UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
INVENTORY - NOMINATION FORM

(Mississippi)

COUNTY: Benton

Entry Date: OCT 2 1973

1. NAME

COMMON: Michigan City

AND/OR HISTORIC: Davis' Mills Battle Site

2. LOCATION

STREET AND NUMBER: 

CITY OR TOWN: Michigan City

Mississippi 38647

3. CLASSIFICATION

CATEGORY (Check One)

Site

Ownership (Public, Private, Both)

Public Acquisition: In Process

Occupied

Unoccupied

Preservation work in progress

Status

Accessible to the Public

Yes: Restricted

Unrestricted

No

Present Use (Check One or More as Appropriate)

Agricultural

Commercial

Educational

Entertainment

Industrial

Military

Religious

Transportation

Government

Private Residence

Museum

Scientific

Other (Specify)

Comments

4. OWNER OF PROPERTY

OWNER'S NAME: Mrs. Robert Horton

STREET AND NUMBER: 

CITY OR TOWN: Michigan City

Mississippi 38647

5. LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION

COURTHOUSE, REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC:

Chancery Clerk's Office

Benton County Courthouse

Ashland

Mississippi 38603

6. REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS

TITLE OF SURVEY:

DATE OF SURVEY: 

Depository for Survey Records:

STREET AND NUMBER:

CITY OR TOWN:

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CODE:

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When the Confederate cavalry of Major General Earl Van Dorn attacked the small Federal garrison on December 21, 1862, the settlement of Davis' Mills consisted of a few houses, a saw mill and a flour mill. The mills were located on the north bank of the Wolf River along a millrace which diverted water from the stream bed for its power supply. The Mississippi Central Railroad crossed the river over a three-hundred yard long wooden trestle, which was destined to be the center of action during the fighting that day. The Wolf River was a narrow but deep stream bounded on either side by wide cypress swamps into which the elevated land extended to the main stream, thus affording natural advantages for roads, bridges and mill sites. The wagon road leading to Holly Springs was built upon the millrace dam formed of earth and logs with a gate in the middle. This dam was approximately fifty yards in length and was located about one hundred and sixty yards upstream from the trestle. The area north of the river furnished the garrison excellent campground.

Today, the community is known as Michigan City, named for citizens from that state who settled on the site after the mills were extinct. The economy has continued to revolve largely around agriculture, cattle and lumber.

The Indian mound, which served as one of the Federal fortifications, still retains the depression along the base where the Federal soldiers placed entrenchments. Other evidence of the occupation by soldiers exists on the bark of a beech tree where some of the men carved their names, initials, regiments and dates.
### Period

- [ ] Pre-Columbian
- [ ] 16th Century
- [ ] 17th Century
- [X] 19th Century
- [ ] 20th Century

### Specific Date(s) (If Applicable and Known)
- December 21, 1862

### Areas of Significance

- [ ] Aboriginal
- [ ] Prehistoric
- [ ] Historic
- [ ] Agriculture
- [ ] Architecture
- [ ] Art
- [ ] Commerce
- [ ] Communications
- [ ] Conservation
- [ ] Education
- [ ] Engineering
- [ ] Industry
- [ ] Invention
- [ ] Landscape Architecture
- [ ] Literature
- [X] Military
- [ ] Music
- [ ] Political
- [ ] Religion/Philosophy
- [ ] Science
- [ ] Sculpture
- [ ] Social/Humanitarian
- [ ] Theater
- [ ] Transportation
- [ ] Urban Planning
- [ ] Other (Specify)

### Statement of Significance

On December 21, 1862, Davis' Mills was the scene of one of the most animated and gallant struggles of the Civil War. The site, which consisted of a saw mill and a flour mill, was located on the north bank of the Wolf River, six miles south of Grand Junction, Tennessee, and twenty miles north of Holly Springs, Mississippi, at the point where the Mississippi Central Railroad crossed the river. A small Federal garrison, composed of two hundred and fifty men, was charged with guarding this vital railroad trestle.

The decision of garrison commander Colonel William H. Morgan to stand and fight is in striking contrast to the unilitary actions of Colonel Robert C. Murphy, who surrendered the giant Federal supply base at Holly Springs to Major General Earl Van Dorn on December 20, 1862.

