

Rheatown

**tennessee
civil war
preservation
association**

NARRATIVE

On October 11, 1863 a Union advance led by Brig. Gen. Edward Potter (Ferrero's Division) attacked Confederate cavalry commanded by Brig. Gen. John Williams forcing the Confederates to withdraw. At Rheatown the Union cavalry brigade of Col. John Foster had outflanked the retreating Confederates resulting in a rout referred to as the "Rheatown Races." The engagement was also notable for Confederate use of the Williams gun—a breech loading field piece.

HISTORICAL THEMES

Guerilla Warfare, Transformation in Warfare

EXPLANATION OF ATTACHMENTS/VIDEO:

Maps and reports from official records

LINKS FOR FURTHER INFORMATION:

N/A

COUNTY:

Greene

DATE:

10/11/1863

GEO COORDINATES:

36.2310° N,
82.6953° W

PRESERVATION

OPPORTUNITY INDEX:

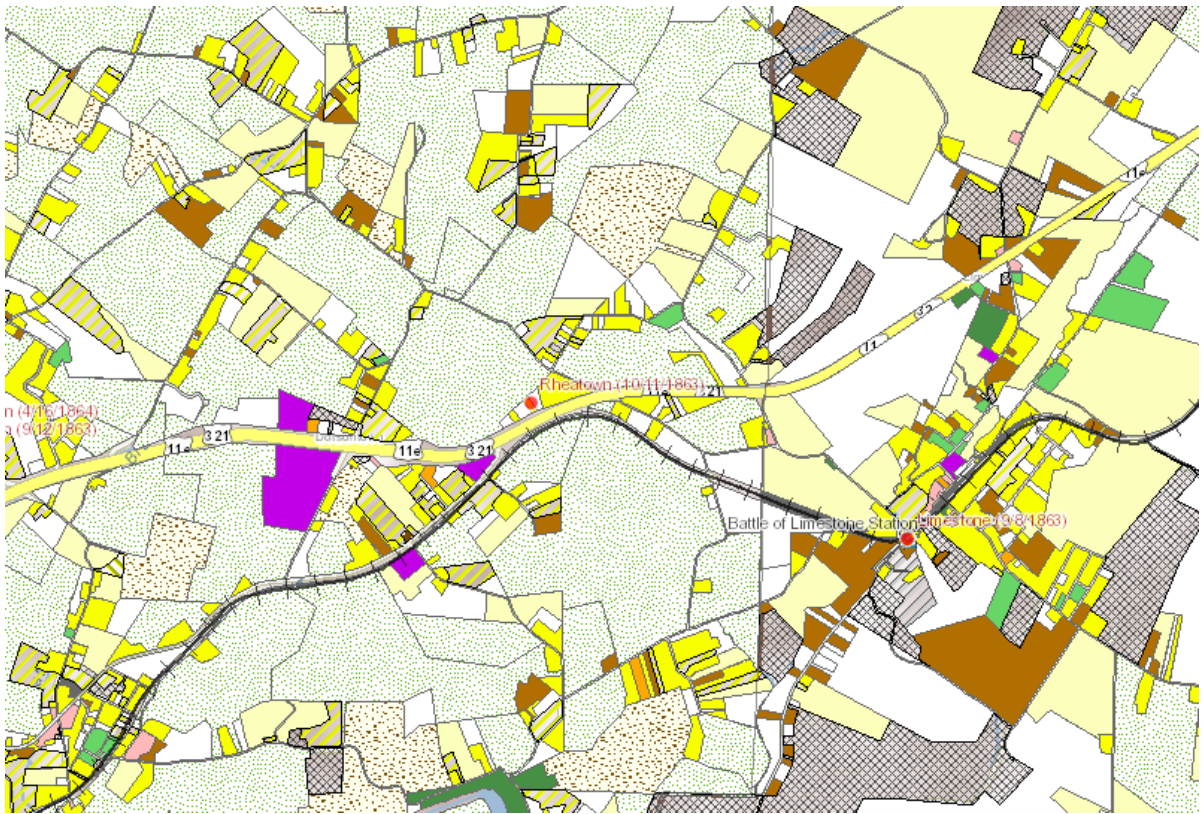
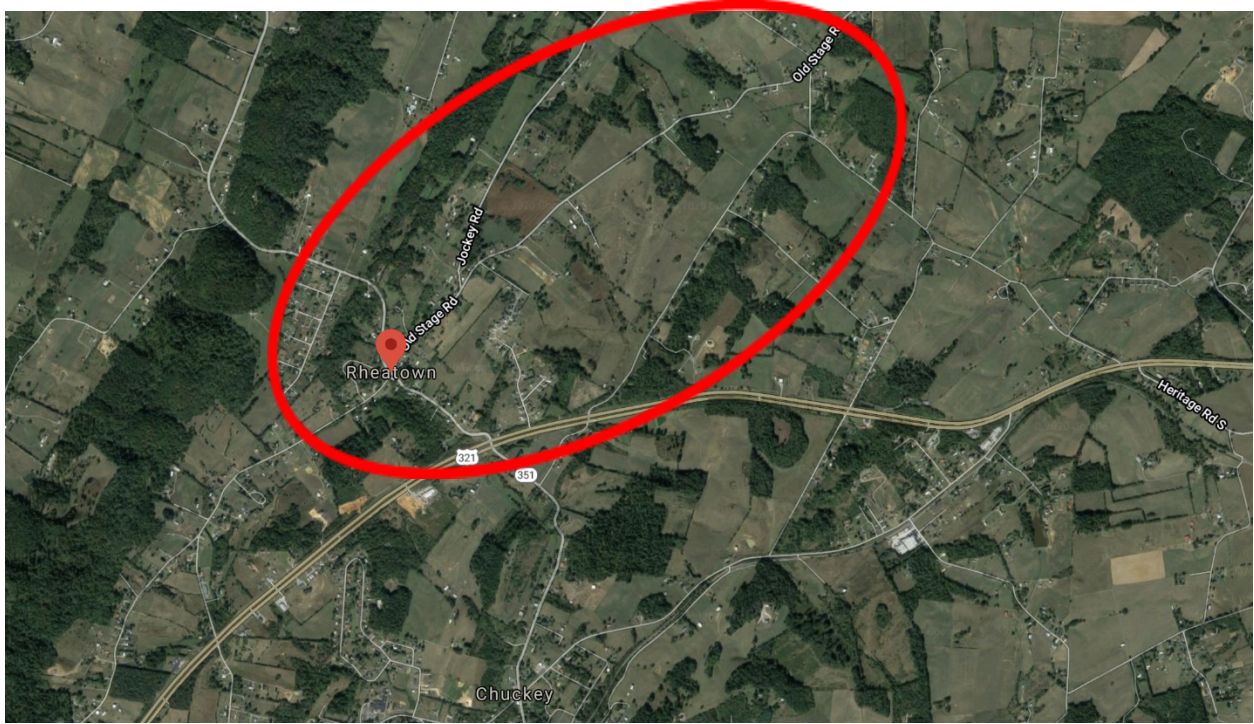
HIGH

