

THE UNION INFORMER

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Sons of Union Veterans of the Civil War
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Union forces at the 150th Reenactment of the Battle of Prairie Grove in 2012. (Photo from the internet)

July Camp Meeting – Battle of Vicksburg

Continuing our series of discussions of Civil War topics at camp meetings, the subject for July will be The Battle of Vicksburg (or perhaps The Siege of Vicksburg). No doubt many of us have visited the Vicksburg battlefield and its many magnificent monuments commemorating the valiant struggles that took place there. Considering its monuments, it's like Gettysburg South.

No discussion leader was designated, so come prepared to do your part. With so much action and so long a struggle to be discussed, surely we won't have any trouble coming up with material.

The camp meeting will be held at our usual time (4th Thursday, 6:30 p.m.) in the Kaiser Library on the east side of Lafortune Park.

June Camp Meeting - Battle of Prairie Grove

PDC Joe Fears was unable to attend the camp meeting to lead the discussion on the Battle of Prairie Grove, AR, but we still had a good discourse of the battle, and everyone participated.

Taking part were: Cdr. Mike Rusk; SVC Carl Fallen; Dept. SVC Jesse Walker; Eric Sachau; Norman Crowe; Mike McGraw; Charlie Walker; and Kevin White.

The battle was almost fought to a draw, however the Confederate forces ran out of ammunition and withdrew during the night, leaving the Union to preside over the grounds. This engagement occurred about nine months after the Battle of Pea Ridge, and was to have a major influence on the outcome of the war in Arkansas and the surrounding territory.

Union General Blunt was forming an army in Kansas, This army threatened Arkansas, which had practically no defense after Confederate troops from Pea Ridge had been sent east of Mississippi to assist General Albert Sidney Johnston. There were practically no troops to defend against Curtis' army.

Things were set in motion when Gen. Van Dorn appointed General Thomas C. Hindman, a former Arkansas congressman and lawyer, to command the Trans-Mississippi Department. He was to organize a defense of the state. Hindman was a 34 year-old well known fiery secessionist. He began raising and equipping a large army and was having success recruiting in Missouri, which got Blunt's attention.

Gen. Blunt moved his troops south to Cane Hill, AR, attacked Hindman's cavalry, and wired Springfield, MO, for reinforcements. Soon thereafter, Hindman, with his superior force moved to attack Blunt before his reinforcements could arrive. He chose the Prairie Grove site for the confrontation. His intent was to first engage and defeat the troops under Herron arriving from Fayetteville by forced march from Springfield, defeat them, and then wheel around and defeat Blunt separately.

As in most battles, things did not go as planned. The attack on Herron lasted longer than expected. Blunt's troops, hearing the sounds of battle advanced to the battleground to also engage Hindman's Confederate force before Herron could be defeated. The tide of battle began to turn. A major factor was that the Union artillery was partly made up of rifled cannon, which were more accurate and had a longer range than the smoothbores used by Hindman's troops. The Union artillerymen stood off out of range of the Confederate guns and concentrated fire on a single enemy cannon until it was put out of action. In this systematic fashion, they gained the upper hand in the artillery duel. Although the battle swayed back and forth all day, neither side was able to gain the upper hand.

Of course, the fighting was vicious and deadly throughout the day, and it appeared that they would go at it again the next morning. However, unknown to the Union commanders, the Confederates were out of ammunition. Therefore, they began to leave the battle during the night by tying blankets to the cannon and wagon wheels to deaden the sound. Fires were kept burning to mislead the Union troops.

Early the next morning, the Confederates proposed under a flag of truce that a period should be allowed to bury the dead, to which the Union commanders agreed.

This gave the Confederates additional time to make their getaway.

Frank James fought as a member of Jo Shelby's Missouri cavalry unit at the Battle of Prairie Grove.



Mike Rusk presents a Membership Certificate to Charlie Walker at the June camp meeting.
(Photo by Eric Sachau)

National Encampment - News

PCC Kevin White, as our camp's lone representative to the National Encampment in Framington, MA, was authorized to be reimbursed for a small expenditure for a gift to the outgoing Commander-in-Chief. This is a customary goodwill gesture from each Department during a fun part of the proceedings. Normally, the gift is a humorous object that characterizes some aspect of the Department, or the CIC's tenure.

Veterans Day Parade

Since early organizational meetings are being held, now is the time to be making preparations to enter Tulsa's Veterans Day Parade, if we want to participate again this year. Cdr. Rusk commented, "With Remembrance Day and Wreaths Across America around the same time as Veterans Day I tend to think it's not a priority." However, we can discuss this further at our next camp meeting to evaluate support.

Department Logo Adopted

Norman Crowe has designed and proposed a logo for the Oklahoma Department of the SUVCW. It was revealed to the camp earlier in the year and submitted to the Department for approval at the Department Encampment this year.



Approval was delayed because of the inclusion of the official SUVCW logo in the design. However, the design has now been approved, and the logo is now official. Thanks, Norman!

Joint Meeting – SUVCW & SCV Camps

During the June camp meeting, it was proposed that our camp meet jointly again with the Daniel N. McIntosh SCV camp as we did last year. That meeting was such a success that both camps wanted to repeat it again this year with our camp visiting the SCV camp.

