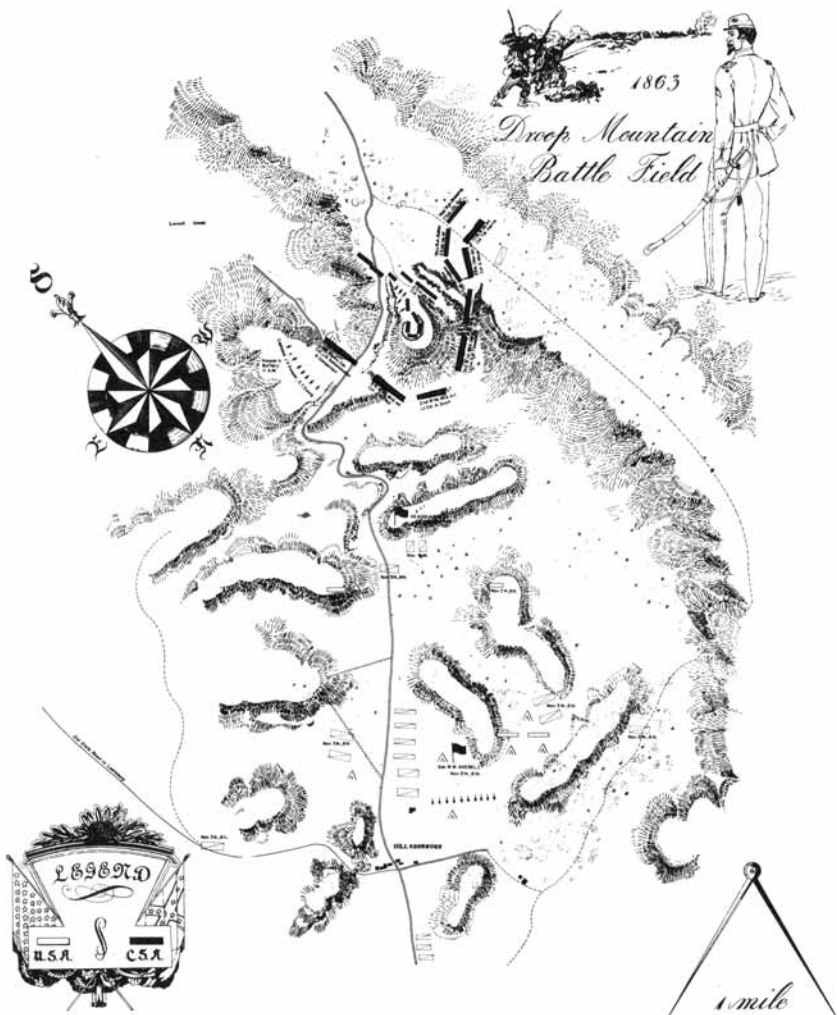
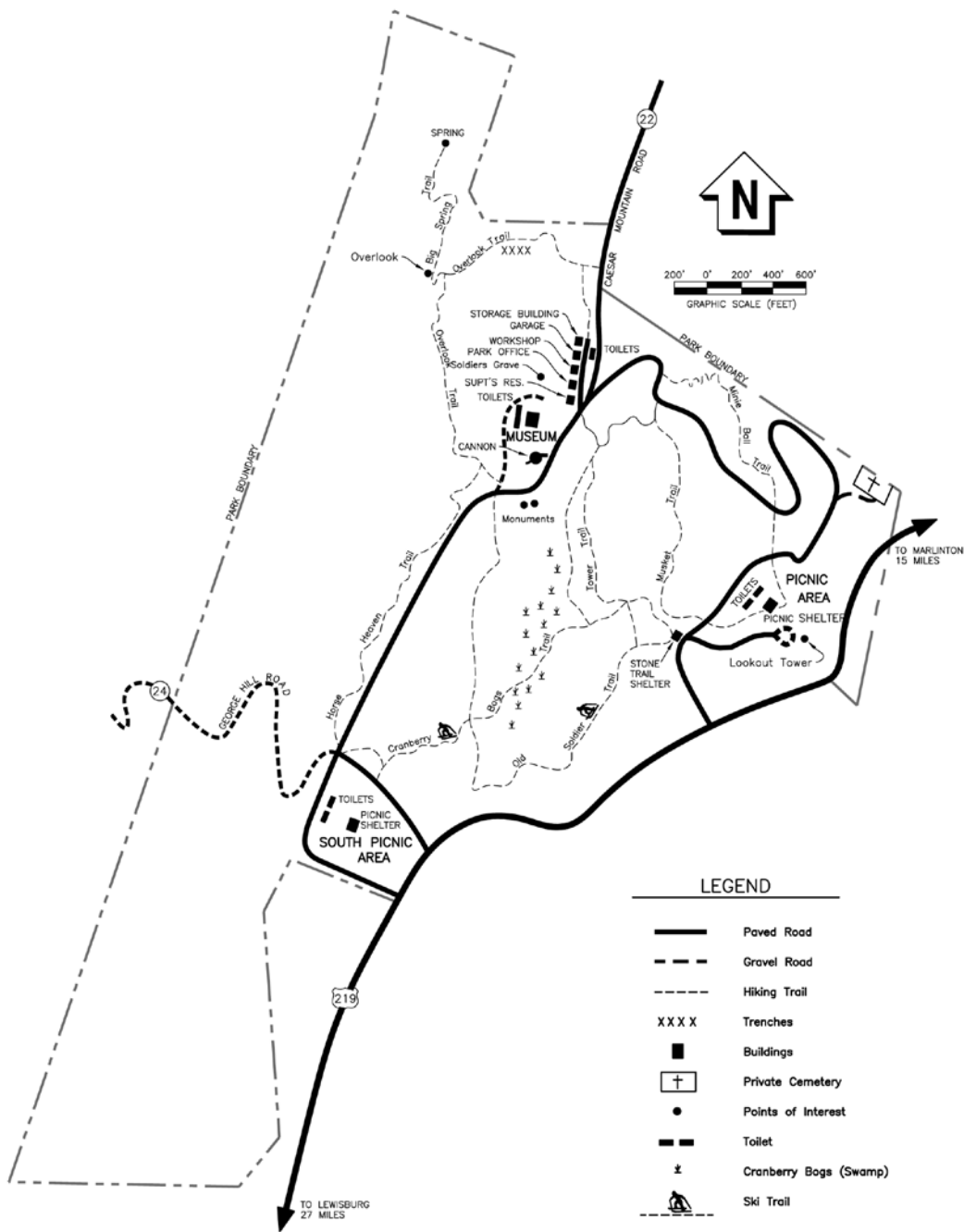


