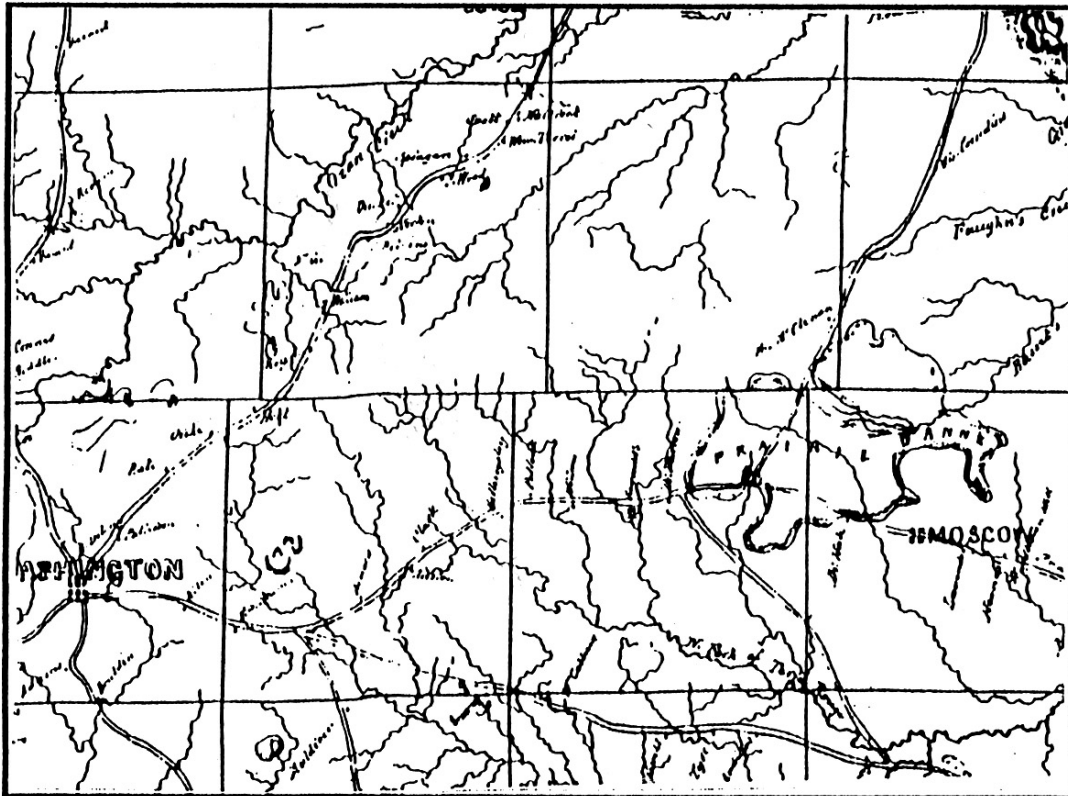


The Camden Expedition of 1864

By William D. Baker



Detail of 1865 Map of Prairie DeAnn Area

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A Historic Context Written and Researched
By William D. Baker

Cover illustration from 1865 map of the Department of Arkansas
compiled from surveys and reconnaissances made during the period.

This volume is one of a series developed by the Arkansas Historic Preservation Program for the identification and registration of the state's cultural resources. For more information, write the AHPP at 1500 Tower Building, 323 Center Street, Little Rock, AR 72201, call (501) 324-9880 [TDD 501-324-9811], or send e-mail to info@arkansaspreservation.org

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The Red River Campaign of 1864

By the fall of 1863, the Union position in the Trans-Mississippi West had strengthened considerably. Federal forces enjoyed a virtual hegemony over the Arkansas and Mississippi rivers as a result of the captures of Vicksburg and Little Rock, effectively severing the eastern and western portions of the struggling Confederacy. Arkansas's Confederate government under Governor Harris Flanagin had relocated to Washington in southwest Arkansas, while the Union military command, safely and strategically ensconced in Little Rock, developed plans for a spring campaign to destroy the remaining Confederate forces in Arkansas, Louisiana, and Texas through a two-pronged simultaneous advance on Shreveport. What would become the Red River Campaign had its impetus in the desires of New Englanders to invade and occupy Texas in order to establish a free-soil cotton growing colony to supply northeastern textile manufacturers with raw materials. The possibility of French intervention in Mexico also concerned the Lincoln Administration, which felt that a stronger Union presence on the Rio Grande might discourage Napoleon III's dreams of empire in the Western Hemisphere.

In March 1864, seven weeks before the Union's "win the war" offensives were initiated in Virginia and Georgia, the Red River Campaign began in Arkansas and Louisiana. Gen. Banks led a combined military and naval expedition up the Red River from the Mississippi in a campaign that lasted from March 12 through May 20, 1864, when Banks, defeated at Mansfield on April 8, and losing his nerve following the fight at Pleasant Hill on April 9, withdrew first to Alexandria and then Semmesport. The Camden Expedition, involving Federal armies based in Little Rock and Fort Smith, lasted 40 days, traveled about 275 miles, saw combat at Okolona, Elkins' Ferry, Poison Spring, Marks' Mills, and Jenkins' Ferry, before ultimately ending in failure and a Union retreat to the safety of Little Rock.

For a number of reasons, Gen. Steele was reluctant to initiate any campaign through central Arkansas in the early spring of 1864. The damp weather made for notoriously bad and rutted roads, the countryside was swept virtually clear of food and forage, and hostile partisans were more active and numerous in Arkansas than in the eastern theaters of the war. Nevertheless, under direct orders from Lt. Gen. Ulysses S. Grant, Steele made preparations to march on Shreveport via Arkadelphia and Washington. On March 17, Steele sent word to Brig. Gen. John M. Thayer, commanding Union forces at Fort Smith, to set out with his 3,600 troops and meet Steele at Arkadelphia 170 miles away on April 1. Col. Powell Clayton, commanding a small garrison at Pine Bluff, would continue to patrol the lower Arkansas River area to as close to Camden as possible. Thayer left Fort Smith for Arkadelphia on March 21.ⁱ

The Battles of Okolona and Elkins' Ferry

Leaving Brig. Gen. Nathan Kimball in charge of the Federal arsenal, Steele left Little Rock via the Benton Road on March 23, 1864, with Brig. Gen. Frederick Salomon's Third Division, 7th Corps, and two brigades of cavalry under the command of Brig. Gen. Eugene A. Carr, a total of about 6,800 effectives. The troops marched about nine miles that first day and Steele ordered the issuance of half-rations on the second day of the expedition. The column reached the nearly deserted town of Rockport on the easily-forded Ouachita River on March 26. Nevertheless, a bridge was hastily constructed to guard against a sudden rise in the shallow river so that the infantry and artillery might cross. The column pushed on toward Arkadelphia to the southwest, arriving on the 29th.ⁱⁱ

Arkadelphia in 1864 was an attractive village of white frame houses that had thus far remained largely untouched by the ravages of war. The weary and hungry Union troops quickly broke ranks and began

foraging for food on entering the town and reportedly paid for "almost all" that they found. Despite reports that Union troops ransacked the community's young ladies' seminary, some of the local women are reported to have commented to Steele that "your men treat us better than our own men do." The Union forces remained encamped at Arkadelphia for two days awaiting the arrival of Thayer's column from Fort Smith. Steele however was concerned that he could not afford to wait indefinitely while consuming his limited supplies, and on April 1, with no word as to Thayer's whereabouts, the Union column left Arkadelphia on the Old Military Road to Washington.ⁱⁱⁱ

While Steele continued to march toward Shreveport, Maj. Gen. Sterling Price, who had recently been placed in command of the Confederacy's District of Arkansas, prepared to counter his advance. Three understrength cavalry divisions, led by Brig. Gens. John S. Marmaduke, James F. Fagan, and Samuel B. Maxey, were assigned to Price's command. Price had at his immediate disposal five brigades of cavalry, including Crawford's and Dockery's brigades of Fagan's division stationed to the east of Saline River near Monticello and Mount Elba. Marmaduke was in command of the other three brigades as a division based at Camden; Brig. Gen. Joseph O. Shelby's and Col. Colton Greene's brigades were with Marmaduke in Camden, while Brig. Gen. William L. Cabell's brigade was on the Red River 16 miles west of the Confederate state capital in Washington. Although Marmaduke's three brigades totaled only 3,200 effective troops, they were seasoned and well-trained.^{iv}

On receiving news of Steele's advance, Price ordered Shelby to Princeton and Cabell's brigade to march for Tate's Bluff, at the confluence of the Ouachita and Little Missouri Rivers north of Camden, where he would be met by Marmaduke and Greene's brigade. From these positions, Cabell and Greene would harass the vanguard of the Union column while Shelby attacked its flanks and rear. Marmaduke was to harry the enemy column until it reached the Little Missouri, where he would attempt to prevent the Federals from crossing. On arriving at Tate's Bluff and learning that the Yanks were en route toward Arkadelphia, Marmaduke ordered Shelby to cross the Ouachita and attack the rear of Steele's army. Gen. Price, fearing that Steele was advancing on Washington, diverted Cabell to Antoine.^v

Skirmishing was fierce as Cabell's brigade attempted to counter Steele's advance toward Washington on April 1. That night, as Steele camped near the community of Hollywood (also known as Spoonville or Witherspoonville), Marmaduke ordered Greene to move most of his brigade to Cottingham's Store, three miles south of the Little Missouri River on the Old Military Road. The following day, Cabell's brigade withdrew to Cottingham's Store as well, leaving just one regiment near Antoine as a rear guard. Falling back slowly, this regiment sharply repulsed the Federals' advance at Wolf Creek on April 2, then rejoined the rest of the brigade south of the Little Missouri.

