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Franz Sigel in the Western Theater of the American Civil War.

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As America headed towards a violent resolution of the slavery issue, Germany fought as independent states against Prussia, the behemoth that towered over middle Europe. Many of the men who participated in the revolutions in Germany, dubbed 48er's, became invaluable supporters of the Union cause in the American Civil War, *from* 1861 to 1865. This work will attempt to analyze Franz Sigel, a German immigrant who commanded troops in the German revolutions, and his command of troops during operations in Missouri and Arkansas during the American Civil War. The battle of Pea Ridge, Arkansas, is generally perceived as the peak military performance in Sigel's career. This work will try to present evidence showing that his conduct at that battle does not deserve praise and admiration. Sigel's contribution to the defeat of rebel forces at Pea Ridge was minimal and stands as an example of the irony and politics involving Sigel's career as a military officer. In a letter to the Secretary of War, Edwin M. Stanton, concerning operations in the final year of the American Civil War, Lieutenant General Ulysses S. Grant wrote, "I regarded the operations of Gn. Sigel as a failure, and *(S/c.?)* Even if the force against him was more than he could control against his retreat upon Harpers Ferry, and loss and *(S/c.?)* destruction of property was not managed with the skill, in my judgement, that ought to be possessed by an officer entrusted with so important a command as that of a Department [Department of West Virginia]. I accordingly asked and obtained his removal."¹ Major John C. Gray, who served under Sigel in 1863, wrote to his mother, "The grand divisions are broken up and the army organized again by corps only. This relieves us from being under the command of General Sigel, which chafed the

¹Ulysses S. Grant, in a letter to Edwin M. Stanton, June 20, 1865, edited by John W. Simon, *The Papers of Ulysses S. Grant*, (Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press, 1988), volume 15: 168-169.

men and officers much in the same way that it does an Irishman to be subject to the orders of a nigger."²

In the eyes of some, Franz Sigel was a leader the Union could have done without. Others feel he could have gone far if it were not for some superiors and peers who resented having a German lead American troops. As it turned out, those who took a dim view of Sigel had just cause in their feelings.

Born in Sinsheim, Germany, in November 1824 to Moritz Sigel and Anna Marie Paulina Lichtenauer Sigel, Franz grew up in a moderately wealthy family. Moritz Sigel was appointed superior judge after holding various lawyer's positions within the Grand Duchy of Baden. Anna Marie accompanied her husband after he resigned his post and joined the forces of the Revolution in 1848. He was captured by the Prussians and sentenced to three years of hard labor. Friends and family helped him escape and gain a passport to the United States, where he lived until 1859. Moritz then returned to Germany after receiving a pardon from the Prussians and died four years later.³

At a very early age, Franz was enrolled in the common school at Sinsheim and later at the classical school near Bruschal. His studies concentrated on Latin, Greek, history, mathematics, and the sciences. He became fluent in French and knowledgeable in English. With high recommendations he was admitted to the Karlsruhe Military Academy. His fascinations were cartography and the conquests of Napoleon. He did well as he continued his studies in math, history, and foreign languages.

²John Chipman Gray in a letter to his mother, February, 1863, *War Letters 1862-1865 of John Chipman Gray and John Codman Ropes*, (Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1927), 84.

³Stephen D. Engle, *Yankee Dutchman: The Life of Franz Sigel*, (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 1993), 2.

Sigel combined a tough, wiry physique with an attitude. He was five feet seven inches tall and weighed one hundred forty five pounds. His hair was coal black. A smooth-shaven face set off his piercing black eyes and his stiff posture.⁴

He excelled at infantry and artillery tactics, graduating from the Academy near the top of his class in 1843. He was given an immediate commission as a lieutenant, Fourth Infantry Regiment, in the Army of the Grand Duchy of Baden. Moritz was proud of his son and his military career, but pressured Franz to attend law school to have a career to fall back on. Law school would have an influence on Franz's subsequent decision to turn revolutionary.

Four years of training ensued after Sigel joined the army. He became proficient in the use of the pistol and at fencing. He was considered the most intelligent young officer in the army at the time, and he thought so himself. He had a charismatic character and much regard for discipline. He was the type of officer who followed the book to a fine point. This trait would prove his undoing on a number of battlefields. His respect for authority was ingrained during his education at the academy. Nevertheless, a belief in individual freedom caused him to resent the ruling aristocratic classes in Baden and Prussia. This bitterness erupted in early 1847, when he killed another officer in a duel. Sigel was defending a junior adjutant and friend. He was wounded himself and later jailed for his actions. Franz was hailed by the revolutionary troops and civilians as a leader of men and defender of freedom.⁵

In the fall of 1847, Sigel resigned his commission and enrolled at the University of Heidelberg, Germany. This school was his father's alma mater. About the time Sigel was reorienting his life, a revolution broke out in France which resulted in the establishment of a new French republic. A yearning for liberal freedoms spilled into

⁴Engle., 3.

⁵Engle., 3.

Germany, Italy, and Austria. Germany in 1847 consisted of separate, independent states of various sizes. Prussia was the strongest and had led the German people in the defeat of Napoleon in 1815. German unity under a constitutional government had been on the minds of the German people since that time. Parliaments were formed from the states and reforms were written into a constitution, which was then offered to King William IV of Prussia. He refused and revolutionary sentiments filled the people of the smaller German states and provinces.⁶

Franz was called to organize a "Freikorps", or independent battalion, at the city of Mannheim. Men of military experience were needed to lead revolutionary forces, which consisted of poorly trained citizen soldiers. Sigel grasped this opportunity to return to a military life and also practice his liberal political ideals. He joined with Friedrich Heckar at Mannheim.⁷ Heckar was an eloquent German orator and prominent lawyer. Most of Sigel's command consisted of lawyers and other professionals, artisans, liberal students, and disgruntled laborers. Some of the men in his command had previous military experience, but most did not. Sigel had approximately four thousand men and eight cannon.⁸ Engagements against superior Hessian and Prussian troops ended in dismal failure. Retreats were common, as batties fought near Lake Constance, Freiburg, the Black Forest, and Wurttemberg proved the revolutionary forces could not stop their opponents. The revolutionary leaders were forced to seek safety in Switzerland for the rest of 1848.

⁶Claude Moore Fuess, *Carl Schurz: Reformer*, (Port Washington, New York: Kennikat Press, Inc., 1963), 17-18.

⁷Engle., 7.

⁸Engle., 9.

Sigel was given a second chance in May 1849. King William IV of Prussia snubbed the German Parliament, a group consisting of "several hundred German professors and lawyers, utterly unversed in politics," as it tried to make some liberal reforms and unite Germany under his auspices.⁹ Several German states mutinied and Karlsruhe became the center of operations in Baden. German nobles fled and anarchy reigned. Sigel was called back by the revolutionaries to restore order. They heralded him as the hero of freedom and a great military leader despite the losses he suffered in the first attempt to overthrow the ruling power. On May 24, 1849, Sigel took charge of all the troops placed in and around the Neckar River, a tributary of the Rhine River as it flowed through Baden.¹⁰

Two days later, against all sound tactical judgment, Sigel moved his inferior forces north to combat numerically superior Hessian and Prussian forces. He was soundly defeated and forced to retreat back into Baden. Colonel Alfred von Beck replaced Sigel, whom the revolutionaries consoled with the office of minister of war..¹¹

Beck was incompetent and did not believe the enemy would attack. The Hessian and Prussian forces surprised him at We:nheim on June 5, 1849. Beck was defeated and was relieved of command. Sigel resumed command of the rebel army until the Polish general, Louis Mieroslawski, exiled in France, could arrive and assume command of all revolutionary forces.¹²

⁹Fuess., 23.

¹⁰Engle., 12.

¹¹Engle., 16.

¹²Engle., 17.

By this time, the revolutionaries mustered under 25,000 men and twenty-four cannon. Prussian forces numbered over 70,000 men, forty nine-squadrons of cavalry, and 126 cannon.

Prussian General Moritz von Hirschfeld's entire corps of 20,000 men advanced on Waghäsel, where Sigel commanded the left wing of the revolutionary forces. Sigel was able to hold his ground and then push back the Prussians through rough terrain. When a cavalry attack bore down on Sigel, he ordered his men into a hollow square. Enemy artillery tore through his formation. He called on Mieroslawski for help. As they were consulting, the entire center of the revolutionary line broke and ran. Sigel assumed command and conducted an efficient retreat from the field of battle.¹³ The retreat continued through June 24, 1849, and halted at Karlsruhe.

