



Colonel Opdycke and his men repulse the Confederate assault at Carter's farm, Franklin, November 30, 1864

## *The Franklin and Nashville campaign September 1864 - January 1865*

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*Adapted into English by Gerald Hawkins*

### FROM ATLANTA TO THE TENNESSEE RIVER

On September 1, 1864, the exhausted Confederate Army of Tennessee was forced to swiftly abandon Atlanta, a key town in northern Georgia. On the 4<sup>th</sup>, it was concentrated at Lovejoy Station, 25 miles further south.

Since July 17, 1864, the army was commanded by the impulsive General John Bell Hood, known for his aggressiveness in action. Hood was a professional soldier promoted from West Point in 1853. He was only 33 years old when he became temporarily full general. He was obviously very young to command an army and many doubted his capabilities, including his superior Robert Lee. Since the beginning of the war, he had often led his troops in glorious but bloody battles. Only action mattered to him. Campaigning with Hood had never been an easy task and the worst was yet to come. His appointment at the head of the army did not rejoice his officers or his men. Boosted by his fame, his rapid promotion and the obvious support of President Jefferson Davis, he was animated by an unrestrained ambition. He also suffered from another major failing: he had the distasteful tendency of rejecting his own responsibility on his

subordinates when things went wrong, which would often be the case! In his defense, it must be said that he always put himself on the line. Hood had lost the use of his left arm at Gettysburg and his right leg at Chickamauga, in 1863. Since then, he walked with crutches and had to be strapped to his saddle. To relieve his constant pain, he consumed much opium and laudanum, which prevented him from keeping a cool head at all times.

It was imperative to restore his reputation that had been somewhat tarnished since Atlanta. The next campaign would thus be his. Hood would not linger for long in Lovejoy Station. Indeed, a plan for an aggressive move sprouted in his fertile mind, which would allow him to regain the initiative. The first part of his strategy seemed consistent. Sherman had ventured deep into the South. His lines of communication were dangerously stretched from Chattanooga to Atlanta. He was thus vulnerable. Hood planned to circumvent Atlanta in a southwesterly direction and by forced march, head north and fall on the enemy communication lines, mainly the Western and Atlantic Railroad, battering the small Federal garrisons scattered along his route and destroying the railway lines as far as possible. Wheeler's and Forrest's cavalry, already operating in Tennessee, would continue to harass the Yankees there. Sherman would have no other choice than to withdraw northward. Hood would attack him on the first opportunity, and unlike Johnston in May, would strike a victory in the mountains of Georgia. The second part of the plan seemed chimerical. While Sherman would be temporarily out of harm's way, Hood would liberate Tennessee and invade Kentucky. Many new enthusiastic recruits would then join his invincible legions. If Sherman continued the pursuit, he would beat him once again and the war in the west would see the victory of the Confederacy. He would then be confronted with a big dilemma: should he invade Ohio or join Lee in Petersburg? Time would tell.

To fulfill his grandiose project, Hood disposed of a rather weakened Army of Tennessee after the bashing at Atlanta. Unfortunately, as of September 5, President Davis made it very clear that he would not be able to send him any reinforcements. Hood could only rely on local recruitment. His army numbered only about 40,000 men. Its meager nine infantry divisions were divided into three weak corps initially commanded by William Hardee, Stephen D. Lee<sup>1</sup> and Alexander Stewart<sup>2</sup>. Hood would ride with William H. Jackson's small independent cavalry division. Wheeler's Cavalry Corps would strengthen his forces. The army's hardware situation was no brighter than the condition of its men. Indeed, in the stampede that followed the evacuation of Atlanta on September 1, 1864, large amounts of ammunition and equipment had exploded or were burnt. Five valuable locomotives, 81 railcars and 13 siege guns had also been destroyed. Once again, the Southern soldiers would hit the field under-equipped, hungry, ragged and barefooted.

On September 8, while the army was still being reorganized at Lovejoy Station, Hood committed his first blunder. He did not overly like William Hardee, yet his best corps commander. It is true that Hardee was upset by Hood's promotion at the head of the Army of Tennessee, having probably longed for the position himself. Disappointed, he requested his transfer but it was denied in July. He would eventually be promoted unexpectedly in September. Indeed, unjustly rejecting on Hardee the responsibility for the failure of operations around Atlanta between July 20 and September 1, Hood

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<sup>1</sup> Stephen Dill Lee (1833-1908, West Point 1854, 17/46). At the age of 31, he was the youngest lieutenant general of the Confederacy.

