



Charge of the Third Brigade, First Division, Sixteenth Corps, at the Battle of Nashville, Tennessee, December 15, 1864

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THE
BATTLE
OF
NASHVILLE

DECEMBER 15 & 16, 1864



The Battle of Nashville
Howard Pyle



HOOD'S ILL-FATED INVASION
OF TENNESSEE

By the summer of 1864, the Confederacy was in danger of losing Atlanta. The Union army seemed to control the progress of the war; a war with no end in sight.

In July, Confederate President Jefferson Davis replaced General Joseph E. Johnston, commander of the Army of Tennessee, with 33-year-old General John Bell Hood.

In early September 1864, Hood devised a plan to retake portions of the south, including Nashville. With the Western Theatre divided by Union forces, much needed supplies could not reach Lee's Army of Northern Virginia in the east.

Southern newspapers published Jefferson Davis' speeches warning Sherman of Hood's plans. Sherman left Atlanta with 55,000 men in pursuit of Hood, but soon returned.

Although General Grant, now supreme commander of all Union forces, pushed for Hood's destruction, Sherman felt his men would not catch the Confederate army.

Sherman, anxious to begin his march to the sea, returned to Atlanta and sent General John Schofield to Tennessee with 27,000 men.

On November 21, Hood's Army of Tennessee marched towards TN from Tuscumbia, Alabama led by Forrest's cavalry.

Schofield's men reached Columbia just hours ahead of Hood on November 24 and dug in.

Over the next several days, Schofield and Hood, formerly roommates at West Point, engaged at Columbia where Hood held Schofield on the north side of the Duck River.

On November 29, Hood's army, north of Spring Hill, camped along the pike believing they blocked Schofield's route to Nashville.

That night, Schofield's army defied Hood and raced past sleeping Confederate troops with a five mile long train of wagons.

When Hood awoke the next morning, Union forces were safely dug in at Franklin.

Hood's army of 22,000 raced to Franklin and launched an attack against the center of the Union line with only seven of eighteen available brigades and without artillery.

Samuel Foster, 24th Texas Cavalry, later called Hood's attack "cold-blooded murder" and recalled streams and standing pools of blood on the battlefield. Confederate casualties reached 6,000 with five generals dead.

On December 2, the Army of the Tennessee began arriving south of Nashville. From his headquarters at Travellers Rest, Hood ordered his army to dig in.



Travellers Rest



Nashville, Tennessee (1864)

Source: Harper's "Pictorial History of the Civil War" 1866

NASHVILLE:
THE LAST MAJOR WESTERN
BATTLE OF THE CIVIL WAR

By 1864, Nashville was the most heavily fortified city with the exception of Washington, D.C.

Upon capturing the city in 1862, the Union army built a series of forts and established a system of 21 hospitals.

The Cumberland River, as well as, rail lines made Nashville a target for the Confederacy struggling to supply men in the field.

In mid-October, Grant ordered Maj. Gen. George H. Thomas, the “Rock of Chickamauga,” to Nashville and tasked him with defending the city.

Thomas arrived in Nashville with a series of units Sherman left behind and immediately set to work building an army. By mid-November, Thomas’s command was still incomplete and Hood was moving north.

Thomas also pushed for the completion of Nashville’s fortifications using civilians, black refugees and convalescents from the many army hospitals.

For the next two weeks, Thomas’ army of 55,000 men planned and waited.

FROZEN NASHVILLE

From December 2 to December 14, the two armies peered at each other across “no man’s land.” Grant, growing impatient in Washington ordered Thomas to attack, threatening him with removal.

On December 7, the skies dumped snow and ice on Nashville. Four days later, forever known as “cold Sunday” temperatures dropped to single digits.

ATTACK!

On December 14, temperatures rose and the ice melted. From his headquarters at the St. Cloud Hotel, Thomas ordered an attack at first light.

On the morning of December 15, thick fog covered the battlefield but Thomas was undeterred.

At 8 a.m. Maj. Gen. James Steedman’s division including four USCT infantry brigades, attacked Confederate redoubts. Colored regiments trapped in the railroad ravine were nearly annihilated.

On the Federal right, Gen. James Wilson’s cavalry and Gen. Andrew J. Smith’s infantry swept across Harding Pike engaging five redoubts held by Stewart’s Corps.

As one redoubt after another fell, Hood’s army moved back ending the day’s fighting.

That night, makeshift hospitals filled with wounded and dying men. As units reformed the men gripped the devastation.

James McNeiley, 49th TN, recalled that only six of 1,000 men from his unit remained.



Soldiers and civilians watched the battle from the Capital on December 15, 1864.

The next morning, fog again covered the battlefield. Despite what Union generals believed, Hood remained in Nashville. Union artillery bombarded the Confederate line pieced together the night before.

Although Thomas planned an attack mirroring the previous day’s operations, Schofield hesitated. For hours Union generals debated and nothing happened.

At noon, as rain fell, Generals Wood and Post initiated an assault on the Confederate right at Peach Orchard Hill. One Confederate soldier later recalled, “men fell like wheat before a mowing machine.” Union troops sustained heavy losses, one USCT regiment lost five color bearers. Union dead and wounded covered the hill.

In the late afternoon, Wilson’s cavalry circled the lightly defended Shy’s hill as General John MacArthur of Smith’s XVI Corps attacked. As Federal troops charged up the hill, Cheatham’s men, facing overwhelming, numbers fled. All those who could not run were captured. Stewart’s corps

also fell back and Gen. Stephen D. Lee, at the top of Peach Orchard Hill, ordered retreat.

For the next ten days, Wilson’s cavalry pushed Hood’s army south.

The Battle of Nashville marked the end of the Army of Tennessee and Confederate attempts to retake the state.

THE COMMANDERS



Hood’s invasion cost the Army of Tennessee 23,000 men. Hood resigned in January 1865. The general lived the rest of his life blaming his officers and men for his failures.



Thomas never received proper credit for his victory in Nashville. He spent the rest of his life blasting Schofield for his part in attempting to remove him from command prior to the battle.



After the war, Schofield served as Secretary of war, superintendent of West Point and commanding general of the army.

THE COST

Union: 2,562 Wounded
387 Killed
112 Missing
*1/3 of these losses occurred on Peach Orchard Hill
Confederate: 2,300 Killed / Wounded
4,462 Prisoners