Early on the afternoon of April 2, Confederate scouts brought word to Cottingham's Store that the Federals had unexpectedly turned off the Old Military Road and were now marching toward Elkins' Ferry on the Little Missouri by way of Okolona. One section of the 9th Wisconsin Infantry under Capt. Martin Voegele, guarding the rear of the Union train, skirmished continually with Shelby's cavalry division and three pieces of artillery beginning four miles south of Hollywood near Gentry's Creek. Brig. Gen. Samuel A. Rice moved quickly to the rear of the train to assess this new threat, and ordered the 50th Indiana back to reinforce Col. Thomas Benton's 29th Iowa. The attackers were soon repulsed and Benton fell back about half a mile to the summit of a ridge near Terre Noir Creek, where he placed his artillery in position and prepared to meet the enemy again. The Confederates reformed to the left of Benton's line on the summit of a nearby hill, but a Union charge soon drove them back in confusion and disarray with heavy losses. Benton then rapidly fell back to regain the train, reported to be menaced on another front by the approach of Cabell's

forces from Washington to the south. The Confederates mounted another attack on Benton's rear guard as they established camp late that afternoon but were summarily repulsed, and Benton rejoined the Union train at 9:30 that evening.^{vi}

Aware of the importance of seizing and holding the strategic Elkins' Ferry crossing to the south of the Union train, on the afternoon of April 2 Salomon told Col. William E. McLean of the 43rd Indiana Infantry to lead his brigade on a forced march through the evening to reconnoiter the ford. Arriving at the river after dark, McLean ordered a squadron of cavalry sent forward across the shallow Little Missouri as advance pickets, while the remainder of his forces -- the 36th Iowa Infantry under Col. C. W. Kittredge, the 43rd Indiana Infantry under Maj. W. W. Norris, and Company E of the 2nd Missouri Light Artillery under Lt. Peetz -- encamped near the river for the night. On the morning of April 3, skirmishing and occasional firing along the Union picket line alerted McLean to the presence of the enemy and prompted him to order Norris to cross the river with four companies of the 43rd Indiana to support the cavalry pickets and flush out the Confederates. Norris succeeded in driving back the enemy skirmishers, cutting off and capturing 16 Confederates in the process.^{vii}

Satisfied that a Confederate attack was imminent in the morning, that evening McLean ordered Lt. Col. Francis Drake to have three companies from the 36th Iowa and three companies from the 43rd Indiana to position themselves on the left and right of the road leading from the ford to resist possible rebel encroachments. One section of artillery under Lieutenant Peetz was deployed so as to command all possible approaches to Elkins' Ferry. Meanwhile, Marmaduke's division prepared itself nearby, deployed along a ridge overlooking the river bottom to the northeast. In an attempt to relieve pressure on Shelby's forces to the north and counter the Union advance, the 1,600 men of Cabell's brigade attacked Drake's positions early on the morning of the 4th and a lively skirmish ensued for the following two hours. On discovering the location of Peetz's battery, the Confederates moved four pieces of artillery into position and forced the Union pickets and advanced companies back toward the river, but an effort to flank the Union left and capture the battery was met by a well-coordinated defense by the 36th Iowa under Col. Kittredge and turned back. Soon after Cabell's charge had been repulsed, the arrival of the 29th Iowa Infantry and the 9th Wisconsin Infantry as reinforcements convinced the Confederates that the main body of the Union train was approaching, and the attack was called off. Losses on both sides in the Battle of Elkins' Ferry were light, with 30 Union soldiers slightly wounded, 50 Confederates wounded, and 18 Southerners killed. On the evening of the 4th, Shelby's brigade joined Marmaduke, and together they withdrew 16 miles south to Prairie DeAnn the following morning.^{viii}

The Battle of Prairie De Ann

In 1864, Prairie De Ann was a circular body of land surrounded by forest, 25 to 30 miles square, a well-known landmark one hundred miles southwest of Little Rock. The prairie was something of a crossroads; to the west lay the Confederate capital of Washington, to the east lay the heavily fortified city of Camden, where many Confederate troops were headquartered, while to the south lay the strategic Red River and Shreveport beyond. One soldier, on viewing the prairie for the first time, wrote that it "stretched away smoothly as a sea of glass"; another described it as "like an oasis...a relief for the eye of the traveler, who for many days has hardly seen anything but rocks crowned by dark pines or gloomy cypress swamps." Except for a few scattered farmhouses and the tiny village of Moscow on its eastern edge, the prairie was mostly unoccupied. Arriving on April 5, Marmaduke took a position behind a frail line of earthworks on the southwestern side of Prairie De Ann to protect the approach to Washington and await the arrival of reinforcements. Meanwhile, scattered skirmishing continued with the slowly advancing Federals.^{ix}

On April 6, the Yanks finally received word of the approach of Thayer's column from Hot Springs, and Steele decided to await their arrival on the Cornelius farm, a short distance south of the Little Missouri. A heavy rain fell that evening, flooding the bottomlands and washing away bridges. Working parties were sent to repair the damage and construct a new pontoon bridge across the Little Missouri in preparation for the passage of Thayer's wagon train. By the time Thayer's Frontier Division arrived on April 9, the troops were destitute of supplies, while Steele's decision to delay his advance by three days had further diminished the Union rations; the Federals no longer had sufficient supplies to carry them to Shreveport, and Steele was forced to send word to Little Rock to dispatch a supply train with 30 days' half-rations for 15,000 men. The arrival of Thayer's column increased Steele's effective fighting force to 10,400.^x

Meanwhile, Marmaduke's position on the Confederate side was strengthened with the arrival on April 6 of Brig. Gen. Richard M. Gano's Texas cavalry brigade, a part of Maxey's division from the Indian Territory. Sterling Price, the Confederate district commander nicknamed "Old Pap" by his men, arrived on the 7th along with the brigades of Crawford and Dockery, taking direct charge of Confederate operations amid growing concerns as to the effectiveness of the general's military decisions thus far. Of the five Confederate brigades at Price's disposal, only three had been used effectively, and these under Marmaduke's orders. Crawford and Dockery's brigades had been left east of the Ouachita when it should have been obvious that no Union attack would be forthcoming from Pine Bluff. Subsequently, Price was unable to contest with his full force Steele's crossing of the Little Missouri, and the best opportunity to halt the Federal advance was lost. Fully expecting a Union attack on Washington, Price had pulled almost all of the Confederate troops from Camden and assembled them on Prairie De Ann; unknown to Price however, Steele had decided as early as April 7 to go to Camden for desperately needed food and forage.^{xi} On April 10, the Confederates were well-prepared when the Federals drove Shelby and Dockery back and Steele's forces began to move across Prairie De Ann.^{xii}

As Col. Adolph Engleman's 3rd Brigade of the Third Division, together with Company A, 3rd Illinois Artillery, emerged from the thick pine forest onto the prairie, they were confronted by "large numbers of the enemy cavalry...deployed upon the central ridge of the prairie running east and west, while the ridge in front commanding the point where the road enters the prairie was held by the enemy's skirmishers concealed in the dense undergrowth covering the same." The bluecoats deployed to the west of the road, the 40th Iowa to the right of the battery and the 43rd Illinois on the left; these troops soon moved forward as skirmishers, extending westward as much as a mile, while the 27th Wisconsin advanced to support the battery. After the 3rd Brigade had filed into position, Brig. Gen. Rice's 1st Brigade - consisting of the 50th Indiana, 29th Iowa, 33rd Iowa, and Voegelé's Battery manned by Company F, 9th Wisconsin Infantry - entered the prairie and deployed to the left of the road.^{xiii}

Col. William E. McLean's 2nd Brigade, the last to enter the prairie, was initially charged with guarding the Federal's supply and pontoon trains, but as skirmishing intensified the 77th Ohio and 36th Iowa were ordered to advance and take positions on the right and left of the Old Military Road respectively. Company E, 2nd Missouri Light Artillery, deployed to the extreme right of the Union line and was soon engaged in an artillery duel that lasted through the afternoon and evening. The 43rd Indiana, in the rear of the Union train, arrived in the Union camp at midnight, while Thayer's troops did not arrive until the following day.^{xiv}

Though mounted, the Confederate forces often fought as infantry, with every fourth man remaining in the rear to hold horses. Facing the advancing Federals, stationed one-half mile southeast of the Union line on a small ridge covered with brush, were the 18th, 19th, and 20th Arkansas, as well as the 12th Arkansas

Battalion of Sharpshooters, under the command of Gen. Dockery. Farther back and to the east was Shelby's brigade, including the 1st Missouri Battalion; 5th, 11th, and 12th Missouri Regiments; Hunter's Missouri Regiment; and Collins' Battery. To the west was Col. Greene's Brigade; the 3rd, 4th, 7th, and 8th Missouri, as well as the Missouri Battery. Cabell's Brigade, including the 1st, 4th, and 7th Arkansas, in addition to Gunter's Arkansas Battalion and Blocher's Arkansas Battery; and Crawford's Brigade, composed of the 2nd Arkansas Regiment, Crawford's Arkansas Regiment, Wright's Arkansas Regiment, Poe's Arkansas Battalion, and McMurtrey's Arkansas Battalion, were all stationed in various positions along the southern and western sides of the prairie. Together, the combined forces of Dockery and Shelby totaled 2,000 effectives, while Greene, Cabell, and Crawford collectively commanded about 4,000 men. Gano's Texas Brigade and Walker's Indian Brigade of Choctaws and Chickasaws totaled about 1,000 men, so that the assembled Confederate forces were about half as large as the opposing Federals. Expecting a Union attack on Washington to the west, the Confederates had thrown up their fortifications along the western and southern edges of the prairie.^{xv}

An artillery duel developed as the Federals deployed on the battlefield. Union skirmishers moved forward and small arms fire broke out between the Yank vanguard and Dockery's troops. Dockery fell back and was ordered to take a position to the left of Shelby's line. The bluecoats continued their slow advance over the next three hours as the fighting continued. "The artillery duel was terrible and magnificent," Shelby wrote later. "The long lines of cavalry on either side of the Guns, and over all the bursting bombs and the white powder clouds came fast and furious."^{xvi} As darkness fell on the 10th, Marmaduke ordered Shelby to withdraw his forces to the rear, beyond the grove of gum trees that would provide the Confederate name for the battle. The Union troops occupied the high ridge formerly defended by Shelby's retreating troops.^{xvii}

Darkness brought no respite in the fighting. From his new position at the Gum Grove, Shelby attempted to check Steele's relentless advance by deploying most of his brigade as skirmishers. In his report, Shelby described the night battle that ensued: "For three hours more the fight went on, the whole heavens lit up with bursting bombs and the falling flames of muskets. Their advance was checked for the night, and at 12 P.M. I drew off after eight hours of severe fighting."^{xviii} A postwar account of the fighting by one of Shelby's troops described the scene in vivid detail:

The horizon from east to west was one leaping incessant blaze of about six thousand muskets lighting up the very sky and making night hideous with the screaming missiles. The batteries, too, joined in the combat and burst like volcanoes from the solid earth, throwing large jets of flame at every discharge.^{xix}

Late in the evening, some of Price's men mounted an assault against a Federal battery but were repulsed, and at midnight the cannonading ceased for the night.

The following day, April 11, except for occasional skirmishing and cannon fire, there was little action until the afternoon. A soldier in the 33rd Iowa later noted that "[i]t was a beautiful day, and the singing of birds in the thicket near us contrasted oddly with the occasional booming of the cannon and the continued skirmishing on some part of the line. As for us, we hunted rabbits, played euchre, read old novels, wrote away at letters, slept, and so on, as though there were no thoughts of battle in the world."^{xx} At 2:30, the Federals once more deployed into cavalry, infantry and artillery battle lines, two to three miles in length across the prairie, and began to advance on the Confederates. After several hours of skirmishing and artillery action the Union troops withdrew, while Shelby and Marmaduke pulled their forces back to Prairie De Rohan twelve miles to the south. Sterling Price withdrew most of the rest of the Confederates to a point

about eight miles east of Washington in order to better defend the capital from the advancing Federals. A small contingent was left to defend the Confederate entrenchments on the western side of Prairie De Ann.^{xxi}

Dawn on April 12 found the Union army again on the move, advancing across the prairie toward the Confederate entrenchments to the west. The Confederates slowly withdrew in the face of the Union thrust, evacuating their entrenchments and falling back to rejoin Price's army near Washington. On reaching the western edge of the Prairie, the bluecoats found "nearly a mile of rifle pits with positions for artillery, and nearly a mile of felled timber thrown up as breastworks."^{xxii} Union cavalry pursued the retreating rebels down the Old Washington Road, suggesting to Price that the main body of the Federal force was on its way; however, the main Union column, as well as the wagon train, instead took the eastern road back across the prairie toward Camden. After following the retreating Confederates for several miles to mislead Price, the cavalry doubled back to rejoin the main column. That night, the Union vanguard camped on Terre Rouge Creek, while Thayer's troops at the rear of the column did not leave Prairie De Ann proper until the following day.^{xxiii}

