

# Collierville-First Battle

**tennessee  
civil war  
preservation  
association**

## **NARRATIVE**

Confederate forces of Brigadier-General James Chalmers advanced from Oxford, Mississippi to attack the Federal garrison at Collierville. The Confederate force struck a Federal cavalry camp on the north side of the town, routing the 7th Illinois Cavalry into the river bottoms and capturing 150 prisoners and 5 stands of colors, and 48 wagons of supplies. Fearing Union reinforcements from Germantown, Chalmers withdrew without taking the fort.

## **HISTORICAL THEMES**

Controlling Resources, Crucible for Leadership, Guerilla Warfare, Transformation in Warfare

## **EXPLANATION OF ATTACHMENTS/VIDEO:**

Reports of Engagement

## **LINKS FOR FURTHER INFORMATION:**

N/A

## **COUNTY:**

Shelby

## **DATE:**

10/11/1863

## **GEO COORDINATES:**

35.0420° N,  
89.6645° W

## **PRESERVATION**

### **OPPORTUNITY INDEX:**

LOW

## **CONFEDERATE UNITS:**

7th, 12th, 13th and  
14th Tennessee  
Cavalry  
1st, 3rd, 12th, and  
18th Mississippi  
Cavalry  
2nd Missouri Cavalry  
Buckner's Battery

## **UNION UNITS:**

7<sup>th</sup> Illinois Cavalry  
13<sup>th</sup> U.S. Infantry

Reports of engagement:

October 11, 1863 - Action at Collierville Report of Major Henry C. Forbes, Seventh Illinois Cavalry, of action at Collierville, Tenn., October 11, 1863 CAMP SEVENTH ILLINOIS VOLUNTEER CAVALRY, Collierville, Tenn., October 17, 1863.

SIR: I have the honor to report responsive to orders, that on the morning of the 11th instant at about 11.30 o'clock the camp of the Seventh Illinois Cavalry was attacked by the enemy about 1,100 strong, under Gen. Chalmers. Preceding the attack there had been skirmishing on the infantry pickets south of the station for an hour, of which we had received no intimation. We were accidentally informed of the approach of the enemy, when disposition was immediately made to receive him with our camp force of about 200 men, consisting of men off duty on account of sickness, detail, being dismounted, unarmed, &c. Our line was scarcely formed when the pickets from the east were hastily driven in, and immediately the enemy was attacking. We received his attack with a line of dismounted men, which gallantly repulsing him, was itself repulsed in turn by his reserves, and after a few minutes further contest, and receiving an attack from formations on both flanks of our position, against which we had no reserve to use, we found ourselves compelled to retire from under a cross-fire, becoming intolerable, and rendering further contest on that ground hopeless. We accordingly withdrew, skirmishing through the camp toward the Wolf, sacrificing it in the belief that the preservation of the command had become a duty paramount to all others. A portion of the enemy pursued us to the river, picking up disabled and dismounted men who had been unable to regain their horses, and a portion remained to fire and pillage the camp, which they did in fine style. An hour later after a reconnaissance of the enemy's position, we repossessed our ground, finding about two-thirds of our camp and garrison equipage destroyed, the entire regimental and the greater part of the company records burned, and the enemy rejoined to the force which meanwhile had engaged the infantry forces at the fort. Our loss in killed (so far as known) was First Lieut. Charles F. Lee, Company F, who behaved with conspicuous gallantry. Of the number of our wounded we are not apprised, as they were removed by the enemy. Together with other prisoners they aggregate 49 men. We lost about 100 mules and 14 wagons. Of arms, accouterments, and ammunition,

there has not as yet been an inspection sufficiently minute to determine the exact loss. Our men killed and wounded, according to the report of escaped prisoners, a sufficient number of the enemy to employ four mule-wagons and two ambulances in their removal from the field. Considering him, nevertheless, our debtor, we await the opportunity to pay him on a field where the disparity of numbers shall not be so hopeless as at Collierville. I have the honor, sir, to be, very respectfully, your obedient servant, Henry C. Forbes, Major, Seventh Illinois Cavalry. OR, Ser. I, Vol. 52, pt. I, p. 88. [The 7th Illinois did retire the debt it owed to Chalmers on November 3, 1863, when forces under Chalmers were repulsed at and pursued from Collierville.] MEMPHIS, TENN., October 12, 1863-2.30 p. m. (Received 1.45 p. m., 14th.) The enemy was repulsed from Collierville yesterday. Our loss is reported 18 killed, 60 wounded, 20 missing. They have gone south. The railroad will be repaired to-day. I have a brigade of infantry at Holly Springs, and cavalry to the right and left of that point, and hope to cut them off. No other points on the railroad were struck. I have issued orders to open the telegraph and railroad from Columbus to Corinth, but have no hope of keeping them up with my force. At least six regiments more will be required for that service. If ordered, they should report to Gen. A. J. Smith, at Columbus. Joe Johnston is reported organizing a force at Meridian-probably from the Vicksburg prisoners.

