rapid marches, precise timing, and secrecy. Van Dorn determined to strike immediately. The troops would be called on to make a night march. Even so, Curtis might learn of the movement or Van Dorn might fail to get his army in position to attack at dawn. If this happened, the maneuver would be disclosed to Curtis with possible disastrous consequences for the Southerners.

Van Dorn felt confident that the Yankees would see the glare from his camp fires. This, he theorized, would serve to allay their fears of a night march on the Confederates' part. Brigadier General Martin E. Green's division of the Missouri State Guard would be left to guard the trains. Green's soldiers could be expected to keep the camp fires burning throughout the long, cold night.<sup>7</sup>

It was about 8 p.m. when General Price turned out his Missourians. Before putting his column in motion, Price told Green to make sure that his men kept the fires roaring. General Van Dorn and his staff accompanied General Price. (Since he was quite ill, Van Dorn rode in an ambulance.) As

<sup>5</sup> Walter L. Brown, "Pea Ridge: Gettysburg of the West," *The Arkansas Historical Quarterly*, XV, II; *O. R.*, Series I, Vol. VIII, 283.

<sup>6</sup> *O. R.*, Series I, Vol. VIII, 283; Franz Sigel, "The Pea Ridge Campaign," *Battles and Leaders of the Civil War*, R. V. Johnson and C. C. Buel, eds., 4 vols. (New York, 1884-1887), I, 320.

<sup>7</sup> *O. R.*, Series I, Vol. VIII, 283, 317.

the Missourians took up the march, Colonel Henry Little's combat-ready brigade took the lead. Little assigned Colonel John Q. Burbridge's 2d Missouri Infantry the advance.<sup>8</sup>

There was a great deal of confusion as the night march began. Because Price's Missourians had forded Little Sugar Creek before the halt, they at first made satisfactory progress. McCulloch's cavalry under McIntosh experienced no difficulty in crossing the stream. By the time the Missourians and the troopers were out of the way it was 10 o'clock. Colonel Louis Hébert, who led McCulloch's infantry brigade, passed the word for his unit commanders to arouse their men. Since the soldiers were to travel in light marching order, they left their blanket rolls behind.

When the head of the column reached the Little Sugar Creek ford, it was discovered that no provision had been made for bridging the icy waters. Finally, two poles were secured and laid side by side, to facilitate the crossing of the infantry. Nevertheless, it was almost daybreak before the last of Hébert's footsoldiers had crossed. The units which had forded first pushed on. After marching about five miles, Major William F. Tunnard of the 3d Louisiana halted his regiment. Since the Louisianians had hiked 26 miles, they needed rest badly. Evidently forgetting that the march was to be veiled in secrecy, the rugged Louisianians ripped down fences, using the rails to build fires around which they huddled. One of the soldiers wrote, "It was impossible to sleep, for the night was bitter cold; no one will ever know how much we suffered from cold and hunger; no tongue or pen can paint it."<sup>9</sup>

General Pike's troopers, who followed Hébert's infantry, mounted their horses and moved out at midnight. The Indians soon overtook and passed McCulloch's train. When he reached Little Sugar Creek, Pike was compelled to call a halt to wait for Hébert's men to cross on their "little bridge of rails." It

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 305, 307; Anderson, *History of the First Missouri Confederate Brigade*, 166; Emily Miller, *A Soldiers Honor, with Reminiscences of Major General Earl Van Dorn* (New York, 1902), 74.

<sup>9</sup> Tunnard, *History of the 3d Louisiana*, 137; W. L. Gammage, *The Camp, the Bivouac, and the Battle Field*, (Selma, 1864), 21-36. Since the night was exceedingly cold, there was a great deal of suffering among the soldiers as they stood in ranks, waiting for the units ahead to cross the stream. W. L. Gammage recalled, "For my part I shall retain a lively and unpleasant recollection of my suffering on that wretched night, for my whole natural life time."

was sunrise before the last of the infantrymen were out of the way. Pike's Indians resumed the march, turning into the Bentonville Detour.<sup>10</sup>

Van Dorn expected to reach a point in the Federals' rear near Elkhorn Tavern before daybreak. At first, Price's troops made satisfactory progress. Van Dorn began to feel confident. About midnight, Colonel Burbridge's advance guard found the road blocked with felled timber. A halt had to be called, while the pioneers were put to work clearing a route through the obstructions.<sup>11</sup>

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An Iowan was responsible for obstructing the Bentonville Detour. If the road had not been blocked and Price's column delayed for several critical hours, it is very likely that the Confederates would have scored a smashing victory in the impending battle.

About 4 o'clock on the previous afternoon, several of Colonel Grenville M. Dodge's scouts reported Confederate patrols reconnoitering the Bentonville Detour.<sup>12</sup> Dodge, realizing the importance of this information, rode over to speak with General Curtis.