Price discovered the Union deception on April 13, and hastily returned to Prairie De Ann to attack the Camden-bound Union column as it withdrew. Gano's Texas Brigade, Walker's Choctaw Brigade, and Dockery's Brigade recrossed the prairie and assailed Thayer's troops as they were leaving Prairie De Ann the afternoon of the 13th. Thayer deployed his men along the timberline on the eastern edge of the prairie near the village of Moscow to meet the pursuing Confederates; in the four hours of combat that ensued, the 2nd Indiana Battery fired more than two thousand shots, solid and shell. As the afternoon turned to evening, the Confederates withdrew and were pursued back across the prairie for about four miles by Thayer's people. The Federals reported seven killed and 24 wounded in the "Battle of Moscow"; Confederate losses were not reported. As evening fell, Thayer withdrew from the prairie and marched all night to catch up with the main Union column en route to Camden.^{xxiv}

The Occupation of Camden

The march on Shreveport aborted, Steele's army continued its march toward Camden over treacherous roads to await the arrival of desperately needed supplies from Little Rock and Pine Bluff. "Our supplies were nearly exhausted, and so was the country," Steele later wrote Chief-of-Staff Henry W. Halleck: "We were obliged to forage from 5 to 15 miles on either side of the road to keep our stock alive." On half-rations for almost three weeks, Steele's soldiers ignored their commander's strict orders against unauthorized foraging.^{xxv}

As the Federals approached Camden, Steele received reports on the afternoon of the 14th that the Confederates were planning to ambush the Union train before it reached the city. Gen. Rice, with his infantry brigade in the van of the Union column, was ordered to press on toward Camden as rapidly as possible. That evening, after a grueling forced march, Rice joined Gen. Carr's cavalry at White Oak Creek, 18 miles west of Camden. The march resumed at dawn the following day. The Union column had not travelled far on the morning of the 15th before it encountered Marmaduke's cavalry division, which had left Washington the morning of the 13th, made a 60-mile detour around the southern flank of the Camden-bound Union army, and entered the Camden-Washington road 14 miles west of Camden. After such a grueling pace, the Confederates were ill-prepared to effectively resist the advancing Federals. After a two-hour skirmish, Marmaduke was forced to pull back. He then rushed a detachment to Camden to destroy as much public property as possible lest it fall into enemy hands, then withdrew his command to a position about eight miles southwest of the city. Price joined Marmaduke shortly thereafter and established headquarters

for his 6,000 effectives 16 miles west of Camden at Woodlawn, distributing his forces so as to cover all the western and southern approaches to Camden. As the sun set on the evening of the 15th, Rice's infantry brigade marched into and occupied Camden, 23 days after leaving Little Rock. This accomplishment was to represent the zenith of the Federal campaign.^{xxvi}

As Steele occupied Camden on April 15, Gen. Edmund Kirby Smith received word in Louisiana that the Yanks had ceased their southward advance at Prairie De Ann, and were now moving east toward Camden. Smith sensed that the Federals were in retreat, but he could not discount the possibility that Steele meant to link up with Gen. Banks, who had been defeated at Pleasant Hill on April 9 and was currently stalled at Grand Ecore on the southern leg of the Red River Campaign that was to have converged at Shreveport preparatory to an advance into Texas. Sensing that the Union campaign was a failure, Smith now hoped that he could keep Steele ignorant of Banks' difficulties on the lower Red River, disrupt Union supply lines, force the enemy's retreat, attack and ultimately destroy the starving adversaries, then recapture Little Rock and northwest Arkansas, possibly even carrying the war back into Missouri. Intending to lead the pursuit of the Federals himself, Smith set out for Camden with his three infantry divisions and established his headquarters at Calhoun (Columbia County), which was connected by telegraph with Shreveport.^{xxvii}

The Battle of Poison Spring and the First Kansas Colored

The Federals' successive defeats in the battles of Mansfield and Pleasant Hill in Louisiana had effectively halted Banks's progress toward Shreveport, and Steele chose to remain in Camden to await further developments rather than pressing on toward the Red River. Steele's supply problems were not alleviated by the capture and occupation of the heavily-fortified Camden; indeed, the Federals were forced to provide food from their diminishing stores for the starving residents of the city. The Ouachita River was too low for transport. The Federal capture on April 16 of the Confederate steamer Homer thirty miles below Camden netted between 3,000 and 5,000 bushels of corn, alleviating the shortages somewhat, and Union troops scoured the countryside in search of forage.^{xxviii}

On April 17, a train of 198 Union wagons left Camden under the command of Col. James M. Williams, traveling west on the Washington Road in order to appropriate a large quantity of corn that had been discovered during the army's advance on Camden three days earlier. Williams's command included 438 men of the 1st Kansas (Colored); 193 cavalry from the 6th Kansas, 2nd Kansas, and 14th Kansas; and two guns from the 2nd Indiana Battery manned by 33 artillerymen. The 1st Kansas Colored had been recruited from among the swelling numbers of fugitive slaves from Missouri and Arkansas who had fled to Kansas in 1861 and 1862. The state's reputation as a bastion of progressive abolitionism inspired antipathy among many Southerners, and the concept of blacks in uniform was especially loathsome. A number of Unionists were equally uncomfortable with the notion of whites fighting alongside blacks, although the regiment's extraordinary conduct under fire soon tempered such concerns. Privates in the 1st Kansas were paid ten dollars a month, three dollars less than white privates received. As was the case in most black combat units throughout the war, all of the officers of the 1st Kansas were white, although the noncommissioned officers were black.^{xxix}

The Confederates had been livid at the news of the formation of the 1st Kansas Colored. Southern troops in Arkansas and Missouri spoke with loathing of the "First Nigger" Kansas regiment, and general orders were issued that such "crimes and outrages" (the utilization of black soldiers) would require "retaliation." Captured white officers commanding black troops were to be "executed as a felon," while it was made clear that Southern troops would take no black prisoners. At best, a captured 1st Kansas soldier could expect to be

returned to slavery. On one occasion, under a flag of truce in Indian Territory, Confederate forces exchanged a number of white prisoners with the 1st Kansas, but refused to turn over any black prisoners. When Williams later received reports of the murder of one of the black prisoners, the 1st Kansas' commanding officer promptly ordered the execution of one of his Confederate prisoners. Williams' ruthlessness convinced the Confederates to desist in murdering their black prisoners, at least for a number of weeks.^{xxx}

The 1st Kansas Colored became the first black regiment to see combat in the war in a victorious skirmish at Island Mound near Butler, Missouri, on October 29, 1862. The following year, on July 1-2, the unit had carried the day in the Battle of Cabin Creek in modern-day Oklahoma with only eight casualties, saving Fort Gibson and ensuring a continued Federal presence in Indian Territory throughout the remainder of the war. The unit's regimental historian later noted the broader significance of the battle:

This engagement was the first during the war in which white and colored troops were joined in action, and to the honor and credit of the [white] officers and men...be it said they allowed no prejudice on account of color to interfere in the discharge of their duty in the face of an enemy alike to both races...[the 1st Kansas Colored] evinced a coolness and true soldierly spirit which inspired the officers in command with that confidence which subsequent battle scenes satisfactorily proved was not unfounded.^{xxxi}

The 2,200 Indians and Texans deployed against the 1st Kansas Colored at Cabin Creek that day would carry a grudge against the black unit for almost a year before they met again at Poison Spring. In the weeks that followed Cabin Creek, the 1st Kansas Colored played a key role in the Battle of Honey Springs in Indian Territory, on July 17, 1863, and in Maj. Gen. James G. Blunt's efforts to drive the Confederates out of north Arkansas. Blunt later remarked "I never saw such fighting as was done by that Negro regiment...they make better soldiers in every respect than any troops I have ever had under my command." This mettle would be tested again under most ferocious conditions at Poison Spring.^{xxxii}

Foolishly, Steele had ordered no reconnaissance to ascertain the whereabouts of the Confederate cavalry before the Union forage train's departure on April 17. Eighteen miles west of town, the train dispersed to forage in the countryside, then returned to camp at White Oak Creek at midnight loaded with corn. The following morning, the Union train began its return trip to Camden; reinforcements arrived on the trip back in the form of 383 men of the 18th Iowa; 96 cavalry troopers from the 6th Kansas, 2nd Kansas, and 14th Kansas; and 25 artillerists with two mountain howitzers from the 2nd Indiana Battery, all under the command of Capt. William M. Duncan. At this point, Williams now had 1,000 effectives and four guns to protect his ill-gotten provender.^{xxxiii}

Unfortunately for the Federals, Williams' forage train had not gone unnoticed by the Southerners. Confederate pickets under the command of Col. Greene spotted the train soon after it left Camden on April 17. As evening fell, Gen. Marmaduke left camp with 500 of his own troops as well as 1,500 men from Gen. Cabell's brigade, and rode to attack the Federal column. Marmaduke, on hearing of the imminent arrival of Union reinforcements the following day and fearing that he faced as many as 2,500 men, sent word to Gen. Price recommending that all available troops be focused on the train to prevent its return to Camden. Price ordered Maxey's division to assist Marmaduke, not realizing that Maxey's commission preceded Marmaduke's; although Maxey yielded his authority to the junior general, friction between the two was inevitable.^{xxxiv}

On the morning of the 18th, Marmaduke led his troops north and entered the Washington road near Lee's plantation, atop a low ridge perpendicular to the Washington-Camden road where he ordered all except Greene's brigade to dismount. Col. Crawford's brigade was placed to the right, while Cabell's men both blocked the road and occupied the left. Marmaduke's four artillery pieces were unlimbered on a knoll a short distance to south of the road. Shortly before 10 a.m., Maxey arrived with the Choctaw and Chickasaw brigades of Tandy Walker, as well as 655 Texans under Col. Charles DeMorse. Marmaduke had Maxey deploy his troops parallel to the road and hidden in thick undergrowth and heavy pine, perpendicular to Crawford's and Cabell's lines. Greene's mounted brigade was held in reserve. Confederate pickets advanced westward to warn of the approach of the Union forage train; the Federals would be forced to fight their way through to Camden or surrender. Marmaduke soon discovered that he had overestimated the size of the Federal force; the 3,100 Southern troops assembled outnumbered the Federals three to one.^{xxxv}

Williams, unaware of the proximity of the Rebels, had stopped momentarily at a crossroads to rearrange his order of march to better utilize his reinforcements. The 1st Kansas Colored under Maj. Richard Ward moved to the fore of the train with Williams himself trading places with the 18th Iowa under Capt. Duncan. The Yanks discovered the Confederate pickets near a local landmark known as Poison Spring and easily pushed them back until encountering the Confederate line blocking the Washington road near Lee's plantation. Williams quickly closed ranks, positioning the 1st Kansas in a line facing the Southerners to the east, with his cavalry on both flanks, unaware of Maxey's brigades hidden to his right. The Southerners opened fire, Hughey's Arkansas and Harris's Missouri cannons lobbing round after round into Ward's line while Krumbhaar's Texan howitzers pounded the Union right, catching the 1st Kansas in a "cross-fire of shot and shell." The Union artillery had difficulty responding.^{xxxvi}