<sup>2</sup> Alexander Peter Stewart (1821-1908, West Point 1842, 12/56). After a final battle with Joseph E. Johnston at Bentonville, NC, on March 20, 1865, he commanded the handful of survivors of the Army of Tennessee during the final surrender in North Carolina, on April 26, 1865.

convinced President Davis to remove him. Hardee was transferred to the Department of South Carolina, Georgia and Florida, where he headed vast territories void of troops! His army was placed under the command of Major General Benjamin F. Cheatham.<sup>3</sup> Since he was much appreciated by all, Hardee's departure demoralized his officers as well as his men. Desertions increased significantly.

### **THE GREAT TREK**

On September 18, the Army of Tennessee left Lovejoy Station in a westward direction. The great trek had begun. On the 20<sup>th</sup>, Hood reached Palmetto and on the 29<sup>th</sup>, he crossed the Chattahoochee River. On October 1, Jackson's cavalry was operating between the Chattahoochee and Marietta. The Western & Atlantic Railroad was to suffer again. On the 4<sup>th</sup>, two strong Confederate detachments seized Acworth and Big Shanty along its line.

Since the Confederates lacked everything, an opportunity to replenish their supplies was now open to them: to seize the huge Union depot at Allatoona Pass, reportedly defended by a small garrison and which contained among other things, a million rations for Sherman's army. On October 5, Hood sent French's Division capture this gold mine. His attack was briskly repulsed by the energetic resistance of the determined General John M. Corse.<sup>4</sup> The rebels were forced to retreat empty handed.

Nevertheless, the great trek continued. On October 6, the Confederates were in Dallas, Georgia. On the 9<sup>th</sup>, a first meeting was held at Cave Spring with Beauregard, Hood's immediate superior. The latter outlined his plan, proposing an attack on the Resaca-Chattanooga axis. Although Beauregard appeared skeptical about the merits of this action, he reluctantly approved the project since there was no other. On the 10<sup>th</sup> (or 11<sup>th</sup>) the army reached Coosaville where it was joined by the cavalry of *Fighting Joe* Joseph Wheeler. On the 12<sup>th</sup>, Hood was denied access to Resaca by another equally tough Federal officer, Colonel Clark R. Wever of the 17<sup>th</sup> Ohio, heading a single brigade of the Northern Army of Tennessee. The 13<sup>th</sup> was significantly more rewarding: Hood captured Dalton and Tunnel Hill. Having again moved his troops near Resaca, he wondered if his army would be able to face Sherman with any chance of success. The answer was negative. Of a different opinion, his corps commanders succeeded in imposing their point of view. On the 14<sup>th</sup>, the Confederates captured Villanov. On the 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup>, the troops were given a much needed rest in Lafayette.

On October 17, the Richmond administration created the "Western Division", a military outfit responsible for coordinating the armed operations of Richard *Dick* Taylor in Mississippi and John Bell Hood in Tennessee. General Pierre Gustave Toutant Beauregard, an experienced professional, headed this organization. His actual role was primarily to advise and temper the young and impetuous Hood.

On that same day, the Confederate army was again on the go. The troops crossed the border of Alabama and on the 22<sup>nd</sup>, entered Gadsden. Here, a second Hood-Beauregard meeting took place. The latter was puzzled: what was Hood doing in Gadsden? He thought he was actually in Chattanooga! Beauregard firmly suggested that he hastily

<sup>3</sup> Benjamin Franklin Cheatham (1820-1886) was not a West Pointer. He was a veteran of the Mexican War (1846-1848) and also of all campaigns of the Army of Tennessee. Contrary to what some authors have written, he never reached the well deserved rank of lieutenant general.

<sup>4</sup> All the more determined since he communicated by signals with Sherman who received the messages on the same day at Kennesaw Mountains, 14 miles further south.

cross the Tennessee River at the closest ford, i.e. at Guntersville. He also informed him that the Army of Tennessee would have to temporarily do without Wheeler's cavalry since it had to return to Georgia. However, another body of cavalry under Forrest would join him as soon as possible.

Hood departed so disturbed that he forgot to take along his pontoon bridge! Fortunately, the overseeing Beauregard sent him the equipment. Guntersville seemed a nut too tough to crack so Hood continued westward. At this rate, he would soon be ... in California! On October 26, he decided to circumvent Decatur. On the 28<sup>th</sup>, two of his divisions finally crossed the Tennessee River at Florence and on November 1, Hood settled on the south shore of Tuscumbia, Alabama.

