

In October 1861 Confederate general, M. Jeff Thompson, launched a campaign into southeastern Missouri with the purpose of cutting railroads and bridges near Pilot Knob, Ironton, and Fredericktown Missouri. Thompson would lead a total command of 3000 men. In addition to threatening St. Louis, the goal was to draw Union attention to Thompson to relieve pressure on the command of Sterling Price in southwest Missouri and also to “embarrass” and weaken the Union control of that part of the state. The 11<sup>th</sup> Missouri’s first real challenge of the war would be with General Jeff Thompson’s Confederates.

The Eleventh Missouri Infantry was garrisoned at Cape Girardeau, Missouri and was part of the Union force that was sent to repel General Thompson’s attack. The Union forces which converged on Fredericktown were under the overall command of Colonel Joseph Plummer and the 11<sup>th</sup> Missouri was commanded by Lt. Colonel. W. E. Panabaker. The opposing forces in the Battle at Fredericktown, Missouri were:

#### **Union Forces**

##### **Plummer’s Command – Colonel J. B. Plummer**

17th Illinois Infantry Regiment --- Colonel Leonard F. Ross

20th Illinois Infantry Regiment --- Colonel C. C. Marsh

##### ***11th Missouri Infantry Regiment --- Lieutenant Colonel W. E. Panabaker***

Stewart’s Cavalry Company --- Captain C. Warren Stewart

Langen’s Cavalry Company --- Captain Langen

1 Section, Taylor’s Battery --- Lieutenant P. H. White

##### **Carlin’s Command – Colonel William Carlin**

21st Illinois Infantry Regiment --- Colonel Alexander

33rd Illinois Infantry Regiment --- Colonel C. E. Hovey

38th Illinois Infantry Regiment --- Colonel William Passmore Carlin

8th Wisconsin Infantry Regiment --- Colonel Murphey

6 Companies, 1st Indiana Cavalry --- Major Gavitt

Hawkin’s Company Missouri Cavalry --- Captain Hawkins

Battery, Missouri Light Artillery --- Captain Manter

2 Howitzers --- Lieutenant C. W. Purcell

STRENGTH = 2,500-3,000

#### **Confederate Forces**

##### **BRIGADIER GENERAL M. JEFF THOMPSON**

3rd Infantry Regiment --- Colonel Lowe (k)

Lieutenant Colonel Kedgpeth

Jennings Battalion

Rapley’s Battalion

2nd Regiment --- Colonel Farmer

4th Regiment --- Colonel Waugh

2nd Dragoons

3rd Cavalry Regiment

STRENGTH = 1,200

The Union attack began 1:00 P. M. as the Union column approach the trap set by Thompson. Carlin reinforced Plummer's force with Colonel Alexander's 21<sup>st</sup> Illinois, Colonel Hovey's 33<sup>rd</sup> Illinois, six companies of Colonel Baker's 1<sup>st</sup> Indiana Cavalry, and Hescocck's section of artillery. <sup>30</sup>

Colonel Leonard Ross's 17<sup>th</sup> Illinois Volunteer Infantry was leading the Union column. Ross's deployed into line of battle just to the south of Fredericktown and one section of Taylor's batter immediately opened fire and the enemy responded with 4 artillery pieces that were concealed on the facing slope about 600 yards away. As Ross's 17<sup>th</sup> Illinois moved forward, the 11<sup>th</sup> Missouri and the 20<sup>th</sup> Illinois Infantry formed on either side of the them. As the Union infantry moved forward they found Aden Lowe's Confederate Infantry concealed in a cornfield directly in their front when a furious volley was sent toward the Union Infantry. The 8<sup>th</sup> Wisconsin, much to their chagrin, was held in reserve. Two additional sections of artillery (Captain Manter's and Lt. Hescocck's), joined the duel that was underway across the cornfield.