At this hour, the general was supervising the construction of an artillery emplacement on a bluff east of, and commanding, the ford where the Telegraph road crossed Little Sugar Creek. Dodge informed Curtis that the Confederates were apparently feeling their way around the Union right. Furthermore, he added with remarkable foresight, the Rebels might use the Bentonville Detour to gain the rear of the Army of the Southwest. If the Bentonville Detour were obstructed it would delay the Southerners, Dodge pointed out.

Curtis reacted to Dodge's advice immediately. A staff officer was sent with instructions for one of the regimental commanders to proceed to the Bentonville Detour and start fell-

<sup>10</sup> *O. R.*, Series I, Vol. VIII, 287.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 307.

<sup>12</sup> Grenville M. Dodge, "Personal Biography of Major General Grenville Mellen Dodge 1831 to 1870," Vol. I, 49-52. This unpublished manuscript is in the General Grenville M. Dodge collection, Iowa State Dept. of History and Archives, Des Moines, Iowa. Grenville M. Dodge, who had been born in Massachusetts in 1831, called Council Bluffs his home. *Roster and Record of Iowa Soldiers in the War of the Rebellion, Together with Historical Sketches of Volunteer Organizations 1861-1866*, I (Des Moines, 1908), 534.

ing timber. For some unexplained reason, this order was not carried out. When he learned that the designated unit was still in camp, Curtis sent for Dodge. He told his fellow Iowans, "You know the country, go and do it."<sup>13</sup>

Replying, Dodge remarked that his men had been on the road most of the night, but he would do what his general wished.<sup>14</sup>

When he moved out, Colonel Dodge took with him a battalion of the 4th Iowa Infantry and two companies of the 3d Iowa Cavalry. By 9 p.m. Dodge had reached the Bentonville Detour. Dividing his men into two teams, Dodge put them to work felling timber. The infantry blocked the detour near its junction with the Telegraph road, while the cavalrymen worked several miles to the west.<sup>15</sup>

#### An Iowa cavalrymen recalled:

We had a captain in our regiment, O. H. P. Scott . . . who had been a railroad builder, and was always ready for a job of road building or timber cutting; and on the night of the 6th he was detailed, with a number of men

<sup>13</sup> Dodge, "Personal Biography," I, 49-52.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*; O. R., Series I, Vol. VIII, 258. On the night of March 5, Colonel Dodge's brigade, along with the other units of Carr's division, had retired from Cross Hollow to Little Sugar Creek.

<sup>15</sup> Dodge, "Personal Biography," I, 49-52. The 4th Iowa Infantry was organized under the proclamation issued by President Abraham Lincoln dated May 3, 1861. The companies constituting the regiment were mustered into Federal service at two places—Camp Kirkwood near Council Bluffs and Jefferson Barracks, Missouri—between August 8 and 31, 1861. Grenville Dodge was commissioned colonel and placed in command of the regiment by Governor Samuel J. Kirkwood. Originally, it was planned to employ the companies which had been organized at Council Bluffs to repel an invasion of Iowa by the Missouri State Guard. Before the Iowans were ready to move, the Secessionists contingents in northwest Missouri had disbanded.

The companies of the 4th Iowa which had been mustered in at Council Bluffs were sent to St. Louis. By August 15, all the companies except I and K had reached Benton Barracks.

On August 24, the eight companies left Benton Barracks for Rolla. The 4th Iowa remained at Rolla for over four months. Companies I and K were mustered into Federal service on August 31. After leaving Benton Barracks on September 13, the two companies joined the regiment at Rolla. In the following months, detachments of one or more companies were sent on reconnoitering expeditions. In the period from November 1-9, combat patrols from the 4th Iowa visited Houston and Salem, Missouri.

No important movements were undertaken by the Iowans until January 22, 1862. At that time, the regiment (as a unit in General Curtis' Army of the Southwest) left Rolla. *Roster and Record of Iowa Soldiers*, I, 527.

... [to assist Colonel Dodge]. Our cavalymen thought this was not the branch of service they had enlisted for.<sup>16</sup>

When he inspected the work, Dodge was satisfied that his men had done a good job. Orders were issued for the officers to reform their units and return to their camps. Two companies of the 4th Iowa under Captian Samuel D. Nichols inadvertently followed the troopers of the 3d Iowa westward along the Bentonville Detour. When Dodge learned what had happened, he went to look for Captain Nichols. Fortunately for the Iowans, Price's vanguard was making a lot of noise as it pushed ahead. As soon as he heard the sounds of the approaching greyclads, Nichols turned his column around. Encountering Dodge, Nichols told him what he had seen.<sup>17</sup>

Dodge's detachment was back in camp by 2 a.m. As the colonel was getting ready to retire, Adjutant James A. Williamson of the 4th Iowa came in and reported that he had not "seen a picket on our whole right flank." This alarmed Dodge. Hastening to Curtis' headquarters, Dodge awakened the general. Besides telling the general that the Bentonville Detour had been obstructed, Dodge reported the Confederates were making a night march and would "strike us on the right and in the rear." To make matters worse, Dodge continued, he had learned that there were no Union outposts northwest of Leetown. Curtis apparently had received other information, Dodge recalled, because he didn't seem to place much importance on what he heard from the colonel. At this, Dodge returned to his tent.<sup>18</sup>