The Confederates remained completely inactive for three weeks in the Tuscumbia-Florence area. The prodigious effort required of the troops to swiftly march northward was quashed. However it was not all Hood's fault. Heavy rains had turned the roads into quagmires and were raising the level of the rivers, which hindered the movement of men and equipment.

On November 2, Beauregard arrived in Tuscumbia and stayed there for two weeks. A third and final meeting took place with Hood. The orders remained the same: move fast and march into Tennessee, even without Forrest. However, an advance into enemy territory without cavalry was a risky business. It was thus decided to wait for Forrest's Cavalry Corps.

On the 14<sup>th</sup>, returning from operations in western Tennessee, Forrest<sup>5</sup> finally arrived with his three cavalry divisions, which heartened General Hood who badly needed it. On the 17<sup>th</sup>, Beauregard said goodbye to Hood and left for Macon, Georgia, where he would try to counter Sherman.

## ***NORTHERN REACTION***

In the meantime, the Yankees had not remained inactive. They had instead followed Hood's track as best as possible. Based in Atlanta since September 5, Sherman had sensed the enemy's maneuver. In late September, he preventively sent General George Thomas to Nashville, Tennessee. He also expedited two divisions to Chattanooga. As of October 2, Sherman knew that Hood was north of Atlanta. This disrupted his plans of marching in the opposite direction, southward and toward the Atlantic Ocean. He would finally achieve this goal, but six weeks later than expected.

On October 3, Sherman and his entire army were marched northward except the XX<sup>th</sup> Corps which was left in charge of protecting Atlanta's fortified camp. The pursuit began. On the 5<sup>th</sup>, Sherman was in Marietta, on the 12<sup>th</sup> in Rome and at Snake Creek Gap on the 13<sup>th</sup>. On the 22<sup>nd</sup>, he finally halted at Gaylesville, Alabama. At that moment, Hood was already in Gadsden.

Sherman returned to Atlanta. However, he ordered the IV<sup>th</sup> and XXIII<sup>rd</sup> Corps with all the available cavalry to Pulaski<sup>6</sup>, Tennessee, under the command of General John M. Schofield<sup>7</sup>.

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<sup>5</sup> General Nathan Bedford Forrest (1821-1877), a native of Tennessee and barely literate, enlisted at the age of 40 as a private in 1861 and became a lieutenant general in 1865. Military genius and specialist in cavalry raids, his overarching strategic principle was "Git thar fist with the most". Sherman referred to him as The Devil Forrest. He was probably the first Grand Wizard of the Ku Klux Klan (1865).

<sup>6</sup> Except Judson Kilpatrick's third Cavalry Division.

<sup>7</sup> John McAllister Schofield (1831-1906, West Point 1853, 7/52). Commander-in-chief of the United States Army from 1888 to 1895.

## FROM THE TENNESSEE RIVER TO NASHVILLE

### **PULASKI**

After waiting three weeks for the arrival of his cavalry, equipment and pontoon bridge, Hood was finally able to resume the offensive. His forces numbered 40,000 to 45,000 infantrymen and 108 guns, excluding Forrest's precious cavalry of 4,000 to 6,000 riders.<sup>8</sup>

That idle time had not been lost for everyone, especially for the enemy. Taking advantage of this unexpected break, the Yankees had concentrated at Pulaski the IV<sup>th</sup> and XXIII<sup>rd</sup> Corps and 5,000 cavalrymen, about 30,000 men in total.

On November 19, Forrest's cavalry crossed the Tennessee River at Florence, followed by the rest of the army on the 21<sup>st</sup>. Hood's intention was to pounce on Columbia and block Schofield who was supposedly waiting for him at Pulaski and thus prevent him from joining Thomas at Nashville. The plan was feasible.

On the 22<sup>nd</sup>, Hood was in Lawrenceburg. However, on that same day, Schofield evacuated Pulaski and on the 24<sup>th</sup>, he was already at Columbia. Hood's maneuver had failed.

### **COLUMBIA**

Hood arrived at Columbia on November 26. The next day, the elusive Schofield ordered the destruction of the bridges, abandoned the city and fell back on the north bank of the Duck River.

On the 28<sup>th</sup>, preceded by the cavalry, Cheatham's and Stewart's Corps with Johnson's Division of Lee's Corps in turn crossed the Duck River east of the city and then marched on Spring Hill. Lee's other two divisions and all the artillery, except two batteries, remained at Columbia to contain Schofield.

