

Section Two

THE BATTLE OF NASHVILLE

CIVIL WAR MARKERS



Tennessee State Capitol
Encircled by Earthworks and
Stockades (1862)

INTRODUCTION: December 15 and 16, 1864

HISTORIANS HAVE CALLED the Battle of Nashville one of the most decisive of the Civil War. Union forces had held this strategically important city since February 1862. After losing Atlanta to Sherman in September 1864, Confederate General John Bell Hood moved his Army of Tennessee north, hoping to reclaim Nashville for the Confederacy. It is thought that Hood planned to use Federal supplies captured here and to move on, either through Kentucky and Ohio, splitting the Union in two, or to Virginia to meet up with Robert E. Lee, where the two would take on Ulysses S. Grant.

Either of these plans, if successful, would have changed the course of the war. But the Battle of Nashville sent Hood's forces running to the south in defeat, ending his hope of saving the Confederacy.

SETTING THE STAGE

During the three years Union forces had occupied Nashville, the city had become a fortified supply center for the Western Theater (everything west of the Appalachians). Nashville was guarded by General George Thomas, a Virginian who had remained loyal to the Union. Thomas had a force of 70,000 soldiers.

While the Union soldiers were better fed and clothed than their Confederate counterparts, life in occupied Nashville was not especially pleasant. With the influx of occupation soldiers and slaves from the countryside, Nashville had grown almost overnight from a small town to a grossly overcrowded city, now waiting out the dreary years of war.

On the Confederate side, Hood's army was exhausted, having marched from Atlanta since September, fighting along the way. Food and firewood were scarce, and the men were poorly clothed. Some had no shoes. Combat was fierce and personal—often hand-to-hand. Medical care was crude at best. Physical pain and the presence of disease and death were the norms of living.

THE BATTLE

By December 2, 1864, Hood had advanced to within sight of Nashville. Thomas, cautious and deliberate, waited to attack until he was ready despite nearly contin-

uous nagging over the telegraph from General Grant and President Lincoln, who feared he would lose his advantage if he waited and allowed Hood to fortify himself.

A severe ice storm paralyzed the area on December 8. A thaw finally came on the 14th and Thomas attacked the next day. Accompanied by bombardment from Fort Negley on the morning of the 15th, Thomas moved from the river west of town toward the south and east, engaging Confederate forces and pushing them back.

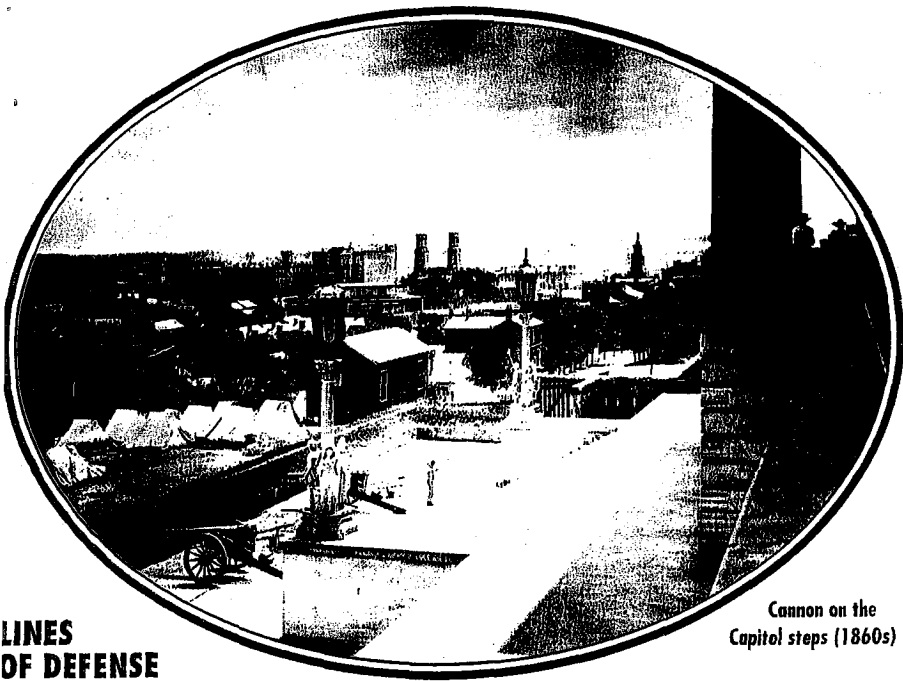
On December 16th both sides had formed new lines. During the day, the three main Confederate positions fell like dominoes, first the left at Shy's Hill, then the center, a few miles to the east. After the fall of the right position at Peach Orchard Hill, the remaining Confederate forces fled to the south.