In defense of the train itself, Williams posted Lt. Josephus Utt's detachment of the 14th Kansas Cavalry to the left of the 1st Kansas, while detachments from the 2nd and 6th Kansas Cavalry Regiments under Lts. Barnett B. Mitchell and Robert Henderson formed on the right of Ward's infantry. The 18th Iowa and Capt. Duncan were posted at the rear of the train. Two Union field artillery pieces were brought forward to fire on the Confederate positions, to alert and recall the scattered Federal foragers, and to summon aid from Camden, as well as to attempt to ascertain whether the Southerners possessed artillery.^{xxxvii}

After the 1st Kansas had been pounded by cannon fire, Marmaduke's plan of attack called for Maxey to deliver a surprise attack on the Union's exposed right flank, forcing the Federals to shift their front to meet this assault and thereby allowing Marmaduke's troops to hit the Union's left flank and trap the Federals in a devastating cross fire. Unfortunately for the Southerners, Williams noticed Maxey's presence on his right before he had the opportunity to surprise him, and the colonel quickly shifted four companies of the 1st Kansas to counter this new threat. What might have been a ruinous Confederate victory became a battle of attrition, with the Southerners' numerical superiority eventually exhausting and overwhelming the hapless bluecoats.^{xxxviii}

With the element of surprise gone, DeMorse's and Walker's brigades plunged forward toward the Federals' right flank, down a steep, wooded ravine and across an open field criss-crossed by several wooden fence rows, forcing back a Union cavalry detachment as they went. Williams had urged Ward's 1st Kansas to hold its fire as long as possible, then DeMorse's Texans were raked with a withering fusillade of bullets that drove them back to the protection of the wooded ravine, momentarily checking the Union advance. Walker's Choctaws and Chickasaws were spared this onslaught as they advanced across the field to do battle with the Union rear guard -- 18th Iowa. Maxey's artillery soon opened up on the Federals, allowing DeMorse to rally his forces and take the field once more.^{xxxix}

Meanwhile, Marmaduke opened a heavy and destructive crossfire of artillery as both Crawford and Cabell on the Confederate's right wing began to move forward to confront the Union left, keeping their lines intact as they crossed fence rows and fields. A breakdown in communications between Cabell and DeMorse on the Confederate left imperiled the Southerners' assault. Cabell had planned to overlap his left with DeMorse's right, but the Texans had been repulsed in their initial charge, and a steadily widening gap developed in the Confederate lines. Unfortunately, Williams never had the opportunity to exploit this point of weakness. Before the Union commander learned of its presence, Marmaduke ordered Greene's brigade to move up under scathing Union fire and fill it.^{xli} "Hot work was going on all along the line from the right of Greene's to the left of the Choctaw brigade," Maxey later recalled. "One continued shout was heard."^{xlii}

The 1st Kansas Colored bore the brunt of the Confederate assault from the east when it came, exposed to a severe artillery crossfire and facing odds of as many as four to one. Maj. Ward, commanding the 1st Kansas, described the barrage as the worst his troops had experienced throughout the war. As Greene advanced and hurled his troops into the breach, the weakened Union line sagged. Williams hoped to have the 1st Kansas fall back slowly and regroup at the 18th Iowa's rear guard position, but the intensity of the Confederate attacks on Ward's 1st Kansas had taken its toll on the beleaguered Federals. The 1st Kansas's left soon crumbled and the Federals were forced to fall back about 60 yards and attempt to regroup, only to discover that the Union troops south of the road were breaking up as well. When DeMorse finally succeeded in turning Ward's right flank, the African American troops' orderly retreat increasingly turned to disarray. As Ward and what remained of his command reached the rear of the train, the 18th Iowa let them pass through their lines and prepared to receive the advancing Confederates.^{xliii} Williams struggled to maintain order and mount a defense to avoid annihilation. The harried Union commander fell back to the rear of the train to form a new line with the 18th Iowa, abandoning the supply train in the process.^{xliiii} As Walker's Indian brigade moved forward, a private was seen mounting a captured Union howitzer, from which he "gave a whoop, which was followed by such a succession of whoops from his comrades as made the woods reverberate for miles around."^{xliv}

Duncan's Iowans closed ranks as the Choctaw assault forced him to pull his soldiers out of the field north of the road and place them along the edge of the woods. Artillery was redeployed in an attempt to cover the Union infantry's withdrawal as the 18th Iowa soon joined the 1st Kansas in retreat across Lee's plantation to prevent capture. Confederate pursuit of the retreating Yanks continued in some cases for as many as two and a half miles, and although there were instances of isolated Union resistance on Lee's plantation north of the Washington road to slow the pursuit, all firing had ceased by 2 p.m. as the bluecoats retreated through hollows and swamps back to Camden. Union losses might have been even more severe had Gen. Maxey not decided to pull rank on Marmaduke in the closing rounds of the battle. Although Marmaduke had ordered an all-out pursuit of the fleeing Federals, Maxey countermanded this order, allowing the remnants of Williams' forces to return to Camden unscathed.^{xlv}

The Confederates had scored an impressive victory at Poison Spring and Steele's supply difficulties in Camden worsened considerably. Union losses at Poison Spring totaled 301 killed, wounded, and missing. The 1st Kansas bore the brunt of the Union casualties, losing 42 percent of its strength, 182 killed and wounded out of 438 engaged. Union reports noted that the Confederates shot wounded black soldiers without mercy, and it is significant that the Southerners reported that only four black soldiers were captured. Lending credence to the theory of a conscious Confederate massacre of African American troops is Cabell's report that "Morgan's regiment killed at least eighty Negroes," despite the fact that Morgan's brigade did not participate in the battle *per se*, but was stationed between Poison Spring and Camden to intercept the fleeing

Yanks.^{xlvi}

The 1st Kansas had been decimated in the Battle of Poison Spring, with almost half its men killed in just four hours at the hands of the same Texans they had defeated at Cabin Creek a year earlier. The Texans' revenge was brutal; there were reports of the white soldiers taunting the wounded blacks with shouts of "Where is the First Nigger now?" answered by "All cut to pieces and gone to hell by bad management," before they were shot or bayoneted. The black soldiers who remained vowed never again to take prisoners, and for the rest of the war "Remember Poison Spring" was a potent rallying cry for the surviving 1st Kansans. By the war's end, the 1st Kansas Colored had seen more regular combat than any other black Civil War regiment.^{xlvii}

Confederate losses were considerably less than those of the Federals; 114 killed, wounded, or missing, just three percent of Marmaduke's total force. Almost two hundred wagons loaded with forage, as well as four Union field artillery pieces, fell into the Southerners' possession and were returned to Price's headquarters near Woodlawn. The Southerners had won their first clear-cut victory of the Red River Campaign, and the morale boost to Price's harried troops was significant. Steele's supply difficulties had worsened, and the bluecoatss would remain on the defensive for the remainder of the ill-fated campaign.^{xlviii}

The Battle of Marks' Mills

In the aftermath of the Battle of Poison Spring, Gen. Steele was confronted with an increasingly precarious logistical and supply position. Steele soon concluded that foraging parties were ineffective. "It is useless to talk of obtaining supplies in this country for my command," he wrote of the surrounding countryside, "[it] is well-nigh exhausted and the people are threatened with starvation."^{xlix} Federal soldiers encamped in Camden were incredulous that their commander would have sent out such an important foraging party with so little protection. Although meat was still being issued and Camden's steam and hand mills were in constant operation grinding cornmeal, the hardtack had given out and the Union soldiers were becoming increasingly demoralized over their situation. These conditions were alleviated somewhat on April 20 with the arrival of the long-awaited supply train from Pine Bluff carrying mail and ten days' supply of half-rations.^l

Exacerbating the discontent in Camden were the persistent rumors and reports that Gen. Banks had been repulsed and forced to fall back in his drive toward Shreveport. Steele was not optimistic as to how this development might affect the campaign. "Although I believe we can beat Price," he wrote Maj. Gen. William T. Sherman, his immediate superior, on April 22, "I do not expect to meet successfully the whole force which Kirby Smith could send against me, if Banks should let him go." The following day, Steele received a communication from Banks informing him of the Louisiana campaign's difficulties and urging him to bring his army south to the Red River. Steele dismissed this suggestion out of hand as unworkable given the Camden Expedition's tenuous logistical position and the possibility that Arkansas and Missouri might then be left vulnerable to Confederate invasion, and resolved to defend the line of the Ouachita rather than push on toward Red River. The Federals seemed uncertain and hesitant following the disastrous defeat at Poison Spring and had lost the initiative to Price's Confederates. Meanwhile, with Banks no longer a threat, Kirby Smith was free to concentrate most of his forces in the Louisiana theater in southwest Arkansas.^{li}

Steele was certain that he could hold the heavily-fortified Camden if the navy could send a convoy up the Ouachita; otherwise, the Arkansas River would have to remain the Federals' primary supply route. As Poison Spring had proven, Price's overwhelming cavalry force had compelled Steele to detail strong escorts

for all forage trains leaving the Camden perimeter. Kirby Smith, meanwhile, arrived at Woodlawn on April 19 in advance of the three infantry divisions to take command of the Confederate forces investing Camden, leaving Maj. Gen. Richard Taylor in command in Louisiana. On the 21st, Smith's command was strengthened by the arrival of 8,000 infantry, organized into three divisions led by Brig. Gens. M. M. Parsons, John G. Walker, and Thomas J. Churchill, to reinforce the 10,000-12,000 cavalry and mounted infantry already at his disposal. As Confederate artillery pounded Federal outposts west of the city, an attack on Camden appeared imminent.

Upon arrival at Woodlawn, Smith ordered Price to organize a cavalry force to be deployed to the east of the Ouachita to hinder Federal foraging, as well as to harry the Union supply and communication lines to the north. Gen. Fagan was given command of the 4,000 soldiers in the raiding column, then sent to attack Union supply depots at Little Rock and Pine Bluff. Ultimately, Fagan would place his force between Steele and Little Rock to prevent the Federals' retreat to safety. In Smith's opinion, such a strategy would ensure the destruction of Steele's army because "[n]either man nor beast could be sustained in the exhausted country between the Ouachita and White Rivers."ⁱⁱⁱ

Gen. Shelby's brigade, assigned to Fagan's column, left the Confederate camp on April 19, crossed the Ouachita above Camden, and swept southward toward El Dorado Landing, 26 miles downriver (near modern-day Calion), skirmishing and driving in Union patrols as they rode. Following the arrival of Churchill's and Parson's infantry divisions at Woodlawn, the remaining three brigades of Fagan's column left camp on April 22, headed south on the middle Camden road. The following day, Fagan's command rendezvoused with Shelby's brigade guarding the floating bridge at El Dorado Landing, where Shelby informed Fagan that his scouts had learned that a large, heavily guarded Union supply train had left Camden en route to Pine Bluff.^{liii}