The Federal line that faced Lowe consisted of 4 companies of the 11<sup>th</sup> Missouri Infantry, the 17<sup>th</sup> Illinois Infantry and the 20<sup>th</sup> Illinois infantry. As volleys were exchanged, Lowe's Confederate infantry was in the unenviable position of being the unit closest to the Union battle line in Thompson's trap and had to find a way to disengage from the 2 and a half regiments of blue coats that faced them.

The Union regiments quickly fell into line to meet their foe. Lt Colonel Panabaker was ordered to support White's battery and advanced with it to the "extreme front" and remained with it through to the end of the battle. Lt. Colonel Panabaker, who commanded the 11<sup>th</sup> Missouri while Colonel Plummer had brigade command, moved into battle line as Union troops faced the Confederate Infantry with part of the 11<sup>th</sup> Missouri being relegated to the protection of Union supply train. The 4 companies of the 11<sup>th</sup> Missouri lined to the left of an artillery battery that had been pushed forward to meet the Confederate threat to their front. Col Leonard Ross's 17<sup>th</sup> Illinois Infantry advanced forward and moved to face the Confederate infantry under Colonel Aden Lowe hidden in a cornfield directly in front of forming Union line. As a result the 17<sup>th</sup> Illinois was involved in some of the hottest exchanges with the Southerners. Ross and Panabaker "moved directly opposite of Lowe's 3<sup>rd</sup> Infantry regiment". <sup>32</sup>

In addition to the four companies, engaged in combat with the 17<sup>th</sup> Illinois., 5 companies of the 11<sup>th</sup> Missouri, Company A, Lt. Menomen O'Donnell, Company C, Captain Moses Warner, Company D, Captain Clark Hendee, Company F, Captain Amos Singleton, and Company K Captain William Stewart, marched in the rear of the 17<sup>th</sup> Illinois as that regiment deployed to meet the Lowe's Infantry which was hidden in the cornfield. Companies B, Captain Andrew Weber, Company G., Lt. Charles Carter, Company H, Captain Thomas Dollahan, and Company I, acting Lieutenant James Hummer, were detached to guard the baggage train. At 10:00 Am, company D was also detached to guard the train.

So only the four companies, A, C, F and K, were formed in battle line that connected with the 17<sup>th</sup> Illinois and left of Lieutenant White's artillery, and moved forward with the 17<sup>th</sup> Illinois "until the enemy were driven from their position and completely routed." At the battle progressed, it became evident that the army's baggage train was not under threat from the enemy and four of the companies were moved into the battle. They were ordered forward with the artillery and then moved to the right of the 33<sup>rd</sup> Illinois as this regiment advanced. These companies advanced under enemy fire until the left wing of the enemy were driven from the field.

Col. C. C. Marsh's 20<sup>th</sup> Illinois also advanced forward and flanked Lowe's Confederates and being flanked the Confederates could not withdraw without heavy losses. Ross' 20<sup>th</sup> Illinois and the 17<sup>th</sup> Illinois again moved forward. As the battle began to turn serious, Col. Aden Lowe was shot in the head and died instantly, and after that Lowe's command fell on Lt. Col. Isaac Hedgpath. Lowe's Confederates fell back with heavy loss.

Pvt Floyd Andrews of the 17<sup>th</sup> Illinois would later describe the battle and some of the activities of the 11<sup>th</sup> Missouri which fought next to his regiment:

*"When therefore their camp, confidently believed to be concealed, became the target for a raking fire of shells, there was confusion in the camp, and when, instead of enjoying the spectacle of seeing their trap aimlessly walked into by an unsuspecting enemy, they instead, found themselves partially surrounded, and attacked on two sides, by troops well armed, disciplined and handled, there was consternation, for simultaneously with the planting of the union banner, immediately supported by Companies D and B of the 11<sup>th</sup> Missouri under Captain, afterward, Surgeon, C. K. Hendee, of Company D, with the 20<sup>th</sup> Illinois on its right, the 17<sup>th</sup> Illinois was thrown well forward on its left, with the balance of the 11<sup>th</sup> Missouri on its right, and next to the battery. This brought the 17<sup>th</sup> Illinois around pretty well into the rear of the cornfield, in which the bulk of the ambuscading infantry had been massed, in which rear they, the 17<sup>th</sup> Illinois, poured a most deadly fire..... The 21<sup>st</sup> Illinois, Grant's regiment, Colonel Alexander commanding, forming on the left of the 17<sup>th</sup> well to the rear of the enemy's right.*

