

# Where is Camargo Crossroads?

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Historians and enthusiasts familiar with the battle record of the Thirty-third Wisconsin Volunteers know of an engagement with a strange-sounding name: Camargo Crossroads. The skirmish took place on July 13, 1864 as the Thirty-third acted as a train guard, and then rear-guard for the supply train of Maj. Gen. Andrew Jackson ("A. J.") Smith's expedition against Confederate forces under General S. D. Lee and Nathan Bedford Forrest.

Simply put, General William T. Sherman sent Gen. A. J. Smith into northern Mississippi with two goals in mind: 1) hunt down Bedford Forrest after his stunning victory at Brice's Crossroads, and thereby 2) secure Federal rail lines for Sherman's army group operating near Atlanta. Part of Smith's expedition was a provisional brigade commanded by Colonel Ward of the 14th Wisconsin. This brigade was comprised of the Thirty-third Wisconsin regiment, led by Lieut. Col. Frederick Lovell, a 200-man battalion from the 14th Wisconsin, and one company from the 41st Illinois. The entire brigade could not have numbered much more than 700 effectives.

Departing from a staging area near LaGrange, Tennessee, the small brigade marched generally south, and arrived at the southern outskirts of Pontotoc, Mississippi, by the afternoon of July 12, 1864. There, Smith learned of a trap set by Bedford Forrest near Oklona, Mississippi, some miles to the south and west. Smith suddenly switched his route of march to the east along the Pontotoc/Tupelo Road, in the direction of the vital rail junction at Tupelo, Mississippi. Surprised, Forrest sent his horsemen galloping all over the countryside looking to strike the Federal column wherever and whenever possible.

Repeated forays against the wagon train caused Col. Ward to order the Thirty-third Wisconsin to quit its assigned role as flankers for the wagon train and act a rear-guard for the train. With the Thirty-third Wisconsin gone, the remaining flankers of the 14th Wisconsin were stretched dangerously thin as they tried to protect as many wagons as possible. In the meantime, Col. Edmund Rucker's Sixth Brigade of Confederate horsemen rode north from the Confederate main body, along narrow roads to a point south of the Tupelo Road. Col. Rucker's intention was to intercept Smith's train and do some significant damage in the Federal rear.

Rucker deployed his brigade south of the Lockhart Plantation and the Pontotoc/Tupelo Road, with his axis of attack planned along a narrow farm lane that headed north towards Burrow's Shop (also known as Barrow's Shop.) Among the first regiments to deploy was Col. Robert Duff's Eighth Mississippi Cavalry. Duff had recently reorganized the old 19th Mississippi Cavalry Battalion into a full-fledged regiment, although confirmation of the new designation had yet to arrive from the Confederate War Department. The impetuous Duff did not wait for the rest of the brigade to form, and instead ordered his men to dismount and advance under the cover of tall grass and strike the wagon train.

Sudden blasts of Confederate musketry from a mere 20 paces away stunned the flankers of the 14th Wisconsin and unnerved their commander, Lieut. Col. James W. Polleys. The Wisconsin soldiers fled into the protection of some convenient woods north of and adjacent to the Tupelo Road. There, small knots of men returned an ineffectual fire as Confederate troopers raced to the wagon train and began shooting the mules in their traces.

Col. Ward was swift to react. He quickly sent a staff officer to order Lieut. Col. Lovell to bring up the Thirty-third Wisconsin from its rear-guard position and strike the left flank of Duff's 8th Mississippi. The Wisconsin men marched at a double-quick through stifling Mississippi summer heat and rapidly formed a battleline in a cornfield some 100 yards from the dismounted Confederates. The Captain of Company "A" reported that by the time the Thirty-third was in position, he heard no sound of return fire from the Federal side-only Confederate gunfire. Lovell then gave the command to open fire.

The withering volley caught Duff's men by surprise. Perhaps among the first killed was Lieut. William H. Barr, the color-bearer for the Eighth Mississippi. As he fell, the flagstaff caught in the rails of a fence that bordered the cornfield, and remained standing. Col. Ward directed the fire of the Thirty-third Wisconsin personally, as the regiment fired volleys by wing. Mississippi troopers continued to fall, including Col. Duff himself, before the regiment broke and retired from the field. After a time, Ward ordered Lovell to have the right wing cease-fire, but directed the left wing to continue to fire, in order to prevent any of Duff's remaining men from retrieving their regimental banner. Behind the line of the Thirty-third Wisconsin rode Lieutenant John M Read, staff officer to Col. Ward and former Adjutant of the 14th Wisconsin, who shouted "Hurrah! Hurrah! A stand of colors for the Thirty-third!" Ward then rode off to rally Lieut. Col. Polleys and the rest of the 14th Wisconsin battalion.

Volleys continued to crash from the right wing of the Thirty-third Wisconsin as Col. Ward brought the 14th Wisconsin men from the shelter of the trees and into some semblance of a battleline. History has not revealed what Col. Ward said to Lieut. Col. Polleys, nor to Captain Carlos M. G. Mansfield. Perhaps it was an admonishment for dashing for the tree line. Maybe it was words meant to bolster the 14th in the presence of a sister Wisconsin regiment. What has emerged, however, was a clear desire on the part of Col. Ward to capture the flag of the 8th Mississippi for his own regiment.