Like Murphy, Morgan had been alerted to the Confederate cavalry's movement to the north from Grenada. Van Dorn's route did not indicate that his objective was Holly Springs and the Federal communications, but on the morning of December 20, he struck the base from two directions, capturing the garrison and destroying over a million and a half dollars in Federal supplies. Colonel Morgan sent Companies B and M, 5th Ohio Cavalry, down the Holly Springs road to give warning should Van Dorn continue north to destroy the railroad crossing at Davis' Mills. He also had taken the precaution of converting the saw mill into a blockhouse with cotton bales, as well as erecting fortifications at the base of an Indian mound nearby. These works afforded a commanding diagonal field of fire on both the railroad trestle and the wagon road which crossed along the top of the millrace dam, approximately one hundred and sixty yards upstream from the trestle. Morgan's men also removed the plank floor on the south end of the trestle to prevent its being used as a bridge.

Shortly after noon, the Federal cavalry was driven in from the Holly Springs road by the advancing Confederate column. As the Confederate horsemen neared the river, they dismounted and advanced as infantry through the woods and along the road,
9. MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

Bearss, Edwin C., Decision in Mississippi (Jackson, Mississippi Commission on the War Between the States, 1962), pp. 114-120.


10. GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

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16 acres

Approximate acreage of nominated property

List all states and counties for properties overlapping state or county boundaries:

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11. FORM PREPARED BY

NAME AND TITLE:
William C. Wright, Historian

ORGANIZATION
Mississippi Department of Archives & History

STREET AND NUMBER:
Post Office Box 571

CITY OR TOWN:
Jackson

12. STATE LIAISON OFFICER CERTIFICATION

As the designated State Liaison Officer for the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (Public Law 89-665), I hereby nominate this property for inclusion in the National Register and certify that it has been evaluated according to the criteria and procedures set forth by the National Park Service. The recommended level of significance of this nomination is:

National [□] State [X] Local [□]

Name
Elbert R. Hilliard

Title
Director, Miss. Dept. of Archives and History

Date
July 30, 1973

13. NATIONAL REGISTER VERIFICATION

I hereby certify that this property is included in the National Register.

Robertson Witley
Director, Office of Archeology and Historic Preservation

Date
10/29/73

ATTEST:

Elbert R. Hilliard
Director, Office of Archeology and Historic Preservation

Date
9/28/73
forming a line of battle as they approached the bridge, and then charged forward. Suddenly, a leaden hail checked their advance, leaving many casualties on the bridge and in the water. Those that succeeded in crossing were forced to take refuge beneath the river bank. The Confederates tried three times to force a passage on the road bridge. They also made attempts to cross the trestle and to ford the river about a half mile below the trestle. All of these attacks were beaten back by the handful of Union defenders.

Van Dorn realized that it would be impossible to capture the garrison or achieve his goal of destroying the trestle without artillery before the Federal cavalry, pursuing his column, caught up with him. He tried a bluff, therefore, by sending a flag of truce into the Federal lines asking "...if a surrender was in contemplation or had been decided upon." Morgan replied that no such thought had been entertained.

Van Dorn next dispatched a small group of Texans, under a cover of concentrated rifle fire, to attempt burning the trestle by using smoothbore muskets firing cotton balls saturated with turpentine. The entrenched Federals poured such a volley into the Confederates that Van Dorn was forced to withdraw his men. The Texans took shelter beneath the trestle and later surrendered. Van Dorn subsequently continued his northward sweep after leaving Davis' Mills, crossing the Wolf River ten miles west of La Grange, Tennessee; and, after several skirmishes, he returned safely to Grenada, Mississippi.

The failure to destroy the trestle at Davis' Mills was more of a humiliation to Van Dorn than a defeat. The small garrison of Federal troops had withstood approximately three thousand Confederates fresh from the easy victory at Holly Springs. Van Dorn's raid was still a tactical success, however, in that it forced the Federals out of north Mississippi and caused Major General Ulysses S. Grant to forego his plans of an inland attack on Vicksburg.
9.

Looking north along the modern day railroad trestle that is very similar to and in the same location as the trestle in 1862.
1. NAME
   COMMON: Michigan City
   AND/OR HISTORIC: Davis' Mills Battle Site
   NUMERIC CODE (Assigned by NPS):

2. LOCATION
   STATE: Mississippi
   COUNTY: Benton
   TOWN: Michigan City
   STREET AND NUMBER:

3. PHOTO REFERENCE
   PHOTO CREDIT: Miss. Dept. of Archives & History
   DATE: May 21, 1973
   NEGATIVE FILED AT: Miss. Dept. of Archives & History

4. IDENTIFICATION
   DESCRIBE VIEW, DIRECTION, ETC.: Beech tree with Civil War soldiers' carvings.