*"...Colonel Lowe, brigade commander of that part of the enemy's forces, in trying to change front, was killed. In trying to face the 17<sup>th</sup> they had necessarily exposed themselves to a murderous flank fire from the 11<sup>th</sup> Missouri, while Taylor's Battery was pouring shells into their artillery."*

*"The now general rush towards the Union right, along which their route to Greenville law, was taken, by the union troops as an attempt to turn their right flank, and so get into their rear, and a move in that direction, especially the 11<sup>th</sup>*

*Missouri was made to head them off, so added to their fright, that their officers lost all control over them.”*<sup>36</sup>

Col Aden Lowe's infantry was intended to engage the Union forces and fall backing pulling the bluecoats into an ambush. However, Lowe did not withdraw, whether unable to disengage such a large force or failed to do so, regardless he was killed as he faced the Union infantry directly in his front. After Lowe's death, Thompson reported that the Union artillery then found the range of his own artillery. Thompson ordered a retreat of his right wing and caused significant casualties to the 1<sup>st</sup> Indiana Cavalry which rushed in to pursue his men. Then Thompson retreated 26 miles to Greenville by the 22<sup>nd</sup>, and declared the battle a defeat.<sup>37</sup>

The 1<sup>st</sup> Indiana Cavalry was ordered to pursue the retreating Confederates and unfortunately, found that the Confederates still had plenty of fight left. The 1<sup>st</sup> Indiana charged ahead after the retreating Confederates and captured a piece of artillery but were riddled by enemy fire killing Captain Highman and Major Gavitt. But the Union forces proved too much for Thompson's Confederates and their retreat now became general and were pursued by Colonel Plummer's forces until dark and by the next morning Colonel Plummer reported that he had pursued the enemy 10 miles along the Greenville Road.<sup>34</sup>

Colonel Plummer would report 158 dead from Thompson's force and 38 wounded, 80 captured. The Union loss reported by Plummer was 6 killed and 60 wounded.

After the battle, the Union soldiers turned their vengeance on the town of Fredericktown, believing the local citizens were working with the enemy. Plummer reported that six or seven buildings were burned before the officers could stop the destruction of the town.<sup>38</sup> Thompson's remarks about his reception in Fredericktown and the surrounding area of Missouri tend to shed some light on the Union reaction toward the town and citizens after the battle. "I found, however, the hearts of the people were all right, and from New Madrid to Big River bridge, we have been welcomed in the most flattering and encouraging manner."<sup>39</sup>

On October 27, 1861, General Grant sent a message of congratulations stating that the troops "have done nobly" and prophetically stated that it "goes to prove that much more may be expected when the country and our great cause calls upon them."<sup>40</sup>

Panabaker reported of the vigorous fighting of the men directly under his command, "although exposed to the hottest fire of the enemy, the officers and men fought like veterans, displaying a coolness and bravery worthy of the cause for which they were fighting."<sup>42</sup> The 11<sup>th</sup> Missouri Infantry entered the battle with 460 men present and 1 one man was killed and 3 were wounded. Sgt. Richard

Smith, Company F, was a 44 year old married shoemaker from Xenia, Illinois was one fatality of the 11<sup>th</sup> Missouri Infantry. Sgt. Smith was born in England and had immigrated to Illinois. Among the wounded were Charles Clark, Company A, "badly wounded with a ball in the thigh" (Compiled Service Records), one man wounded in Company C, Private Daniel Gantz, was also "severely wounded".<sup>43</sup> Charles Clark was a 23 year old farmer from Sumner, Illinois and Daniel Gantz was a 21 year old farmer from Mechanicsburg, Illinois. Both soldiers would be treated and would return to service with the 11<sup>th</sup> Missouri. In addition to these casualties, there are two men that were wounded slightly, Caleb Powell and John Powell, both men in Company F. Caleb Powell had a "slight wound" and John Powell was wounded "slightly by a spent ball". Caleb and John Powell were 19 and 22 years old and both were farmers from Xenia, Illinois.