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After losing valuable time clearing a way through the ob-

<sup>16</sup> John W. Noble, "Battle of Pea Ridge, or Elkhorn Tavern," *War Papers and Personal Reminiscences, 1861-1865, Read Before the Commandery of the State of Missouri, Military Order of the Loyal Legion of the United States*, Vol. I (St. Louis, 1892), 224. Oliver H. P. Scott hailed from Farmington. He had been mustered into service as captain of Company B, 3d Iowa Cavalry on August 30, 1861. *Roster and Record of Iowa Soldiers*, IV, 591.

<sup>17</sup> Dodge, "Personal Biography," I, 49-52. Nichols, who called Panora his home, had been commissioned 1st lieutenant of Company C, 4th Iowa on August 8, 1861. He had been advanced to the rank of captain on December 25. *Roster and Record of Iowa Soldiers*, I, 625.

<sup>18</sup> Dodge, "Personal Biography," I, 49-52. A resident of Des Moines, Williamson had been made regimental adjutant, at the time of the 4th Iowa's muster into Federal Service. *Roster and Record of Iowa Soldiers*, I, 535.

structions, Price's column pushed ahead. Just before day-break, Dodge's second barricade was encountered. For a second time, the Missourians were compelled to stop, while Burbridge's footsoldiers cut a path through the felled timber. By 6 a.m., Burbridge pronounced the road open. The troops moved off. The damage had been done, however. It was 8 o'clock before Price's main column reached the junction of the Bentonville Detour and the Telegraph road.<sup>19</sup>

As Burbridge's soldiers were starting to descend into the valley of Big Sugar Creek through which the Telegraph road ran, the rumble of moving vehicles was heard. Pressing their ears to the ground, the Confederate scouts heard wagons approaching from the south. Colonel Burbridge was afraid Curtis had divined the Confederate's intentions and had started to retreat. He sent a runner to see Colonel Little with a request for artillery. Within a few minutes the six guns manned by Captain William Wade's cannoneers came thundering up. Wade had his artillerists throw their smoothbores into battery about 100 yards from the road. The guns were masked by a thick wood.

According to the brigade historian:

The ground was frozen, and the noise could be distinctly heard some distance up the . . . [canyon]. In a few minutes a train of wagons was dimly seen advancing in the darkness. It was immediately halted and captured, the men with it expressing the greatest surprise at seeing an enemy there. They were sent out for forage, and said they knew nothing of the movements of the army [Curtis'], except that it was preparing to fight.<sup>20</sup>

As the head of his column turned into the Telegraph road, General Price ordered his escort under Lieutenant Colonel James T. Cearnal to take the lead. Price's Missourians, although delayed, had gained Curtis' rear and were astride his supply line. Screened by Cearnal's troopers the Confederates pushed up Cross Timber Hollow.

Realizing that they must soon contact the foe, General Price and Colonel Little rode at the head of the column. For the time being, the two officers' command post would be with Burbridge's 2d Missouri. In case of trouble, Price and Little wanted to be the first to know about it.

<sup>19</sup> O. R., Series I, Vol. VIII, 305, 307.

<sup>20</sup> Anderson, *History of the First Missouri Confederate Brigade*, 167.

About a mile and one-half north of Elkhorn Tavern, the Telegraph road crossed Big Sugar Creek and veered sharply to the right. At this point, Cross Timber Hollow narrowed. Colonel Cearnal cautioned his troopers to be on the lookout for ambushes. The 2d Missouri tramped along in column by platoons close behind Cearnal's horsemen. Behind Burbridge's combat-ready regiment marched the other units of Price's command.<sup>21</sup>

It was almost daybreak before the rear contingents of Hébert's infantry overtook the advance units. As soon as Major Tunnard learned that the rear echelon was approaching, he turned out the men of the 3d Louisiana. The order, "Fall in!" rang out. A soldier reported, the troops " 'fell in' to a man, but such a wornout set of men I never saw. They had not one single mouthful of food to eat."<sup>22</sup> Preceded by McIntosh's cavalry and followed by Pike's Indians, Hébert's footsoldiers trudged up the Bentonville Detour.

Van Dorn was disturbed by Price's failure to be in position near Elkhorn Tavern by daybreak. He was afraid the Federals would redeploy their troops to oppose the Confederates as they debouched from Cross Timber Hollow. Since the Yankees would be on the watershed, he reasoned, they could probably keep him from forming his army. Van Dorn decided to alter his master plan.