September was the proposed month, however, that was not a good time for the SCV camp. Cdr. Todd Cathey stated that he very much wanted to have a joint meeting, but stated that October would be a better time for them. So, for the time being, the date is in limbo.

Camp Business

Cdr. Rusk reports that the camp has 19 members in good standing. And we're always looking for more!!

He has also filed the required annual Form 990-N with the Internal Revenue Service, which maintains our good standing with the National Organization, retains our 501 3 (c) status as a charitable organization and provides for tax deductible contributions.

We are also current in filing all our reports to the Department of Oklahoma, and payment of all member dues for the year.



Cdr. Johnny Manley presents a wreath for the Sgt. Jacob Overturff Camp # 4 for the Memorial Day ceremony at Owlawn Cemetery in Tulsa.



Pres. Lori Cooper presents a wreath on behalf of the Rachel Cormany Auxiliary for the SUVCW's Memorial Day observance at Owlawn Cemetery.

Commander's Dispatch

It's true that many groups do not meet during the summer months. Vacations, holidays and other things always seem to drive down attendance. Also there are not many activities between the Memorial Day ceremony and Remembrance Day in November. Our camp will meet as usual during the summer months and I hope everyone will be able to attend. Our July meeting this Thursday will be at the Kaiser Library at the regular time but August 23 and September 27 camp meetings will be at the Schusterman Library meeting

room. Schusterman Library is just east of Harvard on 32nd street and has a nice meeting room that our camp has used many times in the past. Meeting times will be 6:30, and as usual, the librarians will shoo us out at 7:59. Our October camp meeting has not yet been set as we are planning a joint meeting with the Sons of Confederate Veterans and, as we met at our place last time, we will meet at their place this year. I will let all camp members know about the meeting time and place as soon as it is set.

The Battle of Honey Springs - Checotah, Oklahoma

"The Gettysburg of the West"

Source: ExploresSouthernHistory.com

One of the least known but most strategically important battles of the Civil War took place on July 17, 1863 in what was then the far west.

The Battle of Honey Springs was a bloody engagement fought to drive back Southern forces that were threatening an attack on the Union base of operations at Fort Gibson (Fort Blunt), Oklahoma. A Union victory, the battle was in many ways the turning point of the West.

Honey Springs in 1863 was an important stopping point or "depot" on the Texas Road. This wagon trace led south across the rolling hills of Oklahoma and was a vital North-South route through the Indian Territory where the "Five Civilized Tribes" had been resettled following the Trail of Tears.

The road crossed Elk Creek in the Creek nation by an important bridge just north of Honey Springs Depot. Confederate forces under Brig. Gen. D. H. Cooper occupied the vicinity during the summer of 1863 and began massing supplies and troops for a planned effort to recapture Fort Gibson.

Although he was suffering from a severe fever, Blunt moved 3,000 men and 12 pieces of artillery across the Arkansas River on July 15-16, 1863, and drove back Confederate pickets guarding the Texas Road.

Blunt's troops immediately advanced south on the Texas Road, skirmishing with Confederates at Chimney Mountain at around midnight on the 16th and then reaching a ridge overlooking Elk Creek on the morning of the 17th. Exhausted, the men fell out to rest while Blunt and his officers planned their attack.

Aware of the danger to his supplies if the Federals could get across Elk Creek, Gen. Cooper formed his men in line of battle in the timber on the north side of the creek with their backs to the crossing. From the cover of the trees, they could watch as Blunt formed his men into a line of battle on the ridge to the north and prepared to open fire on them with his 12 pieces of artillery.

Unwilling to let the Union guns get into place, the Confederates opened fire first, wheeling their cannon into place and taking aim. The Southern fire demolished one Union gun, but the Federal gunners quickly found the range and rained shot and shell on their Southern counterparts.

A Confederate gun was smashed, but the Southern troops continued to target clusters of Union officers with an experimental rifled cannon that proved highly effective.

Blunt committed his infantry and after two hours of brutal fighting, finally managed to punch a hole in the Confederate lines. The critical moment came when Southern officers mistakenly thought a portion of the Union line was retreating and ordered a counter-attack.

The Confederates surged forward and were only 25 paces from the soldiers of the 1st Kansas Colored Volunteers when that regiment unleashed a deadly volley into their faces. Dozens of men fell dead and wounded as the counter-attack was stunned to a halt.

The Confederate lines began to fall back and Gen. Cooper ordered his men to withdraw across Elk Creek. Soldiers from Texas held the vital bridge under heavy fire while the Southern cannon were withdrawn.

The Southern forces continued to fight, but the battle degenerated into a rout. As his forces collapsed, General Cooper ordered a general retreat. Union forces seized large quantities of supplies that the Confederates were not able to destroy before they withdrew.

Honey Springs opened the door for the Union capture of Fort Smith, Arkansas. Total losses in the battle vary from estimate to estimate, but Confederates reported casualties of 181 killed, wounded and missing. Union forces reported losses of 17 killed and 60 wounded.



Camp Calendar

July 26	Camp Meeting – Kaiser Library
August 9-12	National Encampment – MA
August 23	Camp Meeting – Schusterman Library
September 27	Camp Meeting – Schusterman Library

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