# The Battle at Droop Mountain



# Droop Mountain Battlefield State Park



The Battle  
at  
Droop  
Mountain



November 6, 1863



Dallas B. Shaffer

# The Best Laid Plans...



**Brigadier  
General  
Benjamin F.  
Kelley,  
Commander  
of the  
Department  
of West Virginia**

**I**N SEPTEMBER OF 1863, the Federals were defeated at the Battle of Chickamauga and were being pressed westward by the Confederates. General Sam Jones, who was commanding the Confederate Department of Western Virginia and East Tennessee from headquarters at Dublin, Virginia, moved with a large part of his forces to join in pushing the Federals from Tennessee. At this time, H. W. Halleck, the Union General-in-Chief, conceived a bold plan which he presented to the commander of the Department of West Virginia, Brigadier General Benjamin F. Kelley. Halleck sought to relieve the pressure on the Federals by sending cavalry units from West Virginia to sever the vital Virginia and Tennessee Railroad in the vicinity of Lynchburg. By this move, Halleck hoped to force Jones to withdraw from East Tennessee to protect the railroad.

Kelley was the former commander of the 1<sup>st</sup> (West) Virginia Regiment and leader of the forces that wrested Philippi from the Confederates on June 3, 1861, in the first land battle of the first campaign of the Civil War. Surviving the wound he received in the chest during that engagement, Kelley became commander of the Federal forces in West Virginia, following such notables as General George B. McClellan; General William S. Rosecrans, whose career was ended by the Battle of Chickamauga; and General John

C. Fremont. Under his command were 32,000 troops that he placed at strategic points throughout the new state of West Virginia that had recently been admitted to the Union by President Abraham Lincoln's proclamation in June 1863.

The protection of the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad was Kelley's chief responsibility. On this occasion, the 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> Corps were transferred from Washington by the B&O to reinforce the Federal troops in Tennessee. To protect the railroad, Kelley posted heavy contingents of troops at points from his headquarters at Clarksburg to Harpers Ferry in the Eastern Panhandle. General Kelley assigned the defenses of central and southeastern West Virginia to Generals E. P. Scammon and William W. Averell. A veteran of Civil War campaigns in West Virginia, General Scammon commanded some 6,000 troops concentrated at Charleston. Another contingent of 5,000 troops under General Averell was located in Randolph County at Beverly, a little town some 15 miles south of what was then known as Leadsville (Elkins).

Under command of General Sam Jones, the Confederates in West Virginia were located at points along the Alleghenies from Princeton to Mill Point, 34 miles north of Lewisburg. With headquarters at Mill Point, Colonel W. L. Jackson's command was rather widely distributed in

the surrounding area. General John Echols' brigade was at Lewisburg, while Colonel M. J. Ferguson held the 14<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> Virginia Cavalries in readiness. Under Lee's orders, Brigadier General John Imboden was encamped near Bridgewater, east of Beverly. Maintaining pressure on the Federals in this area and trying to occupy as many of the enemy as possible, Imboden's primary objective was to strike the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad at the earliest opportunity to prevent its being used to transport troops to Tennessee.

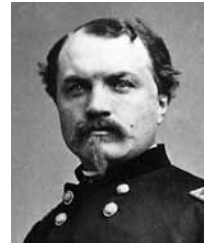
Kelley informed General Halleck that part of the Confederates had been withdrawn from West Virginia and that the offensive against the Virginia and Tennessee Railroad would be launched from Beverly. According to Kelley's plan as disclosed to Halleck, Averell was to move to Lewisburg, while another column was to leave Charleston to arrive there at the same time. As the two arms of the pincer movement converged upon Lewisburg, Kelley hoped that the Confederates in Greenbrier, Pocahontas and Monroe counties would be driven out or trapped between the two. At Lewisburg, General Averell was to determine if circumstances warranted the completion of his drive to sever the Virginia and Tennessee. With Halleck's concurrence, Kelley issued the appropriate orders to Averell and left his headquarters to coordinate the movement from Charleston.

Kelley had good reason to entrust such a hazardous movement behind Confederate lines to General Averell. This 31-year-old cavalry officer had earned a

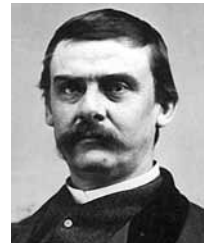
reputation as an Indian fighter, following his graduation for West Point, and he had already distinguished himself in many battles in the Civil War. Averell was with McClellan during the abortive Peninsular Campaign, later participating in the bloody affair at Fredericksburg in December, 1862. His transfer to West Virginia in May of 1863 and his vigorous attempts to cope with guerilla bands and Confederate raids further enhanced his reputation.

Soon after Averell arrived in West Virginia, many infantry units were converted to "mounted infantry" regiments. These regiments were an innovation designed to cope, particularly, with the guerilla forays and embarrassing Confederate raids which had destroyed oil and other properties, as well as crippled the Baltimore and Ohio. A delegation from West Virginia visited Lincoln earlier, in February of 1863, to request this change from foot to horse. Following Lincoln's intercession with Halleck, this request was granted. The mounted infantry units were mobile and could cope with Confederate cavalry raids, reverting to normal infantry tactics when confronting an entrenched position.

