

Plum Point-Fort Pillow

**tennessee
civil war
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NARRATIVE

After the defeat of Confederate forces at Island No. 10 the Union naval squadron moved down the Mississippi River to support an attack at Fort Pillow. On the morning on May 10, 1862, the Confederate River Defense Fleet attacked the Union squadron and rammed the *Cincinnati* and *Mound City* forcing them into shallow water where they eventually sunk. Unable to pursue due to deeper draft, the Confederate ships then withdrew. Only one Confederate ship (*General Earl Van Dorn*) avoided being disabled by superior federal firepower. The Union squadron was able to proceed down river and attack the Confederate squadron at the Battle of Memphis the following month. Both *Cincinnati* and *Mound City* were later raised and placed back into service.

HISTORICAL THEMES

Controlling Resources, Crucible for Leadership, Guerilla Warfare, Transformation in Warfare, Influence on Campaign

EXPLANATION OF ATTACHMENTS/VIDEO:

Maps and reports from Official Records

LINKS FOR FURTHER INFORMATION:

N/A

COUNTY:

Lauderdale

DATE:

5/10/1862

GEO COORDINATES:

35.636111° N,
89.842222° W

PRESERVATION

OPPORTUNITY INDEX:

LOW

CONFEDERATE UNITS:

Confederate River
Defense Fleet-

Col. M. Jeff

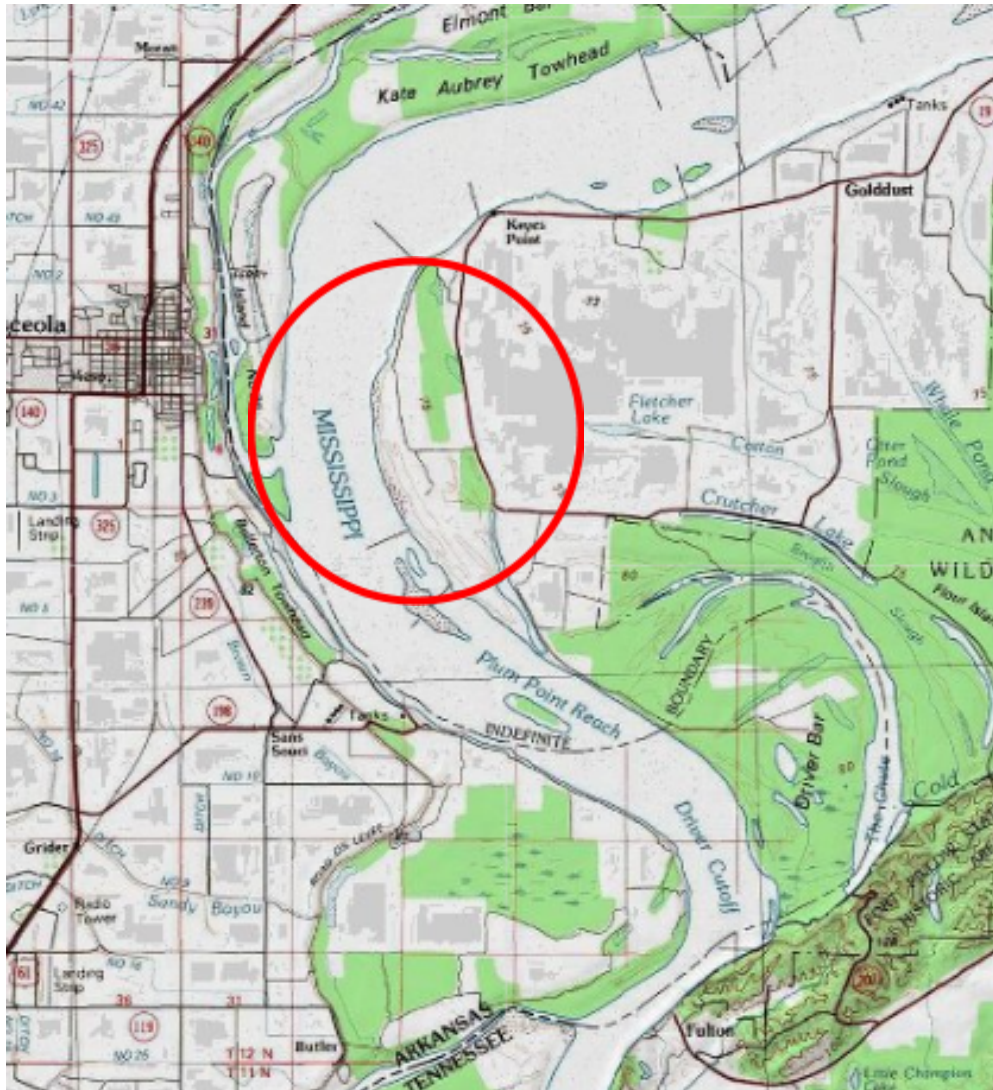
Thompson

UNION UNITS:

Mississippi

Flotilla-Capt. Charles

Davis USN



May 10, 1862 - Naval engagement at Plum Run Bend [or Plum Point], Tennessee, Mississippi River

Note 1 No. 1 Report of Brig. Gen. William K. Strong, U. S. Army.

No. 2 Report of Capt. J. E. Montgomery, C. S. Navy.

No. 3 Report of Brig. Gen. M. Jeff. Thompson, Missouri State Guard

No. 1 Report of Brig. Gen. William K. Strong, U. S. Army CAIRO, May 11, 1862. The rebel gunboats and rams made an attack on our flotilla yesterday morning. Two of their gunboats were blown up and one sunk. The remainder returned with all possible haste to the protection of their guns at Pillow. WM. K. STRONG, Brig.-Gen.

No. 2 Report of Capt. J. E. Montgomery, C. S. Navy. FLAG-BOAT LITTLE REBEL, Fort Pillow, Tenn., May 12, 1862. SIR: I have the honor to report an engagement with the Federal gunboats at Plum Point Bend, 4 miles above Fort Pillow, May 10: Having previously arranged with my officers the order of attack, our boats left their moorings at 6 a.m., and proceedings up the river passed round a sharp point, which brought us in full view of the enemy's fleet, numbering eight gunboats and twelve mortar boats. The Federal boat Carondelet [Cincinnati?] was lying nearest