Duncan McCall of the 11<sup>th</sup> Missouri remembered his experiences during the battle of Fredericktown. "When we started the rain was falling sufficient to make it pleasant marching during the whole trip. ..We met the rebels and repulsed them, after a fight which lasted about two and a half hours, resulting in a loss to the rebels of about six hundred in killed, wounded and prisoners. We came very near being surprised and our force taken. We were marching as if it were to our destruction, when an old negro warned us of our danger. He informed Plummer where the rebels were posted. They had planted two batteries, so that, when we got close enough they could rake our ranks. Plummer ordered up a battery and opened on them. Blank cartridges were fired from our side, and they replied with shot and shell, doing no damage, as they shot over us. The 17<sup>th</sup> Illinois and part of the 11<sup>th</sup> Missouri were ordered forward, and advanced and poured in a heavy volley of musketry. The enemy could not stand it, and fled, leaving us the masters of the field. The 1<sup>st</sup> Indiana cavalry made a charge, and Major Gavitt was killed. We lost about twenty-five men, in killed and wounded. The 17<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> Illinois charged and took a battery. Col. Lowe was killed on the rebel side, and Thompson's army all dispersed. We followed them twelve miles, until we reached a bridge which the rebs had burned, so we could not follow them any farther. This was the death blow of Jeff Thompson's forces. There were about three thousand rebels engaged; on our side, about one thousand seven hundred. Out total loss in this battle was sixty-three."<sup>48</sup>

A personal summary of the experience of the Battle of Fredericktown, Missouri was summarized by Captain William Stewart, Company K, in a letter to his family. "My company was given the second position of importance in the whole battle line because (as the Col' told me) they were the best drilled. And though we were exposed to a continual fire from the cannon and muskets of the enemy, not a single one of my men was killed or wounded, though several guns and garments were struck and the grounds ploughed up around us. Our boys stood in line and poured in a continual volley of Minnie [Minie'] balls, making a stream of fire all along the line, without cessation, and slaying the rebels horribly. When we left there we had discovered that 7 of our men were killed and about 50

wounded, while we had buried 232 of the rebels. About 500 of their men were wounded...There was battery of our cannon placed right behind and above our men, we being on the slope and the cannon on the hill, with the rebels in the hollow and other slope and hill. When (5000) five thousand on each side got in earnest in the firing of muskets and cannon the scent and the sound were magnificent. I never enjoyed anything so much in my life. Though this continual firing lasted for near two hours, our boys seemed very disappointed when it ceased. Our firing did so much execution that the rebels could not stand it but fled with us after them. Our Regiment was put in pursuit with Major Schofield's Battery but after running them four or five miles that night could not catch them. Next day we went 25 miles further but finding Jeff Thompson ['s] Army all scattered we had nothing more to pursue and next day we returned to Fredericktown, and then by forced marches returned to the Cape here. I cannot begin to give you a description of the battle-field after the battle was over. Just think of 300 dead men, 300 wounded, a lot of horses killed and wounded, the wounded men crying out with the most hideous groans and moans and the dead men, some mangled to pieces, some with their heads shot off, some with their bowels torn out, and you will have some idea of the ravages of war. But if I ever get to see you again I will be able to tell you more about it, as I was in a good position to observe closely all that went on. My men fought bravely and well and obeyed my orders strictly. I never felt cooler in my life. Our beautiful flag was right by the side of my men and they sustained it nobly. The Battle was fought on Monday, the 21<sup>st</sup> of Oct. and last night the 25<sup>th</sup> we returned to our quarters having marched 30 miles yesterday. This forced march was because we expected Gen. Hardee to make an attack upon Cape Girardeau who is very close to us with 10,000 men. We are all hoping strongly that he will come on and try us. <sup>49</sup>