As the Federal cavalry advanced against the Confederates in eastern Tennessee, Averell left Beverly on November 1, 1863, with orders to arrive in Lewisburg on Saturday, November 7, at "two p.m." Averell's command consisted of the 2<sup>nd</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup>, and 8<sup>th</sup> West Virginia Mounted Regiments; the 10<sup>th</sup> West Virginia Infantry; two batteries of the 1<sup>st</sup> West Virginia Light Artillery; the 28<sup>th</sup> Ohio Infantry; the 14<sup>th</sup>



**Brigadier General William W. Averell,**  
4th Separate  
Brigade,  
U.S. Army

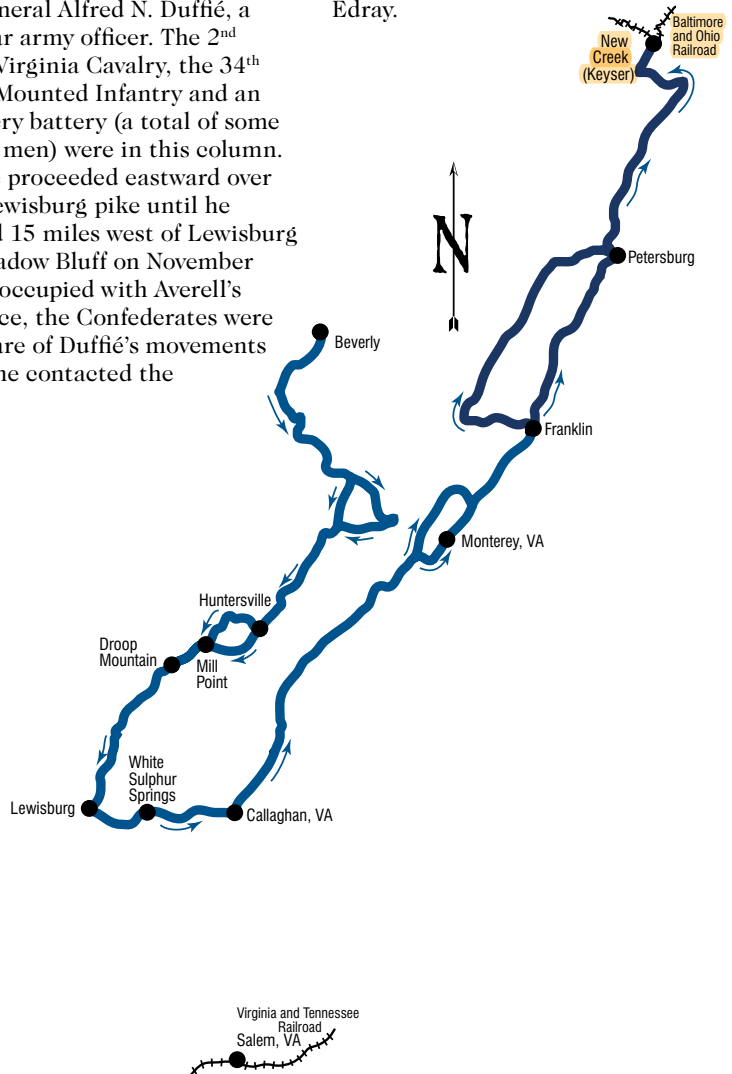


**Brigadier General John Echols,**  
1st Brigade,  
Army of  
Southwest  
Virginia, C.S.A.

Pennsylvania Cavalry; and Major Thomas Gibson's (Pennsylvania) Independent Cavalry Battalion. As the citizens of Beverly observed the departure of the Federals, they were likely reminded of General George B. McClellan's feat at the battle at Rich Mountain some two years earlier. Perhaps Averell could imitate his former commander's successes in West Virginia.

The column that left Charleston two days later was commanded by General Alfred N. Duffié, a regular army officer. The 2<sup>nd</sup> West Virginia Cavalry, the 34<sup>th</sup> Ohio Mounted Infantry and an artillery battery (a total of some 1,000 men) were in this column. Duffié proceeded eastward over the Lewisburg pike until he halted 15 miles west of Lewisburg at Meadow Bluff on November 6. Preoccupied with Averell's advance, the Confederates were unaware of Duffié's movements until he contacted the

outposts at Meadow Bluff. The first obstacle encountered by Averell was Colonel W. L. Jackson's command at Mill Point. Jackson's headquarters there were protected by part of the 19<sup>th</sup> Virginia Cavalry and an artillery battery. The remainder of the 19<sup>th</sup> had been sent into Nicholas County on an expedition. At Marlin's Bottom (Marlinton), Jackson had stationed the 20<sup>th</sup> Virginia Cavalry, while other detachments were located at Dunmore and Edray.



**Brigadier  
General  
William W.  
Averell's  
November 1863  
raid**

# Mill Point

**L**EARNING OF AVERELL'S advance upon Huntersville, Jackson concentrated his command at Mill Point. While drawing in his forces, Jackson sent a message to General Echols at Lewisburg informing him of the enemy movements and his intention to engage them. Echols replied that he would immediately move to his support.

Jackson ordered Colonel William W. Arnett to return with the 20<sup>th</sup> Virginia from Marlinton, eight miles north of Mill Point. Captain Marshall's detachment returned from Edray, while Lt. George W. Siple, commanding a company at Dunmore, was ordered to make a reconnaissance to determine the Federal strength and disposition. For some time Siple was isolated in Pocahontas County by the rapid movements of Averell's column. Colonel William P. Thompson, with the 19<sup>th</sup> in Nicholas County, returned just in time to prevent the 3<sup>rd</sup> West Virginia Mounted from cutting off Arnett's retreat from Marlinton.

Far into the night, Jackson was busily aligning his troops and preparing for the impending struggle. He placed Arnett in command of all infantry and ordered him to station them by detachments in defensible positions along Stamping Creek. Captain Lurty's two artillery pieces were placed on a hill south of the village. The following morning, Averell's advance units probed Jackson's position.

The stillness of the remote little town was rudely disrupted that morning by the small arms fire of Federal skirmishers and sharpshooters moving against Mill Point. Soon Lurty's two 12-pound howitzers opened fire upon the main force of the Federals, forcing them to withdraw to a sheltered position. As a result, the Confederate artillery held the Federals at bay for some time.

Averell's advance units confronting Jackson were commanded by Colonel James N. Schoonmaker of the 14<sup>th</sup> Pennsylvania. Schoonmaker was supported by the 3<sup>rd</sup> West Virginia that had rejoined him after failing to trap the 20<sup>th</sup> Virginia at Marlinton. The 3<sup>rd</sup> had moved from Huntersville over the road toward Cackleytown, when the timely arrival of the 19<sup>th</sup> from Nicholas County permitted the 20<sup>th</sup> to escape to Mill Point. Upon the withdrawal of the Confederates from Marlinton, other units of Averell's column occupied the town.

