

Photo of the Month

Tall Tree Tales



When you see a very old tree do you ever think to yourself, "If only that tree could talk." What would the tree say? How much of both its own and human history could it relate?

The tree in this photograph was located on the battlefield at Pea Ridge. It is recorded that this tree was about 16 inches in diameter when white settlers arrived in 1833. At that time perhaps the tree thought, "Oh no, not again." A puzzling thought, indeed, and if we only knew what the tree meant by this, our understanding of history would be greatly enhanced.

On the second day of the Battle of Pea Ridge, which was March 8, 1862, a shot from a piece of artillery took off the top of the tree. "Hey, watch where you point that thing! Ouch, my head hurts," is probably pretty close to what the tree thought. This unfortunate incident caused the tree's branches to spread out much longer than is natural, putting extreme stress on the trunk. "Boy, are my arms tired and I didn't just fly in from anywhere," the tree may have joked to the other trees.

What the tree witnessed on that March day one hundred and forty-five years ago would decide control of southern Missouri and northern Arkansas for the duration of the war. A short description from the National Park Service's American Battlefield Protection Program sums up the battle of Pea Ridge:

On the night of March 6, Maj. Gen. Earl Van Dorn set out to outflank the Union position near Pea Ridge, dividing his army into two columns. Learning of Van Dorn's approach, the Federals marched north to meet his advance on March 7. This movement—compounded by the killing of two generals, Brig. Gen. Ben

McCulloch and Brig. Gen. James McQueen McIntosh, and the capture of their ranking colonel—halted the Rebel attack. Van Dorn led a second column to meet the Federals in the Elkhorn Tavern and Tanyard area. By nightfall, the Confederates controlled Elkhorn Tavern and Telegraph Road. The next day, Maj. Gen. Samuel R. Curtis, having regrouped and consolidated his army, counterattacked near the tavern and, by successfully employing his artillery, slowly forced the Rebels back. Running short of ammunition, Van Dorn abandoned the battlefield. The Union controlled Missouri for the next two years.

With the battle over and its wounds healing the tree went on to watch over its surroundings as they first went back to agricultural purposes and then, in 1963, became a National Battlefield. Sadly the tree would not be recognized by Park officials as the tree that had its top shot off during the battle; it was cut down in the 1980s.