

Mine Creek Battle - October 25, 1864

One of the largest cavalry battles of the Civil War was fought in the fields around Mine Creek.

In August 1864 Confederate Major General Sterling Price received orders to invade Missouri. He was to bring Missouri into the confederacy and at the same time weaken Abraham Lincoln's chance at reelection. To accomplish his objectives, Price intended to:

- capture St. Louis
- capture Jefferson City and install a Confederate governor in the capitol
- collect supplies and weapons for the struggling confederacy
- recruit soldiers from Missouri's large population of Southern sympathizers

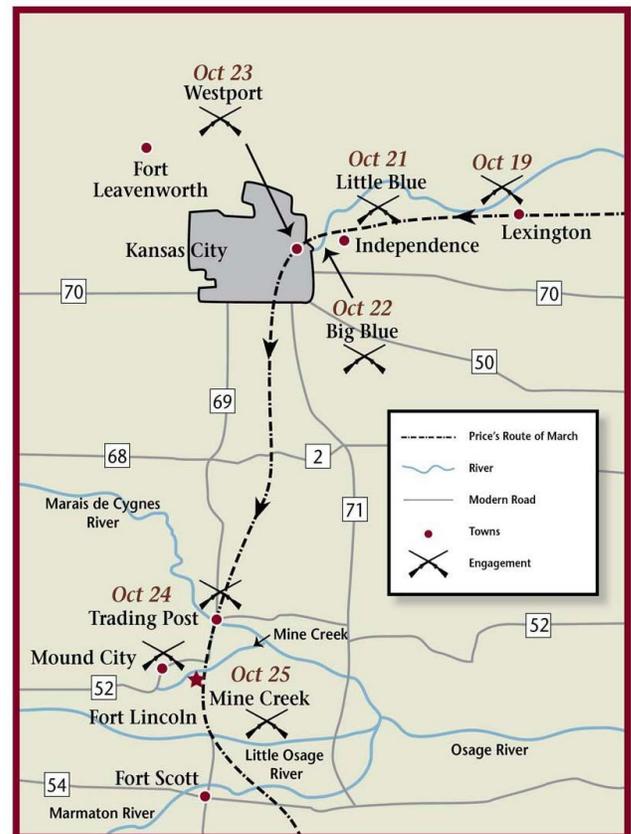
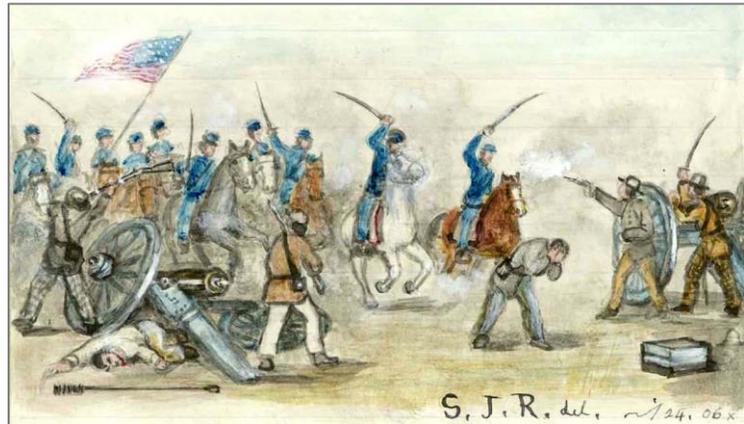
As Price advanced into Missouri he discovered St. Louis and Jefferson City were both heavily fortified. He abandoned his plans to capture the cities, but his mission to gather provisions resulted in a supply train of 500 wagons.

Near Kansas City, Union troops clashed with Price's army in a series of battles:

- Oct 19 in Lexington
- Oct 21 at the Little Blue River
- Oct 22 at the Big Blue River
- Oct 23 in Westport

The Battle of Westport was a stunning Confederate defeat. Price withdrew south with Union cavalry in close pursuit.

On October 24 the Confederates crossed into Kansas and moved toward Fort Scott with its large supply depot. Price and one division went ahead while the other two divisions protected the 10 mile long wagon train as it continued to retreat south.



