

Fredericktown had fewer than 1,000 citizens in 1861, and was located on the heavily travelled road from Ironton to Cape Girardeau. There were no manufacturing sites in town, just a few small stores, several gristmills in the area, residences, and the Madison County courthouse. Located near the Mine La Motte lead mine, Fredericktown was one of the most prosperous towns in southeast Missouri and an important crossroads.

By 1861, the south had taken control of Kentucky, a border state, and intended to do the same in Missouri. Missouri's governor, Claybourne Jackson, a southerner and pro-slavery,

M. Jeff Thompson received no commission from the Confederate Army, but he was elected General by his troops who called him "Old Swamp Fox". General Thompson was a small but arrogant man who wore a wide brim hat with a long white plume. He carried an army revolver and usually had a saber clanking along on the ground beside him. "Old Swamp Fox" also wore a bright yellow sash, buff-colored gauntlet gloves and ever ready field glasses on his chest. Thompson rode a fine, spotted Arabian horse and kept an Indian known as "Ajax" as his personal aide. Thompson's brigade of men was described as a "crowd of vagabonds, ragged, scantily fed and deserving." Many of the infantry had no shoes and several had no guns. The troops that had weapons used what they had brought from home – shot guns and squirrel rifles. Those without weapons intended to pick up guns from wounded or killed men. Thompson created stories of maneuvers making his force seem much larger and making it appear that he commanded a regiment of Indians.

appointed Jeff Thompson to organize people to resist Union control in Southeast Missouri. General Thompson became very bold and conceived a plan to destroy the Iron Mountain Railroad bridge over the Big River in St. Francois County, seize stores of ammunition and food from the Union supply depot in Pilot Knob, then March to

Fredericktown to capture and secure large quantities of lead from Mine La Motte.

*October of 1861*, General Jeff Thompson left his headquarters at Bloomfield in Stoddard County, with about 1200 infantry troops and 700 – 800 cavalry troops, poorly trained and equipped Gen. Thompson burned the railroad bridges in St. Francois County, but since there were large numbers of Union forces at Pilot Knob, he did not attack the fort. Thompson then moved his forces to Mine La Motte and captured lead stores for the Confederacy.

*Union General Ulysses Grant* was based in Cairo, Illinois. When Grant was notified of General Thompson's raid, he sent Colonel J.B. Plummer from

Camp Fremont, near Cape Girardeau, to Fredericktown with about 1500 Union soldiers. Colonel W.P. Carlin was ordered to advance from Pilot Knob with about 3000 men. The plan was to capture General Thompson and his troops at Fredericktown.

General Thompson's men intercepted the messenger delivering a note from Colonel Plummer to Colonel Carlin about the plan to capture the Confederates. General Thompson, realizing he would be outnumbered, ordered a retreat towards Greenville while transporting 18000 pounds of lead captured at Mine La Motte.

*By Midnight, on October 20*, General Thompson's forces had marched twelve miles south of Fredericktown. Many of the soldiers with the General were from Fredericktown and Madison County. They protested the retreat. If they could not stay and fight to defend their own families and property, they would not fight at all! War hungry, the infantry complained that they had joined the army to fight – not to march in retreat all over southern Missouri.

General Thompson sent wagons carrying the captured lead to Greenville and brought the army back to the hills south of Fredericktown Sunday night to bivouac. The General warned local citizens to leave the area because there would be a battle, but many went to nearby Mt. Devon to watch. Colonel Carlin's Union forces arrived in Fredericktown late Sunday from Pilot Knob and bivouacked around the courthouse. Colonel Carlin used the brick home at 205 South Main Street (built in 1835) for his headquarters. The town people told Colonel Carlin and his men that the Confederates had left town – enroute to Greenville.

Colonel Plummer camped Sunday night at what is now the junction of "F" and "A" highways near Marquand. Reporting to Colonel Carlin Monday morning, Colonel Plummer discovered that Colonel Carlin had "over-indulged" Sunday night and was "indisposed". Carlin told Colonel Plummer that the Confederates had escaped, but Colonel Plummer decided to march south in pursuit of the rebels. When Colonel Plummer's Troops traveled out South Main Street (near the Masonic Cemetery is today) his scouts observed the Confederates on the high ground (near where the Animal Hospital is today), and along the old Greenville Road. The scouts reported the location of the rebels to Colonel Plummer who immediately brought the rest of the Union Army to the area. Troops were deployed from Bloomfield Road to what is now S. Wood Avenue.

*Around midday* on Monday October 21, 1861, Thompson opened with cannon fire. It is said that the

Confederates were very poor shots and their volleys landed in the town – striking the Methodist Parsonage and the house being used by Colonel Carlin for his headquarters. The Union infantry charged down the hill and met the Confederates at the small creek between the cemetery hill and the hill near the present Veterinary Hospital. The battle lasted over two hours, with the Confederates in retreat towards Greenville. Each side claimed victory, although the southerners fled the field of battle and left the Union in Control.

The Union army vastly outnumbered the Confederates – four or five to one. The Southerners lost one of their big guns when Union cannon fire wrecked the carriage and wounded the horses pulling the gun. The Union forces had two batteries of four guns each, in line on each side of the Greenville road. They had also placed seven mortars to the rear to protect the courthouse.

Union forces reported six soldiers killed and some sixty wounded. General Thompson put the number of Confederate dead at twenty with thirty captured. Two Union officers, Major Gavitt and Captain Highman, and one Confederate officer, Major Lowe were killed. The casualty reports are contradictory from both sides – Confederate losses were heavy while the Union lost comparatively few men. Some of the Union soldiers were buried in the city cemetery and a wagon load of casualties was taken to Pilot Knob for burial. The dead of the Confederate army were buried on the Arnett farm – where the battle had taken place. Confederate Colonel Adin B. Lowe is buried in the cemetery at St. Michaels Catholic Church.

During the disorder following the battle, the Union troops returned to Fredericktown and began to burn the town. They ransacked St. Michael's Catholic Church, stole the Catholic priest's horse and buggy, pillaged stores, ruined the school, and destroyed records at the courthouse. The soldiers believed that local citizens had misled them by reporting the Confederates had fled south. Union soldiers destroyed several lead furnaces including Mr. Fleming's in Mine La Motte, Valle and Mathew's and others, to prevent the lead from falling into southern hands.

Union troops were stationed in Fredericktown during the rest of the war and a military telegraph station was established. The only other Confederate intrusion into Fredericktown during the war was in 1863, when sections of General Price's army marched through town in their way to Ironton before the Battle of Pilot Knob.