An aide was sent galloping back along the Bentonville Detour with instructions for McCulloch to countermarch his command. Turning into one of the country lanes passing around the western face of Pea Ridge, McCulloch was to advance toward Leetown. Thus, Van Dorn had determined to undertake a converging attack. Such an operation is always dangerous. This was especially true in the days when messages had to be carried by horsemen, and at a stage of the Civil War when many of the officers were getting their first opportunity of handling large numbers of men in the field. Furthermore, Van Dorn's two assaulting columns would be separated by Pea Ridge, an all but impassable barrier. If the Federals could keep the converging arms from closing, they

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*; O. R., Series I, Vol. VIII, 305, 307, 329.

<sup>22</sup> Tunnard, *History of the 3d Louisiana*, 137.

would have a good chance of defeating their numerically superior foe in detail.<sup>23</sup>

By the time the staff officer reached McCulloch, all of his units had passed around the northwestern corner of Pea Ridge. McCulloch wasted no time in turning his command around. This worked a special hardship on Hébert's infantrymen, because they had to countermarch three miles before they reached the country lanes leading southeastward toward Leetown.<sup>24</sup>

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While the Confederates spent the night of March 6 on the road, Curtis' Army of the Southwest (except Dodge's working party) rested quietly in its chosen position overlooking Little Sugar Creek. General Curtis who expected an attack from the south or southwest had made his dispositions accordingly. Brigadier General Alexander Asboth's division held the right of the Little Sugar Creek line, its right flank anchored near the wood road ascending Winton's Spring Branch. Colonel Peter J. Osterhaus' division was on Asboth's left. Colonel Jefferson C. Davis' was in the center. One of his brigades was to the right of and the other to the left of the Telegraph road. Colonel Eugene A. Carr's division held the Union left. The Commanders of the two right flank divisions, Asboth and Osterhaus, reported to General Sigel.

Unlike Curtis, General Sigel doubted that the Rebels would make a frontal attack. He likened it to knocking one's head against a stonewall. Sigel expected the main Confederate blow to be delivered from the west against his right flank division, Asboth's. To see if he could learn the Southerners' intentions, Sigel sent his two chief scouts (Brown and Pope) with a mounted patrol to reconnoiter the countryside west of Winton's Spring Branch and Leetown.<sup>25</sup>

About daybreak, the scouts returned. Awakening Sigel, they informed him that "troops and trains of the enemy were moving the whole night on the Bentonville . . . [Detour] around our rear, towards Cross Timber [Hollow], thereby endan-

<sup>23</sup> O. R., Series I, Vol. VIII, 283-284, 287; Gammage, *The Camp, the Bivouac, and the Battle Field*, 25-26.

<sup>24</sup> Tunnard, *History of the 3d Louisiana*, 137; O. R., Series I, Vol. VIII, 287.

<sup>25</sup> Sigel, "The Pea Ridge Campaign," *Battles and Leaders of the Civil War*, I, 321.

gering our line of retreat and communications to Keetsville, and separating us from our reenforcements and provision trains."<sup>26</sup>

Sigel, after listening to this report, sent for Lieutenant Louis Schramm of his staff. Schramm was to take Sigel's escort and see if he could obtain additional informations. Sigel wanted to know in what direction the greyclads were moving. It was several hours before Schramm's patrol returned. When it did, the staff officer corroborated the intelligence brought in earlier by the scouts.<sup>27</sup>

It was after 6 a.m., Schramm's report "left no doubt in" Sigel's "mind that the enemy was moving around our position toward the northeast. . ." Sigel now rode out himself. Like his scouts and Lieutenant Schramm, the General was able to spot Confederate troops and trains moving rapidly along the Bentonville Detour. A staff officer was sent to carry these evil tidings to General Curtis.<sup>28</sup>

Following the receipt of this unpleasant news, General Curtis called a meeting which was attended by his chief subordinates. The officers assembled at General Asboth's tent, near Lewis Pratt's Store. After Curtis had listened to all the reports, he realized that the Confederates were turning his fortified line. The battle would not be fought as he had planned.

As Colonel Dodge recalled, most of the officers on hearing this information expressed themselves as favoring a retreat. He and Colonel Davis, however, voiced violent opposition to such a movement. Colonel Osterhaus thought it would be a good idea if the Federals could place Cross Timber Hollow "in our front instead of rear."

To strengthen Curtis' hand, Dodge reminded the general, "we had come there [into northwest Arkansas] to fight; that it would never do for us to refuse, now that we had an opportunity; and that for us to retreat would ruin us, and him, especially in Iowa."

Encouraged by Dodge's words, Curtis prepared to meet this new threat. The Army of the Southwest would change front to the rear, so as to face the Bentonville Detour. At the same

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*; O. R., Series I, Vol. VIII, 211.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>28</sup> Sigel, "The Pea Ridge Campaign," *Battles and Leaders of the Civil War*, I, 321.

time, Curtis did not know whether Van Dorn was using all or part of his army to flank the Union position. Consequently, Curtis would be unable to pull all of his troops out of the Little Sugar Creek defenses.<sup>29</sup>

When the army carried out the projected change of front, it would reverse the order in which the divisions were deployed. Asboth's and Osterhaus' which had been on the right would now be on the left. These two units which constituted Sigel's wing were to continue to hold the Little Sugar Creek line. Davis' division would be in the center, while Carr's became the extreme right.<sup>30</sup>

Before dismissing the officers, Curtis announced he was going to send Colonel Cyrus Bussey with a strong mounted force toward Leetown. Bussey's column would be accompanied by three guns manned by the 1st Missouri Flying Artillery. After passing beyond Leetown, Bussey was to strike the Rebel column which was reportedly advancing around the southwestern face of Pea Ridge.

