

West Harpeth River

**tennessee
civil war
preservation
association**

NARRATIVE

On December 17, 1864 following the Battle of Nashville, Union cavalry under Gen. James Harrison Wilson pushed the Confederate rear guard out of Brentwood, down the Franklin Pike, through the Holly/Hollow Tree Gap and back over the Harpeth River to Franklin, which the Union cavalry entered shortly after noon. Confederate General S.D. Lee established a blocking position two miles south of Franklin on Winstead Hill which delayed the Union advance for several hours. While at Winstead Hill, Lee suffered a shrapnel wound and passed control of the rear guard to General Carter L. Stevenson.

By about 4 pm the Confederates had been forced back from Winstead Hill to a position about 3 miles south of Franklin, just north of a tributary of the West Harpeth River. The Union infantry was unable to cross the Harpeth River due to high water and destroyed bridges so the fight was left to the Union cavalry which forced the Confederates back to another position about a mile north of the West Harpeth River.

As darkness fell, the Union cavalry was able to move around the Confederate flanks which had been left unprotected by the Confederate cavalry which failed to distinguish itself on this day. Stevenson was therefore forced to form infantry squares, which was a rare occurrence in the Civil War, and managed to retreat back towards Spring Hill. Stevenson was aided in his retreat by General Clayton who heard the firing and returned to protect Stevenson's rear. In the dark and confusion Clayton's men were able to ambush and drive off a flanking Union column in the final engagement of the day.

COUNTY:

Williamson

DATE:

12/17/1864

GEO COORDINATES:

35.830569° N,
86.882772° W

PRESERVATION

OPPORTUNITY INDEX:

HIGH

CONFEDERATE UNITS:

Lieut.Gen. S.D. Lee's
Corps

UNION UNITS:

Brig. Gen. James
Wilson's Cavalry
Corps
Johnson's Cavalry
Div.
Knipes Cavalry Div.
Hatch's Cavalry Div.
4th U.S. Cavalry

HISTORICAL THEMES

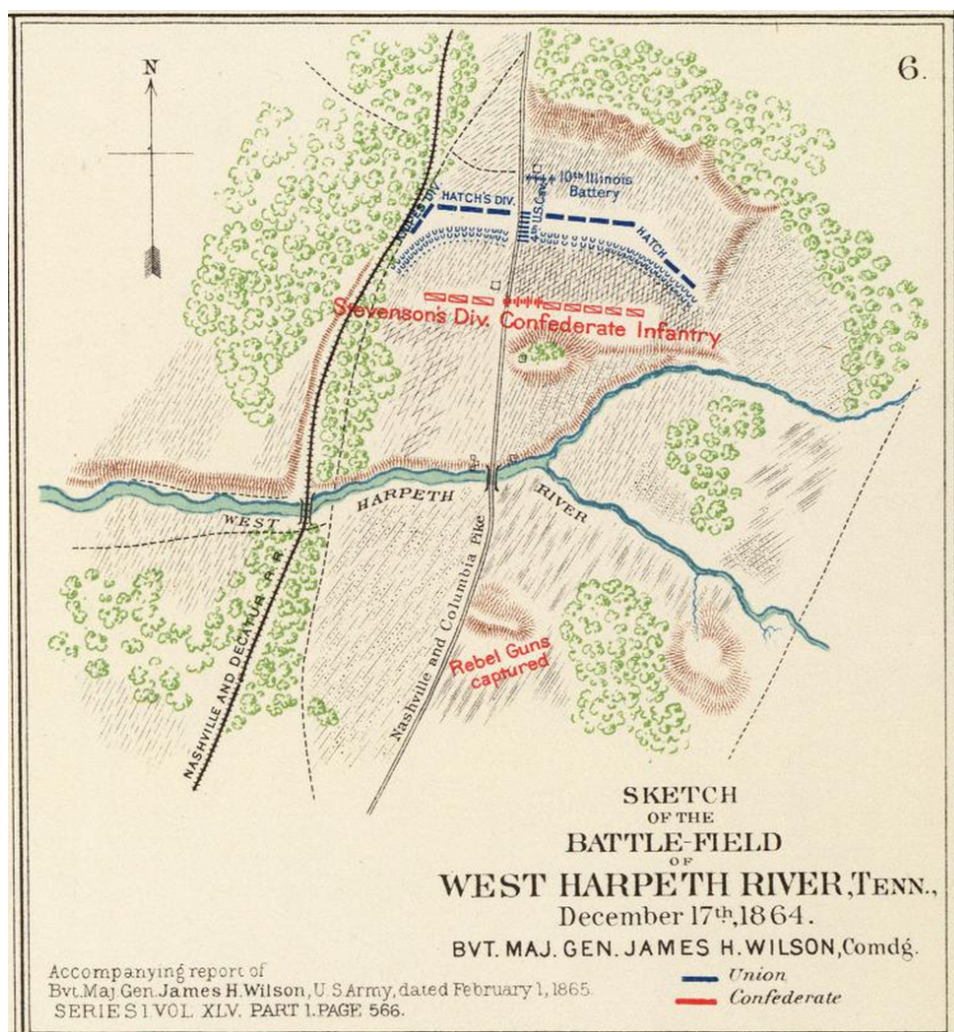
Controlling Resources
Crucible for Leadership

EXPLANATION OF ATTACHMENTS/VIDEO:

Official Records Map
Additional narrative of engagement

LINKS FOR FURTHER INFORMATION:

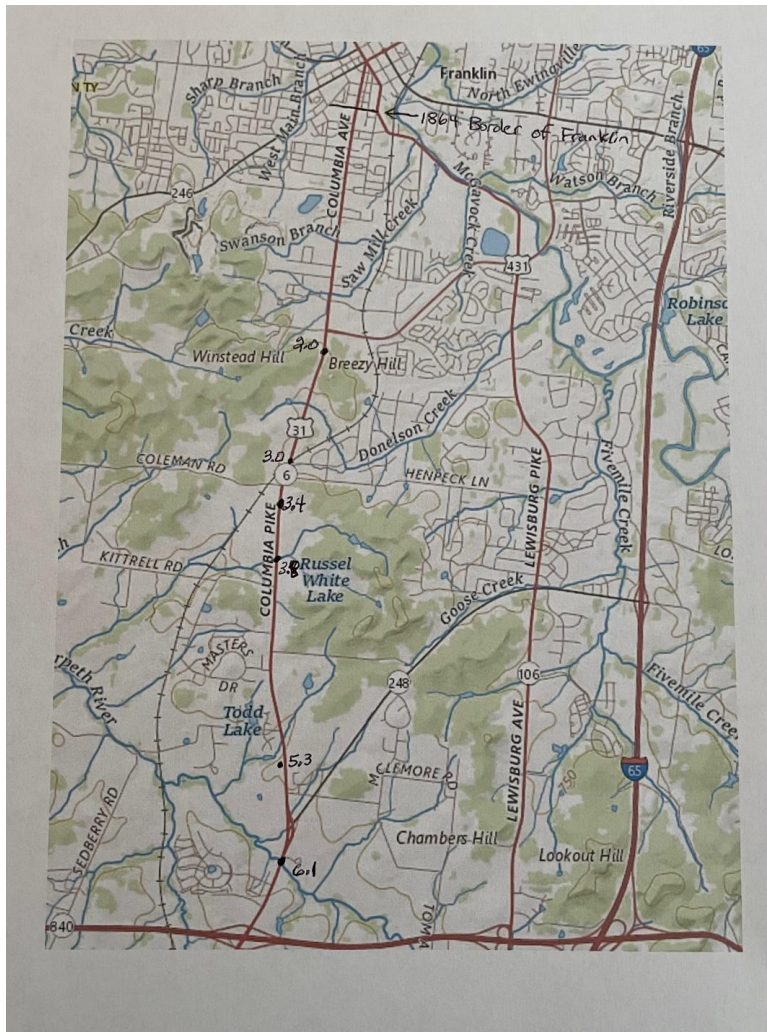
N/A



The Union pursuit took place over a distance of more than 4 miles along the Columbia Pike from Winstead Hill to south of the West Harpeth River. A major engagement occurred about 1-1/2 miles south of Winstead Hill between Coleman Road and a West Harpeth tributary which is depicted in the following map that accompanied General Wilson's report (see Map 1). A second major engagement started about 1 mile north of the West Harpeth near the James Johnson house (Laurel Hill) which still stands along the Columbia Pike. A third engagement occurred south of the West Harpeth when troops from Clayton's Division ambushed a Union column from Hammond's brigade which had crossed the West Harpeth far to the left of Stevenson in an effort to get behind him.

Map 1: The map on the next page accompanied General Wilson's report of February 1, 1865 which covered Hood's Tennessee Campaign. The map was originally thought to depict the portion of the battle that occurred just north of the West

Harpeth, but it was subsequently realized that the map matched the terrain near a tributary of the West Harpeth just south of Coleman Road. The Union line as depicted is roughly 3.4 miles from Franklin. In his report, Col. Coon of the 2nd Iowa, who was commanding the Second Brigade of Hatch's Division, describes an action that occurred 3 miles south of Franklin which must have been what is depicted in this map. According to the Journal of the IV Army Corps, at 4pm Wilson was skirmishing 3 miles south of Franklin which provides the time frame for this engagement. The map shows Confederate artillery being captured just south of the West Harpeth tributary. Two Medals of Honor were awarded for this capture, one to Lt. Joseph Hedges of the 4th US Cavalry and one to Major Eugene Beaumont who was on Wilson's staff. Interestingly, a close reading of the reports and accounts indicates that this capture may have actually occurred further south near the main West Harpeth River.



LEGEND OF TERMS:

Historical themes: Topics and subject matter that characterize the battlefield including Control of Tennessee's Resources, Crucible for Leadership, Guerilla Warfare, Transformation in Warfare, Enslaved People, and Influence on Campaign. Sites are identified that exhibit themes at moderate to high levels, and some sites may contain one or more Historical Themes.

Preservation Opportunity Index (POI): A rating assigned for each battlefield to indicate relative opportunity and potential for successful site preservation. The Index is generated by a model that evaluates ratings assigned for site significance, condition, risk of loss, protection potential, and opportunities for interpretation. Based upon the POI values for each region in Tennessee (West, Middle, East), sites are indicated as having High, Medium, or Low opportunity.

Geo Coordinates: General/central location of the battlefield area per latitude and longitude coordinates utilized in Google Earth

DO YOU HAVE INFORMATION ON A BATTLE SITE?

Please email us at info@tcwpa.org and we will reach out to you soon. If you have copies of documents or photos to share, you can include those. If you want to discuss by phone, we will schedule that too.

HELP US COLLECT INFORMATION TO PRESERVE THESE BATTLEFIELDS

TCWPA's Statewide Preservation Plan team captains are recruiting volunteers to help gather information about many of the lesser-known sites with hopes of verifying the condition of each site and identifying opportunities for preservation and interpretation.

If you are interested in helping, please contact TCWPA at info@tcwpa.org.

TCWPA will not publish nor release any confidential information, or the name of the contributor, unless you request to be recognized.

Thank you!



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Have Information on a Civil
War Battlesite?

Contact our team at info@tcwpa.org