Riding back to the Thirty-third, Col. Ward ordered the regiment to cease-fire. This command seemed to be a signal to the soldiers of the 14th Wisconsin to charge south from the Tupelo Road and sweep the field before them. Captain Mansfield, mounted on a mule, perhaps from one of the wagons, quickly rode out ahead of the charging 14th Wisconsin and snatched the flag of the Eighth Mississippi from the fence. All this occurred as an astonished Thirty-third Wisconsin watched obediently from their position in the cornfield. Later, an examination of the Eighth Mississippi flag revealed thirteen bullets had struck it.

The skirmish was over as quickly as it began. The Thirty-third suffered one man killed and five wounded. Col. Ward recorded that the 14th Wisconsin had six men wounded for the entire Tupelo campaign. Some or all of these injuries may have been sustained at the fight near Camargo Crossroads. The Eighth Mississippi left behind forty-seven casualties, including Col. Duff severely wounded. Soldiers labored to transfer wagon stores to other wagons and burned the wagons that could not be moved. The Federal march east towards Tupelo resumed. One stinging hurt was the flag issue, and to which regiment the trophy truly belonged. For some, the issue remains unresolved to the present day.

One practical issue arising out of the skirmish labeled "Camargo Crossroads" was to identify the location of the actual skirmish. With such prominent landmarks as a labeled crossroads and Burrow's Shop, an identified landmark, the task was anticipated to be quick and painless. The reference in Lieut. Col. Lovells' report that the action took place "near" Camargo Crossroads did not dissuade. Mindful that Civil War references to place locations qualified with the verb "near" may involve distances of a few feet to several miles, the search for the crossroads began.

The best map seemed to be found in the endpapers and text of the book *Forrest at Brice's Cross-Roads*, by the eminent historian Edwin C. Bearss. While this map confirmed the modest "crossroads" nature of the vicinity of Burrow's Shop, it provided little information on the location of Camargo Crossroads, nor a clue as to the actual modern whereabouts of Burrow's Shop or the Lockhart Plantation. Modern inquiries using roadmaps and mapping sources on the internet provided little in the way of new information.

Enter Mr. Curtis Dean ("Deano") Burchfield of New Albany, Mississippi. A resident of the area where A. J. Smith's troops marched during that hot July in 1864, he is well familiar with significant local landmarks. So, too, is his associate, Mr. Julian Reilly. Mr. Reilly is described as "an excellent map person," who over the years collected antebellum maps and overlaid them with modern maps to locate significant place-names and features. Dean Burchfield was able to learn that the Camargo Crossroads was an important Mississippi road. In use longer than the Natchez Trace, the Camargo Crossroads ran from Cotton Gin Port on the Tombigbee River to Bolivar, Tennessee. It was an important access route to the Tennessee River. The trace was in use until silt filled in the river north of Cotton Gin Port and river traffic moved elsewhere. Mr. Reilly's investigation indicated that Camargo Crossroads exists today at Bissell, Mississippi, several miles east of present-day Tupelo. Because of this proximity, it was clear that the action known as "Camargo Crossroads" was not fought at the intersection of the same name. So, where was the July 13, 1864 skirmish fought?

Thanks again to Mr. Reilly's investigation, the location of Burrow's shop (also known as Barrow's or Bertan's Shop) was discovered to be nowhere near modern-day Bissell and Camargo Crossroads. In fact, his investigation revealed the site of Burrow's Shop to be over six miles west of Bissell!

Northeast of the intersection of Mississippi Route 6 and Highway 342 was the most likely spot for the site of Burrow's Shop. A field investigation by Mr. Burchfield and Mr. Reilly

in the spring of 1999 confirmed their initial suspicions: there in the broken, vine-crossed woodland north of Route 6 was found the crumbling brick foundation of Burrow's Shop! Between the shop site and Highway 6 was evidence of the once-beautiful Lockhart Plantation, where tradition held the casualties from Rucker's brigade were taken and treated.

It was an amazing piece of field investigation. Unfortunately, the actual site of the Burrow's Shop fight remains a bit of a mystery. The Bearss map indicated that the location of the shop was near and north of the intersection of the Pontotoc/Tupelo Road (today's Route 6) with the skirmish taking place south of this location, and on the south side of the Pontotoc/Tupelo Road. Did the wagon road used by Rucker in his advance become Highway 342? Perhaps. If so, this would place the site of the skirmish only a few hundred yards on a southwesterly direction from the modern intersection. While the trees mentioned in the summer, 1864 accounts are now gone from their former areas of growth the north side of the Pontotoc/Tupelo Road, the area south of the highway remains fairly open... much as it did 135 years ago.

Knowing where the actual skirmish took place does not seem to settle the reason why the original soldiers inscribed the action on the state battle-flag of the Thirty-third Wisconsin as "Camargo Crossroads." The crossroads ARE east of Tupelo, and that is where the July 13th action took place. It is possible that Federal maps of the area revealed the closest named landmark to the skirmish site as "Camargo Crossroads." Or maybe the location was "assumed" to be the actual crossroads. Apparently, the local Confederates, with a better knowledge of local place-names, had little difficulty naming the action after the closest landmark: Burrow's Shop. Many modern historians have followed suit.

Due to the generosity and investigative skills of Mr. Burchfield and Mr. Reilly, a much better understanding of the location of the July 13, 1864 fight near Burrow's Shop is now available to modern researchers. Historians and persons interested in the history of the Thirty-third Wisconsin, the 14th Wisconsin, and the several regiments of Rucker's Brigade owe a debt of gratitude to these gentlemen for taking the time to search out the location of one of the many obscure skirmishes in north central Mississippi.

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