

Self-Guided  
Driving Tour  
of the  
Prairie Grove  
Battlefield



## Origins of the Battle

Following the Union victory at Pea Ridge, Arkansas (March 7 & 8, 1862), the defeated Confederates moved their army east of the Mississippi River, leaving Arkansas defenseless. The situation improved with the arrival of General Thomas C. Hindman who organized the defense of the state by raising a new army and obtaining much needed war supplies. Federal forces in Missouri and Kansas responded by forming the Army of the Frontier to meet this threat. After several minor engagements during the summer and fall, the two armies met in full force at Prairie Grove.

### The Battle of Prairie Grove

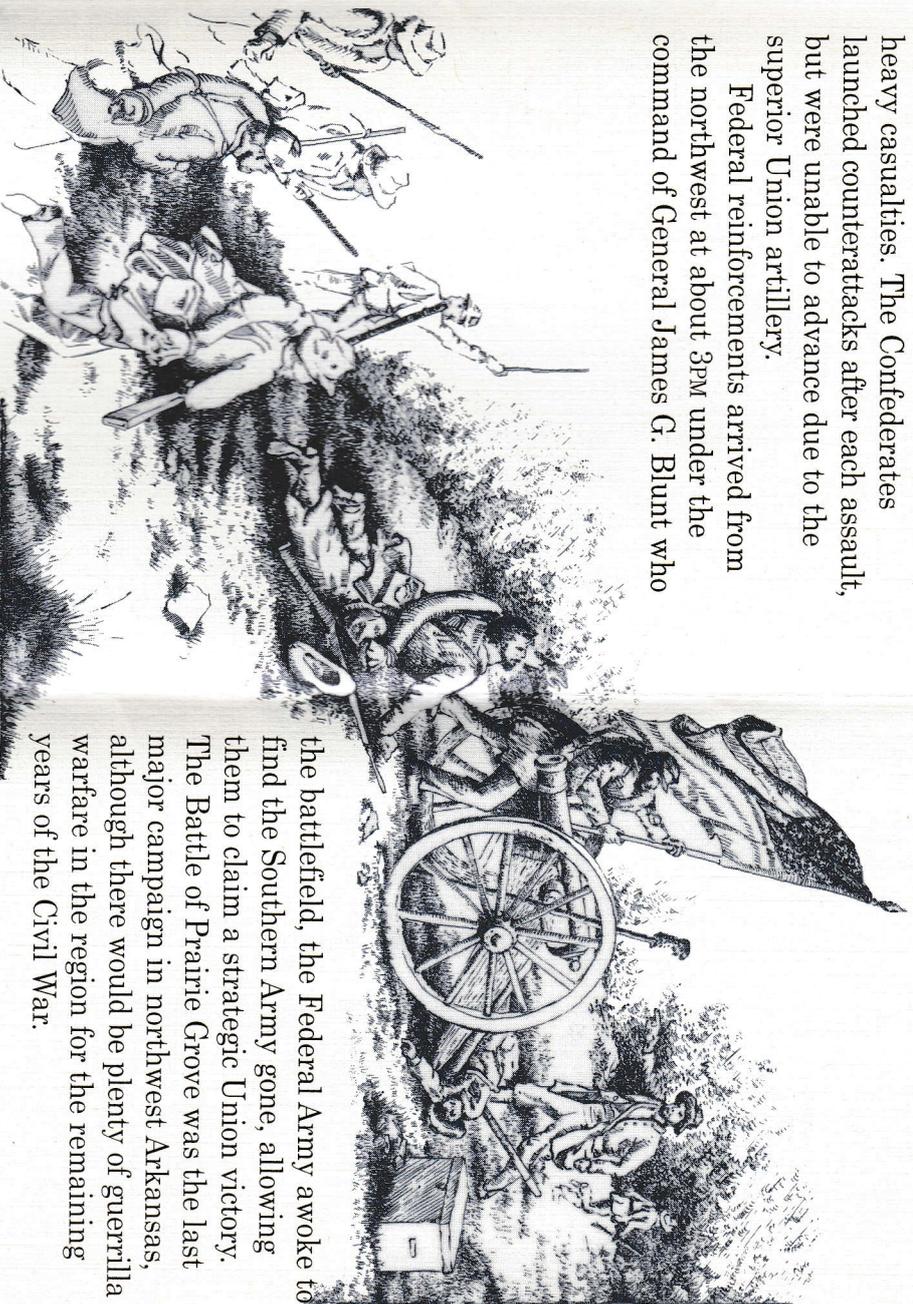
Early on the morning of December 7, 1862, about one mile south of the Prairie Grove church, Confederate cavalry met and defeated the advance units of Union General Francis J. Herron's command.

