

THE SANDYLAND CHRONICLE

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*****<http://sandyland.nevada.ar.us/>*****



THE BATTLE OF POISON SPRING

The Battle of Poison Spring occurred April 18, 1864 in Ouachita County. Those of us who live in the area have driven by the small roadside park many times, but do we really understand what happened here on that day in 1864?

This battle was small when compared to the major battles of the Civil War like Vicksburg and Gettysburg where thousands of brave men lost their lives, but this was the largest battle fought in our part of Arkansas. It was a victory for the Confederate army as they captured a large wagon train of supplies that had been confiscated from farms in the area by the Union soldiers to supply their soldiers stationed at Camden. Several hundred men lost their lives in the battle of Poison Spring, mostly Negroes from the Kansas Colored Infantry Volunteers. Some call it "The Massacre at Poison Spring".

A mixture of races was involved in the battle. There were Negro soldiers from Kansas on the Union side and Choctaw Indians on the Confederate side as well as white soldiers on both sides. The use of African-American soldiers by the Union army did not set well with many Southerners and this probably contributed to the large number of black soldiers killed at Poison Spring.

There were reports of the colored soldiers being shot with their own guns after they had surrendered and wagons being driven over wounded soldiers lying on the ground to finish them off. I have read that some Confederate generals did not take African-American prisoners of war. Those captured were either sold back into slavery or executed. There were also reports of the Choctaw Indians involved in the

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battle scalping some of the soldiers on the Union side. They blamed the Union army for an earlier raid on their villages and considered this a time for them to get even.

This is from an Internet web site regarding the Battle of Poison Spring: Pursuing Confederates, enraged as the Rebels usually were when the Federals used blacks as combat troops, showed no mercy. They continued to fire into the fleeing ranks, and many wounded blacks were murdered as they lay on the ground. Other black troops, hunted down and trapped in the surrounding swamps and woods, were executed when they attempted to surrender. One Rebel colonel admitted, "Away trotted the poor black men into the forest, clinging to their rifles, but not using them, while the pursuing Confederates cut them down right and left." A private in Cabell's brigade believed Choctaws perpetrated most of the butchery. "You ought to see Indians fight Negroes," he recalled, "kill and scalp them. Let me tell you, I never expected to see so many dead Negroes again. They were so thick you could walk on them." A few blacks, realizing the vengeance being reaped on their comrades, feigned death by lying motionless on the field. After dark, they crawled into the woods and made their way back to Camden. Kirby Smith, who arrived from Louisiana on April 19, admitted that of some two hundred captured Federals, he saw "but two Negro prisoners."

Even though this was a small battle that lasted only a few hours, it was a bloody battle. Cora Powell Bragg wrote that her father visited the battle-field the next day and said "he never beheld such a sight. Dead bodies, only half buried, feet protruding, were heaped all about and the stench was sickening."

It is hard to imagine that the peaceful countryside along present day Hwy. 76 was once the scene of a fierce battle complete with Rebel yells, the sounds of cannons and muskets being fired, and the horrific scenes of human suffering that followed. The area around Poison Springs is now a National Historic Landmark and is protected as an archaeological site.

Below are battle reports from a few of the commanding officers of the Federal troops involved in the battle. Next month, we will include some reports from the Confederate officers. These reports are from "The War of the Rebellion—Vol. 34". These books are in many libraries and also available on the Internet. I will be happy to tell you how to find them on the Internet which also has a search engine to search through all these books for a person's name or a place.

Excerpts from the report of Lieut. William C. Gibbons, First Kansas Colored Infantry, of the engagement at Poison Spring.

