General Curtis, Unsung Hero of Civil War

Victor of Pea Ridge, A First Class Fighting Man

By JOHN A. McHAUGH

D OWN in the extreme southeastern corner of Missouri, about ten miles below the Missouri state line, is a line of hills and bluffs which is known locally as the Osage bluffs. Here on March 7 and 8, 1862, that Union army of which Gen. G. B. McCullough was the commander, was engaged with a much superior force sent into Missouri by Gen. Earl Van Dorn, southwest of the state line.

Responsibility for this struggle was Brig. Gen. Samuel Curtis, a remarkable military leader but a man much more interested in engineering than in war. Curtis, with an army of 14,000 men and a cavalry and artillery division of 140 men, was engaged with Gen. Van Dorn, who had about 10,000 men. From the start of the engagement, Curtis was in the field until the battle was over, and his position on the Heights of Osage bluffs, was a strategic one.

Van Dorn had a Railroad Commission project in mind, and Curtis was instrumental in providing the city with a railroad between Hannibal and St. Joseph, Mo. Through his efforts, the Missouri River was bridged at St. Joseph, and a railroad was completed.

In February, 1862, Curtis undertook a drive to clear southwest Missouri of Confederate troops. He met the Confederates and captured their commandant.

During the night of March 7-8, the Confederates were soundly defeated, and the Union troops secured their objective.

Curtis was promoted to major general, and the campaign was a success. He was appointed colonel of the 1st division of Curtis' army; Gen. George B. McClellan, and Curtis, the victor of Pea Ridge, led his army south-west across Arkansas through the Mississippi mountains on an extremely difficult march. But a few days later, the Union troops were In a position to keep the Confederates from attacking the Union army, deprived of its advantage of position, was forced to retreat.

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