The Union Army pursued for a while, but the battle was over. Hood's army had been virtually wiped out. He resigned his command the following January. General Thomas was promoted to Major General.

On April 9, 1865, less than four months after Hood's defeat, General Robert E. Lee surrendered to General Ulysses S. Grant at Appomattox, effectively ending the war.

THE MARKERS included in the following section designate the main sites of Union defenses, Confederate lines, and actual skirmishes on the first and second days of the Battle of Nashville. Today, the markers stand on the streets of well-tended suburban neighborhoods. In December 1864, the traveler would have seen ruined farms and wilderness and felt the bitter cold of winter.

(From a self-guided tour of the Battle of Nashville, written by James A. Hoobler. Brochure available at the Metropolitan Historical Commission.)



Cannon on the
Capitol steps (1860s)

LINES OF DEFENSE

★ Federal Defenses

The hill to the west was a strong point in the system of permanent Federal defenses, started in 1862, which extend to the river on both sides of town. Artillery was emplaced here from time to time.

Location: Centennial Park, west of Parthenon

★ Federal Defenses—

Dec. 2-15, 1864

Near here, the interior defensive lines ran southwest to cross Harding Pike; the total length of these works was about 7 miles. First garrisoned by Wood's IV Corps, it was occupied Dec. 15 by Donaldson's Division of Quartermaster employees. Part of the breastworks can be seen on Vanderbilt campus, 300 yards west.

Location: Twenty-first Avenue, South, and Edgehill Avenue

★ Outer Federal Defenses—

Dec. 2, 1864

Here the outer Federal defensive line, which stretched 7 miles around the city, crossed Hillsboro Pike. It was used at the commencement of the battle on Dec. 15 by Wood's IV Corps as a line of departure for the main attack. Faint traces of the old entrenchments are visible a few yards west.

Location: Twenty-first Avenue, South, and Bernard Avenue

★ Federal Defensive Line—

Dec. 15, 1864

The Federal defensive line ran NE and SW through here. Ft. Casino was on the hill to the west, Fort Negley to the northeast. Garrisoned on Dec. 2 by Schofield's XXIII Corps, it was occupied by Cruft's Provisional Division when the battle began. The XXIII Corps moved out in support of the

main effort, 5 miles southwest.

Location: Eighth Avenue, South, on south slope of the City Reservoir

★ Schofield's Jump-Off Line-

Dec. 15, 1864

The Federal defensive line ran northeast and southwest through here. It was garrisoned by Schofield's Corps on arrival here after the Battle of Franklin, Dec. 2, and later became a line of departure for the advance into support positions: Cruft's Provisional Division then occupied this line in reserve.

Location: Twelfth Avenue, South, and Acklen Avenue

DECEMBER 15

★ Fort Negley Site

The guns of Fort Negley, commanding three turnpikes to the South & Southeast, opened the Battle of Nashville, Dec. 15, 1864. This site was selected by Capt. J. S. Morton as the key strong-point in the Federal line around the city. The European style fort named for General James S. Negley, was built of stone, logs, earth & railway iron.

Location: Chestnut Street and Ridley Avenue

★ Steedman's Line of Departure-

Dec. 5, 1864

The left of the Federal main defensive line rested on the Cumberland River north of here, extending southeast to the Murfreesboro Pike. From this line, Steedman's Provisional Detachment of six brigades made the secondary attack against the Confederate right. Thomas' main attack was delivered against the Confederate left.

Location: Nashville General Hospital, Hermitage Avenue

★ Steedman's Position-

Dec. 15, 1864

From a line of departure running N.E.-S.W. through here, Maj. Gen. Steedman's Provisional Detachment of 6 brigades at 6:00 a.m. launched a holding attack southwestward against the Confederate right, on high ground about 2 miles south. The main attack, about 5 miles west, enveloped the Confederate left after an all-day fight.

Location: Lafayette Street and Claiborne Street

★ Lee's Position-Dec. 15, 1864

Here, Stephen D. Lee's Corps, Army of Tennessee, bestrode the highway and railroad. Cheatham's Corps held the right of the line, which ran northeast about 2 miles to Rains' Hill. After the Confederate left was broken in the afternoon's fighting, Lee's Corps fell back to high ground about 1 1/2 miles south.