Camden, Ark., April 21, 1864

Col. J. M. Williams
Comdg. First Regiment Kansas Colored Volunteers

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...I have the honor to submit the following report of the part taken by Companies C and I, First Kansas Colored Volunteers, during an engagement with the enemy 14 miles west of this place, on the 18th instant....At this juncture, I knew by the heavy musketry discharges on my right that the eight companies under Major Ward were heavily engaged, but I could see nothing in that quarter owing to the density of the smoke. Accordingly, I kept a sharp lookout to the front to prevent a flank movement by the enemy which I anticipated. While the right was engaging the enemy with musketry, the six-gun battery of the enemy planted in our immediate front continued to throw shell to our left...I then ordered the two companies to fall back opposite the advance wagon of the train, which they did. Just then both horse and footmen to the number of 100 crossed my front dressed in blue. Captain Graton and myself supposed them to be our own men, the Second or Sixth Kansas Cavalry...but I was soon undeceived by the appearance of a large body of infantry dressed in gray, following directly after, and the appearance of 400 or 500 rebel cavalry crossing the road farther off on the right of their infantry. I immediately ordered the men to fire, which was kept up for a few minutes only, but with such effect as to check the enemy's advance. Being sorely pressed by an overwhelming number, and seeing the cavalry about to flank me on the left, I ordered a retreat and formed again about 60 yards to the rear. Again our men poured a deadly volley among the enemy, but it was impossible to hold the ground. However, I would not suffer the men to fall back farther, until I saw that the left of the right wing was broken and making their way across the road between the mules and wagons, then I ordered the men to fall back in as good order as possible.

During this maneuver, I was on foot leading my horse, and in the attempt to mount, my saber tripped me, my horse became scared, and dragged me about 5 yards. During this, the infantry had all passed me and the enemy was bearing down on us with a yell. I need not say I mounted quick and rode away quicker. At the distance of about 100 or 150 yards, I came to the southwest corner of a fence surrounding an open field. Here I found nearly all of Companies C and I who had escaped the fire of the enemy....I succeeded in forming a line of about 100 men to check the advance of rebel cavalry, who had by this time formed a line extending across the field. I ordered the men to fire and the effect was as I anticipated, but this line could not stand longer than to deliver one volley. I saw that the right was entirely broken and the men pouring past me, and the cavalry had but to charge across the field, leap the fence, and our retreat was cut off. Then, seeing the train was lost, my first idea was to save the men. So I ordered them to scatter and bear to the left, with the hope of being able to form on the left of the Eighteenth Iowa, in order to protect the guns which I saw were being driven through the timber a little in advance of me. I rode square off to the left and came up near the Eighteenth Iowa just as they were leaping a fence. Supposing that to be their final repulse, I bore to the right and came up with No. 1 gun, which had run against a tree and the rear wheel-horse fell. Lieut. Haines, commanding that section, then commanded the men to cut the horses loose and mount them, while one man, I think the lieutenant himself, spiked the piece. This was done in a ravine. Mounting the hill in front, I could distinctly see the rebels shooting down our brave but fatigued boys. In a few minutes you overtook me. I still rode slowly on (knowing my horse could easily take me out of danger), giving such

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directions to all of our men I met as I thought would insure their safety. When about 4 miles from the battle-field, in company with the adjutant of the Eighteenth Iowa, I rode as fast as the nature of the country would allow for Camden, where I arrived about 8 p.m.

Great credit is due both officers and men under my observation for the coolness, bravery, and promptness with which they obeyed and executed orders. I would especially mention First Sergeant Berry, Company I (supposed to be dead), whose efforts to keep his men in place, urging them by all the endearments of freedom to keep their ground, were unceasing. He was a brave soldier and a noble man.

I remain, Colonel, your obedient servant,
W. C. Gibbons
Adjutant First Regt. Kansas Colored Volunteers

Report of Lieut. Josephus Utt, Fourteenth Kansas Cavalry, of engagement at Poison Spring

Col. J. M. Williams
Commanding Detachment

...The conduct of the officers and men was good under the trying circumstances, being outnumbered eight or nine to one, and entirely surrounded, none being daunted, continued fighting with the most daring heroism, determined not to surrender, preferring death. After the right and left wings were broken and driven in and almost entirely surrounded, a galling cross-fire broke the columns and it was impossible to form another line at the rear of the train. Many heroic efforts were made by the officers and men, though the result was so evident to all. A line was partly formed where the charging columns of the enemy were so numerous and their fire so destructive, that it was again abandoned. The entire train being surrounded, and almost the entire command hemmed in, nothing but surrender or retreat was left. All preferring death to surrender, all was lost and retreat in the best possible manner was the only recourse left.