Curtis, turning to Colonel Osterhaus, asked the German to accompany Colonel Bussey "for the purpose of taking control of the movement." Since up to this moment, the Confederates had not made the slightest demonstration against the Little Sugar Creek line, Sigel advanced the suggestion that Curtis support Bussey's cavalry with a brigade of infantry and a second battery from his wing. He argued that if the cavalry were unsupported and suffered a repulse, it might have serious consequences. Curtis adopted Sigel's proposition. When Osterhaus took the field, his task force would consist of cavalry, infantry and artillery.<sup>31</sup>

While General Curtis was explaining the projected redeployment to his subordinates, Major Eli W. Weston thundered up on a sweat-lathered horse. Entering Asboth's tent, Weston excitedly informed Curtis that one of his outposts north of Elkhorn Tavern had been attacked by Rebel infantry. (Major Weston and the soldiers of his 24th Missouri Infantry were

<sup>29</sup> *O. R.*, Series I, Vol. VIII, 199; Dodge, "Personal Biography," I, 49-52.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*; Sigel, "The Pea Ridge Campaign," *Battles and Leaders of the Civil War*, I, 323. Bussey, who called Bloomfield his home, had been mustered in as colonel of the 3d Iowa Cavalry on August 10, 1861. *Roster and Record of Iowa Soldiers*, IV, 441.

posted at the tavern.) If the Rebels were in force, this could be disastrous. Since time was all important, Curtis told Colonel Carr to rush a brigade to Weston's assistance. It was about 10:30 when the meeting broke up and the officers hastened to join their units. Aides were sent racing ahead to acquaint the regimental and battery commanders with the decisions which had just been reached.<sup>32</sup>

Upon the departure of the ranking officers, General Curtis and his staff assembled on a small knoll near headquarters. Already the distant rattle of musketry was audible. The general's nephew recalled:

Some one asked what would be the name of the battle. One suggested Sugar Creek, but it was said that a fight on nearly the same ground, but a few weeks before, had already received that name. Another suggested the "battle of the Ozark Mountains," but it was objected that this described no particular locality and covered a vast territory. "Whatever you call it," said the scout, "the people here will call it the battle of Pea Ridge, for that is the name by which this ridge is known all through this country."

"Better call it Pea Ridge then," said Curtis, and thus a name was made in history.<sup>33</sup>

The 24th Missouri, reinforced by two companies of cavalry (G, 1st Missouri and M, 3d Illinois), had been given the task of watching the Union rear. In addition, the Missourians guarded Curtis' forward supply depot and a stockade in which a few Confederate prisoners were confined. To carry out this assignment, the regiment camped at Elkhorn Tavern. The Elkhorn and its outbuildings were used as a "commissary store-house." On the night of March 6, Major Weston stationed cavalry and infantry patrols on the Huntsville and Telegraph roads, as well as the Bentonville Detour.<sup>34</sup>

About 3 a.m. several of Colonel Cearnal's Rebel troopers surprised a Union outpost. While the Confederates were escorting the bluecoats to the rear, one of them (Private Thomas Welch of Company M, 3d Illinois) gave his captors the slip. Making his way cross-country, Welch succeeded in

<sup>32</sup> O. R., Series I, Vol. VIII, 199, 258.

<sup>33</sup> Samuel P. Curtis, "The Army of the South-West, and the First Campaign in Arkansas," *Annals of Iowa*, Vol. VI, No. III, 154.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 270-271; Curtis, "The Army of the South-West, and the First Campaign in Arkansas," *Annals of Iowa*, Vol. VI, No. III, 144.

reaching Elkhorn Tavern, where he reported to Major Weston.<sup>35</sup>

In the meantime, the major had learned from his scouts that Confederate patrols were operating on the Bentonville—Sugar Creek road. (This road branched off to the west from the Telegraph road, about one-fourth mile southwest of the tavern.) He ordered Captain Sampson P. Barris to take one infantry company and the two cavalry companies and reconnoiter the area west of Elkhorn Tavern.

