

Information Sheet

R **Carthage (Mo.).**
167 **Civil War battle memoir, n.d.**
 One folder, photocopies.

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This is an unsigned, manuscript account of the battle of Carthage in Jasper County, Missouri, on 5 July 1861. Contextual evidence indicates that the author might have been Archy Thomas, a soldier in the Missouri State Guard from Carrollton, Missouri.

This battle memoir is consistent with official reports and secondary accounts of the fight. It is, unfortunately, signed only by "An Eyewitness" to the battle, who was a member of the Missouri State Guard. Although there is some internal evidence to suggest that Archy Thomas was the author, the handwriting and phrasing of the memoir are not clear enough to make a certain identification of the writer. Other than the commanding generals, Gen. Monroe Parsons and a Col. Pritchard are the only officers mentioned in the account. Parsons commanded the Sixth Division, Missouri State Guard, and Pritchard was in Hughes's Brigade, Fourth Division, so it seems likely that the author was a member of one of those divisions.

The Battle of Carthage was one of the largest engagements of the Civil War when it occurred. It was precipitated by the Federal column sent into southwestern Missouri in the summer of 1861 to intercept pro-Southern Missouri Governor Jackson and to prevent the junction of Missouri State Guard troops with Confederate forces out of Arkansas under Gen. Benjamin McCulloch. Led by Franz Sigel, the Federal force of about 1100 men was made up largely of St. Louis Germans, many of whom were veterans of military service in Europe. The rebel force was much larger, but consisted of unorganized and untrained recruits. About one-third of the estimated 6000 Missouri troops were unarmed.

Sigel encountered Jackson's army about twelve miles north of Carthage on July 5, and the battle began with a lively artillery duel. Although the Federal troops had the advantages of superior arms and training, the Missourians soon threatened to envelope the Union line by sheer weight of numbers, forcing Sigel to order a withdrawal. Through skillful use of his artillery, Sigel managed a series of rear-guard actions that allowed his troops to retreat slowly to Carthage. Nightfall ended the engagement, and, under cover of darkness, Sigel's soldiers continued their retreat toward Sarcoxie, thus eluding the rebels.

Both sides claimed victory at Carthage. Sigel was acclaimed for slipping from the grasp of a larger force and for managing a skillful retreat, the first of several retrograde movements he made during the war. For the Missourians, victory was more tangible, the results of which they were to demonstrate at the Battle of Wilson's Creek in August. The Union withdrawal bought valuable time in which to complete their organization and begin training, and opened the route southward for supplies and reinforcements from the Confederacy. The junction of Missouri and Confederate troops the day following the battle meant that plans could be made for an offensive to recapture the state. Having evened the score for their previous defeat at Boonville, the morale of the state troops was considerably improved, and they had gained needed battle experience along with their first victory. With Sigel and his force temporarily out of the way, the rebels could also work the lead mines near Granby for much-needed ammunition.

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