The Southern horsemen pursued the Union Cavalry back to Herron's main army at Walnut Grove, where they skirmished. Meanwhile, the Confederate infantry and artillery positioned themselves on the Prairie Grove ridge overlooking the Illinois River valley.

The Federals forced the Southern cavalry to fall back to the ridge, then waded across the river under artillery fire. An artillery duel began at about 11AM in which the Confederate smoothbore cannons were no match for the rifled guns of the Union Army. As the cannons fell silent, General Herron ordered two Union charges up the ridge, which were beaten back with

heavy casualties. The Confederates launched counterattacks after each assault, but were unable to advance due to the superior Union artillery.

Federal reinforcements arrived from the northwest at about 3PM under the command of General James G. Blunt who



the battlefield, the Federal Army awoke to find the Southern Army gone, allowing them to claim a strategic Union victory. The Battle of Prairie Grove was the last major campaign in northwest Arkansas, although there would be plenty of guerrilla warfare in the region for the remaining years of the Civil War.

### About Your Tour

This self-guided driving tour gives an overview of the entire Prairie Grove Battlefield with stops at important points. The drive of almost six miles will take from 30 minutes to an hour to complete.

Prairie Grove Battlefield Historic State Park protects over 750 acres of the 3,200 acre battleground. Thus, it is necessary to tour some privately owned areas using state and county roads. Your cooperation in respecting private property and observing traffic laws is necessary. Please drive safely and take special care when you are on Highway 62 and the Prairie Grove city streets.

# Take a Drive Through

## STOP #1

### SHOUP CHOOSES THE POSITION

Confederate infantry marched up the road to the left and arrived in time to hear the Southern cavalry skirmishing with General Herron's Federals at Walnut Grove (about two miles east of here). General Francis A. Shoup decided to deploy his division along the ridge from the road to beyond the Borden house [Stop #4] east of this location. Upon arriving, General Hindman approved the disposition, noting the position was "an exceedingly strong one." Dr. Hugh Rogers' house sat across the road northwest of here.

## STOP #2

### LATTA HOUSE & CELLAR

While not on the original battlefield, the Latta house and cellar (along with the other structures) remind us that there were four family homes on the ridge where the Confederate Army waited for the Federals. Warned of the approaching conflict, Mrs. Borden took her three children west along the ridge, stopping at the homes of Dr. Hugh Rogers and William Rogers before reaching the William Morton house [Stop #13] with the other families. When the fighting got near, the twenty men, women, and children hid in the Morton cellar, similar to the one west of the Latta House.

## STOP #3

### RAVINE

This natural ravine runs north and south through the Prairie Grove ridge. Soldiers in General James F. Fagan's Confederate brigade lay here around noon waiting for the Union Army. When the 20<sup>th</sup> Wisconsin Infantry appeared to the east, the Southern troops poured a heavy fire of small arms into the blue ranks, before charging toward the Borden house [Stop #4].

## STOP #4

### BORDEN HOUSE & ORCHARD

The heaviest fighting of the day took place around this house and orchard. After the battle, General Herron reported 250 dead within a 100-yard radius of the house. One soldier stated

the ground was "muddy with blood" on the hillside where Confederate cannons under the command of Captain William D. Blocher sat during the battle. More information about this area can be found by taking the short walk to the Borden house.

## STOP #5

### CARNAGE IN THE ORCHARD

During the first Union charge, the 19<sup>th</sup> Iowa Infantry reached the southern edge of the apple orchard before heavy fire from Shelby's cavalry to the east halted their advance. Lieutenant Colonel Samuel McFarland died instantly when nine musket balls penetrated his body. The 37<sup>th</sup> Illinois Infantry entered the orchard during the second charge, but were also forced to withdraw. The 26<sup>th</sup> Indiana Infantry charged just east of the orchard during the second Union charge and suffered heavy casualties before retreating down the ridge.

