

Battle of Fair Garden: January 27, 1864

By Carroll McMahan

At dawn on January 27, 1864, a dense fog covered the area around the farms of Stewart Dickey, Dr. Robert Hodsdon and Major John McNutt. Union forces occupied a ridge above the Middle Prong of Little Pigeon River while Confederate forces were on a ridge near McNutt's Bridge.

At daylight, Col. Campbell's brigade advanced easily across the river charging the confederates' position, only to discover the enemy encamped in a strong position east of McNutt's house in the woods.

The battle encompassed an eight-mile area stretching from French Broad River to the Middle Prong of Little Pigeon River.

Federal troops commandeered Stewart Dickey's home and used it as both their headquarters and hospital. A telegraph line was installed from the Dickey house to Union headquarters in Knoxville to improve communication between the two bases.

Col. Eli Lilly led the 9th Indiana Cavalry during the battle. He was later captured in Mississippi and held as a prisoner of war. Once Lilly was released, he was mustered out as a Captain. Capt. Lilly returned home and established Eli Lilly & Company which would become a global pharmaceutical enterprise.

Total casualties of the battle included 100 for the Confederate Army and 65 for the Union.