

Brice's Crossroads and Tupelo
A BGES Civil War Field University Program
with Tom Parson
March 7-9, 2025, from Tupelo, MS

In the spring and summer of 1864, while Gens. Ulysses S. Grant and Robert E. Lee clashed in Virginia and Maj. Gen. William T. Sherman and Gen. Joseph E. Johnston maneuvered it out in Georgia—what historian Richard McMurry has called “the Red Clay Minuet”—there was also plenty of action in North Mississippi. Johnston repeatedly urged President Jefferson Davis to send Maj. Gen. Nathan Bedford Forrest and his much-feared cavalry legions to strike Sherman’s supply line in Tennessee, hoping to relieve the pressure in Georgia.

However, Sherman kept Forrest busy in Mississippi by orchestrating multiple parries with Federal infantry and cavalry units from Memphis, Tennessee. William “Sooy” Smith and his blue-clad troopers had already suffered embarrassing defeats in February 1864. The next move came from Samuel D. Sturgis, who aimed to reach Tupelo and prevent Forrest from disrupting Sherman’s vital railroad connection between Chattanooga and Nashville. Forrest intercepted him in June at Brice’s Crossroads, dealing him a humiliating defeat by a vastly inferior force. Then, in July 1864, a third Union raid into Mississippi culminated in the Battle of Tupelo, also known as the Battle of Harrisonburg. Smith and his men successfully repelled the Confederate cavalry veterans, commanded by Lt. Gen. Stephen D. Lee, while Forrest, who refused to lead his own corps into battle, was wounded, and his gray-clad veterans badly defeated by the wily Smith. This series of engagements in Mississippi, however, achieved Sherman’s goal: keeping Forrest occupied in the Magnolia State and away from Sherman’s critical railroads.

Join veteran NPS Ranger Tom Parson as he retraces the movements of Forrest and Smith across North Mississippi, following their clashes at Brice’s Crossroads and Tupelo during the summer of 1864 on this outstanding tour!

Itinerary

Friday evening, March 7, 2025, 6:00-7:00 p.m.: Orientation

Meet Tom at our headquarters hotel for a one-hour orientation program, which will provide an overview of the sites and events covered during the tour. Program materials will be distributed (or the next morning for late arrivals).

Dinner is on your own.

Saturday, March 8, 2025, 8:00 a.m.-5:00 p.m.

8:00 – Depart Tupelo

8:30 – Arrive at Mississippi’s Final Stands Interpretive Center in Baldwin. Watch the film and explore the exhibits.

9:30 – Short talk by Graham Osborne, president of the Brice’s Crossroads Foundation, on the history and future of battlefield preservation.

10:00 – Begin the battlefield tour. The morning portion will focus on the vicinity of the Crossroads. Sites will include:

- Initial contact
- Cavalry fighting
- Union final stand at the Crossroads
- National Park Service Monument
- Bethany Cemetery
- New monuments

12:00 – Lunch

1:00 – Continue the tour, including:

- The bridge site over Tishomingo Creek
- Log Cabin Ridge
- Holland Ridge
- Jourdan Grave site
- White House Ridge
- Ripley

4:30 – Depart for Tupelo

5:00 – Arrive at the hotel

We will return to the hotel by 5 p.m. Lunch is included, but dinner is on your own.

Sunday, March 9, 2025, 8:00 a.m.-5:00 p.m.

8:00 – Depart Tupelo

8:30 – Arrive in New Albany

9:30 – Arrive in Pontotoc

10:00 – Follow the march to Tupelo, visiting:

- Pinson’s Hill
- Bertram’s Shop
- Calhoun’s Crossroads/Confederate hospital/burial site
- Camargo Crossroads/Coonewah Creek

12:00 – Lunch

1:00 – Resume the tour, including:

- Crossland’s Attack
- Tupelo National Battlefield site
- Union right flank/Rankin Elementary School

- Forrest's Flank Attack/Hancock Park
- Old Town Creek/Attack on Union's rear guard

4:30 – Return to the hotel.

Lunch is included.

About the Faculty

Tom Parson, a native of Sylmar, California, a suburb north of Los Angeles, enlisted in the U.S. Navy immediately after high school and served for twenty years, retiring as a Chief Petty Officer in 1998. While on leave in May 1980, he visited his first Civil War battlefield—Shiloh—which ignited his passion for history. After retiring from the Navy, he joined the National Park Service, where he has worked for twenty-six years at Shiloh National Military Park. During his first five years at Shiloh, Tom maintained the National Cemetery and other battlefield sites. He is certified as a Historic Weapons Supervisor and Historic Preservation Worker, specializing in masonry.