All of which is respectfully submitted by your very humble servant,
Josephus Utt
First Lieut. Co., K, 14th Kansas Vol. Cav.

Report of Col. J. M. Williams First Kansas Colored Vols., Commanding Escort of the engagement at Poison Spring

....Many wounded men belonging to the First Kansas Colored Volunteers fell into the hands of the enemy, and I have the most positive assurances from eye-witnesses that they were murdered on the spot. The action commenced at 10 a.m. and terminated at 2 p.m. I was forced to abandon everything to the enemy, and they

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thereby became possessed of this large train, two 6-pounder guns, and two 12-pounder mountain howitzers. With what force could be collected, I made my way to this post, where I arrived at 11 p.m. of the same day.

At no time during the engagement, such was the nature of the ground and the size of the train, was I able to employ more than 500 men and two guns to repel the assaults of the enemy, whose force I estimate at 10,000 men and twelve guns, from the statements of prisoners. The columns of assault which were thrown against my front and right flank consisted of five regiments of infantry and one of cavalry, supported by a strong force which moved upon my left flank and rear. I have named this engagement the action of Poison Spring, from a spring of that name in the vicinity.

My loss during the engagement is as follows: Killed, 92; wounded, 97; missing, 106. Many of those reported missing are supposed to be killed. Others are supposed to be wounded and prisoners. The loss of our enemy is not known, but in my opinion it will much exceed our own.

The conduct of all the troops under my command, officers and men, was characterized by true soldierly bearing, and in no case was a line broken except when assaulted by an overwhelming force, and then falling back only when so ordered. The gallant dead, officers and men, all evinced the most heroic spirit, and died the death of true soldiers.

Very respectfully,
J. M. Williams
Col., First Colored Vols., Comdg. Escort

FARMER PLAYS JOKE ON COW (from the 9-23-1909 issue of The Nevada County Picayune)

Editor's Note: This story doesn't have anything to do with Nevada or Ouachita counties, but I thought it was a nice little story.

Columbus, Ind.—Aug. 28—

William Baker, a farmer who lives in Bartholomew County, has superceded his wife in the affection of the family cow, but the cow does not know it. Baker is playing a joke on the cow.

Mrs. Baker always milks the cow, but this week, she decided to go to Newman, Illinois on a visit. When the cow returned from the pasture, Baker took the milking pail and the little stool and started to milk.

The gentle bovine turned her head and stared in mild surprise to see a man at her side. Then she became genuinely aroused and started trouble. She kicked the bucket and the bucket-holder and tore up things generally. Baker was in a

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quandary. The cow had to be milked and his wife was on her way to Illinois. Then he had an idea and he put it to work.

He went to the house, donned a dress belonging to his wife and pulled a sunbonnet over his face. Returning to the barnyard, he approached the cow and she seemed glad to see him. He milked without any trouble, and now he has to wear his wife's clothes whenever milking time comes.

TRIVIA (answers on page 7)

1. Which president is pictured on the \$2 bill?
2. The faces of which four presidents are carved on Mt. Rushmore?
3. What was the name of George Washington's home?
4. Which president died one month after taking office?
5. Who killed Alexander Hamilton in a duel?

INTERESTING NEWS ITEMS FROM DAYS GONE BY

Nevada County Picayune (3-11-1909)

A man by the name of Galloway found a R. R. torpedo (?) and not knowing what it was, split it open with an axe which caused it to explode and knock him senseless. A piece struck his wife in the temple and the doctor had to cut it out. It was quite dangerous, but the doctor said she might get over it. It cut a gash about three inches long above her ear. (from the Wallaceburg-Blevins local news column)

Nevada County Picayune (4-30-1908)

Prof. A. C. Evered left this morning for Bluff City where he will be located for several weeks taking photographs

Prescott Daily News (12-3-1910)

The Prescott Hardware Co. has secured the agency for the E. M. F. and Flanders automobiles for Prescott and vicinity. To secure this agency, the company had to purchase five cars. This they did and have disposed of three of them, two five passenger touring cars and one Flanders 20 roadster. Flanders cars have the reputation for being the best automobiles on the market.