### **SPRING HILL, NOVEMBER 29, 1864**

On November 29, Schofield's cavalry gave warning of the Confederate movement. The 5,000 soldiers of Wagner's Division (IV<sup>th</sup> Corps), the wagon train and the artillery reserve were sent to Spring Hill, 10 miles further north, which was reached at 2 PM. Riding from the north, Forrest's cavalry arrived almost simultaneously and immediately attacked the enemy but was repulsed.

At 3 PM, Cheatham's infantry was on site. Stewart's Corps and Johnson's Division were not far away. The Confederates were logically about to crush the Yankees since they enjoyed a force ratio of 6 to 1. However, for obscure reasons, probably a misinterpretation of orders, only Cleburne's Division proved ready for action. The other two divisions of Cheatham's Corps were slow in lining up their men. Following orders, Cleburne vigorously attacked alone but his assault was repelled.

Night fell and the fight ended. The Confederates pitched their tents along the trail but not across it. During the night and under the nose of the impassive enemy<sup>9</sup>, the

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<sup>8</sup> Rough figures that vary greatly according to the sources.

<sup>9</sup> General Edward *Allegheny* Johnson, commanded a division of S.D. Lee's Corps and was most respectful of the military ethics and chain of command. He refused to receive from an officer of the general staff of Cheatham's Corps the order to move his division to block the road. Consistent with himself, Johnson did not execute the order and the road remained open.

remainder of Schofield's troops, about 20,000 men, marched on the road that the rebels had left open north and south of Spring Hill. At noon of November 30, Schofield reached Franklin. The Confederates had lost a great opportunity. Hood, fuming at the announcement of the news, rejected the responsibility for the failure on Cheatham. He claimed that his subordinate had not been able to execute his orders. It was not impossible that Cheatham had drunk too heavily during the evening but more likely, he was still under the spell of Mrs. Jessie Peters<sup>10</sup> with whom he had spent the previous night.

### **FRANKLIN, NOVEMBER 30, 1864**

Hood arrived in Franklin in the afternoon of November 30, with just two batteries of artillery, his cavalry and two of his three army corps, those of Cheatham and Stewart. D.H. Lee's Corps and the bulk of the artillery recently returning from Columbia were still far away.

Six Confederate divisions were now facing five divisions of well entrenched Yankees. Although Hood had promised before the offensive that he would no longer engage an unprotected infantry in suicidal assaults, he soon took back his word. Indeed, up to now - and it would be the same throughout the campaign - his maneuvers had yielded only poor results. Replicating previous blunders, Hood was about to throw his unfortunate infantry in one of the bloodiest frontal attacks of the war.

At 3 PM, Schofield was pleased since his transport convoy was safe on the north bank of the Harpeth River. He was preparing to withdraw his troops at 6 PM if the enemy did not show up. This proved too optimistic since at 3.30 PM, the Confederates attacked. At Franklin, everyone had seen them approach, except the unfortunate general Wagner, the victor of Spring Hill. Two of his brigades were still outside the city. At 4 PM, they were mowed down by the enemy wave. The Federals retreated in disorder on the Columbia Turnpike with the rebels on their heels. The tangled mass of soldiers entered the city simultaneously. The defenders were forced to suspend their fire for fear of hitting their comrades. The Confederates took advantage of the situation. Their charge seemed irresistible, but at Carter's plantation<sup>11</sup>, Colonel Opdycke's reserve brigade counter attacked, putting an end to Hood's thrust.

On the rest of the line, the Confederates stormed the enemy fortifications, taking a foothold here and there, but their charges were immediately fended off. On the far right, Bate's Division, supported by Chalmers' cavalymen fighting on foot, attacked without much enthusiasm and were easily pushed back. Until 9 PM, the Confederates launched assault upon assault without success. Their antagonists shot them at close range from both sides of their parapets. It was a terrible slaughter. At 11 PM, Hood finally ordered a general retreat. During the night, Schofield slipped away and on December 1, he joined Thomas in Nashville.

A mile further east, Forrest's two remaining Cavalry Divisions crossed the Harpeth River. They were energetically brought back on the south bank with the aid of Wilson's

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<sup>10</sup> Great seducer of Confederate generals, she had previously set her sights on General Earl Van Dorn, a great womanizer who probably did not refuse her advances. Ben Cheatham was luckier than his colleague who was killed by the deceived husband on 8 May 1863.