Day was starting to break when Barris left the regimental command post. Moving ahead of the infantry, the troopers discovered a greyclad patrol about three-quarters of a mile west of the junction. The Confederates took cover in the dense undergrowth south of the road. Leaving the road, the Union footsoldiers advanced into the brush and drove out the Secessionists. Barris reassembled his patrol on the road and resumed the march. Beyond G. W. Ford's house, the Federals again found the Confederates. Deploying his infantry to the left and right of the cavalry which remained on the road, Barris attacked. After a few minutes' hot action, the Southerners swung into their saddles and skedaddled.<sup>36</sup>

The two cavalry companies (M, 3d Illinois and G, 1st Missouri) followed the retreating Confederates for some distance along the Bentonville-Sugar Creek road. Since the greyclads failed to rally for another stand, the Union horsemen were unable to overtake them. Captain Barris' infantry, to keep up the bluecoated cavalry, was compelled to double time. Gaining the high ground between Round Top and Pea Ridge, the Yankees looking westward saw large numbers of Confederates moving along the Bentonville Detour.

At this, the pursuit was abandoned. Barris' infantry and the cavalry retraced their steps; Captain Barbour Lewis of Company G, 1st Missouri raced ahead to tell Major Weston what the patrol had discovered. When he reached Elkhorn Tavern, Lewis found that Weston had gone to Curtis' headquarters. Lewis wasted no time in hastening there, where he reported all he knew concerning the movements of the Confederates. After complimenting the captain, Weston told him to return

<sup>35</sup> O. R., Series I, Vol. VIII, 271.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 271-275, 277. Captain Barris commanded Company F, 24th Missouri.

to Elkhorn Tavern. He would employ his men as scouts to watch the approaches to the tavern from the north and east.<sup>37</sup>

Shortly after the departure of Barris' patrol, Major Weston had been notified by one of his outposts that a number of Rebels were advancing down the Telegraph road toward the tavern. Captain Robert W. Fyan was directed to take his unit (Company B) and investigate this report. Fyan's patrol moved off at 7 a.m. About three-quarters of a mile north of the tavern, the Federals sighted a large number of horsemen approaching from the north. Because these troopers wore various nondescript types of garb, Fyan found it impossible to tell whether they were friend or foe. Deploying his men to the left and right of the Telegraph road, Fyan moved forward to investigate. After advancing almost to the tannery, the problem was solved. The heretofore unknown cavalymen opened fire, wounding one of the Federals. Falling back, Fyan established a roadblock and called for reinforcements.<sup>38</sup>

Upon receiving Fyan's call for help, Weston ordered Lieutenant James J. Lyon to take companies H and I and hurry up the Telegraph road. By the time Lyon's panting men reached the tannery, Fyan had observed that the Confederates were feeling for his right flank. He knew that once the Rebels gained the high ground south of Williams Hollow, they would encounter little difficulty in reaching the Huntsville road. The captain considered the situation so critical that he decided to abandon the roadblock.

Accompanied by his company and Lyon's command, Fyan scaled the steep eastern slope of Cross Timber Hollow. Beating their way through the thick undergrowth, the Federals reached the Huntsville road ahead of the greyclads. After deploying his men as skirmishers on either side of the road, Fyan pushed forward as far as the western fringe of Clemens' field. Here, he ordered his men to take cover. Within a short time, the bluecoats could hear the Confederates advancing through the woods between the field and Williams Hollow. Rebel scouts soon appeared at the edge of the oaks on the far side of the field.<sup>39</sup>

When he issued marching orders to Lieutenant Lyon, Wes-

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 275, 277.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 271-275.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 271, 274-275, 276.

ton had called for Captain Thomas A. Reed. The captain was told to turn out Companies A and F and form them on the Telegraph road in front of the tavern. Reed's force would constitute a small strategic reserve, ready to march to any threatened point on a moment's notice. Fully realizing the gravity of the situation, Weston ordered Captain James R. Vanzant to take Company K and escort the forty Confederate prisoners and the wagon train to the Pratt's Store area.<sup>40</sup>

Within a few minutes, Weston had received reports from Captain Barris that Confederate patrols had been sighted on his left, while Fyan's messengers told of the greyclads' swing toward the Huntsville road. Weston directed Captain Reed to rush the 2d Platoon of Company A up the rocky southeastern face of Pea Ridge. Reed relayed this order to Lieutenant James L. Robberson.

At a word from the lieutenant, the soldiers took their arms and followed him through the peach orchard behind the tavern. As soon as his gasping men had reached the crest of the ridge, Robberson deployed them as skirmishers.<sup>41</sup>

Immediately following the departure of Robberson's platoon, Major Weston resolved to commit the rest of his reserve. Captain Reed was to reinforce Fyan's bluecoats with Company F and the 1st Platoon of Company A.

When the captain gave the order, the soldiers moved down the Huntsville road about 400 yards and took position in support of their comrades. Near Clemens' house, they could see Confederate scouts (Cearnal's troopers) feeling their way through the underbrush north of the road. In response to the pleas of several of his men, Reed gave them permission to open fire. At the first shot, the Confederates began to form into a line of battle in the timber northeast of Clemens' farm.<sup>42</sup>

In the meantime, Lieutenant Robberson's platoon had sighted Confederates moving through the thick undergrowth west of the Telegraph road. He relayed this information to the regimental command post. With his situation growing more critical by the minute, Weston tried to scrape up a few additional

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 271, 273. While waiting for orders to march, Reed's men stacked their arms.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 271, 273.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 273.

men. He now learned that Captain Barris' company had returned from its sweep westward along the Bentonville-Sugar Creek road. Barris' bluecoats were rushed to support the troops opposing the Confederate drive toward the Huntsville road. Reaching Clemens' field, Barris had his men take cover behind logs and trees. Captain Reed's detachment held the ground on Barris' left.<sup>43</sup>

Having committed all his available effectives, Major Weston anxiously awaited the reinforcements which one of Curtis' staff officers said were hastening up the Telegraph road.