us, guarding a mortar boat, that was shelling the fort. The Gen. Bragg, Capt. W. H. H. Leonard, dashed at her; the Carondelet [Cincinnati?], firing her heavy guns, retreated Carondelet [Cincinnati?] toward a bar where the depth of water would not be sufficient for our boats to follow. The Bragg continued boldly on under fire of nearly the whole fleet, and struck her a violent blow that stopped her further flight, then rounded down the river under a broadside fire and drifted until her tiller rope, that had got out of order, could be readjusted. A few moments after the Bragg struck her blow the Gen. Sterling Price, First Officer J. E. Henthorne, ran into the same stern-post, and a large piece of her stern. This threw the Carondelet's stern to the Sumter, Carondelet [Cincinnati?]. Capt. W. W. Lamb, who struck her, running at the utmost speed of his boat. The Gen. Earl Van Dorn, Capt. Isaac D. Fulkerson, running according to orders, in the rear of the Price and Sumter, directed his attention to the Mound City, at the time pouring broadsides into the Price and Sumter. As the Van Dorn proceeded, by skillful shots from her 32-pounder, W. G. Kendall, gunner, silenced a mortar boat that was filling the air with its terrible missiles. The Van Dorn, still holding on the Mound City's amidships, in the act of striking, the Mound City sheered, and the Van Dorn struck her a glancing blow, making a hole 4 feet deep in her starboard forward quarter, evidenced by splinters left of the iron bow of the Van Dorn. At this juncture the Van Dorn was above four of the enemy's boats. As our remaining boats, the Gen. M. Jeff. Thompson, Capt. J. H. Burke; the Col. Lovell, Capt. J. C. Delancy, and the Gen. Beauregard, Capt. J. H. Hurt, were entering boldly into the contest in their prescribed order, I perceived from the flag-boat that the enemy's boats were taking positions where the water was too shallow for our boats in number and size, I signaled our boats to fall back, which was accomplished with a coolness that deserves the highest commendation. I am happy to inform you, while exposed to close quarters to a most terrific fire for thirty minutes, our boats, although struck repeatedly, sustained no serious injuries. Our casualties were 2 killed and 1 wounded-arm broken. Gen. M. Jeff. Thompson was on the Gen. Bragg; his officers and men were divided among the boats. They were all at their posts, ready to do good service should an occasion offer. To my officers and men I am highly indebted for their courage and promptness in executing all orders. On the 11th instant I went