<sup>11</sup> The Carter house was also the scene of a family drama. During the assault, one Captain Theodoric *Tod* Carter of the Confederate army fell mortally wounded in front of his parent's house. He died the next day, December 1, 1864, among the members of his family he had not seen for two years!

effective horsemen.

Schofield, who had lost 2,300 soldiers in the fighting, retired from the battlefield. So Hood was theoretically declared the winner. It was actually a pyrrhic victory.<sup>12</sup> He had lost 6,250 men, including six generals. Brown's Division had no brigade commanders left: three had been killed and the fourth captured. Cleburne's Division had lost its heroic senior officer who was also killed. The Texas brigade of the same division was now leaderless: General Granbury lay dead next to his superior. Thirty-three flags had fallen into enemy hands. The Confederate victory at Franklin was actually a disaster.

James Horn, the American historian, labels the charge of the Army of Tennessee at Franklin "the greatest tragedy in American history". He compares it to Pickett's charge at Gettysburg in 1863. After a massive artillery barrage, the Confederate assault was launched on open ground, one mile deep, against improvised Federal field fortifications. The attack failed. Although he personally led a division at Gettysburg, Hood seemed to have a short memory. At Franklin, his attack was launched on open ground, 2.5 miles deep, without any artillery preparation and against strong fortifications. In these conditions, he had little chance of success.

## NASHVILLE

### ***THE CITY OF NASHVILLE***

The final phase of the campaign was to take place in Nashville, and not on the banks of the Ohio or in Virginia as Hood still seemed to believe.

Nashville is the capital of the State of Tennessee, established on the south bank of the Cumberland River. Three roads and five railway lines merged into the municipality, so it was an important strategic place. In 1861, Nashville had 30,000 inhabitants, which was significant for a Southern town. At that time, Richmond, Virginia, the capital of the Confederacy, counted 70,000 souls. In 1864, the population of Nashville reached 100,000.

Since March 1862, the city was in the hands of the Union. The Federals had turned it into a gigantic storehouse supplying their troops operating in the South. It was thus a strategic objective for the Confederacy. Many raids were launched on the town. To discourage any offensive enemy ambition, the Yankees had built a strong network of forts: Negley, Casino, Morton, Dan McCook, Hill 210, Sill, Whipple and Garasch. These defensive bastions were backed by twelve miles of field fortifications along the Cumberland River. Two thousand freed black slaves had been requisitioned by their liberators to achieve this titanic task.

In October 1864, Nashville became the headquarters of Major General George H. Thomas<sup>13</sup>. His character trait was not to move lightly. All his actions were meticulously prepared and generally met success. He was also a very stubborn man, which rendered him particularly effective in defensive battles. In a nutshell, Thomas was the opposite of Hood.

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<sup>12</sup> In 280 BC, Pyrrhus, king of Epirus, defeated the Romans at Heraclea, Lucania (Italy), while suffering more casualties than the enemy's.

<sup>13</sup> George Henry Thomas graduated in West Point in 1840. Although an artilleryman, he served in the 2<sup>d</sup> US Cavalry Regiment under Robert Lee with his opponent John Bell Hood. Although a Virginian, he remained loyal to the Union.



## **NEW UNION REINFORCEMENTS**

In Nashville, Thomas was working hard at reorganizing his units. His plan was simple: attack Hood and destroy his army. However, he wanted to be ready. He transformed the city's garrison into a division that he entrusted to General Donaldson. He created another division by mustering the convalescent men of Sherman's army, which he put under the command of General Craft. On December 1, Schofield's IV<sup>th</sup> and XXIII<sup>rd</sup> Corps arrived from Franklin. They comprised five divisions. Between November 30 and December 2, the three divisions of Andrew J. Smith's XVI<sup>th</sup> Corps arrived from Missouri and Mississippi. Also, by December 2, Steedman's Division was moving toward Chattanooga. Thomas finally disposed of 11 divisions or 58,000 troops. The cavalry, about 12,000 strong, was directed to Edgefield, on the north bank of the Cumberland River. Under the energetic leadership of General Wilson, it was completely reorganized and divided into three divisions and an independent brigade. However, despite all the staff's efforts, two brigades or 3,000 cavalrymen could not be mounted due to a lack of horses. On the other hand, most riders were provided with repeating carbines that gave them devastating firepower. All in all, Thomas had gathered an imposing force of 70,000 men. He also benefitted from the support of the Nashville flotilla under Lieutenant Fitch. Among his vessels was the armored gunboat USS *Neosho*.