## STOP #6

### CONFEDERATE RIGHT FLANK

Colonel Emmett MacDonald's Missouri cavalry positioned themselves at the edge of the ridge. Captain Westley Roberts' located his Missouri battery, composed of the only rifled cannons in the Southern Army, just up the ridge where he and his men withstood a heavy bombardment from the Union guns.

## STOP #7

### BORDEN WHEAT FIELD

Lieutenant Joseph Foust's Union Missouri battery set up just east of this location and pounded the ridge with his cannons. Just north of the battery was the 94<sup>th</sup> Illinois Infantry, which was supposed to be a part of the first Federal charge of the day, but they never left the wheat field. This regiment served as the left flank of Herron's Army with the end of its line abutting the Illinois River. Ordered to lie down in the field, the Illinois troops saw the Confederate bullets and shells go over their heads, resulting in very light casualties for the regiment.

# History

## STOP #8

### ILLINOIS RIVER FORD

Northeast of this location is the main ford of the Illinois River. General Herron crossed with a small number of troops only to be driven back by Confederate artillery fire from the ridge. Learning of a northern ford, the Federals placed Captain David Murphy's Missouri battery on Crawford's Hill to the north and began pounding the ridge with his cannons' fire. After silencing the Southern guns, the majority of Herron's men used the main ford, then positioned themselves in this prairie and faced the ridge to the south. Captain Frank Backof's Union Missouri battery sat just a few yards north of here.

## STOP #9

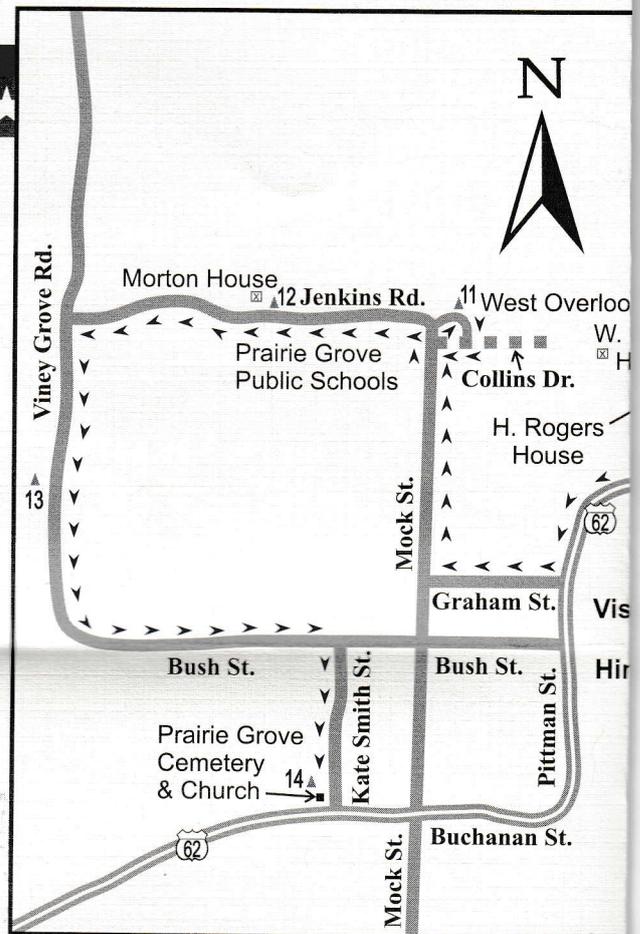
### BORDEN CORNFIELD

General Herron's infantry advanced through the Borden cornfield south of here to assault the ridge. After both attacks failed, Confederate counterattacks crossed this ground only to be shattered by Union cannons firing canister at ranges of less than one hundred yards at times. One soldier commented afterwards, that you could walk a long distance without touching the ground because of the dead bodies in this field and along the slope of the ridge. After heavy casualties for both armies, the fighting shifted to the west.