CONFEDERATE UNITS:

Brig. Gen. John
William's cavalry

UNION UNITS:

Edward Ferrero's
Division
Col. John Foster's
cavalry brigade



Report of Maj. Gen. Ambrose E. Burnside, U. S. Army, commanding
Department of the Ohio.

KNOXVILLE, TENN., October 17, 1863-10 p. m.

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On the following morning the advance was ordered and at Blue Springs, midway between Bull's Gap and Greeneville the enemy were found, posted in heavy force and a strong position, between the wagon road and railroad to Greeneville. Our cavalry occupied him with skirmishing until late in the afternoon. Col. Foster's brigade was sent around to the rear of the enemy, with instructions to establish himself on the line over which he would be obliged to retreat, at a point near Rheatown. It was not desirable to press the enemy until Col. Foster had time to reach this point. I directed Capt. Poe (my chief engineer) to make a reconnaissance of the enemy's position, with a view to making the attack at the proper time. The ground was selected upon which the attacking force was to be formed, and at half past 3 o'clock, believing sufficient time had been given to Col. Foster to reach the desired point, I ordered Gen. Potter to move up his command and endeavor to break through the center of the enemy's line. By 5 p. m. he had formed Gen. Ferrero's division for the attack. When the order to advance was given, this division moved forward in the most dashing manner, driving the enemy from his first line.

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OR, Ser. I, Vol. 30, pt. II, p. 551.

Excerpt from the October 23, 1863 Report of Brigadier-General John S. Williams, C. S. Army, commanding Cavalry Brigade, relating to the skirmish at Rheatown.

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We passed on without the loss of a wagon or a single head of beef cattle. We moved on to Rheatown, where, by some misunderstanding of orders, the artillery took the wrong road, and some time was consumed in getting it back. While waiting for its return the enemy again made his appearance, which, in the absence of our artillery, produced considerable confusion; but order was soon restored and the enemy checked. The artillery was brought back as soon as possible, and from a good position 2 miles east of Rheatown we again gave

the enemy battle, which lasted for more than 3 hours, when gradually fell back to Jonesborough. Agreeably to your instructions, I moved Gen. Jackson's infantry along the line of the railroad and the cavalry toward Blountsville.

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OR, Ser. I, Vol. 30, pt. II, pp. 641-642.

A Confederate staff officer's account of the Skirmish at Rheatown
BATTLE OF RHEATOWN -(sometimes called the "Rheatown Races")

Col. Giltner had gone into Camp-Genl Jackson had diverged from the main column & was a mile off on the R. R. -Col Carter's Brig-were sitting on their horses in the road above town.

The Enemy had made another flank movement & came upon our left, and had placed their artillery in a gap of the ridge just opposite R-town, & commenced shelling our column. Witcher who was in the rear was cut off & came around South of the town & rejoined his Command.

Our artillery was by a misunderstanding all ordered down to the Rail Road with Genl. Jackson-& accidentally escaped capture by the Enemy -, and before it could be brought up the Enemy had advanced their sharp shooters within rifle shot of our mounted men & opened upon the columns standing in the road.

A portion of Col. Carter's brigade considering rather their safety than their honor-broke to the rear & caused the terrible military phenomenon of a panic resulting in a stampede. They rushed madly forward, dashing through fences, & passed right through our Head Quarters camp, where I was lying down to get a little rest.

Have rode my gray horse until his back was very sore, I was bridling Capt. Jenkins Sorrell-but had only time to put the bridle on-& mounted him bareback & joined Col Carter & some of his officers in trying to rally his men—& after appealing to their sense of patriotism & pride, & their baser sense of fear of being shot for stampeding, about 300 were stopped, dismounted & sent back to a position to hold the Enemy in check until our other troops could get in

position & our wagons move[d] out of the way.

I gave my grey horse (Charley) to 'boy' Arthur to lead, but the stampede so frightened him that he jerked away & rushed headlong with the crowd. Col Giltner's men were soon put in position on the left, & Jimmie Schoolfield's Battery of four little William Guns served by 25 as gallant boys as ever lived;- but Col Carter's men being compelled to give way on the right compelled the withdrawal of our line to another position more defensible where we could check the advance of the Enemy until our trains could move out of the way. A heavy force of the Enemy's cavalry upon our left flank also rendered a change of position necessary.

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