## **SUICIDAL DISPERSION OF HOOD'S ARMY**

On December 2, 1864, the Confederates also arrived in the vicinity of Nashville. Temporarily abandoning their muskets for shovels and picks, they built field fortifications on the hills overlooking the city. However, their army was far from complete. Hood had no equal to disperse his troops, but to do so in front of a superior enemy was pure suicide, militarily speaking. Already at Franklin, on December 2, he had ordered Bate's Division (Cheatham's Corps) to attack Murfreesboro and bring destruction along the Chattanooga Railroad.

On the next day, not content of having dispersed the little infantry at his disposal, Hood also divided his cavalry into two groups. Two cavalry divisions under Forrest would help raid the Chattanooga Railroad. The third under Chalmers would stay with the general-in-chief at Nashville. It ended up completely isolated on the far left of his line. As of early December, Chalmers was ordered to detach one of his regiments twelve miles downstream, east of Nashville, on the Cumberland River. But it was too late! Andrew J. Smith's XVI<sup>th</sup> Corps had just passed through this area and was already in town. Another wasted opportunity! All that Chalmers' gunners could do at most was to harass some supply convoys. On December 10, the unfortunate Chalmers was again requested to transfer one of his brigades to Forrest. He was thus left with Rucker's Brigade of 900 men to hold a front four miles long! Fortunately, on the 14<sup>th</sup>, eve of D day, he was reinforced by 700 men of the dismounted Texas Cavalry Brigade of General Matthew Ector. It was better than nothing!

## **REINFORCEMENTS FOR HOOD**

The reinforcement problem became Hood's nightmare. The losses at Franklin had been particularly heavy: twenty percent of the engaged forces. The Tennesseans who had probably realized where lay their best interest had not joined the thin Confederate



ranks en masse as expected, only 164 recruits were enrolled. These did not even compensate for the desertion of 254 dismounted cavalymen automatically transferred to the infantry. Considering their assignment a serious insult, they simply decided to return home!

Hood continued to hassle the top brass for reinforcements: his superior Beauregard, President Davis and his colleague Kirby-Smith in the Trans-Mississippi. He sincerely hoped to receive at least two divisions from Texas. These never materialized. Moreover, on January 6, 1865, twenty days after the disaster to come, Kirby-Smith officially informed Hood that he was not able to send him a single soldier! Since the fall of Vicksburg, on July 4, 1863, the Mississippi River was completely and securely in the hands of the Union and the Trans-Mississippi Department found itself completely cut off from the rest of the Confederacy.

### **CONFEDERATE PLAN**

Hood deployed his small army southeast of the city: Stewart's Corps on the left, that of Lee - who had finally caught up with the main army - in the center and Cheatham's forces on the right.

The left flank was protected by five redoubts that the troops had unfortunately no time to properly finish. In December, the weather was not traditionally favorable to perform outdoor work. Like Wellington at Waterloo in 1815, Hood knew that the attacking enemy wave would smash these frail barriers. The left flank of his line was the weakest and it is naturally there where the Yankee juggernaut would punch through.

### **MURFREESBORO**

While their comrades were building as best they could field fortifications south of Nashville, other Confederates were operating further south around Murfreesboro. Hood had sent them in the hope that Thomas would also transfer a part of his troops there. However, Thomas did nothing of the sort since General Rousseau and 10,000 soldiers were already stationed in the town.

General William Brimage Bate arrived at Murfreesboro with 1,600 valid men. There was no hope of investing the place. On December 5, his division was joined by two infantry brigades and Forrest's cavalry. The latter assumed overall command.

On the 7<sup>th</sup>, Rousseau made a sortie and drove back the Confederates. Two days later, Bate's Division joined Cheatham's Corps at Nashville, on the Confederate right flank. The remaining two brigades at Murfreesboro were also sent to Nashville and strangely replaced by two others! Forrest's two Cavalry Divisions remained in the vicinity. One would not hear much more of them.

### **WASHINGTON'S GROWING IMPATIENCE**

Washington was deeply concerned and growing impatient. What was really the situation at Nashville? Why was Thomas not attacking Hood? Above all, because he did not have enough horses for his cavalry. He commandeered everything that looked like horses, including those of Vice President Andrew Johnson and of a passing circus.