## STOP #10

### POSITION OF THE 20<sup>TH</sup> IOWA

Just west of here were the lines of the 20<sup>th</sup> Iowa Infantry, which served as the right flank of Herron's Union Army. The Confederates began to mass on the ridge to the southwest in order to attack and overwhelm this regiment, which would give the Southerners a victory over Herron's command. Before the attack began, two cannon shots from the northwest signaled the arrival of General Blunt's Federals who quickly advanced up the ridge to the west. This forced the Southerners to move their troops to face the Union threat to their left flank. The 20<sup>th</sup> Iowa charged with Blunt's soldiers, which included



members of the Cherokee and Creek Nations in the 1<sup>st</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> Indian Home Guard.

## STOP #11

### MORTON HAYFIELD (WEST OVERLOOK)

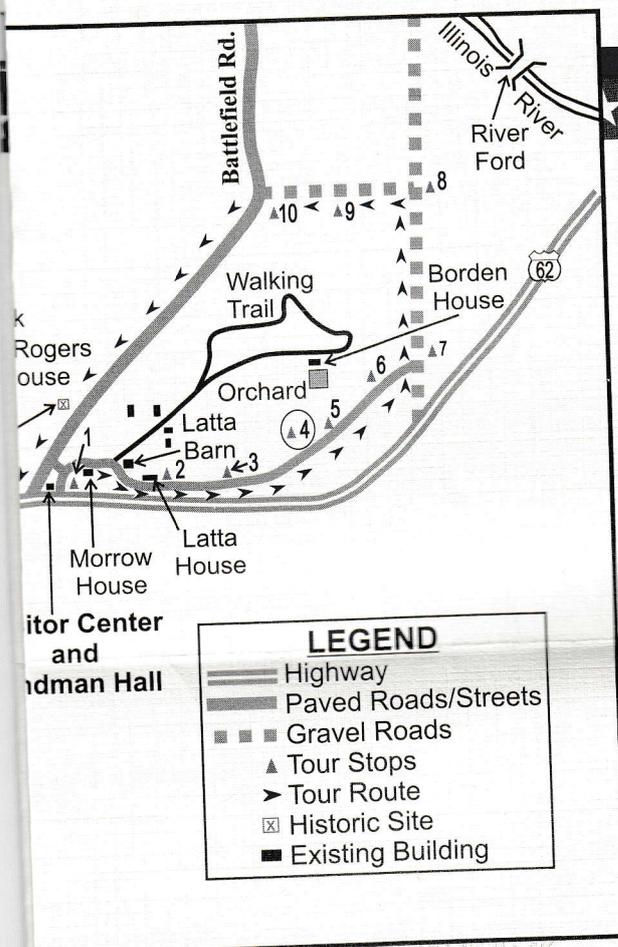
The heaviest fighting on the western end of the battlefield took place just north of here in the Morton hayfield. General Mosby M. Parsons ordered a Confederate charge composed of his men in the Missouri Infantry brigade and Colonel Robert G. Shaver's Arkansas Infantry brigade out into the field. The Southern troops suffered heavy casualties from the Union artillery before withdrawing to the wooded ridge. Robert West and his family sat out on the hill to the north and watched the entire battle.

*Stop, stretch your legs, and read the wayside panels at this overlook to learn more about the battle in this area.*

## STOP #12

### MORTON HOUSE SITE

The William Morton house was near this location. Men of the 10<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> Kansas Infantry advanced to the Morton blacksmith shop south of here,



which sat where the Prairie Grove School is today. Unable to break through the Confederate lines in front of him, General Blunt ordered his troops to withdraw into the valley late in the day.

**STOP #13  
CONFEDERATE LEFT FLANK**

General Daniel M. Frost's Confederate division rested on this road. A brigade of dismounted Texas cavalry, under the command of General John S. Roane, positioned themselves to the northeast. Colonel Walter P. Lane's 1<sup>st</sup> Texas Partisan Cavalry guarded the Confederate left flank in the woods to the northwest.

**STOP #14  
PRAIRIE GROVE CHURCH**

The original one-room log building stood in almost the same spot as the present structure. General Hindman used the church as his headquarters during the battle. Afterwards, both sides used it as a hospital. The battle received its name from this simple structure. The town of Prairie Grove, established in 1888, got its name from the Civil War battle.