By July 7, Mieroslawski had resigned, leaving the revolutionary forces encamped around the fort at Rastatt.¹⁴ Sigel repulsed the enemy several times during the siege, leading his men from the front. Due to overwhelming odds, the main revolutionary force evacuated Rastatt. The small garrison there included Carl Schurz, a famous German with whom Sigel would become involved with in America. The garrison was eventually captured, but Schurz escaped through a sewer system.¹⁵ The revolutionary forces continued retreating southward. Sigel hoped they could reach the Swiss border before being captured.

Once again, Sigel was heard to say, "I [bid] farewell to the Fatherland forever".¹⁶ He ordered his troops to cross the Rhine into Switzerland once more. He survived on a

¹³Engle., 20.

¹⁴Engle., 20.

¹⁵Fuess, 26-27.

¹⁶Engle., 22.

meager subsistence through August and September 1849. He contemplated fighting for the revolution in Austria and Hungary, but was arrested in Hungary when the revolution was crushed.¹⁷ The Prussians were looking for Sigel and almost had him when friends helped him escape back to Switzerland. There he wrote several pamphlets and articles concerning his ideals and the problems of the revolution in Germany. He also wrote some articles on military maneuvers and military tactics.¹⁸ Prussian spies tracked Sigel to his refuge, and he was forced to move to Lugano to avoid being captured.

In Lugano, an Englishwoman who cohabited with a friend taught Sigel conversational English. Sigel continued to publish works on liberal freedoms and military topics. The Swiss government, due to Sigel's inflammatory articles, arrested him and had him deported to France in early April 1851.¹⁹

In France, Sigel was popular in the social elite. There he met Carl Schurz, an ex-revolutionary who would later become prominent in German-American politics, through an ex-Prussian officer named Alexander Schimmelfennig, who commanded an independent freikorps in the revolution. Prussian agents in France demanded the return of Sigel to their custody. The French refused, and sent Sigel under police escort to England on the steamer *Franklin*.²⁰

In England, Sigel had the opportunity to meet and discuss society with Karl Marx and other prominent political leaders. Sigel became involved in the German Agitation Union of London.²¹ He also met and courted Elsie Dulon, the daughter of a prominent

¹⁷Engle., 22.

¹⁸Engle., 28.

¹⁹Engle., 28.

²⁰Engle., 31.

²¹Engle., 32.

German pastor from Bremen, Germany. He spent much of his time with her before he left for America in the spring of 1852.

On May 15, 1852, Franz's brother Emil met him in New York. Sigel supported himself by teaching English, Italian, German, and French. He also offered fencing lessons. When Franz's other brother, Albert, arrived, the two of them opened a small but successful cigar store.

After two years of trans-Atlantic courtship, Elsie Dulon's family moved to New York and she became Elsie Sigel. Franz left the cigar business and helped his father-in-law develop a school for German-Americans called the Feldner School.²² Sigel also became involved with the Turner Society, an organized gymnasium devoted to physical fitness and high society athletics, and perfected his fencing skills. Because Sigel spoke both German and English, he was able to gain significant time speaking with some politically important people. Sigel was given a commission as a major in the New York State Militia. He was instrumental in organizing and training other local German militia Regiments. The Fifty-second New York State Militia Regiment was called the "Sigel's Rifles", a tribute to his celebrity, and earned distinction in the Civil War.

Sigel was offered a job by Dr. Adam Hammer in Saint Louis, Missouri, at the famed Deutsches Institut and was very perplexed as to what to do. He knew the job would promote his career, advance him politically, and give his family a fresh start. His wife had borne him one son, and was pregnant with another. After conferring with Elsie, Franz packed his family belongings and moved to Saint Louis in late August 1857. He continued his writings in German newspapers, advocating his anti slavery stance and other political views.

By early 1860, Sigel had distinguished himself in St. Louis. He was a father of two sons, he played an active part in the Turner Society and he was the district

²²Engle., 37.

superintendent of the Saint Louis school system.²³ He vigorously campaigned in the election of 1860 on behalf of the Republican Party, gaining political clout that some would later use to gain his status in the Union Army. He was an asset in recruiting Germans to the Republican cause. In 1860, Missouri contained 1,063,509 white people. There were 88,487 Germans. Saint Louis had a population of 157,476 white people. Germans numbered 50,510. Therefore, the potential number of German voters was fairly significant.²⁴

Seizing the opportunity to continue his own private campaign against slavery, Sigel wrote, "Free unhampered states in the south and free communications through the whole south-freedom of speech and press, no restriction to the right to meet and arm, sacredness of the person in political and religious convictions, free untrammelled ballot; these are the rights which the real republic and national government must maintain even with force of arms if necessary if the North as well as in the South, because they are the essential attributes of a republican constitution, and because they are clearly expressed in the Constitution of the United States".²⁵

Tension and political unrest encompassed Missouri at this time. The seven Southern states seceded soon after Abraham Lincoln was elected President in November 1860 and were preparing for defense against a Northern invasion. Missouri was a slave state and a border state. Claiborne Jackson, the governor of Missouri, and many of the leading politicians were sympathetic to the newborn Confederacy. They threatened to

²³Engle., 43.

²⁴Walter Harrington Kyle, *Missouri: Union or Secession*, (George Peabody College for Teachers, 1931). Kyle used the *Census Report: Population, 1860*, 28-29, for his number; Joseph C. G. Kennedy, *Population of the United States in 1860; Compiled from the Original Returns of The Eighth Census* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1864), State of Missouri.

²⁵Engle., 45.

enter the war on the rebel's side if the North invaded any seceded states. The rebel headquarters was in Saint Louis, and flew the rebel flag publicly.²⁶ Militiamen supportive of the Confederacy congregated at Lindell Grove in the suburbs of Saint Louis. They were under the command of Brigadier-General D.M. Frost. The camp was named Camp Jackson. Governor Jackson overhauled the militia rules to make it appear that these men were only training and that the gathering was legal. Meanwhile, the governor of Louisiana sent arms from his state arsenal to the camp.²⁷

Captain Nathaniel Lyon commanded the federal regulars at the Saint Louis arsenal. He had secretly recruited "Home Guards" and trained them for the Union cause. These forces consisted mainly of German immigrants.²⁸

Frank Blair, a prominent German American political leader whose brother was a cabinet member for Abraham Lincoln, gained a political appointment for Sigel to the rank of Colonel. Sigel took charge of the Third Missouri Volunteer Regiment. Captain Lyon, with approximately 7,000 men, marched on General Frost and his followers at Camp Jackson in May, 1861. Frost surrendered, as he had only 635 men, and they were taken prisoners. According to William T. Sherman, a spectator at this event, a drunk had fired a pistol at the Union troops. The "damned Dutch" fired into the crowd and killed about thirty civilian men, women, and children. Among the Federal wounded was Sigel. His horse had fallen on his leg when the firing began.²⁹

²⁶William T. Sherman, *Memoirs of General W.T. Sherman* (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1875), Volume I: 169

²⁷Thomas W. Knox, *Camp-Fire and Cotton-Field: Southern Adventure in Time of War* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1969), reprint of original published in 1865, 29; Robert Underwood Johnson and Clarence Clough Buel, eds., *Battles and Leaders of the Civil War*, 2 volumes (New York: Castle, 1887-1888), volume I:264.

²⁸Johnson and Buel., volume I: 264; Sherman., 169.

²⁹Sherman., 174; Johnson and Buel., volume I: 265; Engle., 59.

This violence forced the citizens of Missouri to take sides. The General Assembly gave virtual dictatorial rights to the governor and authorized him to appoint a major-general to command all the forces in the field. Governor Jackson named Sterling Price, a former governor, Mexican War hero, and a member of the State Convention, to the position. Union Brigadier General William S. Harney, commander of the Military Department of the West, tried to mediate a truce between Price and Union forces. Harney was relieved for this and Lyon promoted to brigadier general and put in charge of all Federal troops in Missouri by the beginning of June³⁰

Lyon and a force of approximately 2,000 men went to Jefferson City, the capital of the secessionist movement and the state, in mid-June 1861. He captured the town and left a sizable garrison. He pushed on to defeat a Confederate militia group that gathered around Boonville on the 17th.³¹ Jackson was sent fleeing south again. Price headed for Lexington, where a sizable force had gathered. He immediately sent Brigadier-General James S. Rains to unite with Jackson.