Suspecting that reinforcements were moving to aid Schoonmaker, Jackson sent out a reconnaissance party of 30 men under Captain L. R. Exline. Driving in the Federal pickets and retrieving all of his men safely, Exline returned to report that artillery and cavalry reinforcements were joining Schoonmaker. Aware that he could not hold his position against the superior fire power and long range of the Federal artillery,



**Col. William L. Jackson,**  
19th Virginia  
Cavalry



**Col. James N. Schoonmaker,**  
14th Pennsylvania  
Cavalry

## The long Confederate column finally retreated the seven miles from Mill Point, through a beautiful cleared valley to Droop Mountain.

Jackson prepared his troops to retreat when the batteries opened against him.

Schoonmaker was reinforced by the 8<sup>th</sup> West Virginia and Captain C. T. Ewing's battery of the 1<sup>st</sup> West Virginia Light Artillery. Leaving Marlinton about dawn, these units had hastened to Schoonmaker's support when Jackson's batteries announced that the battle had begun. Dismounting the cavalry, Schoonmaker dispatched Colonel Oley with his 8<sup>th</sup> and the 14<sup>th</sup> against the Confederate right. Placing the artillery on the summit of the hill to the center, he sent the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> West Virginia to support the artillery and to move against the Confederate left. As Ewing's artillery opened fire, Schoonmaker ordered a general advance upon Jackson's position.

Colonel Jackson could hold his line for only a few minutes under the heavy cannon fire and musketry, and about 11 o'clock, the Confederates began to withdraw. With the 19<sup>th</sup> Cavalry, Colonel Thompson checked the Union charge until the infantry and artillery could escape. Sending the major party of the 19<sup>th</sup> with the Confederate rearguard, Thompson remained with two officers and 30 men to hold a hill under a shower of shell and grapeshot while the infantry moved out safely.

Thompson retired slowly while

delaying the Federal pursuit as much as possible. As the Federal artillery lobbed shells to burst overhead and near their ranks, the Confederates retreated under cover of hills and through timber wherever possible. The long Confederate column finally retreated the seven miles from Mill Point, through a beautiful cleared valley to Droop Mountain. The first encounter of this campaign proved to be merely a delaying action, but Jackson had a position in mind against which Averell would find a movement more difficult.

General Averell arrived at Mill Point with two infantry regiments just as the Confederates began to retreat. Within 34 miles of his objective, Lewisburg, Averell avoided pressing the Confederates too closely, attempting to keep them as far from Lewisburg as possible. Averell's advance followed the Confederates through Hillsboro, but they were never closer than 200 yards from their rearguard.

Attempting to cut the 19<sup>th</sup> Virginia from the main Confederate column, Averell sent three mounted regiments to flank the column. When the 19<sup>th</sup> arrived at the base of Droop Mountain about three that afternoon, it was confronted by these mounted regiments. The isolation of the 19<sup>th</sup> was prevented by some well directed shells from Lurty's battery that forced the Union regiments to withdraw.



# Droop Mountain

JACKSON'S EXHAUSTED troops arrived at the summit of Droop Mountain late in the evening and immediately began the placement of artillery. Jackson disposed his units to block the main road to Lewisburg, which then extended across the mountain. The northern slope of Droop Mountain was partially cultivated, and strips of woodland somewhat concealed the approach from the pike. To gain this position, the Federals would have to move over low, rolling hills and across difficult ravines to attack from any direction.

The crest of the mountain was densely covered with laurel and undergrowth, and from this naturally fortified position, Jackson could observe the Union forces about Hillsboro, two miles distant, as well as the plain known as Little Levels below his position. From his camp near Hillsboro, Averell faced the great obstacle presented by the steep mountain. His advance would have to proceed through the open fields and over the pike in the face of Confederate artillery.

Jackson constructed temporary fortifications to meet the attack expected to come the following morning. Arnett was assigned the center position overlooking the pike. His 20<sup>th</sup> Virginia spent the night and part of the next morning constructing breastworks of logs, stone and earth. Jackson placed Lurty's howitzers on a projecting

spur commanding the frontal approaches.

Including the 19<sup>th</sup> on picket duty at the front, Jackson hoped to hold this position with about 750 men against Averell's estimated strength of 3,500 until the arrival of General Echols. Some of Jackson's troops were posted to guard the Locust Creek Road, while some were still cut off in Pocahontas County. While his fortifications were being constructed, Jackson sent another dispatch to Echols. In this dispatch, he misinformed Echols concerning Averell's strength, based on faulty reports from his scouts. General Echols was advised of the impending battle and requested to come immediately to support Jackson.

By this time, Echols had moved his brigade about halfway to Droop Mountain. Having departed Lewisburg about nine o'clock on the morning of November 5, Echols had advanced to within 14 miles of Jackson's position and encamped for the night. Receiving Jackson's urgent pleas for help, Echols moved the remaining distance to arrive at Droop Mountain about nine o'clock the following morning.

Before leaving Lewisburg, Echols dispatched the 16<sup>th</sup> Regiment and part of the 14<sup>th</sup> to Meadow Bluff to guard the approaches and to picket the roads from Kanawha and Nicholas counties. Major James Nounnan, commanding the 16<sup>th</sup>, was placed near Bunger's Mill

**4th Separate  
Brigade,  
8th Army Corps,  
U.S.A.**

**3,855 officers  
and men  
8/31/1863**

**1st Brigade,  
Army of  
Southwest  
Virginia,  
C.S.A.**

**Approximately  
2,500 men  
engaged at  
Droop Mountain**



**Colonel  
George S.  
Patton,  
Echols'  
Brigade**

at Meadow Bluff. A squadron of the 14<sup>th</sup>, under Captain James A. Strain, took a position on the road leading from Nicholas County. Echols soon realized the wisdom of protecting himself against a drive to his rear which would have put his command in a compromising position.

