

# The Battle of Pea Ridge, 1862



The **Battle of Pea Ridge** (also known as **Elkhorn Tavern**) was a land battle of the American Civil War, fought on March 6–8, 1862, at Pea Ridge in northwest Arkansas, near Garfield. Union forces led by Brig. Gen. Samuel R. Curtis moved south from central Missouri, driving Confederate forces into northwestern Arkansas. Maj. Gen. Earl Van Dorn reorganized the Confederate army and launched a counter-offensive, hoping that a victory would enable the Confederates to recapture northern Arkansas and Missouri. In a two-day battle, Curtis held off the Confederate attack on the first day and drove Van Dorn's force off the field on the second day. The outcome of the battle essentially cemented Union control of Missouri and northern Arkansas. The battle was one of the few during the war in which a Confederate army outnumbered its Union opponent.

Federal forces reported 203 killed, 980 wounded and 201 missing for a total of 1,384 casualties. Of these, Carr's 4th Division lost 682, almost all in its action on the first day, and Davis' 3rd Division lost 344. Both Asboth and Carr were wounded but remained in command of their divisions. Van Dorn reported his losses as 800 killed and wounded, with between 200 and 300 prisoners, but these are probably too low. A more recent estimate is that the Confederates suffered approximately 2,000 casualties in the Battle of Pea Ridge. These losses included a large proportion of senior officers. Generals McCulloch, McIntosh, and William Y. Slack were killed or mortally wounded, and Price wounded. Among colonels, Hébert was captured, and Benjamin Rives was mortally wounded, with two other colonels captured and one wounded.

Separated from their supply train, Van Dorn's main body retreated through very sparsely settled country for a week, living off what little food they could take from the inhabitants. They finally reunited with their supply train south of the Boston Mountains, but thousands of Price's troops deserted and returned to Missouri. Pike meanwhile, believing that the Confederate army had been destroyed, returned to the Indian Territory. Van Dorn refused to admit that he was defeated "but only failed in my intentions". With the defeat at Pea Ridge, the Confederates never again seriously threatened the state of Missouri. Within weeks Van Dorn's army was transferred across the Mississippi River to bolster the Confederate Army of Tennessee, leaving Arkansas virtually defenseless.

With his victory, Curtis sent some of his troops east of the Mississippi and proceeded with the remainder of his army to move east to West Plains, Missouri. Then he turned south into undefended northeast Arkansas. He had hopes of capturing Little Rock, but this proved impossible because of a lack of supplies and because guerrillas had cut his supply lines. Instead, following the approximate course of the White River, Curtis continued south and seized Helena, Arkansas on July 12.