Despite his concern over the muddy road conditions through Moro Bottom and reports of Shelby's aptly-named Iron Brigade patrolling in the vicinity, Steele ordered the Union train of 211 government wagons begin its return to Pine Bluff 70 miles away on April 23. Lt. Col. Francis M. Drake of the 36th Iowa Infantry was tapped to command the train's escort, 1,200 foot soldiers of the 43rd Indiana, the 36th Iowa, and the 77th Ohio; 240 mounted troopers of the 1st Indiana Cavalry and the 7th Missouri Cavalry; and two sections of Company E, 2nd Missouri Light Artillery. In addition, 520 officers and men of the 1st Iowa Cavalry returning to their homes on furlough would accompany Drake over part of his route, and 350 troopers of the 5th Kansas Cavalry based at Pine Bluff joined the train later. Upon arrival in Pine Bluff, the train was to be loaded with supplies and Drake was to accompany the wagons on their return trip to Camden. The train left the Camden vicinity before dawn on the morning of the 23rd with Maj. Mark McCauley's Indiana troopers in the fore, unaware of the presence of Fagan to the south. A number of private wagons and citizens, cotton speculators, refugees, and contraband blacks joined the entourage for the treacherous journey to the Arkansas River. The train camped that night 18 miles east of Camden.^{liv}

Leaving El Dorado Landing on April 24, Fagan divided his command into two divisions under Shelby and Cabell and began a 45-mile forced march paralleling the Camden-Pine Bluff road in order to intercept the Union train before it reached the Saline River crossing at Mount Elba. The Confederate column finally halted at midnight to camp eight miles south of Marks' Mills, a local landmark at the intersection of the Camden-Mount Elba-Pine Bluff road. When his scouts brought word before dawn on the 25th that the Union train had not yet reached Marks' Mills, Fagan decided to attack the Federals at that point. As the Confederate column approached the road on which the Yankee train was traveling, Fagan ordered Shelby's and Crawford's mounted brigades to the east to place themselves between the bluecoats and the Saline

River.^{lv}

The Union train covered 17 miles on April 24, finally stopping to camp on the edge of the Moro Creek bottoms that evening. Although roving Confederate patrols had been encountered that day, Drake was confident that his train would arrive safely in Pine Bluff. Nevertheless, Union patrols were sent to determine whether or not any Rebel troops were in the area. The following morning, the train lurched into motion again, with the 43rd Indiana well out in front as the train and its escort entered the Moro Bottom. McCauley's Indianians, with one section of artillery in tow, were to proceed to the Marks' Mills road intersection five miles ahead to present a strong front in the event of a Confederate ambush. The 36th Iowa and 77th Ohio remained with the train, with one section of artillery at the rear. The 43rd Indiana was the first to encounter the Confederates.^{lvi}

The morning of April 25, Cabell's division rode northward on the Warren road while Shelby took up his position between Marks' Mills and the Saline River. Fagan's plan of attack called for Cabell and Shelby to attack the Union train simultaneously, a difficult maneuver even for seasoned troops such as Fagan's. While Shelby's men were to remain mounted, Cabell was to dismount as he neared the intersection and have his men form a line parallel to the Camden-Pine Bluff road, to the right of Dockery's brigade. Despite their inherent difficulties, the tactics and maneuvers that had worked so successfully for the Confederates at Poison Spring were to prove just as effective at Marks' Mills. Col. John F. Hill's 7th Arkansas Regiment and one company of the 1st Arkansas were to maintain the Confederates left flank as Dockery moved into place. Unfortunately for the Confederates, Dockery's brigade was late in taking up its position along the road, and the Federals arrived before Dockery had his troops positioned.^{lvii}

Scattered skirmishing between the 43rd Indiana and Cabell's vanguard had already broken out to the west when Cabell first caught sight of the large wagon train approaching Marks' Mills. Disregarding Fagan's orders for a coordinated Confederate attack, Cabell elected to launch his attack without consulting Shelby and with Dockery still moving into position. As the 1st Arkansas Cavalry under Col. James C. Monroe dismounted to form east of the Warren road, Cabell ordered the Arkansans forward as skirmishers to engage and push back the Yank's vanguard. As the 1st Arkansas pressed forward, the remainder of Cabell's brigade moved into position. Meanwhile, the still-absent Dockery had discovered a large quantity of forage at a nearby farm and had ordered his troops to suspend their march and feed their animals. One of Dockery's brother officers later observed "[n]either orders nor cannon-shots seemed to disturb that equanimity which he always carried with him into battle. Jolly, energetic, yet absolutely devoid of nervous sensibility, he appeared to have perfect immunity from both fear and anxiety."^{lviii}

Upon arrival at Marks' Mills, Drake realized that the Confederates had undertaken to ambush the Union train. To avoid being flanked, Drake ordered Maj. Wesley Norris's 43rd Indiana to extend its skirmish line. Norris threw out two more companies to reinforce the three already engaged. Majors McCauley and Spellman dismounted their cavalry except for 50 horsemen each and took position alongside Norris' Indianians. McCauley's 50 remaining horsemen occupied a high point to the right of the infantry, while Spellman's riders were placed to the left of the foot soldiers. The 36th Iowa and the 77th Ohio were to come up on the double. As the Iowans arrived, Drake had Norris reinforce his skirmish line with his five remaining companies, holding the 36th Iowa in reserve.^{lix}

Cabell quickly succeeded in driving back the advancing Union skirmishers, but awaited Dockery's arrival before attempting to engage their main line. On learning of Cabell's success, Fagan sent word directing Cabell to move forward and attack the train. Cabell's brigade surged forward, easily overwhelming the

opposing Union cavalymen and capturing a number of wagons as they reached the road itself. Col. Morgan's 2nd Arkansas was likewise successful as it swept into a clearing full of Union wagons, routing the Yankee teamsters and cavalymen, then slaughtering the mules to ensure that the wagons would be stalled long enough for Shelby and Dockery to arrive. Monroe's 1st Arkansas confronted a more dangerous adversary in the 43rd Indiana and retreated.^{lx}

Observing the success of Norris's Indianians against the 1st Arkansas, Col. Drake ordered Maj. Augustus Hamilton and his 36th Iowa to support Norris's counterattack. As Hamilton's Iowans surged forward, the Southerners that had reached the Mount Elba road to the right and left of the Union position at Marks' Mills changed fronts and focused on the 43rd Indiana, compelling Drake to alter his tactics. The 43rd Indiana and the 36th Iowa were withdrawn and Norris positioned his soldiers to the left and right of several log houses nearby. Two guns from the 2nd Missouri Light Artillery were unlimbered in front of the buildings with orders to rake the Rebels with canister as soon as they had closed sufficiently.^{lxi}

The initial successes of Cabell's brigade were short-lived as heavy firing from the general's left and rear signaled that Col. Monroe's regiment had stalled. Col. Morgan, intent on shooting mules and capturing wagons, also learned of Monroe's difficulties at this time and ordered his regiment to about face and assist Monroe. Unable to view Monroe's predicament through the heavy foliage, Cabell ordered Lt. Col. Thomas Gunter to hasten to his comrade's assistance as well. Coming into position, Gunter's Arkansas Battalion found itself on the left of Monroe's 1st Arkansas as Morgan's 2nd Arkansas moved into place to Gunter's left. The 43rd Indiana confronted the Southerners along a ridge known as the Red Lands with a section of artillery at their disposal.^{lxii}

Cabell ordered his brigade to press forward as soon as Morgan and Gunter were in position. With the assistance of Gunter's battalion and the 2nd Arkansas, Monroe's Arkansans successfully regrouped and forced Norris's Hoosiers back onto their battery. The Rebels closed to within 75 yards and the guns of the 2nd Missouri Artillery roared to life, raking the advancing Southerners with canister as Maj. Hamilton ordered his 36th Iowa to stand up and open fire. The Confederates retreated to the relative safety of the tree line to return the Federal volleys. For the next hour and a half, the artillery duel "raged with unabated fury," as Cabell called for the four guns of Capt. W. M. Hughey's Arkansas Battery to take out the 2nd Missouri Artillery. Despite a withering barrage from the Confederate artillery, the Missourians stayed at their guns. Dockery's brigade now arrived on the scene, and Gen. Fagan ordered the newcomers to dismount and deploy on Cabell's left, enabling Col. Hill's 7th Arkansas to be redeployed to guard Dockery's left flank.^{lxiii}

Despite the odds, the outnumbered Federals still held firm when Drake received word that Shelby's division was approaching from the east along the Mount Elba road, potentially threatening the unprotected Union left and rear. The 36th Iowa's right battalion, heretofore held in reserve, was called upon to ready themselves in the event of an attack from that quarter. Drake ordered Maj. McCauley to charge the Confederates with his 60 mounted troopers and, if possible, to reopen communications with the 77th Ohio, believed to be rushing to the front from the rear of the Union train. Drake, although seriously wounded in the hip by a Confederate minie' ball, promised to support McCauley's cavalry with three companies of infantry from the 36th Iowa commanded by Capt. Joseph B. Gedney. McCauley agreed to the plan with misgivings. As Drake returned to his command post to issue the necessary orders to Gedney, he collapsed due to loss of blood. Before losing consciousness, Drake told Capt. William S. Magill to turn the Union command over to Maj. Henry P. Spellman, the next ranking officer. For reasons that are unclear, Magill failed to follow Drake's orders and the Union defense remained leaderless throughout the remainder of the battle, with individual unit commanders issuing orders and attacking as they pleased.^{lxiv}

Gen. Shelby, meanwhile, having dispatched Maj. Benjamin Elliot and the 1st Missouri Cavalry Battalion to capture and hold the Saline River crossing, turned west on the Mount Elba road to join the battle in progress at Marks' Mills. As Shelby approached the battlefield, the sounds of artillery and small-arms fire were heard and the Confederates encountered and routed stragglers and wagons en route to the Mount Elba crossing. Shelby formed his division into four columns: Col. John C. Wright's brigade to the right of the Camden-Mount Elba road, with the 5th and 12th Missouri Cavalry Regiments under Col. David Shanks following. The remainder of Shelby's Iron Brigade remained in reserve.^{lxv}

As the column approached Marks' Mills, Capt. Richard A. Collins brought the four guns of his Missouri battery to bear and fired two blank cartridges to alert Fagan to Shelby's arrival. Shelby's division deployed into battle lines and, with the 11th Missouri Cavalry in the van, swept down on the Federals' left and rear. As Shelby took the field, Cabell ordered the dismounted troopers of the 1st, 2nd, and Gunter's cavalry command to charge the Union positions. Morgan's and Monroe's Arkansans stormed the guns of the 2nd Missouri Light Artillery, forcing the cannoneers to abandon their posts and take shelter under a nearby log cabin, only to be surrounded by Rebels and eventually surrender. The still-unconscious Col. Drake was taken into custody and carried from the building on a stretcher.^{lxvi}

Pockets of Union resistance remained, but were soon quelled as the Battle of Marks' Mills petered out. The 43rd Indiana and the left battalion of the 36th Iowa had been accounted for, and Shelby's division soon dispatched the 36th Iowa's right battalion and McCauley's cavalry detachment before they could regain contact with the 77th Ohio. The Ohioans reached the field too late to alter the outcome of the battle. Nevertheless, Capt. A. J. McCormick ordered his Ohioans into the breach in a desperate attempt to recapture the Union train from the Confederates, catching Cabell's troops by surprise. As Cabell's Arkansas troops regrouped to confront this new foe, Shelby's mounted troops engaged the newly arrived Federals. With Dockery's dismounted troops to his left and the 6th and 12th Missouri mounted regiments to his right, Cabell sent Gunter's, Monroe's, and Morgan's units against McCormick's column, as Maj. J. H. Harrell's Arkansas State Battalion struck at the Yanks' rear. The Ohioans, quickly grasping what had occurred at Marks' Mills, fought dispiritedly and most soon surrendered to the cheering Confederates.^{lxvii}