\* \* \*

It was Price's escort which established contact with Captain Fyan's patrol near the tannery. At the first shot, Colonel Cearnal dismounted his battalion. General Price, who immediately joined his escort, decided against a frontal attack up the Telegraph road. His scouts had already located a narrow wood road ascending the ridge which bounded Williams Hollow on the south. Price told Cearnal to have his troopers dismount and move up this road. On gaining the ridge, they were to see if they could turn the Yankees' right flank.

Within a few minutes the Confederates had reached the high ground. On doing so, they were fired on by a mounted Union patrol (one of Captain Lewis'). The Secessionists replied, and the Yankees beat a hurried retreat. From this point, the Rebels were able to look southwestward and see Elkhorn Tavern. Before pushing on, Cearnal notified Price that here was commanding ground from which the Confederate artillerists could shell the Union position at the head of Cross Timber Hollow. In addition, Williams Hollow offered a covered approach for a Confederate advance against the Union right. Resuming their advance, Cearnal's dismounted troopers felt their way toward the Huntsville road.<sup>44</sup>

The soldiers of the 2d Missouri, who marched behind Cearnal's battalion, had their curiosity whetted by the sight of several Yankee pickets. These men, whose horses were still tied to trees, had been surprised and captured by the Rebel troopers. Instead of watching the road, the Federals were caught napping "in a little house upon the road-side." Finding

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 271, 273, 275-276.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 329; Anderson, *History of the 1st Missouri Confederate Brigade*, 168.

themselves suddenly surrounded by men dressed in white, the bluecoats "seemed bewildered and somewhat frightened."<sup>45</sup>

By the time the infantry reached the tanyard, the surgeons had taken over the buildings in expectation of the grim harvest that was to come.<sup>46</sup>

When Cearnal's troopers were sent up the wood road, the 2d Missouri prepared to take the lead. Just as Burbridge's regiment was getting ready to resume the march up the Telegraph road, there was a rumble of wheels. One of the soldiers recalled:

An ox team came down the hill attached to an old wagon, having a wood bed with a chickencoop on it: the driver was a big Federal soldier, who, when captured, put on an air of the greatest simplicity and seemed perfectly stupid; he said he was a citizen of the country, and that the blue clothes he wore were given to him; the distance to the Federal camp and its situation seemed to be unknown to him: a few of the soldiers were coming out with him after chickens, but had run back after the shooting. He was very desirous of proceeding, and expressed great disappointment when he found his trip for the day was at an end.<sup>47</sup>

General Price now learned that the Federals were emplacing several guns (the 1st Battery, Iowa Light Artillery) at the head of Cross Timber Hollow. These pieces would be able to rake the Confederate force advancing up the Telegraph road with a storm of shot and shell. Consequently, Price determined to deploy his command before advancing any farther.

Colonel Little, who rode with the General, was told to form his brigade to the left and to the right of the road. Brigadier General William Y. Slack was to have his troops take position on Little's right. This would throw slack's troops well up on to the eastern slope of Pea Ridge. Having learned from Cearnal that there was good ground for artillery on the south rim of Williams Hollow, Price called for his staff officers. The aides were sent galloping off with instructions for all of

<sup>45</sup> Anderson, *History of the 1st Missouri Confederate Brigade*, 168. The soldiers of Little's brigade were clad in undyed wool uniforms. *Ibid.*, 161.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 168.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*

Price's artillery and all the divisions of the Missouri State Guard that had accompanied the general's column on the night march (except Lindsay's) to take possession of this commanding ground. By extending his flanks to the right and to the left, Price hoped to find an opening from which he could launch a successful attack on what looked to him like a very formidable position.<sup>48</sup>

When the Confederates left Big Sugar Creek and turned up Cross Timber Hollow, Price had directed Major D. Herndon Lindsay to post his Sixth Division at the mouth of the hollow. Lindsay's task would be two-fold. He was to guard the Telegraph road so that a Union column coming from Keetsville could not strike the Confederates in the rear and he was to watch Big Sugar Creek Hollow which veered off to the east.<sup>49</sup>