General Ulysses Grant did not care. As of December 2, the telegraph wires between Washington and Nashville literally exploded under a storm of messages. Grant wanted Thomas to attack immediately. The latter replied that he was not ready. On December 9,

he just missed being replaced by Schofield, second in command, who had not hesitated to pour scorn on his superior to take his place. This was bad strategy for on December 15, General John A. Logan, an Atlanta veteran, was preparing to leave Washington for Nashville to take overall command. Grant, fuming, was about to accompany him. On the same day, Thomas finally ordered the attack. Everybody was then reassured and the matter rested. The lack of cavalry horses had not been the only reason for delaying the attack. The cold spell and the terrible snow storm of December 9 were other contributing factors. It was impossible to maneuver and the troops had to remain in their shelters. Disaster struck the opposite camp as the Confederate soldiers froze to death in their open trenches.

## ***THE BATTLE***

On December 13, the Federal cavalry crossed the Cumberland River and deployed on the right side of the front. Obviously something was up.

Once again, and probably one time too many, Hood proceeded against sound military principles. He was not able to accept battle at Nashville. His line was concave with respect to that of Thomas. Movements through his interior lines would prove difficult. However, they would partially work. His forces were three times smaller than those of the enemy: 23,000 or maybe 25,000 men against 70,000! He had only a symbolic cavalry, Rucker's Brigade of Chalmers' Division, compared to Thomas' 12,000 horsemen. He had no operational reserves while Thomas had plenty. In such circumstances, there was only one sensible thing for Hood to do: back off and save his army.

## ***DECEMBER 15, 1864***

It was obviously too late. On December 15, the Federals poured out of Nashville and attacked en masse. Hood had definitely lost the initiative. His 23,000 men would have to fight against 55,000 Yankees!

Before dawn, Federal gunboats opened fire on Rucker's cavalry. Ector's dismounted riders had meanwhile withdrawn to the left flank of the main Confederate line, leaving Rucker's 900 men facing an entire enemy division.

At 6 AM, the 7,500 men of Steedman's Division were the first out of the fortifications to make contact with the enemy at 8 AM. They vigorously attacked the Confederate right flank. Their mission was to create a diversion, pin down Cheatham's Corps and possibly leave Lee's Corps in disarray. Brown's excellent but poorly manned division - (formerly Cleburne's) - blocked Steedman who, nevertheless, managed to keep up the pressure. Two brigades of his division were composed of black soldiers, and this probably increased tenfold the determination of Cleburne's veterans.

Hood quickly understood the game that Steedman was playing and anticipated that the main enemy attack would take place on his left flank held by Stewart's Corps. He transferred Johnson's Division of Lee's Corps from the right to the left of his line. This move would be Lee's sole contribution of the day. Hood also ordered Cheatham's two Divisions to move in the same direction. They arrived on site at the end of the day, when the battle was over!

Everything was to be decided on the left flank. On the main line, the two divisions of Stewart's Corps and Johnson's Division were now virtually facing the entire enemy army, namely eight infantry and two cavalry divisions. The outcome seemed obvious.

However, it was without counting on the resolve of the veterans of the Army of Tennessee. Delayed by fog, the bulk of the Union army came out of Nashville at 10 AM, accompanied by most of the civilian population who had come to attend the grand free show.

Thomas realigned his forces: the three divisions of Wood's IV<sup>th</sup> Corps to the left; in the center, the three divisions of A.J. Smith's XVI<sup>th</sup> Corps, and Wilson's two Cavalry Divisions to the right. The third division had the task of taking care of Rucker's horsemen, which it would not manage to do. The two divisions of Schofield's XXII<sup>th</sup> Corps constituted the reserve.

The five incomplete rebel redoubts were stormed one after the other. The IV<sup>th</sup> Corps seized Montgomery Hill. Loring's Division retreated. Under pressure of the XVI<sup>th</sup> Corps, Johnson's Division gave way, forcing Walthall to retreat. The tiny yet heroic Ector Brigade found itself completely isolated. Stewart, however, managed to rally his decimated troops behind the Granny White Pike. The northern reserve (XXIII<sup>rd</sup> Corps) positioned itself on the right of the XVI<sup>th</sup> Corps, increasing the run over. Wilson's cavalry was now free to cover the Union right flank, which no longer needed it.

Night fell and the fight ended. Thomas did not chase the Confederates despite the advice of his corps commanders. His troops were exhausted and he estimated that they had enough for the day. Hood was clearly beaten and about to pull back. The pursuit would start on the next day.