The remainder of the 14<sup>th</sup> Virginia Cavalry arrived at Jackson's position that night. Jackson placed two companies of the 14<sup>th</sup> on the extreme left to protect the rear and left flank, while the other companies reinforced Arnett's 20<sup>th</sup> Virginia at the center. When Echols arrived and assumed command of the position the following morning, the Confederates at Droop Mountain enthusiastically threw down the gauntlet to the Federals confronting them. The reinforcements were greeted by the music of the band, as battle flags were unfurled and the Confederate cheers announced their arrival to the Federal commander preparing the assault.

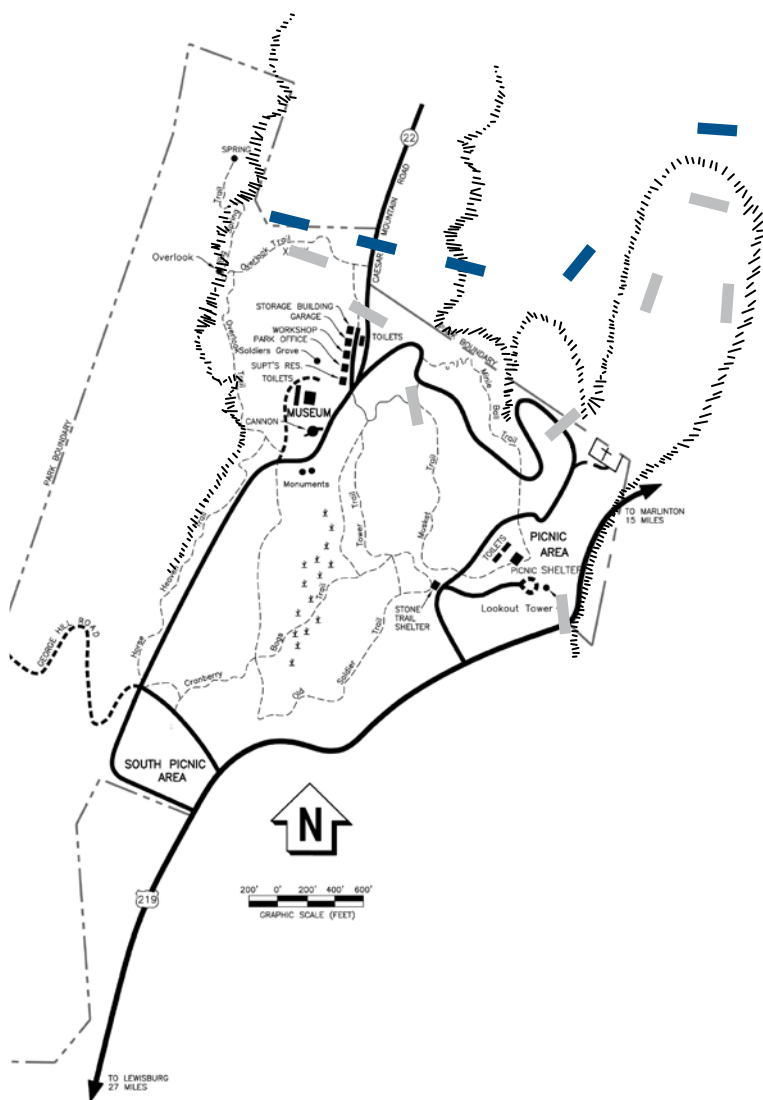
Approving Jackson's disposition of the troops, Echols took further measures to protect the vulnerable flanks. The 26<sup>th</sup> Battalion, under Colonel George M. Edgar, was dispatched with one artillery piece to guard the old road from Hillsboro to Falling Spring, a road by which Averell might have moved southeast to cut off Echols from the rear. One rifle piece from Chapman's battery was later detached and sent to Edgar.

The 23<sup>rd</sup> Battalion Virginia Infantry was placed on the right of the main road. Company C was placed on the right of the main road, while companies A and F were deployed as skirmishers

before the battalion. This unit was located about 400 yards to the right of the batteries. The 22<sup>nd</sup> Virginia was placed in the rear of the batteries for their support. Assigning immediate command of his brigade to Colonel George S. Patton, Echols assumed personal supervision of the right wing of the line. Jackson remained at the center of the line with Colonels Arnett and Cochran of the 14<sup>th</sup> and the 20<sup>th</sup> Virginia. Colonel Thompson was entrusted with the defense of the left flank with the 19<sup>th</sup> Virginia.

Echols assigned the disposition of the artillery to Major William McLaughlin of the Confederate artillery branch. McLaughlin placed the batteries of Jackson and Captain George B. Chapman, a 22-year-old Monroe County youth, to support the infantry. Jackson's two artillery pieces, one a parrott gun, were placed with Lurty's battery. This unit was temporarily assigned to Echols from Jenkin's cavalry brigade. Chapman's battery was without two of its artillery pieces which had been left behind for repairs at the Dublin ordinance depot. His battery of four guns consisted of two howitzers (a 12- and a 24- pounder) and two rifled pieces. His battery was placed in a position to the rear on a hill in easy supporting distance of the infantry.

The most vulnerable point in the Confederate lines was the left flank defended by the 19<sup>th</sup>. Its collapse would allow a Federal advance to the rear of the entire position. Early that morning, Thompson sent 25 men, under Lieutenants Mark V. Jarrett and William W. Boggs, to relieve the two companies of the 14<sup>th</sup> stationed there the previous



Map showing battle positions in relationship to park area.

■ Union  
■ Confederate

night. Before the arrival of Echols, Jackson had ordered Thompson to reinforce that point. Thompson then sent another 100 men to the left, under Captain J. W. Marshall, with orders to dismount the men and send the horses to the rear. Jackson's anxiety over the left flank soon induced him to send the remainder of the 19<sup>th</sup> there with Colonel Thompson.

Having been misinformed by Jackson's underestimating Averell's strength, Echols was confident in his ability to hold his position. Engagements in this theater during the past few months had been encouraging for the Confederates. Unaware of the menace posed by General Duffié's advance from Charleston, General Echols felt prepared for the worst.