Later in the day, Shelby's patrols west of Marks' Mills encountered the 520 officers and men of the 1st Iowa Cavalry under Lt. Col. Joseph W. Caldwell, dismounted and returning home on veteran furloughs. On hearing the sounds of battle to the east, Caldwell formed his men into a line of battle at the bridge crossing Moro Creek, to the west of Marks's Mills. On learning of this new development, Shelby ordered Col. DeWitt C. Hunter's Missouri Cavalry Regiment to engage the Iowans. Advancing west, the Confederates met a hail of gunfire as they approached Moro Creek, shooting from his horse and badly wounding Col. Hunter in the melee. This, in addition to reports from a captured Iowan that Gen. Steele's army was on its way, curbed the Southerners' enthusiasm for a new round of fighting. Steele had in fact ordered his 3rd Cavalry Brigade out, and the Iowans broke contact with the foe and fell back to Camden.^{lxviii}

The Battle of Marks' Mills lasted about five hours and involved approximately 1,600 Federal effectives (not including the 1st Iowa Cavalry), of whom at least 1,300 were captured. The Southerners effective strength had been diminished by the need to detail one-fifth of Cabell's and Dockery's men to hold mounts, while Elliot's battalion had been stationed at the Mount Elba crossing. There were about 2,500 Confederate effectives on the field that day, and their losses were fewer than 500 casualties. Union losses were much higher; although less than 100 Federals were killed, total casualties including captured and wounded approached 1,500. Drake also reported that "a large number" of blacks and pro-Union Arkansans

accompanying the Union train had been "inhumanly butchered by the enemy." The Union dead were buried on the Marks' Plantation. Following the war, many were disinterred and returned to their home states for burial. Confederate surgeons examining Col. Drake pronounced his wound mortal, and Fagan allowed the colonel and other Union wounded to be returned to Camden under a flag of truce.^{lxxix}

In assessing the Confederate victory, Fagan found that he had captured a large number of ambulances, hundreds of small arms, 150 contraband slaves, four James rifled guns, and more than 300 wagons, many of which had been partially burnt. Many items that the Union troops had looted from farms along the road were found in the captured wagons, including many prized family possessions belonging to Arkansans who had participated in the battle. Several important and sensitive military documents and returns detailing Steele's troop strengths were captured. The captured train and Union prisoners were escorted under heavy guard back into Confederate territory across the Ouachita, the prisoners bound for the prison camp at Tyler, Texas. Responding to reports of another Union train en route from Princeton to Little Rock, Fagan departed early on April 26 with his reduced command up the west bank of the Saline River.^{lxxx}

Despite the resounding victory at the Battle of Marks' Mills, Confederate casualties were disproportionately high and questions as to Fagan's judgement and tactics surfaced. The lack of coordination among Cabell's, Dockery's, and Shelby's divisions may have hampered the effectiveness of the Confederate attack. Aside from this, the Confederate strategy and tactics at Marks' Mills were very similar to those which had proven so effective at Poison Springs one week earlier.^{lxxxi} In nine days, Steele had lost 440 wagons, prompting one observer to write that Steele "supplied the rebels with trains nearly as generously as Gen. Banks ever did Stonewall Jackson." Marks' Mills may have represented the greatest single defeat the Federals suffered west of the Mississippi River.^{lxxii}

The Battle of Jenkins' Ferry

Steele's command was in disarray as the first survivors to arrive brought word of the devastating defeat at Marks' Mills. The Confederate victory made the Federal presence in Camden untenable as it became increasingly clear that Steele's army would never be able to rendezvous with Gen. Banks' army on the Red River. Indeed, even supplying his troops with food and forage was now impossible. Of the 9,000 horses and mules the Federals had in Camden, available forage in the vicinity was sufficient to supply only 1,000. On the evening of April 25, as stragglers and wounded continued to pour into the beleaguered town, Steele convened a council of war of his generals. Steele's most recent intelligence indicated that the Confederates, bolstered by Smith's arrival, had a superior force amassed on the western approaches to Camden. Generals Saloman, Carr, and Thayer advised an immediate retreat toward the Arkansas River, while Gen. Rice suggested destroying all bridges over the Ouachita and falling back to Hampton, 25 miles to the east. Weighing his options, Steele chose to cut his losses and retreat to Little Rock to avoid starvation and capture. Steele's command had conceded that the Red River Campaign insofar as the Camden Expedition had been a failure.^{lxxiii}

Preparations for a withdrawal from Camden began the following day. Supplies that could not be taken along were destroyed to avoid their capture by the enemy, including tents, mess chests, cooking utensils, harnesses, 92 wagons, and even excess hardtack and bacon too cumbersome to carry back to Little Rock. The men were issued skimpy rations barely sufficient to last them to Little Rock: many received just two pieces of hardtack and half a pint of corn meal. In order to mislead the Confederate troops watching the western approaches to Camden, tattoo sounded at eight o'clock and taps at nine. By midnight, the Federal train had slipped out of the city and across the Ouachita River by pontoon bridge. Carr's cavalry and Thayer's infantry

divisions followed the train across the river, then Salomon's 1st Brigade under Samuel Rice crossed. Col. Engelmann's brigade, holding the Camden perimeter, was ordered by Salomon to abandon the works at 1 a.m. The 2nd and 6th Kansas cavalry regiments patrolled the streets, maintaining calm and preventing the destruction of private property as the bluecoats departed. The pontoon bridge was taken up as daylight broke and Steele's army headed north toward Jenkins' Ferry. A halt was finally called on the evening of the 26th, a few miles north of Camden, the exhausted Federals sleeping where they fell.^{lxxiv}

Kirby Smith seized on the arrival from Louisiana of Maj. Gen. John G. Walker's Texas Division as an opportunity to relieve Sterling Price of his duties and assume personal command of the Army of Arkansas. Price -- whose physical and mental rigor had been sapped by three years of war -- was placed in charge of Churchill's and Parsons' infantry divisions. Several hours had passed by the time the Confederates discovered the Federals' escape, and it was late in the morning before Gen. Price occupied the abandoned town with Churchill's and Parsons' divisions. Walker's Texans entered Camden that afternoon.^{lxxv}

Because Smith's army had no pontoon train, pursuit of the fleeing Federals by infantry was impossible for the time being, although Marmaduke led a small cavalry force in across the Ouachita early the following morning, bound for Bucksport via White Hall to intercept Steele's army. The Confederates completed construction of a floating bridge by the evening of the 27th (using timber salvaged from the scuttled steamboat Homer), and the following morning the Southerners crossed the Ouachita in pursuit of Steele's army. Before leaving Camden, however, Kirby Smith detached Maxey's division and sent it back to Indian Territory, apparently concerned by reports of a Union invasion of the Indian Territory and eastern Texas by Blunt's army based at Fort Smith and Fort Gibson. Smith's rationale for such a drastic reduction of his cavalry strength is unclear; although Smith's control over Tandy Walker's poorly disciplined Indian troops may have been minimal, the opportunity to destroy Steele's army would surely have been more important than any hypothetical Union threat to the Choctaw and Chickasaw nations.^{lxxvi}

With Smith in pursuit, Steele's army marched hurriedly along the Princeton road toward Jenkins' Ferry on Saline River and Little Rock beyond, Carr's cavalry division in the vanguard. The regimental historian of the 33rd Iowa later described the hurried nature of the march: "Signs enough of the precipitation of our retreat appeared in the constant succession of shreds of clothing, pieces of knapsack, and other fragments, which fatigue compelled our men to throw away." Rumors were rampant that Smith's army had placed itself between the Yanks and Little Rock. On the evening of the 27th, Steele's army camped at Freeo, 13 miles south of Princeton and 17 miles from the Ouachita, the location of several good springs and a nearby farm with hundreds of bushels of corn. The army was on the march again before dawn the next morning, but stopped for camp near Princeton that afternoon.^{lxxvii}

The pontoon bridge completed, Gen. Price ordered Churchill's and Parson's divisions across the Ouachita at sunrise on the 28th, followed by Walker's Texans. Speed was of the essence if Steele's army, with a day's lead over the Southerners, was to be overtaken. Steele's trail was easy to follow, as the road was strewn with "cast-off garments, and the property and plunder abandoned" by the retreating Federals. The Confederate march was spartan. Supply wagons were left behind and each soldier carried his own rations and ammunition. The army's ambulances and the artillery were the only wheeled vehicles in attendance. Price ordered his two infantry divisions to stop and camp at the springs near Freeo where the bluecoats had camped the night before, while Walker's Texans halted for the night three miles farther back toward Camden. Marmaduke, meanwhile, in command of Greene's cavalry, had ridden most of the day, passing White Hall and Bucksport in an attempt to cut off the Federals. It was after dark by the time Marmaduke gained the Military Road, only to find that the Yanks had already passed and were now encamped at

Princeton to the north. Marmaduke decided to bypass the sleeping Federals, ride his exhausted cavalry to the east, then re-enter the Military Road between Princeton and Tulip to set up a roadblock. However, by the time Marmaduke re-entered the Military Road, the Federals had passed. His plan foiled, Marmaduke's cavalry division and Greene's brigade overtook the 8th Missouri Cavalry and Wood's battalion south of Tulip. Meanwhile, Maj. Elliot and his 1st Missouri Mounted Battalion, ordered by Gen. Shelby on the morning of the 28th to reconnoiter toward Princeton and rendezvous with Fagan at Pratt's Ferry, skirmished with Carr's cavalry north of Princeton but failed to establish contact with Fagan.^{lxxviii}

Steele's column was on the march again at 4 a.m. on the 29th. Carr's cavalry division was in the lead again, while Salomon's infantry division brought up the rear as the Federals marched north toward Tulip and Jenkins' Ferry beyond. A steady rain began to fall around noon, soon to become a deluge that was to last for the next 18 hours. As it neared the Saline, the Military Road descended a bluff and entered a swamp which extended down to the river. To the north and parallel to the narrow, constricted road was Cox Creek, while to the south lay two fields divided by a broad strip of timber. Large trees were felled by the Federals along the eastern edge of the field nearest the river to form log breastworks and abatis. The road soon became a hopeless mire as the rain beat down, swallowing wagon wheels to their hubs and soldiers to their knees, slowing progress of the Union train as it approached the river. Steele ordered the road across the bottom corduroyed.^{lxxix}

On reaching the river at Jenkins' Ferry, Capt. Junius B. Wheeler, Steele's chief engineer, saw that the swollen river was too deep to ford and that the pontoon train would be necessary. That afternoon, the bridge was positioned and the Union train began crossing the river. Carr's cavalry was the first across in order to reconnoiter the river bottom to the east of the Saline and then proceed on to Little Rock. So many wagons had become bogged down by 9:20 p.m. that Wheeler asked Steele to halt the crossing for the night, but the general refused. The Union rear guard had been in contact with Confederate cavalry since that afternoon, and Steele wanted his train safely across the river before the Southerners brought up their infantry and artillery. Despite their best efforts, the bluecoats were only successful in moving about half their train and artillery across the Saline before daybreak. Steele knew that now a delaying action would be necessary to ensure the successful crossing of all his wagons.^{lxxx}