Lyon ordered Franz Sigel to Southwest Missouri to intercept the joining of these two forces. He made a hasty march to Springfield and then Neosho, Missouri. He found that the forces had already formed and were located in Lamar, Missouri. Sigel made a march to Carthage, which lay south of Lamar. The Confederate force in Lamar numbered 6,000 men, 4,000 of them poorly armed and equipped. They attacked Sigel's force of 1,100 well equipped men and two batteries of artillery. Sigel repulsed several attacks but eventually retreated from the battlefield. Casualties were insignificant and

³⁰Johnson and Buel., volume I: 266.; Knox., 39.; James M. McPherson, ed., *Battle Chronicles of the Civil War 1861* (New York: MacMillan Publishing Company, 1989), 105.

³¹Johnson and Buel., volume I: 267; Knox., 52.

Sigel made haste for Springfield. Rains, Price, and Jackson rendezvoused with Brigadier-General Ben McCulloch, who commanded a Confederate army from Arkansas a few days later.

Upon hearing of Sigel's defeat, Lyon marched to Springfield and met his German subordinate. Lyon feared the rebels would assault there first and threaten Saint Louis.³² The two armies prepared themselves for the action that would come near Springfield. Lyon asked for reinforcements from Major-General John C. Fremont, newly appointed Commander of the Department of the West, who refused. Generals McCulloch and Price camped their forces on Wilson's Creek, a few miles south of Springfield.

General Lyon was intent on attacking the large Confederate force before they could take an offensive posture. Lyon and his staff officers held a meeting in which Lyon advised them he wanted to attack Price and McCulloch on the 10th of August. Most accounts report that Sigel suggested a flanking column under his command move around the Confederate right and rear. Lyon and the other staff officers disagreed. Union estimates placed the Confederate force at around 22,000 men.³³ In reality, they had only 10,000 men. Lyon had around 5,300 effective combat troops. The next day, however, Sigel reportedly went to Lyon's tent and convinced him of the flanking plan. Sigel however, in an article he wrote after the war, said that Lyon sent for him and told him of the flanking plan. Sigel never mentions suggesting the plan himself, which would have absolved Sigel for what would happen.³⁴

³²J.M. Schofield, in a letter dated February 13, 1862 to Major-General Halleck, Robert N. Scott, ed., *The War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Records of the Union and Confederate Armies* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1883), Series I, Volume III: 94. All other references to this work will be cited as *O.R.* for *Official Records*; Johnson and Buel., volume I: 268.

³³*O.R.*, series I, volume III: 94.

³⁴Johnson and Buel., volume I:304.

Sigel commanded the Second Brigade of Missouri Volunteers, made up of the 3rd and 5th Missouri Infantry Regiments, two companies of cavalry, and two batteries of six cannon.³⁵ They marched out of camp at 6:30 p.m. They marched several miles to a position southeast of the Confederate camp. They captured several men along the way and placed guards at the doors of houses to ensure secrecy. At 5:30 a.m., Sigel's artillery opened fire on the unsuspecting Confederate camp. Sigel advanced his dragoons and infantry across the creek. General Lyon had opened the battle from the north and Sigel did not waste time in crossing. Sigel marched northwest towards Lyon's position, engaging and routing a strong Confederate cavalry force. Sigel wrote, "When we had taken our position on the plateau near Sharp's, a cannonade was opened by me against a part of the enemy's troops, evidently forming the left of their line, confronting Lyon, as we could observe from the struggle going on in that direction. The firing lasted about 30 minutes."³⁶ Sharp's house was near the junction to the road Sigel had taken and the Fayetteville Road. This suggests that he observed the fighting on Bloody Hill.

Sigel reported that a lull in the fighting soon occurred at the same time that several unarmed Confederates were running south on the Fayetteville Road and were captured. According to Sigel, the 5th Missouri's surgeon informed him that Lyon's troops were coming and to hold his fire. Sigel halted his fire and sent a corporal to challenge the gray clad force arriving to his front. The corporal was shot dead after challenging the Confederates. Confederate artillery had formed to Sigel's right flank and Sigel responded to this, sending a battery of four artillery pieces to counter them. Sigel mistook the Confederates for the 1st Iowa Infantry, a Union force that Sigel was quick to report camped near his force at Springfield before the battle, thus hoping to establish his innocence of incompetence. In reality, the unit in question was the 3rd Louisiana under

³⁵*O.R.*, series I, volume III: 86.

³⁶Johnson and Buel., volume I: 305.

command of General Ben McCulloch. The Confederates opened canister and musket at point-blank range. The German troops panicked and believed they were being fired upon by Lyon's troops. Most of the men retreated in disorder. McCulloch, in his report, stated that Sigel's men had already been thrown into a state of confusion from the artillery fire they were taking and McCulloch's force simply took advantage of the situation.³⁷ Sigel wrote that he could observe the fighting on Bloody Hill. If he could have, then how could he have mistaken a Confederate unit for a Federal unit? Sigel was probably trying to exaggerate his advance at the battle.

Sigel claimed to have rallied some of the men into four companies. The Union cavalry, along with Sigel's infantry column, retreated down the Fayetteville road until they reached a northeast road that led to Springfield.³⁸ Captain Eugene A. Carr commanded the cavalry force accompanying Sigel. In Sigel's article, he claimed that Carr left him behind with the infantry after crossing the White River. Carr's report of the battle supported Sigel's accusations. "It is a subject of regret with me to have left him [Sigel] behind," Carr wrote, "but I supposed all the time that he was close behind me till I got to the creek, and it would have done no good for my company to have been cut to pieces also."³⁹ Just then, Confederate cavalry ambushed Sigel's infantry column. They killed, captured, or wounded almost all of the 250 men. Sigel was wearing a blue blanket over his uniform and a yellow slouch hat, giving him the appearance of a Texas Ranger. Confederate troops passed by Sigel several times and never recognized him. Sigel was

³⁷*O.R.*, series I, volume III: 104.

³⁸Johnson and Buel., volume I: 305.

³⁹*O.R.*, series I, volume III: 90.

able to make his way to Springfield, pursued a little while by Confederate forces after they recognized him as Union.⁴⁰

Meanwhile, on Bloody Hill, General Lyon had been killed and Major Samuel D. Sturgis led the surviving Union troops in an orderly retreat.⁴¹ Sigel arrived at Springfield at 4:30 p.m. Sturgis arrived at 5:00 p.m. This coincidence gave the appearance that Sigel left his troops behind during the battle. Sigel's report in the *Official Records* said nothing about the incident at the White River or the retreat to Springfield. He skipped from the fire from the 3rd Louisiana to his taking command of the reunited Union army.⁴² Sigel's report showed his unwillingness to take responsibility for his actions at the battle of Wilson's Creek. He gave five reasons for the failure of the flanking column in detailed order. Most of them harped on the untrained condition of his men, who were raw recruits. He also said that there were no officers at all in some companies. The three month enlistments had run out for hundreds of men on August 9th, one day before the battle occurred. Sigel claimed credit for keeping the Germans in the ranks.⁴³ Casualties for both sides were around 1,200 each.

Sigel took temporary command of the troops at Springfield and started a retreat from there to Rolla, Missouri. Reports from other officers at the battle berate and talk ill of Sigel. In a report to Major-General Henry W. Halleck, commander of the Department of the Missouri, the late General Lyon's principal staff officer, Brigadier-General J.M. Schofield, wrote, "He had studied with great care the science of strategy, and seems thoroughly conversant with the campaigns of all the great captains, so far as covers their

⁴⁰Johnson and Buel., volume I: 305.

⁴¹McPherson., 111.

⁴²*O.R.*, series I, volume III: 88.

⁴³*O.R.*, series I, volume III: 88.

main strategic features, and also seems familiar with the duties of the staff, but in tactics, great and small logistics, and discipline he is greatly deficient . . . I would do less than my duty did I not enter my protest against the appointment to a high command in the Army of a man who, whatever may be his merits, I *know* cannot have the confidence of the troops he is to command".⁴⁴

Confrontations began when Halleck ordered Sigel on December 24th, 1861, to assume command of all the troops around Rolla, Missouri.⁴⁵ On the 25th of December, Halleck placed Brigadier-General Samuel R. Curtis in command of a new Military District of Southwest Missouri, which included Sigel's new command.⁴⁶ This threw the German into an uproar and he considered Halleck a "trickster". Out of pride, Sigel signed his resignation by the end of the month. Halleck knew that Sigel was important in keeping the Germans in the ranks, but he did not have confidence in the German's military abilities. Sigel's conflict went all the way to President Abraham Lincoln, who penned a letter that suggested Sigel's promotion to major-general take place in March 1862. Sigel withdrew his resignation and Curtis placed him second in command in January 1862.⁴⁷

Curtis wanted to push General Price out of Missouri. Price had succeeded in gaining Springfield and most of Southwest Missouri during early winter. His troops were in winter quarters and Curtis wanted to take advantage of the situation. General McCulloch had marched south to Arkansas for winter quarters.

