

Battle of Sacramento History by J. Harold Utley

Written by Marion Miller
Thursday, 14 May 2009 21:00



Hopkins County, KY - The Battle of Sacramento, where it began and ended in Muhlenberg County Kentucky by J Harold Utley, Hopkins County Historical Society Historian.

When Adam R Johnson decided to enter the Confederate Army, he traveled to Hopkinsville where General Nathan Bedford Forrest was camped. Johnson and Robert M Martin became scouts for Forrest.

General Forrest assigned Johnson and Martin to scout the area of Muhlenberg County from Greenville toward Calhoun and report to him, as he would be close behind. While Forrest and his troops rested at Greenville, Johnson and Martin went toward Rumsey, across the river from Calhoun. They learned that the Union forces had constructed a pontoon bridge across Green River. Johnson returned to Greenville to report to General Forrest while Martin remained to observe the enemy movements.

On Thursday, December 26th, Forrest and his men set out on a reconnaissance toward the lower Green River, the dividing line between the Union and Confederate positions in Kentucky. He initially split his command, sending scouts to Greenville and Rochester. On December 27th, he reunited his troops at Greenville and was joined by Captain W S McLemore's company of 40 men, the 8th Tennessee Calvary under the command of Lt Col James W Starnes and Captain Ned Merriweather's 1st Kentucky Calvary force of 25 men. Forrest's force now numbered about 300 soldiers. Included were Adam R Johnson and Robert Martin, serving at their own request, and without rank, as scouts. When Forrest heard Johnson's report, he ordered his troopers forward.

Southern sympathizers observed the Union troops moving south through Sacramento. A young girl, Molly Morehead, rode past the force to warn General Forrest. He later recalled her

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as “a beautiful young lady, smiling, with untied tresses floating in the breeze, met the column just before our advance came up with the rear of the enemy”.



Garst Pond-Where the Battle of Sacramento Began

The Union patrol, commanded by 18-year-old Major Eli H Murray, numbered 169 men. One-half mile south of Sacramento, at Garst's Pond, the Federal troops stopped to water their horses. The pond was located in a low area with hills both north and south. Forrest's troops were shielded until they were almost on top of the Union forces.

The battle that followed was utter chaos. Forrest, with part of his men, charged the dismounted Federals. Major Murray, with about 45 of his force, repelled the southern attack for about ten minutes. Brigadier General Crittenden said of Murray, “he behaved with great gallantry”. The rest of Murray's men were attempting to tighten girths, which had been loosened to allow the horses to drink.

With the arrival of the rest of his men, Forrest organized a flanking maneuver, a battle plan he would later become famous for. He had part of his troops dismount and armed with Sharps and Maynard rifles (repeating rifles) keep up a steady stream of fire on the Federals. With his mounted troops, he attacked from both the left and the right.

Believing that they were heavily outnumbered, the Union troops began to retreat toward headquarters and safety at Calhoun. What followed was a running gun battle from Garst's Pond through Sacramento for about four miles, just beyond the location of Station Baptist Church.

In 1861 Station Baptist Church was located about a mile and a half north of the present day location. At this location, 43-year-old Union Captain Albert Bacon, Commander of the 3rd

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Kentucky's Company C, narrowly missed killing Forrest with his saber. Forrest wounded Bacon and ordered him to surrender. Bacon continued fighting and Forrest ordered his men to shoot Bacon, killing him.



Station Baptist Church-Where the Battle of Sacramento ended. (This is now Kentucky Highway 81 through Sacramento, KY)

The end result of the battle was:

Union Forces killed: Captain Albert C Bacon (1), Cpl Mitchell (1), Enlisted Men (6), and Captured Men (10).

Confederate Forces killed: Captain Ned Merriweather (1) and Pvt William H Terry (1).

The war continued and General Forrest became famous for his use of his tactical maneuver of flanking. He became such a bother to the Northern Forces that an exasperated General Sherman said, "That devil Forrest has to be hunted down, even at the cost of 10,000 lives and if it bankrupts the Federal Treasury.

It is a strange quirk of history that the Battle of Sacramento is hardly known outside of Kentucky yet General Forrest is remembered for his use of the "flanking" maneuver. He was a very severe thorn in the side of the Union Army for the remainder of the war.

Prepared by J Harold Utley, Hopkins County Historian

Historical Society of Hopkins County located at 107 South Union Street in Madisonville Kentucky with hours of operation of Monday thru Fridays (1pm-5pm). Call the Historical Society of Hopkins County Kentucky for any additional information at 270-821-3986. ©
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