Jenkins' Ferry was hardly the optimum location for a battle. Except for two open fields near the road, Col. Engelmann described the locale as "a majestic forest, growing out of the swamp, which it was very difficult to pass through on horseback, the infantry being most of the time in water up to their knees." The Military Road from Princeton descended from low lying hills into the morass some two miles from Jenkins' Ferry. One hundred yards beyond this high ground, the tangled undergrowth gave way to a one-quarter mile square plowed field known as Jiles field. A 300-yard-wide swath of timber separated this field from the much larger Kelly field that extended to within a mile of the river. Salomon chose a slough-like hollow running north and south through Kelly field to establish his main line of defense and here await the inevitable Confederate attack at dawn. Cox's Creek, with steep, impassable banks, ran on the right flank of the Union's defensive lines, while a heavily wooded swamp protected the Federals to the south. At one point, Salomon's outermost perimeter extended two and a half miles from the ferry, but the Federals soon abandoned this position and fell back toward the river. To assault the retreating Federals, the Confederates were forced to advance down the narrow rectangle formed by the two fields and attack the Union's log defenses on the far side of the Kelly field.^{lxxxi}

Under Salomon's immediate command were two brigades of infantry led by Gen. Rice and Col. Engelmann. The remainder of a third brigade, decimated at Marks' Mills, took the field under Salomon's direct command. Engelmann's brigade at the rear of the Union army had already encountered and skirmished with

mounted Confederate patrols of the 8th Missouri by noon on the 29th, demonstrating that Smith's forces were advancing rapidly. As the Union rear guard approached Guesses Creek, Engelmann was apprised of the desperate predicament of the Union train in the river bottom and determined to form a line of battle to counter the pursuing Southerners and buy time for the Federals' river crossing. The 40th Iowa was deployed across the Military Road while the Springfield Light Artillery under Lt. Charles W. Thomas unlimbered their two pieces along the road. Late in the afternoon, Salomon ordered Companies B and F, 43rd Illinois, called up to relieve Engelmann's weary soldiers. Company F was sent into the breach as skirmishers, while Company B was posted in support of Lieutenant Thomas' artillery. Most of Engelmann's command -- the eight remaining companies of the 43rd Illinois, 27th Wisconsin, 40th Iowa, and the four remaining pieces of the Springfield Light Artillery -- were posted behind the main line of resistance when the skirmishing began. As the Federals unlimbered their artillery, Marmaduke ordered the four Confederate guns of Harris' Missouri Battery to assist Col. William L. Jeffers of the 8th Missouri on the front lines. The Yankees were soon under artillery fire, as Col. Colton Greene reached the field with the 3rd and 4th Missouri.^{lxxxii}

The artillery duel had been in progress for some time when Engelmann received word that the road across Guesses Creek was clear and the colonel decided to disengage. First, the 40th Iowa, 27th Wisconsin, and a section of the Springfield Artillery were recalled and deployed on a ridge on the far side of the swampy creek bottom. The remainder of the brigade was withdrawn when Engelmann was satisfied that these troops were in position. When his brigade had reassembled, the march to the Saline resumed. The 40th Iowa deployed as skirmishers to fend off Confederate attacks on the rear of the retreating column. Considerable time had elapsed by the time the Confederates regrouped and started across the creek bottom; Jeffers' 8th Missouri was the first to reach the high ground north of the Guesses Creek that had just been evacuated by Engelmann. Marmaduke ordered Jeffers' cavalry to pursue the foe.^{lxxxiii}

The distant sound of cannon fire was audible as Steele's column descended into the Saline River bottom and pushed toward the river to join the Union train on the far side. Word was sent back to Engelmann to hold the ridge overlooking the river bottom on the south with one regiment and a section of artillery, and Engelmann dispatched the 43rd Illinois under Col. Adolph Dengler and Lieutenant Thomas' section of the Springfield Light Artillery behind the crest of the ridge south of the Jiles house -- the 1st Battalion was posted to the right of the guns and the 2nd Battalion to the left. Two companies of the 6th Kansas Cavalry covered Dengler's flanks, as elements of the 43rd Illinois were thrown forward as skirmishers. Steele's other infantry commands selected their positions as well: Thayer's division, on one-quarter rations since leaving Camden, bivouacked in the swamp along Military Road about a mile from Jenkins' Ferry, while Rice's brigade camped in Cooper's cornfield.^{lxxxiv}

It was close to midnight on April 29 when Kirby Smith's infantry broke camp and began its final march toward what would become the Battle of Jenkins' Ferry. In a driving rainstorm, Churchill's Arkansans took the lead, followed closely by Parsons' Missouri infantry and Walker's Texas Division. Churchill arrived on the ridge overlooking the Saline River lowlands about 8 a.m. and ordered Brig. Gen. James C. Tappan's brigade forward to assist Col. Greene's dismounted horse soldiers, who had been skirmishing with Engelmann's troops in Kelly's field since early that morning. Brig. Gen. A. T. Hawthorne's brigade soon joined Tappan and Greene on this front as the Federals were forced back to their log breastworks on the far edge of the field. Churchill held his other brigade, commanded by Col. Lucien C. Gause, in reserve. Walker and Parsons had not yet reached the area, and the Federals braced to withstand a heavy assault. Generals Price, Churchill, and Marmaduke established a command post near the Jiles house. Churchill later described the rapidly intensifying fighting along his division's front: "[T]he firing, now incessant, was terrific, and the struggle was desperate beyond description...[the] severest fighting I ever witnessed." Kirby Smith ordered

the 19th Arkansas under Lt. Col. H. G. P. Williams across Cox's Creek to the north and to test the Federals' right flank. Advancing a half mile down the creek's left bank, the Arkansans emerged from the dense undergrowth opposite surprised 29th Iowa Volunteers. A lively firefight ensued, until the arrival of the 43rd Illinois to reinforce the beleaguered Iowans compelled the Arkansans to fall back across Cox's Creek and returned to the Confederate lines.^{lxxxv}

Unable to penetrate the Union defenses, Churchill was forced to concentrate more and more of his troops in front of Kelly's field. Hawthorne's Arkansans had arrived in the sheltering timber dividing Jiles' and Kelly's fields about 8:45 a.m. and positioned themselves to the left of Tappan's troops. Col. Gause committed his brigade and Gen. Parsons brought up his divisions as well. Parsons' brigades under Brig. Gen. John Clark and Col. Simon Burns formed on the left and right of Gause's division. From left to right, the first Confederate line now consisted of Tappan and Hawthorne, with Burns, Gause, and Clark in the second line, numbering about 4,000 men, equal to the Union troops Salomon had west of the Saline. The Union defenders included Gen. Rice's brigade, soon bolstered by the arrival of Engelmann's brigade and Gen. Thayer in command of the Frontier Division. The 29th Iowa and 9th Wisconsin were positioned on the Union right, while the 40th Iowa, 27th Wisconsin, 12th Kansas, and 1st Arkansas held the Federals' left flank.^{lxxxvi}

Their effective strength more than doubled, Churchill and Parsons mounted a fresh assault on the stalwart Federals. Forcing their way out of the timber and across the open ground of Kelly's field, the Confederates were met by a devastating fire that only increased as the Rebels advanced. A thick layer of fog and gunsmoke blanketed the field, making it necessary for the soldiers to stoop to see their targets before taking aim. Visibility was so poor at one point that the 2nd Kansas Colored Infantry captured three guns of Capt. S. T. Ruffner's Missouri Battery when the Missourians mistook the Kansans for a Confederate unit. After several advances and repulses and with ammunition running low, the Confederates' forward momentum was checked. The Arkansas and Missouri troops turned and retreated under withering fire back to Jiles' field, thereby allowing the bluecoats to regroup and replenish their ammunition.^{lxxxvii}

As the harried Confederates regrouped at the base of the bluff west of Jiles' field, Kirby Smith ordered Brig. Gen. William R. Scurry and Col. Horace Randal of Walker's Texas Division to take their brigades and attack the Federals' left flank, as Churchill's and Parsons' divisions were withdrawn. Once Scurry and Randal had made contact with the enemy, Brig. Gen. Thomas Waul of Walker's Texans marched his brigade into position on Randal's left. Parsons' division was deployed to support Waul, but drifted off to the right and was not seriously engaged in the ensuing combat. Elements of Churchill's division were positioned to reinforce Waul's left, but to no effect. Walker's brigades advanced toward the river, but on emerging from the timberline were met again with a withering Union fusillade in front and a terrible crossfire on their left flank from north of Cox's Creek, and were unable to advance beyond the center of Kelly's field. Scurry and Randal were both mortally wounded in the final Confederate assault, while Waul was seriously injured. Despite the Texans' best efforts, the Union lines held and at 12:30 the Confederates withdrew in confusion to the bluffs at the western edge of Jiles' field. Shortly after the cessation of hostilities, Fagan's cavalry division finally arrived on the battlefield after a 34-mile forced ride, but too late to affect the outcome of the day's events. Had Fagan arrived earlier, his cavalry might have delayed the retreating column and allowed the main body of Confederate infantry to overtake and surround the enemy before they had reached the Saline.^{lxxxviii}

The Battle of Jenkins' Ferry was over and the Confederates had failed to halt the Union crossing of the Saline. When the firing ceased, Gen. Salomon ordered his troops to fall back and cross the pontoon bridge to safety. As the battle raged, the Federals had been busy moving the remainder of their wagon train across

the river, and by 11 a.m. only the infantry and one section of artillery remained on the west bank. By two in the afternoon the last of the infantry was across. Artillery and infantry were posted on the east bank to protect the bridge, which remained in place for two hours more to allow stragglers and the wounded the opportunity to cross, then was destroyed for lack of transportation. The Union trains struggled through the same river bottom conditions on the east side of the Saline toward higher ground. With no pontoons, Kirby Smith decided the Saline was too dangerous to attempt to ford and ordered pursuit of Steele's army ended.^{lxxxix}

Both armies paid dearly for the carnage of Jenkins' Ferry. The Confederates reported 86 men killed, 356 wounded, and one missing for a total of 443 casualties. The numbers would doubtless have been much higher, perhaps 800 to 1,000, if Walker's Texas division's losses were known. Walker filed no report on the battle. Union casualties were reported as 63 killed, 413 wounded, and 45 missing, a total of 521 casualties. Again, the Union total is incomplete, as Gen. Thayer filed no report.^{xc}

The Battle of Jenkins' Ferry was a Union victory, because the Federals successfully held back the attacking Confederates and allowed their wagons time to cross the Saline. Kirby Smith's last, best hope to destroy Steele's army was dashed as a result of the badly mismanaged and disjointed attacks in which the Confederate infantry was pushed in piecemeal instead of in a concentrated attack. The Confederates failed to capitalize on the Union's vulnerable left flank, choosing instead to pursue frontal assaults across Kelly's field, where the Southern line was devastated by Union fire.