### ***DECEMBER 16, 1864***

To everyone's surprise, Hood did not move! He withdrew his shattered army two miles further south, on Brentwood Hills. There, he began a rather complex restructuring of his forces: Cheatham's Corps passed from right to left, Lee's from center to right and Stewart's from left to center. The enemy fortunately remained inactive and the maneuver was successful.

During all morning, the Confederate lines were subject to intense artillery fire. At noon, the Union troops began to move. On the left of Shy's Hill<sup>14</sup>, Cheatham's Corps was caught in a hellish fire from three directions: the XVI<sup>th</sup> Corps in front, the XXIII<sup>rd</sup> Corps on the right and Wilson's cavalry at the rear. The position rapidly proved untenable and was soon submerged as well as Cheatham's Corps. General Henry R. Jackson<sup>15</sup> was captured. Stewart's Corps was attacked frontally and on his left flank. It was soon mowed down. General Edward Johnson was captured for a second time during the year.<sup>16</sup> On the right side of Overton Hill, Lee's Corps resisted the attacks of Wood's IV<sup>th</sup> Corps and Steedman's Division.

By now, the Confederates definitely had enough. The remainder of Hood's army withdrew by way of the Franklin Turnpike. On the right, Lee's Corps covered the retreat across the turnpike. On the left, Rucker's indestructible centaurs managed to elude Johnson's cavalry. Taking cover behind a makeshift barricade, they saw two Federal cavalry divisions converging on them, which were astonished to find the enemy

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<sup>14</sup> Later named in memory of Colonel William Shy, who was killed in a heroic action on December 16, 1864. He commanded a regiment consolidating the debris of the 2<sup>d</sup>, 10<sup>th</sup>, 15<sup>th</sup>, 20<sup>th</sup>, 30<sup>th</sup> and 37<sup>th</sup> Tennessee Infantry Regiments.

<sup>15</sup> Henry Rootes Jackson (1820-1898), one of many "Jackson" generals of the Confederate army. He was released in July 1865. Lawyer and ambassador of the United States to Mexico in 1885-1886.

<sup>16</sup> Edward *Allegheny* Johnson (1816-1873, West Point 1838, 32/45) was already captured at Spotsylvania, Virginia, on May 12, 1864, and was quickly exchanged.

across the Granny White Pike. The indefatigable Colonel Rucker was wounded in the ensuing action and taken prisoner.

## **LOSSES**

The two days of intense fighting had been less lethal than during the battle of Franklin. Thomas' strategy, the shock and the disproportion of forces were probably the reasons for this. The Union losses amounted to 3,061 men and those of the Confederates to about 6,000, of which 4,500 prisoners.

## **RETREAT**

A retreat southward was now unavoidable. Lee's Corps formed the rearguard with Chalmers' remaining cavalry. Cheatham's Corps marched in the center and Stewart in the front. On December 20, Forrest's cavalry joined the main body of troops at Columbia. He would effectively cover the retreat of the army.

The rivers were overflowing and Hood had the bridges destroyed after crossing them. Thomas failed to catch up with him. From the 25<sup>th</sup> to the 27<sup>th</sup>, the Confederate army crossed the Tennessee River at Bainbridge, east of Florence. On the same day, Thomas ordered to discontinue the pursuit.

## **TUPELO**

On January 10, 1865, approximately 20,000 survivors of the Army of Tennessee arrived at Tupelo, Mississippi. On the 13<sup>th</sup>, finally assuming his responsibilities, Hood submitted his resignation that was accepted on the 23<sup>rd</sup>. He was demoted from temporary full general to his previous rank of lieutenant general. He then left the army. The Army of Tennessee passed under the command of General Richard Dick Taylor, already in charge of the Department of Eastern Louisiana, Mississippi and Alabama.

Although without any specific assignment, Hood intended to continue the fight. However, the war was nearing the end. Unable to join Kirby-Smith in the Trans-Mississippi Department, he surrendered at Natchez, Mississippi, on May 31, 1865.<sup>17</sup>

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*The illustration at the beginning of this article is a copy of the painting "Opdycke's Tigers" by American artist Don Troiani. The CHAB is indebted to Mr. Troiani for granting the association the kind permission to reproduce his artwork.*

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<sup>17</sup> He married in 1868 and had 11 children in a 10 years' span. Although he built a successful business, he became broke during the economic crisis that resulted from the yellow fever epidemic of 1878. He, his wife and his eldest daughter succumbed to the disease in the summer of 1879.