He had just left Savannah after what would become one of the most infamous marches of Civil War history. Leaving a trail of destruction, General William T. Sherman marched his army of 60,000 veteran fighters into the state of South Carolina in late January 1865.

For all practical purposes, the war was already lost when the intrepid Confederate soldiers took a stand against Sherman’s troops at Rivers Bridge on the Salkehatchie River in what is now Bamberg County, South Carolina. The Union soldiers were headed north when they met with the only major resistance to their advance within the state’s borders. The battle began on February 2. The odds were not good for the men in gray: approximately 5,000 soldiers under General Sherman, only 1,200 Confederates under the leadership of Colonel George Harrison.

The Union troops crossed the Salkehatchie swamp to flank the Confederates on both sides of their line. On February 3, Harrison’s outnumbered troops were forced to retreat. The final toll was a loss of about 100 troops on both sides of the battle. Union troops commanded the land north of the Salkehatchie River and, more importantly, cut the route of the South Carolina Railroad which was a vital supply line. Sherman’s troops moved on, leaving behind the burnt South Carolina capital of Columbia before heading northward toward Richmond.

In 1876 men from communities near Rivers Bridge re-buried the fallen soldiers in a mass grave near the battlefield and began an annual commemoration of the battle. The annual Confederate memorial service is still held in May at the site of the mass grave. The original earthen fortifications and trenches still remain as a monument. The battlefield area became a state park in 1945. Today, Rivers Bridge State Historic Site is on the National Register of Historic Places, the only state historic site that commemorates the Civil War.

The park is the perfect place for day trips, and a three-quarter-mile self-guided Battlefield Interpretive Trail takes visitors through the park. Additionally, ranger-guided tours and educational programs bring the battle and military days during the Civil War to life.

**Find out more in Places...**
Turn to page 143 in the “green pages” for more on Rivers Bridge State Historic Site.