The Camden Expedition Ends

Despite the success of the Federals' delaying action, Steele faced a myriad of difficulties in returning his command to Little Rock. The river bottom to the east of the Saline was even worse than that to the west, and Steele's weary men and mules were often waist deep in water and mud. Wagons that became stuck were burned rather than allow them to fall into Confederate hands, animals too weak to be led were set free, and there were reports of the accompanying contraband blacks abandoning their babies in order to keep up with the Union train. From mid-afternoon on April 30 until 4 a.m. the following morning, the harried and hungry Yanks maintained their grueling pace by the light of fires the cavalry details kindled along the road. By mid-afternoon on May 1, the column reached the Benton road, and an hour later a train of provisions arrived from Little Rock. At ten-thirty on the morning of May 2, Steele's tattered Union columns marched into Little Rock, with the campaign's few trophies of a number of bedraggled prisoners and three captured cannons prominently displayed.^{xc1}

His attempt to capture and destroy Steele's army a failure, Kirby Smith's army spent the night of April 30 encamped near the battle site. On May 3, Smith ordered his three infantry divisions to return to Camden, and a few days later the Confederate infantry headed south in an effort to capture Gen. Nathaniel Banks army and destroy Admiral Porter's fleet that had been compelled to halt their retreat at Alexandria, Louisiana, because low water had closed the Red River falls to navigation. Despite the lackluster Confederate performance at Jenkins' Ferry, the Confederate campaign against Steele's march through southwest Arkansas was a success. The Federals had been forced to retreat in disarray only ten days after the capture of Camden, and had suffered 2,750 casualties as opposed to the Confederates 2,300. More than 600 wagons and 2,500 mules were reported lost by the Yanks, while the Southerners' only loss of materiel was a train of 35 wagons burned at Longview on March 30 and the three guns lost at Jenkins' Ferry. These Confederate losses were more than offset by the nine Union field pieces captured at Poison Spring and Marks' Mills. Sterling Price failed to distinguish himself against the invading Federals, taking too long to

concentrate his cavalry against the Union column and mishandling his infantry at Jenkins' Ferry, although he must be accorded some of the credit for the Confederate victories at Poison Spring and Marks' Mills that ultimately forced Steele to abandon Camden and return to Little Rock.^{xcii}

The reasons for the failure of Steele's 40-day Camden Expedition and the Red River Campaign as a whole are myriad. The lack of a consistent and dependable source of supplies dogged the Federals throughout their expedition, a result of the poverty of the region and the tenuous supply lines from the Union outposts along the Arkansas River. In the face of active resistance to his march on Shreveport, Steele's army was compelled to consume its scarce resources and was unable to continue toward the Red River. On record as opposed to the campaign from the start, Steele cannot be held solely responsible for its failure. Nevertheless, his decisions to allow his supply trains to leave Camden without adequate troop protections are responsible for the loss of the Union trains at Poison Spring and Marks' Mills. To Steele's credit, the Union advance from Little Rock and the successful rear-guard delaying action at Jenkins' Ferry were well-executed.^{xciii}

The Camden Expedition of 1864 ended as it had begun, with Steele's army, the worse for wear, safely ensconced in Little Rock while the obstinate Confederates retained control of southwestern Arkansas and the Red River valley. The Red River Campaign was a Union failure, with none of its principal goals achieved. The War in the West would drag on for another year, and Sterling Price would even take the fight deep into Union Missouri from Arkansas in the fall of 1864, before the guns would fall silent over the Trans-Mississippi West.

ENDNOTES

- i. Ludwell Johnson, The Red River Campaign: Politics and Cotton in the Civil War (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1958), 170-171. Following the war, Clayton was an unpopular Republican governor and U.S. Senator from Arkansas during Reconstruction, and a major political powerbroker in the state for decades thereafter. Clayton later served as U.S. Ambassador to Mexico from 1897 to 1905.
- ii. Johnson, 171-72.
- iii. Johnson, 172-175.
- iv. Johnson, 172-173. On March 30, Dockery's brigade was surprised and routed at Mount Elba by a small expedition from Pine Bluff under Powell Clayton.
- v. Johnson, 173.
- vi. The War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies, Series 1, Volume XXXIV, Part 1 (Harrisburg, Pennsylvania: National Historical Society, 1971), 693-694. Hereafter cited as O.R.
- vii. O.R., 705.
- viii. O.R., 705-706.
- ix. Johnson, 176.
- x. Johnson, 176. This Union supply train would be beset by disaster. On April 13, the Federal steamers Adams and Chippewa, each loaded with provisions for Steele and en route from Pine Bluff to Little Rock, collided on the Arkansas River 20 miles downstream from Little Rock, sinking the Adams and crippling the Chippewa.
- xi. O.R., 660. Richards contends that Steele had intended to proceed to Shreveport via Camden from the initiation of the Red River Campaign and that the march toward Washington had been a ruse to draw the Confederates from their defenses.
- xii. Johnson, 177.
- xiii. Atkinson, 43-44.
- xiv. Atkinson, 44.
- xv. Atkinson, 44-46.
- xvi. O.R., 838.
- xvii. Atkinson, 46-47.
- xviii. O.R., 838.

- xix. John N. Edwards, Shelby and His Men: or, The War in the West (Cincinnati, 1867), 218. Quoted in Atkinson, 47.
- xx. A. F. Sperry, History of Iowa 33rd Infantry Volunteer Regiment, quoted in Atkinson, 48.
- xxi. Atkinson, 48-49.
- xxii. O.R., 675.
- xxiii. Atkinson, 49.
- xxiv. Atkinson, 49-50.
- xxv. Johnson, 179.
- xxvi. Johnson, 179-180.
- xxvii. Johnson, 182-183.
- xxviii. Johnson, 183-184.
- xxix. Glenn L. Carle, "The First Kansas Colored," American Heritage, Vol.XLIII, No. 1 (February/March 1992), 79-82.
- xxx. Carle, 84-86.
- xxxi. Carle, 90.
- xxxii. Carle, 87-90.
- xxxiii. Ira Don Richards, "The Battle of Poison Spring," Arkansas Historical Quarterly, Vol.XVIII, No. 4 (Winter 1959), 341-343.
- xxxiv. Richards, "Battle of Poison Spring," 342.
- xxxv. Johnson, 184-185; Richards, "Battle of Poison Spring," 343-344.
- xxxvi. Edwin C. Bearss, Steele's Retreat from Camden and the Battle of Jenkins' Ferry (Little Rock, Arkansas: Eagle Press, 1966), 25.
- xxxvii. Richards, "Battle of Poison Spring," 344-345. Steele, 14 miles away in Camden, apparently heard the noise of battle at Poison Spring but did nothing to assist Williams.
- xxxviii. Richards, "Battle of Poison Spring," 345.
- xxxix. Richards, "Battle of Poison Spring," 346.
- xl. Richards, "Battle of Poison Spring," 346.

xli. Bearss, 28.

xlii. Bearss, 31-32.

xliii. Richards, "Battle of Poison Spring," 346-347.

xliv. Johnson, 186. Walker later wrote in his report, "I feared that the train and its contents would prove a temptation too strong for these hungry, half-clothed Choctaws, but had no trouble in pressing them forward, for there was that in front and to the left more inviting to them than food or clothing - the blood of their despised enemy. They had met and routed the forces of General Thayer, the ravagers of their country, the despoilers of their homes, and the murderers of their women and children..." O.R., 849. Cabell also claimed credit for capturing the Union guns.

xlv. Richards, "Battle of Poison Spring," 346-348. The reasons for Maxey's puzzling behavior are unclear. In his report, the general claimed that he merely wanted to escort the captured wagon train to safety before Steele could react and send reinforcements. It is unlikely however that the full cavalry contingent would have been necessary to escort the train through Confederate territory, and one regiment from Cabell's brigade had in fact been stationed watching the road to Camden to prevent such a surprise Union attack.

xlvi. Richards, "Battle of Poison Spring," 348-349.

xlvii. Carle, 90-91.

xlviii. Richards, "Battle of Poison Spring," 349.

xlix. Bearss, 45.

l. Johnson, 187-188.

li. Johnson, 188-189. Both Gen. Sherman and Gen. Grant urged Steele to continue his advance toward the Red River and Shreveport.

lii. Bearss, 47-51. Bearss notes that Smith had ordered Fagan to get between Little Rock and Camden so as to cut Steele's potential retreat by felling trees across the roads. Fagan's attack on the Union train at Marks' Mills was in violation of these orders. Had Fagan carried out his assigned mission, Steele's column could have been destroyed at Jenkins' Ferry. Therefore, Drake's defeat at Marks' Mill ultimately proved the salvation of Steele's army.

liii. Bearss, 55-56. This was the same supply train that had arrived in Camden on April 20. Smith was annoyed that Price had not intercepted the train before it had gotten through.

liv. Bearss, 55-56.

lv. Ira Don Richards, "The Engagement at Marks' Mills," Arkansas Historical Quarterly Vol. XIX, No. 1 (Spring 1960), 55-56. Marks' Mills was named for Hastings Marks, who had built several grist mills in the area.

lvi. Richards, "Engagement at Marks' Mills," 56-57.

lvii. Richards, "Engagement at Marks' Mills," 57-58.

lviii. Bearss, 65-66.

lix. Bearss, 62.

lx. Bearss, 65-66.

lxi. Bearss, 66-67.

lxii. Bearss, 67.

lxiii. Bearss, 67-68.

lxiv. Bearss, 69-70.

lxv. Bearss, 70-71.

lxvi. Bearss, 72-74. When Drake later came to, he was questioned by General Fagan. "Can you not arrange for [the Union brigade's] surrender?" Fagan asked. "I am no longer in command," Drake replied.

lxvii. Bearss, 72-74.

lxviii. Bearss, 74-75.

lxix. Bearss, 77-78.

lxx. Bearss, 78-79.

lxxi. Johnson, 193.

lxxii. Richards, 59-60.

lxxiii. Johnson, 193-194.

lxxiv. Johnson, 194.

lxxv. Bearss, 92-93.

lxxvi. Johnson, 194-195.

lxxvii. Bearss, 93-97. Hours before Steele's army arrived on the 27th, Fagan and his command had crossed the Princeton road headed north from Marks' Mills to attack Union bases on the Arkansas River. Unaware that Steele had abandoned Camden, Fagan attempted to ford the swollen Saline River in several places, but finally turned back at Pratt's Ferry below Benton and, having received no orders from Smith, headed toward Arkadelphia on the morning of the 29th in search of food and forage.

lxxviii. Bearss, 97-100.

lxxxix. Johnson, 197-198.

lxxx. Bearss, 100-102.

lxxxix. Ira Don Richards, "The Battle of Jenkins' Ferry," Arkansas Historical Quarterly Volume XX, Number 1 (Spring 1961), 7-9.

lxxxii. Bearss, 104-105.

lxxxiii. Bearss, 105.

lxxxiv. Bearss, 105-106.

lxxxv. Richards, "The Battle of Jenkins' Ferry," 9-10.

lxxxvi. Richards, "The Battle of Jenkins' Ferry," 10-11.

lxxxvii. Richards, "The Battle of Jenkins' Ferry", 10-11.

lxxxviii. Johnson, 199-200. Scurry died of his wounds that evening and was buried in the town of Tulip to the south. Randal died an hour after Scurry's military funeral had concluded.

lxxxix. Richards, "The Battle of Jenkins' Ferry," 14.

xc. Richards, "The Battle of Jenkins' Ferry," 13.

xc. Johnson, 201-202.

xcii. Johnson, 203-204. Churchill and Parsons remained in Arkansas and joined Sterling Price's expedition into Missouri later that year.

xciii. Johnson, 204-205.

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