Excerpt from the letter of Lieutenant William H. Keeling, Thirteenth U. S. Infantry, to the editors of the Dubuque [Iowa] Times, written from Iuka, Mississippi, October 27, 1863.

According to Keeling Our battalion. . . left Memphis for Corinth on the morning of October 11, in a train in which were Generals [William Tecumseh] Sherman, [Hugh Boyle] Ewing, and [Joseph Andrew Jackson] Lightburn. On arriving at Collierville, twenty-four miles out, we found the force stationed there (of near 200 men) thrown out as skirmishers, and a large force of Rebels in sight planting a battery. In a few minutes a flag of truce approached toward the station [which] was met by Colonel [De Witt Clinton] Anthony of the Sixty-sixth Indiana Volunteers, who was in command of the post. The flag was from the Rebel, [James Ronald] Chambers [i.e., Chalmers], demanding an unconditional surrender of the train and fortifications, which under instructions from General Sherman was refused. We were immediately deployed as skirmishers and advanced toward the enemy, who

commenced throwing shot and shell from the battery, which was in easy range of the train and station house, occasionally throwing a charge of grape and canister among us, but we were so scattered that they did little damage to us. Their force, which was mostly mounted, soon nearly surrounded the place and by their vastly superior numbers compelled us to fall back to the fortifications, which were of light earthwork and only partially completed. Lieutenant [Frederick Joseph] James, of the Third Regular Cavalry, and a member of General Sherman's staff collected together a few convalescents and men belonging to the train and made a charge on a regiment of the enemy, and so desperate a one that the Rebels were driven from their position and terribly cut up, though with a severe loss to the little party of brave Union boys. The lieutenant was wounded, most of the party were either killed or wounded. After fighting about two hours, the Rebels succeeded in getting to the rear of the train and taking from the cars a few horses, among them General Sherman's pet, "Polly," when a party from our battalion. . . charged and drove them from the cars in confusion, They endeavored to rally, but such a fire was kept up that they made the best of their way out of sight, and before the light the next morning they were miles away with a few horses and officers' coats, taken from the train. Our men fought with a desperation that is rarely equaled, determined to protect to the last our old Colonel and now much beloved General. All seemed eager to do their best, and even little Dale Borger (whom many of the citizens of Dubuque will remembers as the little fifer. . . ) to a musket and fought nobly, but was at last taken prisoner. Corporal Steele. . . was with a small party surrounded and, when the demand was made to surrender, shot the nearest Rebel and escaped, though the bullets whistled close about him. He lost his knapsack in the operation, which was found later after the engagement on the body of a Rebel who had appropriated it and who, in our last charge, while endeavoring to escape, had been shot, the ball passing through the knapsack and apparently killing him instantly. On the body of one of their officers was found the Oath of Allegiance to the United States, taken but a short time before. Bodies of a number of citizens residing there [i.e., Collierville] were found with the same papers Our whole force engaged was about 450 men, while the lowest estimate of the enemy; is 2,500-from that to 5,000-with a good battery; while we had no artillery ~ ~ ~ [William H. Keeling] SOR, Ser. I, Vol., 5, pp. 711-713.

## LEGEND OF TERMS:

Historical themes: Topics and subject matter that characterize the battlefield including Control of Tennessee's Resources, Crucible for Leadership, Guerilla Warfare, Transformation in Warfare, Enslaved People, and Influence on Campaign. Sites are identified that exhibit themes at moderate to high levels, and some sites may contain one or more Historical Themes.

Preservation Opportunity Index (POI): A rating assigned for each battlefield to indicate relative opportunity and potential for successful site preservation. The Index is generated by a model that evaluates ratings assigned for site significance, condition, risk of loss, protection potential, and opportunities for interpretation. Based upon the POI values for each region in Tennessee (West, Middle, East), sites are indicated as having High, Medium, or Low opportunity.

Geo Coordinates: General/central location of the battlefield area per latitude and longitude coordinates utilized in Google Earth

## DO YOU HAVE INFORMATION ON A BATTLE SITE?

Please email us at [info@tcwpa.org](mailto:info@tcwpa.org) and we will reach out to you soon. If you have copies of documents or photos to share, you can include those. If you want to discuss by phone, we will schedule that too.

## HELP US COLLECT INFORMATION TO PRESERVE THESE BATTLEFIELDS

TCWPA's Statewide Preservation Plan team captains are recruiting volunteers to help gather information about many of the lesser-known sites with hopes of verifying the condition of each site and identifying opportunities for preservation and interpretation.

If you are interested in helping, please contact TCWPA at [info@tcwpa.org](mailto:info@tcwpa.org) .

TCWPA will not publish nor release any confidential information, or the name of the contributor, unless you request to be recognized.

Thank you!

The logo for the Tennessee Civil War Preservation Association (TCWPA) is displayed in a light blue, lowercase, sans-serif font. It is positioned on the left side of a dark blue banner that features a background image of a Civil War-era cannon. The banner also contains contact information on the right side.

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Have Information on a Civil War Battlesite?

Contact our team at [info@tcwpa.org](mailto:info@tcwpa.org)