# Averell Attacks



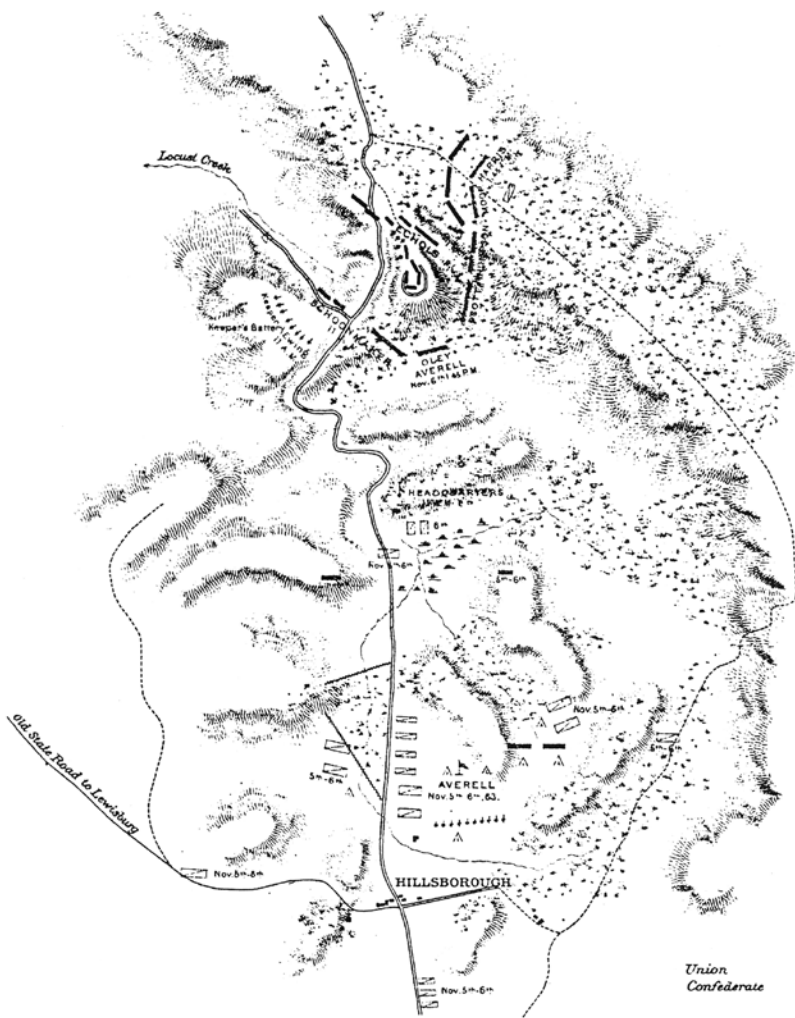
**Colonel  
Augustus Moor,**  
28th Ohio  
Volunteer  
Infantry

**A**S DAWN BROKE on the morning of November 6, Averell was busily arranging his units for battle. Averell first sent out three infantry companies to probe the Confederate position. The skirmishing attack proved the position to be too strong to make a frontal attack practical, whereupon Averell decided to send a detachment far to the west to outflank the Confederates and to fall upon their left. While this flanking movement was in progress, Averell sent other units and artillery to move against the right and center to divert the attention of the Confederates.

Averell assigned the flanking movement to a veteran of campaigns in West Virginia who had proved his abilities in many similar operations, Colonel Augustus Moor, commander of the 28<sup>th</sup> Ohio Infantry. Moor was supported by the 10<sup>th</sup> West Virginia and Captain Julius Jaehne's company of cavalry. Leaving camp about nine that morning, Moor led his company some four miles in a northwesterly direction with the aid of a local guide. He then turned due south for about an hour, having marched some nine miles in a semicircle to a point near the Confederate left without having been detected. Shortly after noon, his advance contacted the Confederate skirmishers. Guided by the sounds of gunfire at the Confederate camp, Moor continued to advance upon the left flank.

Meanwhile, Averell directed units to move against the Confederate right and center. Colonel Schoonmaker led the 14<sup>th</sup> and Keeper's battery against the Confederate right. Driving the Confederate skirmishers before him, Schoonmaker placed his artillery in position about two-thirds of a mile from the lines. The battle was joined about 11 o'clock that morning when the Confederate artillery opened up on Schoonmaker's battery, which directed its fire toward the Confederate center.

Schoonmaker's artillery fire fell among the horses and Confederate batteries. Jackson, Lurty and one piece of Chapman's battery returned the fire in this duel which lasted about a half hour. Directed some 500 feet below them, the Confederate fire was accurate and forced the Federal artillery to withdraw. The Confederate artillery continued to shell the Federal infantry and cavalry whenever a target was exposed. Fearing that the Confederates, if not pressed continuously, would detect Moor's flanking movement, Schoonmaker moved his artillery from the right toward the center of the line. He managed to fire several telling rounds before he was again forced to change position by the heavy Confederate artillery fire. About one o'clock, the three pieces of Federal artillery firing upon the Confederate center were again forced to withdraw by Jackson's battery and Chapman's rifled



Map showing battle positions throughout the day of November 6, 1863.

Drawn from partial survey by Henry Topping.

piece. In the meantime, two artillery pieces were advanced up the road and opened up on the 22<sup>nd</sup> Virginia to the left of Chapman, only to be silenced and driven away by Chapman's and Lurty's batteries.

By the sounds of heavy fighting on the left flank at about 1:45, General Averell decided that Colonel Moor had engaged the Confederates and that the time for the frontal assault was at

hand. Averell then ordered the attack to commence upon the center. Leaving one company of the 2<sup>nd</sup> to guard the horses of the mounted infantry, the 2<sup>nd</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup>, and 8<sup>th</sup> West Virginia regiments attacked. After an hour of hard fighting, exposed at times to the Confederate artillery, the three regiments moved up the mountain and gained a position within 50 yards of the line in front of the Confederate center and batteries. The Confederates repulsed the



**Colonel  
Thomas M.  
Harris,  
10th  
West Virginia  
Volunteer  
Infantry**

first charge, and the Federals fell back to regroup for a renewed assault. In the meantime, the Confederate commander had weakened the center to reinforce the left flank that was wavering and threatened to collapse.

On the left flank, the Confederates were sheltered by timber, while the Federals advanced in line of battle through heavy undergrowth. Colonel Thompson was vainly struggling to resist the overwhelming numbers of Federals under Colonel Moor with the 28<sup>th</sup> Ohio and the 10<sup>th</sup> West Virginia. To prevent being outflanked, which was constantly attempted, Thompson had extended his line much farther than his strength would warrant.