⁴⁴O.R., series I, volume III: 95.

⁴⁵O.R., series I, volume VIII: 460.

⁴⁶William L. Shea and Earl J. Hess, *Pea Ridge: Civil War Campaign in the West* (Chapel Hill and London: The University of North Carolina Press, 1992), 5.

⁴⁷O.R., series I, volume VIII: 471.

Curtis organized his army into four divisions. Colonel Peter J. Osterhaus commanded First Division. Brigadier-General Alexander Asboth commanded Second Division. Brigadier-General Franz Sigel was in overall command of these two divisions. Colonel Jefferson C. Davis commanded Third Division. Since the Wilson's Creek battle, Captain Eugene A. Carr had been promoted to Colonel and commanded Fourth Division. Curtis held a reserve under his direct control.⁴⁸ His command consisted of around 12,100 troops. Curtis called it the Army of the Southwest. Price had approximately 8,000 troops.⁴⁹

As Curtis marched for Springfield, Price began to retreat south for assistance from McCulloch. Sigel suggested a plan to envelope Price at McDowell, a small junction south of McCullah's Spring. Sigel intended on taking his command west on small country roads and cut off Price.⁵⁰ Curtis was to pursue Price along the Telegraph Road, but not too heavily, giving Sigel time to get around him. Unfortunately, Price was pushed into traveling faster when a Union force bombarded the tired Confederates near McCullah's Spring. Curtis sent word to Sigel to increase his pace, but Sigel did not. He arrived at McDowell one day after Price and Curtis passed through. Blame should be cast upon both commanders. Sigel once again showed his textbook tactics in trying to cut off the enemy, but could not adapt to the winter roads and terrible conditions, getting frostbitten himself, and failed to complete the mission. Had Curtis been more in control of his forces and not allowed the engagement near McCullah's Spring to happen, Sigel may have closed the trap on Price. On the other hand, Price could have attacked Sigel

⁴⁸Johnson and Buel., volume I: 337.

⁴⁹Shea and Hess., 14; Johnson and Buels., volume I: 316.

⁵⁰Shea and Hess, 29.

and Curtis piecemeal, destroying each army separately, as they were several miles apart from supporting one another. Either way, Sigel's flanking column failed.

Price escaped and continued to retreat south. His soldiers were footsore, extremely cold, and their morale was extremely low. They passed through Cross Timber Hollow, fighting a rear guard action with ~~F~~ederal cavalry. After passing the Arkansas border, a small skirmish occurred at Little Sugar Creek between the Confederate rear guard and federal cavalry. The main Confederate column proceeded southward.

As Sigel's half of the army caught up, Curtis ordered Asboth to reconnoiter Bentonville. Asboth arrived at noon on February 18, 1862. Asboth reported, "Bentonville was entirely deserted upon our taking possession of it. In a short time, however, we collected from the bushes in its vicinity about 60 men, 32 of whom, being rebel soldiers or taken with arms, I brought in as prisoners."⁵¹ This report was sent to Sigel, while another, brief report went to Curtis. It is interesting that Curtis gave Asboth the order himself, bypassing Sigel altogether, yet Asboth wrote the main report to Sigel. Curtis showed considerable lack of faith in Sigel throughout the campaign. Asboth continued to use the proper chain of command.

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Curtis ordered Sigel to take a position at McKissick's Farm, a few miles south of Bentonville. Curtis established his headquarters with Colonels Carr and Davis at Cross Hollow, twelve miles south-west of Bentonville. Then Curtis bypassed Sigel once more and ordered Asboth, on February 22, to reconnoiter Fayetteville with 1,200 cavalry and a light battery, "You are to assume all command of the cavalry and artillery force which has been or may be ordered to report to you at Mud Town to-morrow morning . . . proceed as far as Fayettevill and take that place; but you will avoid any serious engagement with the enemy."⁵² On the same day that Curtis directed Asboth into

⁵¹O.R., series I, volume VIII: 63.

⁵²O.R., series I, volume VIII: 563.

Fayetteville, Halleck dispatched Curtis, "You will not advance any troops farther south than Fayetteville."⁵³

On March 1, Davis withdrew to the heights north of Little Sugar Creek. Things remained relatively quiet for a week. On March 2, Sigel marched First and Second Division four miles south of Bentonville. Sigel dispatched the 2nd Missouri Infantry and a detachment of cavalry under Colonel Frederick Schaefer to Smith's Mills seven miles east of McKissick's Farm.⁵⁴

The Confederate War Department created the Trans-Mississippi District of Department Number 2 and ordered Major-General Earl Van Dorn, a West Point graduate, to take command on January 10, 1862. This District encompassed Louisiana north of the Red River, the Indian Territory west of Arkansas, Arkansas, and most of Missouri. Van Dorn arrived in Little Rock on January 28, 1862. His main generals and troop concentrations were General Price with around 7,000 men and General McCulloch with around 8,700 men. Price and McCulloch quibbled constantly about their rank and who was to command who. Van Dorn solved this problem, but could not solve the source as both generals continued to argue throughout the campaign.⁵⁵

Van Dorn planned to cut off Sigel and destroy him first, then turn and attack Curtis at Little Sugar Creek. Van Dorn ordered the troops to travel light, taking only a few days rations and a blanket. He expected the operation to come to a quick conclusion.

⁵³O.R., series I, volume VIII: 564.

⁵⁴Johnson and Buel., volume I: 317.

⁵⁵Robert G. Hartje, *Van Dorn: The Life and Times of a Confederate General* (Vanderbilt University Press, 1967), 100-111.

He proceeded north towards Bentonville. He ordered his army north on the Bentonville Road and Telegraph Road on March 5, 1862.⁵⁶

Curtis expressed his concerns of Confederate troop movements on March 3. He dispatched Sigel, "I shall remain here at Cross Hollow till you move around to Sugar Creek, when we must intrench ourselves . . . I desire our camp to be arranged in view of some defenses." Curtis ordered Sigel on March 5, "Make a night march, if need be, so as to join me at Sugar Creek early to-morrow. The enemy claims to have 20,000 [men], with seventy pieces of artillery."⁵⁷

On March 6, at 2:00 a.m., Asboth led the retreating column followed by the wagon train and Osterhaus' Division. They had completely passed through Bentonville by 8:00 a.m. Sigel stayed behind with a rear guard of about 600 men and six cannon. As he later explained in his report, "With the intention not to be too close to the train . . . when ten minutes after 10 it was reported to me that large masses of troops, consisting of infantry and cavalry, were moving from all sides towards our front and both flanks."⁵⁸ Sigel wrote in an article after the war that he stayed behind, "For the purpose of defending the main column on its retreat, and with the intention of finding out whether the enemy was approaching in strong force, and whether he was advancing from Smith's Mills on the road to Bentonville, or by Osage Springs, or on both roads at the same time, I remained at Bentonville with about 600 men, and a battery of 6 pieces, after all the troops had left the place."⁵⁹ Since when did it become the place of a commander of two divisions, or that of any army, to stay behind in such a situation? He had plenty of

⁵⁶Hartje., 127.

⁵⁷O.R., series I, volume VIII: 592.

⁵⁸O.R., series I, volume VIII: 210.

⁵⁹Johnson and Buel., volume I: 320.

Good point

Countersink - As both he was serving in the self-appointed role as Commander of the strategic reserve

reliable subordinates to accomplish that. It is highly unlikely that Sigel remained behind for worry of being too close to the baggage train, as it was in between Osterhaus and Asboth in the main column. He wanted to battle with a small force and show his ability to fight and lead a separate command. This would show Curtis and Halleck that they did not have to bypass him when issuing orders. (A. A. Schaefer.)

The 2nd Missouri Infantry had passed through the town earlier while Sigel was having breakfast at a local hotel. He stated that he had given orders for that unit to halt, to double the size of his force, but Colonel Schaefer misunderstood the orders and followed the retreating column to Little Sugar Creek.⁶⁰

The next few hours were the finest in Sigel's military career. The Confederates were too late to stop the 1st and 2nd Divisions from joining Curtis, but they did not know it was only the rear guard advancing out of Bentonville. A Confederate cavalry brigade under Brigadier-General James McIntosh circled west of Bentonville and then traveled east along the Little Sugar Creek floor, hoping to cut off Sigel's attempted retreat.