Colonel Little quickly formed his combat-ready brigade. His lead regiment, the 2d Missouri, was deployed as skirmishers on the right of the Telegraph road. General Slack massed his brigade (except for Colonel G. W. Riggins' mounted battalion) in the hollow and on the eastern face of Pea Ridge, behind the 2d Missouri. Little used his cavalry regiment, Colonel Elijah Gates' 1st Missouri, to support Cearnal's advance up the wood road. Scaling the commanding ridge south of Williams Hollow, Gates' troopers captured several forge wagons. Gates halted his command and prepared to hold this key position, pending the arrival of the Rebel artillery and the State Guard. Colonel Benjamin A. Rives, who led Little's other infantry regiment, formed his men in close column on the road.<sup>50</sup>

From the point where Little deployed his brigade, the Telegraph road ascended the east slope of Cross Timber Hollow. Elkhorn Tavern stood near the watershed at the head of the ravine. The ground to the left and right of the road was "very much broken, covered with a solid bed of small, white flint rocks, and a growth of scrubby oak trees, interspersed with occasional thickets" of blackjack.<sup>51</sup>

Assisted by the soldiers of the Missouri State Guard the

<sup>48</sup> *O. R.*, Series I, Vol. VIII, 305. Slack's brigade had followed Little's on the march around the Union army.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, 322. One four gun battery, Captain James G. Gorham's, was attached to Lindsay's small command.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, 307; Anderson, *History of the First Missouri Confederate Brigade*, 168-169.

<sup>51</sup> Anderson, *History of the First Missouri Confederate Brigade*, 169.

Confederate artillerists manhandled their guns up the rugged wood road which gave access to the south rim of Williams Hollow. The first two batteries to reach the plateau on top of the ridge were Captain Francis S. Tull's and the St. Louis Artillery. Here, just as Cearnal had reported, the Rebel artillerists found ground from which their pieces could command the Union position at the head of Cross Timber Hollow.

By this time, the Federals had brought up artillery (the 1st Iowa Battery). Unlimbering their seven guns, the Rebel cannoneers engaged the Iowans in a spirited duel. Two more Confederate batteries soon reached the rim (Clark's and Wade's). The boy artillerist, Captain S. Churchill Clark had his men throw their four brass 6-pounders into battery on the left of Tull's guns. Wade's cannoneers unlimbered their six guns on Clark's right.

When Captain Henry Guibor's Battery reached the heights, the captain was disappointed to find that the four units which had preceded him had pre-empted all the good positions. Guibor was unable to find space on the rim to put his guns into battery. His men were compelled to stand-by and watch while the 17 guns which the Confederates had massed fought a deadly duel with the 1st and 3d Iowa Batteries. It was early afternoon before Guibor's gunners were able to place their four pieces in battery. When they did, they unlimbered them on the right of Wade's guns.<sup>52</sup>

From left to right Clark's, Rains', and Frost's Divisions of the Missouri State Guard were massed in support of the artillery. At the same time, Colonel James P. Saunders' Fifth Division of the State Guard felt its way toward the Union right. By 11 a.m. Saunders' soldiers were in position north of the Huntsville road. During its march to the southeast, Saunders' column had been screened by Cearnal's dismounted troopers. As they closed in on the Huntsville road, the Confederates were fired on by Major Weston's skirmishers. Preparatory to attacking, Colonel Saunders told the commander of his attached battery (Captain Joseph Kelly) to have his men park their guns.<sup>53</sup>

<sup>52</sup> O. R., Series I, Vol. VIII, 307, 319, 323, 327; Anderson, *History of the First Missouri Confederate Brigade*, 169-170. Clark, a great grandson of the famous explorer, had resigned from the U. S. Military Academy and joined the Missouri secessionists.

<sup>53</sup> O. R., Series I, Vol. VIII, 307, 321, 329.

## Museum Notes

Without question, the greatest single service the museum has provided over the years is to the thousands of school, church, and club groups that travel to the museum from every part of the state to learn about the history of Iowa. Occasionally, as many as 40 or more groups tour the building in a single day. To enable the museum to adequately handle the steadily increasing number of groups visiting the department, a training program is in effect to further the knowledge of the guards on the objects and specimens in the museum displays and thus better enable them to answer questions and to explain these exhibits to visitors. Due to the fact that the building is open every day of the year, it is necessary that our guide-guard personnel be available at all times, both for the protection of the exhibits and the safety of the public.

While it is expected that new and interesting objects will be periodically added to the Museum, it is also unfortunately true that occasionally objects are removed.

Recently a young man who had earned, over a period of years, the trust of the staff, admitted the theft of a number of antique guns from the study collection of the museum. This young man was a serious student of antique weapons and had used the study collection to aid him in making reproductions of these guns. Most of the stolen guns have been traced and will be returned, but the fact that it did happen has caused serious re-evaluation of security at the Historical Building. These following steps have been taken.

All guns in the display cases have been individually electrically wired to discourage any attempt to break into the cases and remove them.

No person shall be allowed in other than the public sections of the building unless he is continuously accompanied by a member of the staff.

While it would be wise to increase the small staff of security police we have guarding the building, the money appropriated for running the department will not permit it. We must trust that those steps we have been able to take will prove effective in preventing further thefts.

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