on the Little Rebel in full view of the enemy's fleet. Saw the Carondelet [Cincinnati?] sunk near the shore and the Mound City sunk on the bar. The position occupied by the enemy's gunboats above Fort Pillow offers more obstacles to our mode of attack than any other between Cairo and New Orleans. But of this you may rest assured, if we can get fuel, unless the enemy greatly increase their force, they will, never penetrate farther down the Mississippi. I am, with great respect, your obedient servant, J. E. MONTGOMERY, Senior Capt., Cmdg. River Defense Service.

No. 3 Report of Brig. Gen. M. Jeff. Thompson, Missouri State Guard. CONFEDERATE STATES RIVER DEFENSE SERVICE, Gunboat Gen. Bragg, May 10, 1862—10 p. m.

GEN.: At a council of war held last night by the captains of the fleet it was determined to attack the enemy this morning, to cut out a gunboat which for the past two days has been guarding the mortar boat. We started at the commodore's signal at 6 a.m. and steamed round the point in front of Fort Pillow. The boat guarding the mortar boat immediately started into the current and ran for the shoal water on Plum Point. The Gen. Bragg, Capt. Leonard, which had the lead, ran rapidly at her (supposed to be the Saint Louis), striking her a glancing blow on the starboard bow and receiving a broadside at 10 feet distance. The Bragg then backed out, and the Sumter, Capt. Lamb, passed on, striking the same boat on the starboard quarter, and continued upstream to strike another. The Van Dorn, Capt. Fulkerson, which came next, went up to the mortar boat and fired into it at 20 yards distance, and, passing for larger game, ran into another large gunboat, and then, unfortunately, ran ashore, where for several minutes she sustained a terrific cannonade until she backed off. The Price, Capt. Henthorne, which was third in the line of attack, went gallantly in and struck a large gunboat, supposed to be the Benton, and also received several point-blank shots. The other boats of this fleet, viz., the Beauregard, Col. Lovell, Jeff. Thompson, and Little Rebel were not able to get into the fight, except with their guns, but it is worthy of note that the gunners on the open fore-castle and sterns served their guns steadily amid a shower of missiles without one casualty. The Little Rebel was Commodore Montgomery's flag-ship, and ran about amid the storm as heedlessly as if charmed. A tiller rope on the Gen. Bragg was accidentally cut, which prevented her from again returning to the charge, and as the difference in speed had opened the gap between our boats so far, and as the enemy's boats were enough injured to repay our attempt and damage fourfold, the commodore hoisted his recall, and we fell back cheering and shouting. Our loss has been: W. W. Andrews, steward on the Van Dorn, killed, third cook on the Bragg, mortally wounded, and 8 or 10 slightly wounded, among whom is Capt. Fulkerson—a contusion on the hand, more painful than dangerous. Where all acted so handsomely it would be invidious to discriminate, and I will simply state

that the captains and crews of this fleet deserve the confidence which has been reposed in them, and my officers and men acted, as they always have, bravely and obediently. Yours, most respectfully, M. JEFF. THOMPSON, Brig.-Gen., Missouri State Guard, Comdg. Confederate Troops on Fleet. OR, Ser. I, Vol. 10, pt. I, pp. 889-891. Note 2 Note 1: This was one of the few riverine victories for the Confederacy, and certainly the only success of its kind in Tennessee's Civil War experience. The brevity of the Union report contrasts starkly with the elaboration in the Confederate account. Note 2: CAR, p. 17, refers to this event a skirmish at "Port Pillow

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!

The logo for the Tennessee Civil War Preservation Association (TCWPA) is displayed in a light blue, lowercase, sans-serif font. It is positioned in the lower-left corner of a dark blue banner that features a background image of a Civil War-era cannon.

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Have Information on a Civil
War Battlesite?

Contact our team at info@tcwpa.org