Sigel noticed the large force marching across Osage Prairie and held back with a few guns and cavalry for a delaying action, deploying his little force atop a knoll just east of town. He fired a few shots and deterred the advancing enemy infantry. His cavalry provided a harassing force to give the major element of his rear guard some time. While he was providing this time, members of the Confederate force blocking the road had found an overturned Union supply wagon and were having their way with it. The advanced units of Sigel's force surprised them and scattered the mostly cavalry force southward, back to their protective mass of force. As Sigel's men trotted for safety, they came across a gorge in the valley floor. The Confederates had taken the heights along the side and Sigel had no choice but to send an infantry element to counter them. The brave element stirred up the Confederates and caused a distraction, long enough for

⁶⁰Johnson and Buel., volume I: 320; Engle., 108.

Sigel's artillery to race across the gorge and unlimber on the even floor opposite the Confederates. After receiving a few rounds, the Confederates disengaged.⁶¹ Sigel's force regrouped at the Y-junction along the valley floor of Little Sugar Creek. As they did so, rear scouts reported the Confederate cavalry force under McIntosh, sent to head them off, was close behind. Sigel sent his cavalry as bait to the junction. When the rebels saw them, they raced up the floor into a narrow defile, where Sigel had deftly placed his artillery in some wooded bushes and his infantry along the bluffs on either side.⁶² Asboth reinforced Sigel, who turned command over to Osterhaus. Sigel praised the valor with which his troops fought, "As a matter of justice I feel it my duty to declare that according to my humble opinion never troops have shown themselves worthier to defend a great cause than on this day of the 6th of March".⁶³

General Van Dorn planned to flank Curtis behind Little Sugar Creek using the Bentonville Detour. Curtis was dug in overlooking the Little Sugar Creek hollow facing South. Van Dorn, even though his men were exhausted, cold, and without food, decided to double envelope Curtis by taking the Bentonville Detour. McCulloch would proceed to just north of Oberson's Field along Ford Road. Price and Van Dorn would continue around Curtis' right flank and end up north of Curtis near Elk Horn Tavern. Thus, Curtis would have two separate armies to his rear and on his flank. *How?*

Curtis became aware of Van Dorn's plan and had his army execute an about face, leaving Asboth and parts of 1st and 2nd Division in the entrenchment at Sugar Creek. Sigel was to go to Lee Town and provide a reserve force. Osterhaus was to go to

⁶¹Shea and Hess, 76.

⁶²Shea and Hess, 77.

⁶³O.R., series I, volume VIII: 210-211.

Oberson's Field, thus forming the Union left flank. Carr was to proceed to Elk Horn Tavern and provide a defensive position to keep the Confederate forces from combining.

As McCulloch turned east on Ford Road, he decided to halt his army and deploy his infantry against the Federal position at Oberson's Field. Colonel Louis Hebert pushed through Morgan's Woods, flanking Osterhaus' right. Davis counterattacked Hebert with help from Colonel Thomas Pattison's First Brigade, Third Division. Van Dorn and Price pushed Carr from the heights at Elkhorn Tavern.

Sigel played a very minute role in the day's battle. He ordered the 3rd Iowa Cavalry, fleeing from Osterhaus' position, to ride back to the scene of battle.⁶⁴ He also maneuvered a small battery around the battlefield, or so he claimed in his report to Curtis following the battle, and directed some fire missions. Later in the afternoon, Curtis ordered Sigel to reinforce Davis and Carr. Sigel ordered Asboth to assist Colonel Carr with elements of Colonel Schaefer's 2nd Missouri and four pieces of artillery from the Second Ohio Battery. He also ordered an element to demonstrate against the rear of the enemy along the Sugar Creek road towards Bentonville.⁶⁵

Sigel took some reinforcements to Osterhaus and Davis near Oberson's Field. He extended his line further to the Northwest and secured positions in Cox's Field, most prominently Welfley's knoll. There he set up his forces for the next day's battle. Asboth made up his extreme left, crossing Ford Road towards Big Mountain. Osterhaus was the center, extending from Ford Road to Telegraph Road. Davis and then Carr made up the Federal right across Ruddick's field. More importantly was the fact that Osterhaus had mentioned that Welfley's knoll would be the key factor in gaining artillery superiority over the twelve Confederate guns at Elkhorn Tavern. Sigel wanted to position his troops

⁶⁴*O.R.*, series I, volume VIII: 211.

⁶⁵*O.R.*, series I, volume VIII: 212.

south of the field for an easy escape route if retreat became necessary. Because he was not present for the fighting on the 7th, he did not realize the situation completely. He reported, "It was evident that his [Van Dorn's] main forces were stationed near and at Elkhorn Tavern, and that he would make all efforts to break through our lines on the Fayetteville road, and thereby complete his apparent victory."⁶⁶

Where was Sigel during the day's fighting? He wandered around aimlessly trying to find something to do. Curtis rendered him useless, because he dealt directly with the four division commanders and bypassed Sigel altogether. Curtis let Sigel retake command of the left end of the Union line. On the morning of March 8, Sigel accomplished his task of deploying his men in around thirty minutes, incredibly fast for Civil War standards.

*scattering
cricket on!*

Fighting began around seven o'clock. Sigel had something that no other commander of this large a force could hope for, complete view of almost all of his forces on the field of battle. It is not surprising that Sigel dominated the Confederate right. The only real opposition he had was Colonel Thomas H. Rosser and his infantry battalion on the west end of Big Mountain. Osterhaus and Asboth had complete control over their own elements. Sigel merely had a textbook scenario that he could not lose. He had dreamed of this type of battle his whole life. Had there been more Confederates on his front, he may have retreated at first sign of strong resistance. Colonel Osterhaus reported that Sigel barely had anything to do with terrain selection, "The ground selected for this last attack by Lieutenant Asmussen, of General Sigel's staff, and myself was a field forward of and connecting with the one in which we had taken position during the forepart of the night. General Sigel then arrived and took command in person, while I was engaged in bringing out the regiments and batteries of my division."⁶⁷ Curtis

⁶⁶O.R., series I, volume VIII: 213.

⁶⁷O.R., series I, volume VIII: 219.

described Sigel's actions as distinguished, but only mentioned them once in his report, whereas he mentioned Osterhaus, Carr, Asboth, and several other brigade and battalion level officers several times. It may be that Curtis was surprised by Sigel's behavior, but highly unlikely as he skipped over his rank and command and dealt with all four division commanders directly.

Franz Sigel had the opportunity to excel in combat two times during the month of March. He behaved gallantly at the rear guard action in Bentonville, securing the rear and bringing the men to Curtis without one single casualty. His tactics were sound and reasonable and his men carried out his orders without hesitation, something absolutely necessary in precarious situations. He also did very well during the second day of battle. He could maneuver his forces without the "fog of war". He was in the perfect scenario with efficient subordinates. Rarely could there be anyone who could turn that into a failure and defeat. Sigel was a well educated and well versed man, but he lacked the common sense and sometimes humility needed to win in battle. Franz Sigel was not a great general and should not get the bulk of credit for the success at the battle of Pea Ridge, Arkansas. Curtis deserved the credit for the victory. He successfully marched an army, amidst a harsh winter, and confronted a larger Confederate force. He adequately filtered reports about the enemy and analyzed their movements. Curtis followed the guidelines Halleck set for him and maintained troop loyalty among the Germans. He directly controlled four divisions and maintained control of the entire army throughout the battle. Colonels Davis and Osterhaus, deserving credit, successfully countered the Confederate attack at Leesville (Leetown) and Morgan's Woods, the defining moment in the battle of Pea Ridge.

Many Germans saw Pea Ridge as the true colors of Sigel. One account of a soldier who served under Sigel during the rear guard action at Bentonville and at Pea Ridge wrote to his father, "His soldiers will follow him even if he goes with one against a dozen. At least we did it and would do it again if we had the good fortune of being led

by him. It never occurred to any of us to be afraid for himself because of this or that. He did not teach us to know fear, only to obey him, obey him blindly and to win. Long live Sigel! And woe to him who hesitates to follow him or who places any obstacle in his modest, laboriously earned path to glory and the eternal memory of his Fatherland and the honor of its citizens!"⁶⁸ Others will argue that Sigel was loved because of his unswerving devotion to his political ideals, not his military prowess. He was a man of action who defended his ideals to the point of radicalism. His military reputation rested on his education, not his achievements in the field.