Colonel Moor's advance skirmishers had been joined by three companies of the 28<sup>th</sup> when they arrived in front of Thompson's position and were confronted by a hedge constructed of logs and brush. The 28<sup>th</sup> moved forward in line of battle as Colonel Thomas M. Harris brought up the 10<sup>th</sup> West Virginia, just in time. Trees and undergrowth limited their view to about 25 or 30 yards, and the Confederates allowed them to approach within that distance before opening fire. Rising with a "Rebel" yell, the Confederates greeted the 28<sup>th</sup> with a deadly fire and charged the wavering line. This was the critical moment for the Federals, and Colonel Moor saved the day by ordering his regiment to hit the ground and fire by file. The sudden disappearance of the regiment and the increased fire through the under brush checked the Confederate charge. Having some difficulty in bringing up his regiment through the cavalry

horses and confusion, Colonel Harris arrived just in time to hold the line. The 10<sup>th</sup> took a position on the right of the 28<sup>th</sup> as the assault was renewed.

Erroneously informed that the Federals were trying to gain the rear by a more circuitous route than actually taken by Moor, Colonel Thompson had moved far to the extreme left. When the firing began, Thompson realized his error and returned quickly to reinforce Captain Marshall. It was at this point that the Confederates charged and drove the Federal skirmishers back to their main body. Thompson then sent a request for reinforcements to Colonel Jackson at the center. The Union troops pushed the Confederates back and forced their line to give way gradually. Quite a number of the Confederates were unnerved by the overwhelming odds, and knowing the importance of holding his flank, Thompson repeatedly tried to rally his troops.

The Confederates stubbornly defended the left flank against the heavy force of Federals and made several desperate attempts to break the strength of the drive, fully aware that the loss of this flank meant the loss of the battle. As often as they took a stand, the Confederates were driven back. Realizing their advantage in numbers, the Federals pressed vigorously against the wavering line.

Although General Echols was aware that the center and right were heavily engaged, he knew that he must reinforce the left flank to prevent being encircled. He ordered Major Blessing to

move his 23<sup>rd</sup> Battalion from the center to the left flank. With six companies, numbering about 300 men, Blessing deployed his troops to the right of Captain Marshall and led his battalion in a charge, driving the Federals back before he was checked by a heavy volley of musketry. Two companies of the 14<sup>th</sup> Cavalry arrived, and Colonel Thompson deployed them to the left of his line where the Federals were making their strongest assault. In spite of the reinforcements, the Confederates were then forced back to a fence running parallel to the lines which they held for a short time.

Within 300 yards of the turnpike, Thompson was facing the Union lines some 20 yards away. He failed to rally the 23<sup>rd</sup> Battalion and detachments of the 14<sup>th</sup>, which were giving way in some confusion. Echols observed the renewed assault on his center and right as the left was falling back; at this time the fighting was heavy along the entire line. As a last measure, Echols sent Colonel Patton with companies A, E and I of the 22<sup>nd</sup> Virginia to support Thompson, but Patton soon informed Echols that the Confederates were hopelessly outnumbered and that the left flank was on the verge of collapse.

At the same time, the 2<sup>nd</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup>, and 8<sup>th</sup> West Virginia pressed toward the center to join the left segment of Colonel Moor's detachment of some 1,175 men. At the time, the Federals on the right were not pressing, and Echols went to the center to help Jackson rally the men to resist the attacking infantry. At Jackson's suggestion, the artillery began to move to the rear. The center held for a half-hour longer, when Echols ordered

the Confederates to fall back because the left was giving way. Jackson remained at the center until the last two artillery pieces were withdrawn. Major McLaughlin perhaps prevented the capture of Echols' entire command by keeping the artillery in action which checked the Federal advance until the troops withdrew.

The left flank finally gave way completely to Moor's repeated charges. Detailing one company of the 28<sup>th</sup> and one of the 10<sup>th</sup> to march in the rear as a small reserve and to guard his flanks, Moor ordered the final Federal charge against the left flank. With cheers completely drowning out the Rebel yells, the Union infantry pressed forward until the left was forced back to the hill where the Confederate artillery was stationed. The artillery had just begun to withdraw, and at this time, the 8<sup>th</sup> joined Moor's left. Then a wild scene ensued – the Union troops maintained a constant fire into the retreating Confederates, killing and wounding artillery horses, while Confederate officers vainly urged their men to make another stand. Confederate infantrymen were dispersed by their own cavalry as the officers drove cannon and caissons through the confused ranks.

Within a few minutes, the Confederates had faded from sight into the woods south of the turnpike. When Moor's right wing came up to the pike, no Confederates remained but the dead and wounded. Farther up the pike, a part of Moore's detachment fired at two rapidly moving spring wagons and killed both horses. They captured the wagons and found them loaded with wounded Confederates. As Averell arrived,



**Lt. Col.  
William P.  
Thompson,**  
19th Virginia  
Cavalry



**The battlefield  
as seen looking  
north from  
the Lookout  
Tower at Droop  
Mountain  
Battlefield  
State Park.**



the 28<sup>th</sup> was ordered to pursue the Confederates.

The sudden collapse of the Confederate lines, accompanied by heavy Federal artillery shelling and strong infantry charges, made an orderly retreat almost impossible. The 26<sup>th</sup>, guarding the Locust Creek Road, was cut off by Averell's rapid movements, but they later rejoined the main body. Echols' withdrawal from the position at Droop Mountain, begun about 4 o'clock that afternoon, saved his command from Averell's trap.

Averell arrived at the camp just as the Confederates were withdrawing. Assigning details to care for the wounded and dead, Averell brought up the horses of the dismounted cavalry. Gibson's Battalion; Ewing's Battery; the 2<sup>nd</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> West Virginia; and the 14<sup>th</sup> Pennsylvania pursued the Confederates some seven or eight miles until they were halted by darkness. Federal cavalry continued to harass the Confederate rearguard, to be checked temporarily on one occasion by a Confederate counter charge.