The Camden News (8-7-1937)

Chidester men set record. The first bale of cotton was brought in by Harvey M. Livingston and Carleton Corbell from the Livingston farm near Chidester. The bale weighed 525 pounds. This is a record for Ouachita County for being the earliest that a bale of cotton was ever brought in.

Prescott Daily Mail (5-3-1948)

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Bluff City School hosts a softball tournament; Eleven games to be played. Schools represented were: Bluff City, Willisville, Bodcaw, Chidester, Laneburg, Rosston, and Reader. Winner was Bluff City (both boys and girls teams).

Prescott Daily News (9-13-1916)

Advertisement—If you are tired of wearing tan shoes, stop in at Daniel and Sons and have them dyed black.

Prescott Daily News (10-4-1916)

A new drink had been added to line of beverages bottled by the Prescott Ice and Milling Co. It is known as “Claro”. The manager says it is one of the best cola drinks on the market.

MEDICINE DROPPED BY PLANE AT WILLISVILLE (from the 8-14-1947 issue of *The Prescott Daily Mail*)

A new twist was added to Prescott’s delivery service recently when Orville Odom, manager of the Prescott Flying Service dropped a package containing badly needed medicine to a Willisville resident.

Mrs. M. A. Marlar, who lives near Willisville, became ill and the medicine was needed immediately. The roads were in no condition for travel by automobile, so Jane Russell of Falcon contacted the Prescott air field and arranged for the delivery by air. Odom circled the house and dropped the parachute to which was attached the medicine.

“All in a day’s work”, says Odom.

MARY’S JAM Prescott Daily News (10-17-1916)

Mary had a little jam
Upon a piece of bread,
And everywhere that Mary went
She left some, it is said.
They found it on the parlor rug,
And later her irate Dad
On his dress suit found traces of
The jam that Mary had.

Answers to trivia questions on page 6: 1. Thomas Jefferson; 2 George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, Theodore Roosevelt, Abraham Lincoln; 3. Mt. Vernon; 4. William Henry Harrison; 5. Aaron Burr

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AD FOR SCOTT'S EMULSION NEVADA COUNTY PICAYUNE—1906

Fat is of great account to a baby; that is why babies are fat. If your baby is scrawny, Scott's Emulsion is what he wants. The healthy baby stores as fat that it does not need immediately for bone and muscle. Fat babies are happy; they do not cry; they are rich; their fat is laid up for time of need. They are happy because they are comfortable. The fat surrounds their little nerves and cushions them. When they are scrawny, those nerves hurt at every ungentle touch. They delight in Scott's Emulsion. It is sweet and wholesome to them. Send for a free sample.

CHOCOLATE CHEESE PIE From P. F. in Arkansas

**1 cup sugar
3 packages (8 oz. each) cream cheese, softened
5 eggs
1 Tablespoon vanilla
1 package (4 oz.) Baker's German Sweet Chocolate, melted and cooled**

Add sugar to cheese in a bowl, blending well. Beat in eggs, one at a time. Add vanilla. Measure 2 cups of the cheese mixture; fold in chocolate. Pour remaining cheese mixture into well-buttered 10 inch pie pan. Top with chocolate mixture. Zig-zag a spatula through batter to marble. Bake at 350 degrees for 40-45 minutes. Cool; then chill. Garnish with Cool Whip and chocolate curls. Cut in wedges. Makes 12 servings.

EASY KING RANCH CASSEROLE (from Betty in Texas)

**1 bag dorito's
1 can cream of chicken soup
1 can cream of mushroom soup
1 can nacho cheese soup (Campbell's makes it)
1 can rotel
1 lb. diced chicken
grated cheese**

**Mix all together except the grated cheese, put in a cake pan
Warm in oven for about 30 minutes (unless you do like I do with out the chips
warm in mircowave about 10 minutes then mix in the chips)
Top with grated cheese while it is warm. Let it melt and it's ready.**