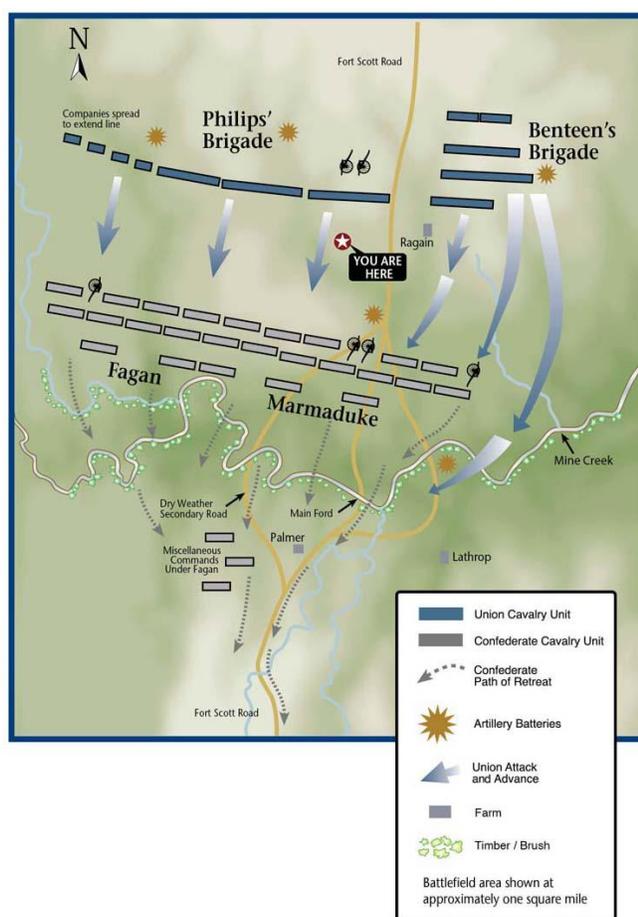
Early on the morning of October 25 a running skirmish developed over the nine miles between Trading Post and Mine Creek. When the Confederate rear guard arrived at Mine Creek the end of the supply train had not yet crossed. With two brigades of 2,500 Union cavalrymen bearing down upon them, the Confederates were forced to stop and fight. The Confederate rear guard formed a skirmish line, which delayed Union troops long enough for the 7,000 men in the two Confederate cavalry divisions to establish a main line of defense. The Confederate divisions were commanded by Major Generals John S. Marmaduke and James F. Fagan. The Union brigades were led by Colonel John F. Philips and Lieutenant Colonel Frederick W. Benteen.

The field was wet and muddy from the previous night's rain, and hundreds of horses and wagons had trampled the ground. In spite of the precarious conditions, both sides quickly moved into position at 10:30 a.m. Confederate artillery opened fire first, followed by the Union.

When the Union charge commenced at 11 a.m. the Tenth Missouri Cavalry, USA, started forward with a yell and bugles blaring, but half-way down the slope the men hesitated and stopped when the Confederates showed no sign of breaking. Benteen (later of Little Big Horn fame) rode out front, shouting and waving his sword for his men to continue, but they stood frozen in their tracks, intimidated by a force three times their size. As the Tenth Missouri faltered, troops behind still charged forward. To prevent a collision and to continue the attack, the Fourth Iowa Cavalry, USA, pushed through the stalled lines of the Tenth Missouri and resumed the charge. All along the Union line, in a chain reaction from left to right, the charge was renewed.

The Confederate line soon collapsed, due in large part to the superior firepower of the Union's weapons.

The Confederates were armed with long muzzle-loading infantry rifles that were difficult, if not impossible, to reload on horseback. The Union troops were armed with shorter breech-loading carbines, which were loaded at the rear of the barrel and hastened the rearming process. Union troops could fire multiple times while the Confederates were reloading. Many Confederates fired one shot then turned their horses and fled. Others stayed and used their rifles as clubs when the two forces, still astride their horses, clashed in fierce hand-to-hand combat.



When Union troops gained position between the Confederates and the creek, many were mistaken for Confederates because the poorly clothed Southerners had confiscated blue Union uniforms on their raids. The Confederates wore these blue uniforms during the battle at Mine Creek, and it was difficult to determine friend from foe. Private James Dunlavy, Third Iowa Cavalry, USA, took advantage of the situation.

“I saw some rebels, dressed in the Federal uniform, and mistaking them for Union soldiers, started toward them. When I got within a short distance, General Marmaduke saw me shooting at the ‘Butternuts,’ and mistook me and started towards me. I had the advantage of him, so I let him come up. I leveled my carbine upon his breast and ordered him to surrender.”

Dunlavy was awarded the Congressional Medal of Honor for his capture of Marmaduke.

By 11:30 a.m. the Confederates were in full retreat. When they arrived at the creek the crossings were in chaos. The four-to-five feet high creek bank was slippery and crumbling from the recent rain, and the rushing water was deep. Hundreds of wagon wheels and horses had churned the mud into mires. The creek was congested with supply wagons—some still attempting to cross, others overturned or disabled and stuck in the mud. The Confederate cavalymen were caught between the wagons and the pursuing Union forces. To avoid capture many Confederates bypassed the crossings and plunged their horses down the steep bank into the water. But capture was not entirely avoidable, and Union troops rounded up many prisoners.

After the battle Union forces continued their pursuit of Price’s Confederates. Late in the evening on October 25 Price gave orders to burn half the wagons so the army could travel faster. The Union troops pushed the Confederates into Missouri and chased them through Arkansas and into Indian Territory (present-day Oklahoma.) The Confederates never again threatened Kansas.

The Confederates suffered more casualties from the battle at Mine Creek than did the Union troops. Union losses were 94 wounded, 15 killed, and one captured. Confederate losses were 250 wounded, 300 killed, and 600 captured.

When Price commenced his invasion of Missouri, he had several objectives. At the campaign’s conclusion, not a single objective had been met. He failed to take St. Louis or Jefferson City, and he did not install a Confederate governor in Missouri. He had to destroy the huge wagon train of much needed supplies, and most of the new recruits deserted on the retreat from Mine Creek.

Following Price’s retreat the Confederate effort west of the Mississippi River was minimal. The battle was one of the last significant engagements fought in the west. The Civil War ended in April 1865.