In 2004, Ranger Parson was assigned to the new Corinth Civil War Interpretive Center in Corinth, Mississippi. His research focuses on military activities in North Mississippi and West Tennessee. Tom has written over 125 articles for the local *Daily Corinthian*, each focusing on Corinth during the war, and posts weekly on Shiloh National Military Park's Facebook page. His published works include *Work for Giants: The Campaign and Battle of Tupelo/Harrisburg* (Kent State University Press, 2014); and *Bear Flag and Bay State: The Californians of the Second Massachusetts Cavalry* (McFarland Press, 2001). He has contributed feature articles for *Blue & Gray Magazine* on the battles of Davis Bridge, Holly Springs, and Tupelo. Tom lives in Corinth with Nita, his wife of 44 years.

Hotel Information

This program is headquartered at Fairfield Inn Tupelo, 3070 Tom Watson Road, Slatton, MS 38866; 662-680-6798. The BGES special hotel rate is \$119 plus tax, with a rate cut-off date of February 08, 2025. When you call the hotel, be sure to tell them that you are booking your room with the group "Blue and Gray Education" to get the special rate. The hotel does not have an airport shuttle.

Transportation

The servicing airport is Memphis International Airport (MEM), 96 miles from the hotel. Birmingham-Shuttlesworth International Airport (BHM) is also an option. It is 139 miles from the hotel.

Recommended Reading

You will receive maps and materials that will meet your onsite requirements. The following books are suggested to enhance your readiness for the program.

Bearss, Edwin C. *Protecting Sherman's Lifeline: The Battles of Brice's Cross Roads and Tupelo 1864*, Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1971 – via [Internet Archive](#).

Bearss, Edwin C. *Forrest at Brice's Cross Roads and in North Mississippi in 1864*. Morningside Bookshop: Dayton, OH, 1979.

Bearss, Edwin C. *Outwitting Forrest, The Tupelo Campaign in Mississippi, June 22-July 23, 1864*, David A. Powell, ed. Savas Beatie: El Dorado Hills, CA, 2023.

Bennett, Stewart L. *The Battle of Brice's Crossroads*. The History Press: Charleston, SC, 2012.

Berg, Gordon (May 2017). "Signals Crossed: Communication Failures Cost Forrest and the Rebels Dearly at Tupelo." *America's Civil War*. Vol. 30, no. 2. HistoryNet: Vienna, Va.; pp. 30–35. ISSN 1046-2899.

Parson, Thomas E. *Work for Giants: The Campaign and Battle of Tupelo/Harrisburg, Mississippi, June–July 1864*. Kent State University Press: Kent, OH, 2014. ISBN 978-1606352229.

Tucker, W. H., *The Fourteenth Wisconsin Vet. Vol. Infantry (General A. J. Smith's Command) in the Expedition and Battle of Tupelo; Also, Wanderings Through the Wilds of Missouri and Arkansas in Pursuit of Price*. Engle & Son: Indianapolis, IN, 1892. OL 25311138M – via Internet Archive.

Wynne, Ben, *Mississippi's Civil War: A Narrative History. State Narratives of Civil War*. Mercer University Press: Macon, GA, 2006. ISBN 978 0881460391. OCLC 74987902. OL 8173556M.

Registration

Registration includes two lunches, all paid admissions, maps, the academic program, support of an historian and a tour director, and transportation by passenger bus or van. We will also provide snacks and bottled water.

Registration Form

Brice's Crossroads and Tupelo *A BGES Civil War Field University Program* with Tom Parson March 7-9, 2025, from Tupelo, MS

Name: _____

Address: _____

City/State/Zip: _____

Phone: _____

Email: _____

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_____ Current BGES member \$575

_____ Non-BGES member \$625

_____ I am not a member but would like to join so that I can get the member's rate; or I am a member who is past-due to renew. Please accept my membership donation of \$_____ (must be \$75 or more, which is tax-deductible; see blueandgrayeducation.org for levels).

_____ I am sending a deposit of \$150 per person and/or memberships. Total enclosed is \$_____. I will pay the balance due before the event.

_____ Check enclosed

Charge my (circle one) MC VISA AMEXP Discover \$_____ # _____

Exp: _____ CVV: _____

Signature: _____

Mail to BGES Seminars, P.O. Box 1176, Chatham, VA 24531; or fax credit card registrations to 434-432-0596. You may also register online at www.blueandgrayeducation.org.