Nevertheless, the combat he experienced in Germany influenced his behavior during command of Union forces in the American Civil War. Retreat had become a part of his military tactics and he became very good at it. Yet, Sigel never seemed to master offensive tactics. Despite all his education in military theory, Sigel could not always apply theory on the field of battle.

Franz Sigel was an example of how politics can interfere in military matters. He was a well educated man with some military experience when the war broke out. He gained a political appointment to Colonel. He attempted the flanking maneuver at Wilson's Creek and failed to follow through. General Halleck placed him in charge of the main force in Missouri, to appease the German populace, but then created a new military district with an American commander that encompassed Sigel's command. Political unrest among the German community followed Sigel's resignation all the way to the White House until he was promised a promotion and withdrew his resignation. Curtis placed Sigel second in command, but Sigel commanded mostly German troops. Sigel failed to trap Price at McDowell on his retreat to Arkansas. Curtis started to bypass Sigel when he issued orders before the Pea Ridge battle. Sigel had no pertinent role in the

⁶⁸Henry Kircher in a letter to his father, August 2, 1862, *The Civil War Letters of Henry A. Kircher* (Kent State University Press, 1983) 9.

first day of the battle of Pea Ridge. Osterhaus and Davis fought the battle of Leetown with little or no help from him. On the second day, Sigel regained control of his forces, but the bulk of the work was done by his subordinates. The Confederate forces were not in a good position to counter a Federal advance. Therefore, Sigel was in a prime position to gain credit for work done by Curtis and his subordinates.

Franz Sigel was promoted to major-general and assigned as corps commander in the Eastern Theater. He lost much distinction at the battle of New Market. He also commanded the Department of West Virginia where he was relieved of command and mustered out of service. Franz Sigel returned to New York before he died on August 22, 1902. At his request, an American flag was draped over his coffin.⁶⁹

Grade: A (95%)

Outstanding critical analysis in this paper. You have a very effective writing style.

My only constructive criticism is that at times this lengthy paper tended to be too descriptive vice analytical. However, it clearly was written IAW the finest academic standards.

It has been my pleasure to serve with you Ryan. You have unlimited potential. Our nation needs dedicated professionals like you to lead FORCE XXI.

HUAAAAH!

Lt Col J. D. Nichols

12 May 97

⁶⁹Engle., 228.

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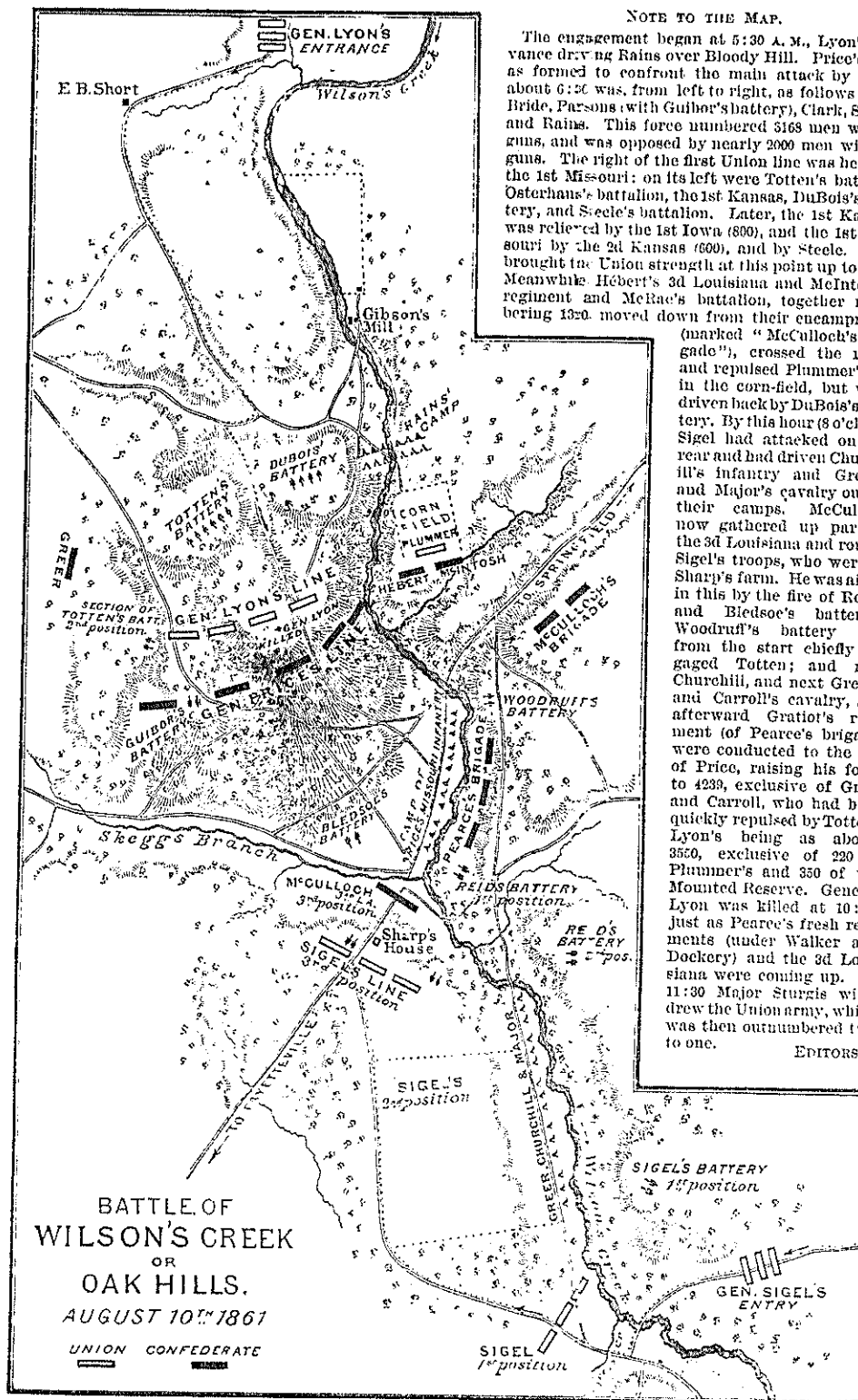
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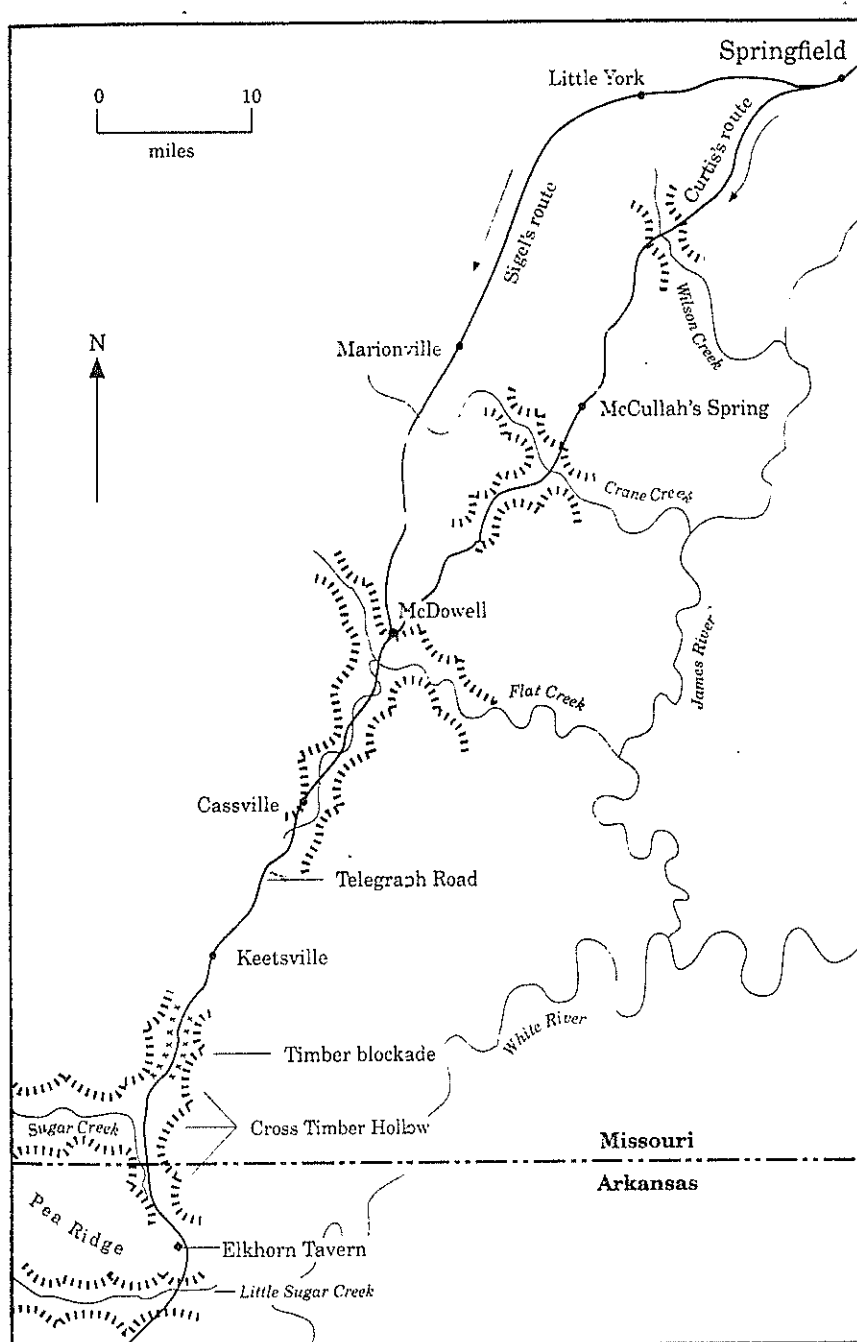
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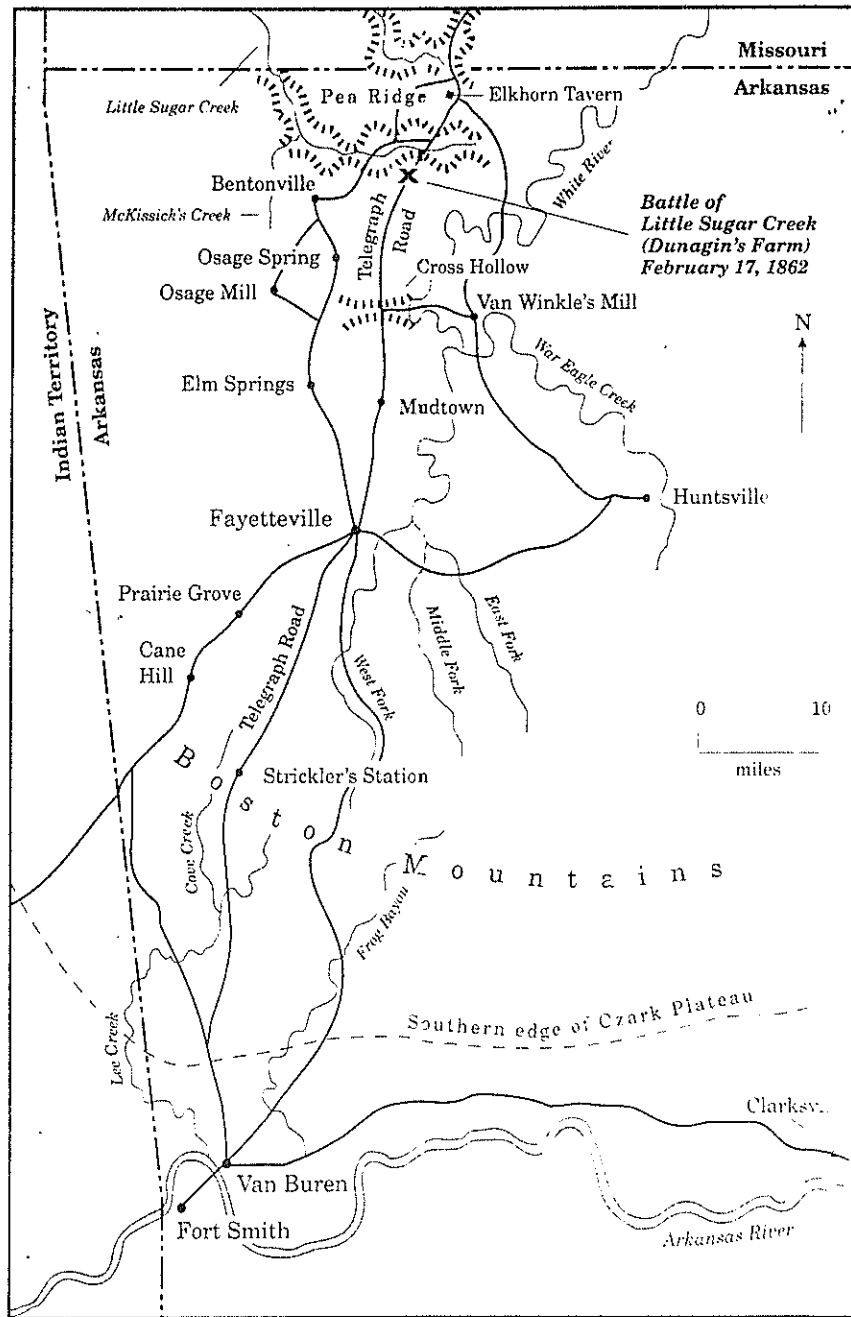
Battle of Wilson's Creek