Soon after his escape from Droop Mountain, Echols learned of a greater and perhaps more dangerous trap confronting him. From Meadow Bluff, a messenger informed him of the Federal column under General Duffie, estimated to be over 2,000 strong, which was rapidly advancing toward Lewisburg. The Confederates at Droop Mountain numbered about 2,000 men, while Echols estimated Averell's strength at about 7,000.

Still some 28 miles from Lewisburg, Averell hoped to keep the Confederates from returning there too quickly. If the Confederates moved too slowly, Echols might be trapped by Duffié, who was scheduled to arrive in Lewisburg the following day. Descending the mountain the following morning, Averell's hopes were boosted by the sight of several campfires to the east, which indicated that the Confederates were somewhat dispersed. If they took time to regroup before continuing southward, the best laid plans might be realized.



# Objective Denied

**G**ENERAL ECHOLS conducted the retreating Confederate column over the four miles of narrow road on Droop Mountain, while Colonels Jackson and Ferguson defended the rear against the continuing Federal cavalry attacks. Colonel Patton returned to the rear in a futile attempt to rally the men and restore order. Unnerved by the ordeal of battle and the Federal cavalry and artillery closely pursuing them, many Confederates dropped from the ranks to escape into the woods, most of whom rejoined the main body later. Unable to repair a broken-down carriage, the Confederates abandoned and partially concealed with brush a brass cannon, which was later recovered by the Federals.

At Frankford, the Confederate commander allowed his troops two hours to eat and rest after the grueling marches and fighting of the past few days. After the units were regrouped and order was restored, Echols continued the retreat southward through Lewisburg, crossed the Greenbrier River before dawn, and proceeded through Monroe County, from which many of his troops were enlisted. Echols led his troops as far south as Sinking Creek in Giles County.

General Duffié entered Lewisburg about nine o'clock on the morning of November 7. Sending the 2<sup>nd</sup> West Virginia Cavalry to follow the Confederates closely, Duffié

led his entire column in pursuit. Before he was stopped by a burned bridge, Duffié succeeded in capturing a few prisoners, along with 100 head of cattle and two caissons. Duffié returned to Lewisburg, where he destroyed large quantities of Confederate Commissary and ordnance stores, tents and the knapsacks of the 22<sup>nd</sup> Virginia. Averell entered Lewisburg that afternoon, and upon Duffié's arrival, ordered him to return the following day to Union, where the Confederates were thought to have made a stand. Learning that Echols had retreated farther south and that he had been reinforced by the 36<sup>th</sup> Virginia from Princeton, Duffié again returned to Lewisburg. Averell then ordered him to return to Charleston, which he did four days later, having been delayed by a heavy snow storm.

Determining the drive against the Virginia and Tennessee to be impractical because of a shortage of rations and the condition of his troops, Averell moved eastward with his cavalry, mounted infantry and Ewing's Battery. With the 28<sup>th</sup>, Keeper's Battery and the 10<sup>th</sup> West Virginia, Colonel Moor was ordered to return to Beverly with the prisoners and wounded.

Moving through White Sulphur Springs to a point near Callaghan, five miles west of Covington, Virginia, Averell contacted General Imboden, who had moved down to protect the Covington area. Unwilling to commit his



**Lt. Col.  
Andrew S.  
Barbee,**  
22nd Virginia  
Infantry

*"Poor me, with shock, [Corp. William S.S.] Morris & [2nd Corp. William H.] Hubbard of our old company, together with other true friends & gallant soldiers now 'sleep their last sleep' on Droop Mountain. My loss is great. I mourn sincerely."*

## Although a qualified success for Averell, the Battle of Droop Mountain might be considered a tactical victory for the Confederates...

### Casualties

**119 Union**

**275 Confederate**

diminished and exhausted command to a general engagement against Imboden, Averell swung northward over the Back Creek Road to Franklin. Part of his troops moved through Hightown, while the 14<sup>th</sup> entered Monterey. At Petersburg, Averell halted his command for rations and forage, and on November 17, he arrived at New Creek (Keyser) with 27 prisoners, some captured horses and several hundred head of cattle.

Casualties at Droop Mountain included 119 Union and an estimated 275 Confederates killed, wounded and missing. Reports in the *Wheeling Intelligencer* indicate that more than 150 Confederates were brought from this campaign and confined in the Athenaeum, a federal prison at Wheeling. This battle, in which brothers and neighbors fought under opposing flags, represented Civil War in its truest and most tragic form. The heaviest fight occurred on the left flank where former neighbors in the 10<sup>th</sup> West Virginia and 19<sup>th</sup> Virginia met in the closest combat. While one brother fought against the Confederates on the left flank, another with the 22<sup>nd</sup> Virginia defended the right.

Although a qualified success for Averell, the Battle of Droop

Mountain might be considered a tactical victory for the Confederates, for Echols survived the main thrust of the Federal offensive and rendered Averell's command unable to complete the raid on the Virginia and Tennessee Railroad, his primary objective. Moreover, Echols managed to escape the closing arms of the pincer movement with his forces in the main unimpaired.

To some degree responsible for the creation of the state of West Virginia, Lincoln referred to Averell's victory at Droop Mountain to boost the sagging morale of the Federals in Tennessee, who had recently been defeated at Rogersville by General Sam Jones. According to Federal commander, General Burnside, the Droop Mountain victory greatly encouraged his troops. Although General Kelley, the departmental commander in West Virginia, informed Washington that all organized bodies of Confederates had been driven from the state, the Confederates returned within 10 days to their former posts. Soon General Jones was on hand to inspect Echols' command, but the Confederates were unable to stop Averell's drive the following month when he succeeded in disrupting the vital railroad.

## About the author

Dallas B. Shaffer was a member of the faculty at Fairmont State College, where he taught history. At the time this booklet was prepared, he was working toward his doctoral degree in the field of history at West Virginia University, while working part-time as historian for the Conservation Commission, now the Department of Natural Resources.

Shaffer's other published work consists of a 12-page booklet, *The Battle of Carnifex Ferry*. Coupled with the work on Droop Mountain, the booklets present a two-part series on two major Civil War battles in West Virginia.

These two booklets are intended to serve as authoritative works on the two battles, portraying accurately the events that took place in the struggle between the Union and the Confederacy. Shaffer studied official records in Washington for much of his information.

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