

# SWEETWATER DEPOT



## *Strategic Target*



### KNOXVILLE CAMPAIGN

On November 4, 1863, to divert Federal forces from Chattanooga, Confederate Gen. James Longstreet led two reinforced divisions from the city to attack Union Gen. Ambrose E. Burnside's garrison in Knoxville. Burnside confronted Longstreet outside Knoxville, then withdrew to his fortifications on November 17, and Longstreet besieged the city. In Chattanooga, after Union Gen. Ulysses S. Grant's army defeated Confederate Gen. Braxton Bragg's forces at the end of the month, Grant ordered Gen. William T. Sherman to reinforce Burnside. As Sherman marched toward Knoxville, Longstreet withdrew on December 4. Sherman soon rejoined Grant.

Settled in the 1820s, Sweetwater flourished when the East Tennessee and Georgia Railroad was constructed through the town in 1852. Trains stopped and drew water from two large tanks supplied by the nearby creek, and a freight depot stood in the parking area to your right. Because of its strategic location, this small town became an important supply center during the Civil War.

Initially, a Confederate garrison protected the facilities at Sweetwater. The situation changed during Union Gen. Ambrose E. Burnside's East Tennessee campaign when the 45th Ohio Mounted Infantry arrived in September 1863 and occupied the town. Military control of the Sweetwater Valley seesawed from one side to the other that autumn because of continuous cavalry engagements.

Gen. James Longstreet made the town his headquarters and staging area for the campaign against Knoxville in November 1863. Sweetwater was then the northernmost station held by the Confederate army on the only remaining railroad in the region. Longstreet's troops and artillery rode the cars from Chattanooga, joined with the cavalry here, and prepared for the attack on Knoxville. When Federal troops reinforced Burnside, however, Longstreet withdrew.



Gen. James Longstreet – Courtesy Library of Congress

Confederate attempts to reoccupy Sweetwater resulted in several engagements later in the war. In February 1865, local resident Gen. John C. Vaughn reported that “Captain Maston, with seventy-five men from my brigade, captured the garrison at Sweet Water, forty-five miles



Main Street, Sweetwater – Courtesy Philip Roy

***“We celebrated the Fourth of July [1865] at Sweetwater, and felt that it was ‘a glorious fourth’ indeed, that had brought back to our country ‘the white-winged angel of Peace.’”***  
— Capt. Samuel W. Scott and Lt. Samuel P. Angel, 13th Tennessee Cavalry (U.S.).

below Knoxville, sixty mounted men, horses, and equipments of Second Ohio Regiment.” The Confederates burned the depot but Federal troops controlled the railroad in Sweetwater until the end of the war.