Johnson and Buel., 290.



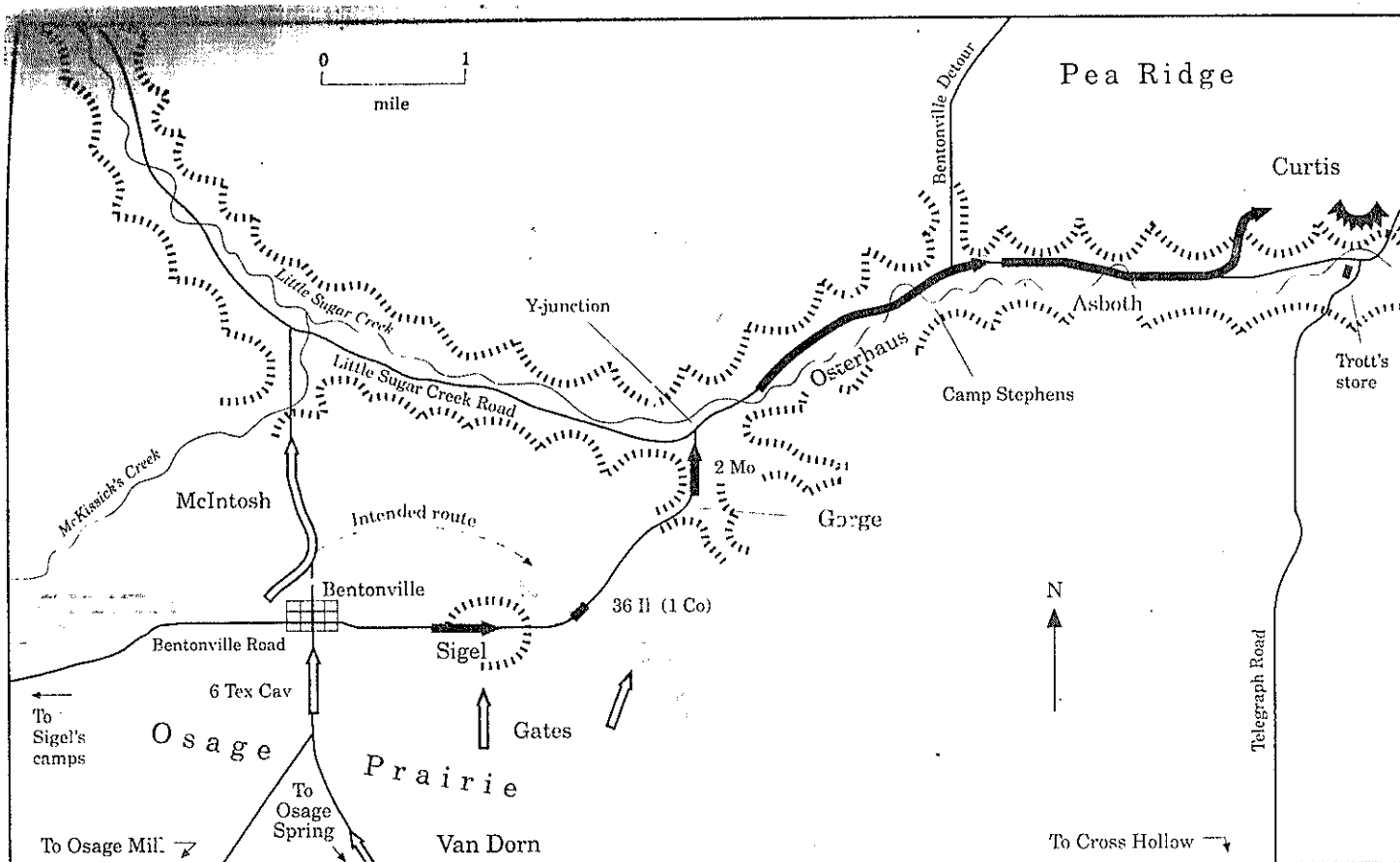
Springfield to Little Sugar Creek

Hess and Shea., 31.



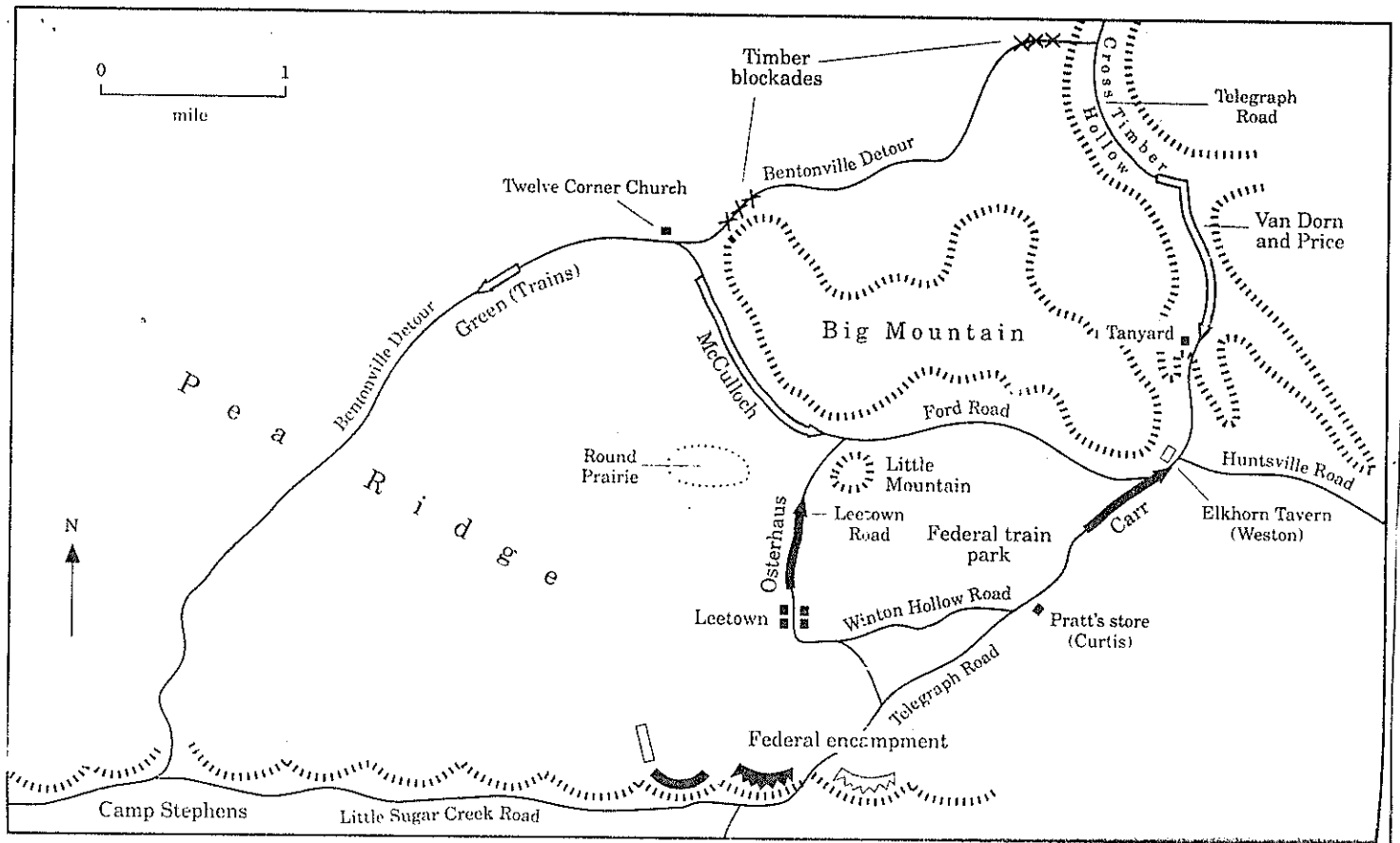
Northwest Arkansas

Hess and Shea., 40.



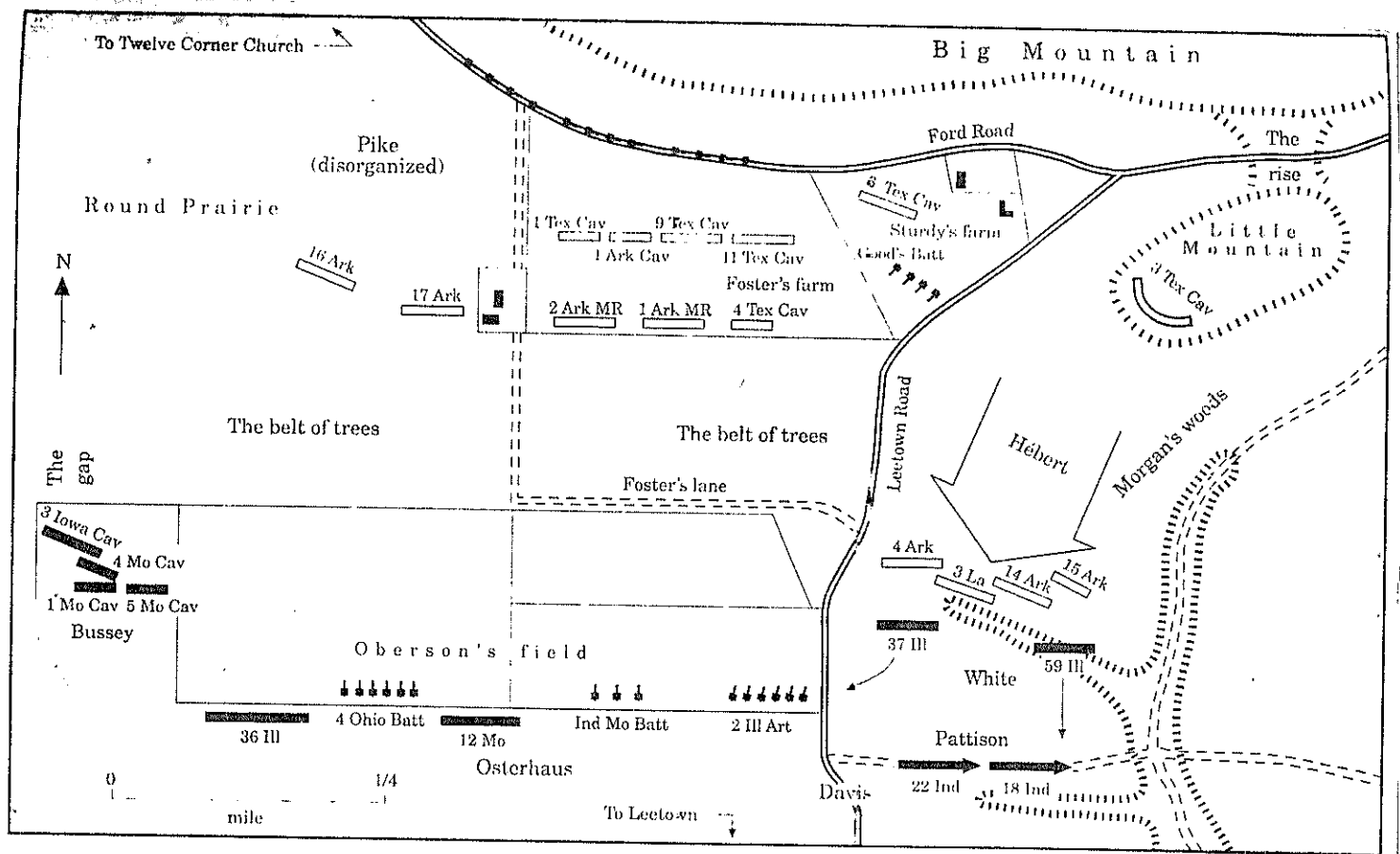
McIntosh's attempt to head off Sigel

Hess and Shea., 73.



Confederate and Union movements, March 7

Johnson and Buel., 92.



Leetown, Hebert attacks Morgan's Woods

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