Location: Franklin Road and Thompson Lane

★ IV Corps Jump-Off Line-

Dec. 15, 1864

Using the defensive salient 500 yards east, Wood's Corps, with the XVI Corps on its right, swung southwest to envelop the left of the Confederate line, 1 1/2 miles south, and pushed it back in spite of determined resistance. The XXIII Corps (Schofield) followed in support.

Location: Twenty-first Avenue, South, and Linden Avenue

★ Assault on Montgomery Hill-

Dec. 15, 1864

500 yards east of here, Maj. Gen. T. J. Wood led an assault by his IV Corps against the Confederate skirmish line on the hill, eventually carrying it. Attacking the main line about 600 yards south, Wood was unable to take it by

direct assault, the divisions of Loring and Walthall holding fast until the XVI Corps, moving past their left, forced withdrawal.

Location: *Twenty-first Avenue, South, and I-440*

➤ **XVI Corps Line of Departure—Dec. 15, 1864**

Supported by a division of Wilson's cavalry, A. J. Smith's Corps moved westward astride Harding Road, displacing Ector's Confederate Brigade from positions across the pike northward to the west of Richland Creek. This brigade outposted the Confederate left flank; the main line was along Hillsboro Pike.

Location: *West End Avenue and Orleans Drive*

➤ **Cavalry Action—Dec. 15, 1864**

The right of the main Federal defense line crossed Charlotte Pike here. In the opening phase of the battle, mounted and dismounted cavalry of Wilson's Corps moved out of the Federal works, supporting the advance of Smith's XVI Corps in a turning movement against the extreme left flank of the Confederate positions.

Location: *Charlotte Avenue between Thirty-third Avenue, North, and Thirty-fifth Avenue, North*

➤ **Cavalry Action—Dec. 15, 1864**

Forming the outer arc of the Federal main attack, R. W. Johnson's 6th Cavalry Division, Wilson's Corps, here hit Rucker's Confederate Cavalry Brigade, west of Richland Creek. Withdrawing southward to Harding Road, Rucker held his ground there until bypassing Federal infantry forced further withdrawal to Hillsboro Pike late in the afternoon.

Location: *Charlotte Pike past Fifty-fourth*

Avenue, North, west of Richland Creek Bridge

☛ **Defense by Ector's Brigade—Dec. 15, 1864**

In position from here northward along high ground, Ector's Brigade of French's Confederate Division, commanded by Col. Daniel Coleman, outposted the left of Hood's line. Attacked by the Federal XVI Corps, supported by artillery and part of the Cavalry Corps, it was overwhelmed. It withdrew southeast to Hillsboro Pike.

Location: *4243 Harding Road*

☛ **Redoubt No. 1—Dec. 15, 1864**

Stewart's Confederate Corps held this salient of the left of Hood's defenses. A thin infantry line ran south behind a stone wall on the east side of the pike. After the routing of Ector's Brigade on Harding Pike and successive overrunning of Redoubts 3, 4, & 5 to the south, Stewart's position was flanked; he withdrew southeast toward Granny White Pike.

Location: *Hillsboro Road and Hampton Avenue*

✱ **Battle of Nashville—Confederate Line**

Trenches about 20 ft. N of this point, held by Loring's Division, were the center of the Confederate main line before the Battle of Nashville. On Dec. 15, 1864, Redoubt #1, a key artillery salient 200 yds. NW, fired on Federal forces until overrun by General Wood's troops late in the day, when Confederates retreated toward Granny White Pike.

Location: *1808 Woodmont Boulevard*

☛ **Confederate Outpost—Dec. 15, 1864**

100 yards west was Redoubt No. 3 in



the Confederate system of detached works beyond the main line. It was overrun by the enveloping attack of Wood's IV Corps from the northwest.

Location: Hillsboro Road and Graybar Lane

★ **Lumsden's Defense—Dec. 15, 1864**

0.3 mile west was Redoubt No. 4 in Hood's detached supporting works. Garrisoned by Lumsden's Battery of smoothbore Napoleons, supported by 100 men of the 29th Alabama Infantry under Capt. Foster, it was finally overrun by the assault of 12 infantry and 4 dismounted cavalry regiments, supported by four Federal batteries.

Location: Hillsboro Road and Hobbs Road

★ **Taking of Redoubt No. 5— Dec. 15, 1864**

Hood's Redoubt No. 5 was on this hill. Couch's division of the XXIII Corps, sweeping to the south of the route of

Smith's XVI, captured it and the hills to the east late in the afternoon. Wilson's cavalry, crossing the highway about 2 miles south, advanced rapidly eastward, flanking the Confederate defenses.

Location: Hillsboro Road and Burton Hills entrance

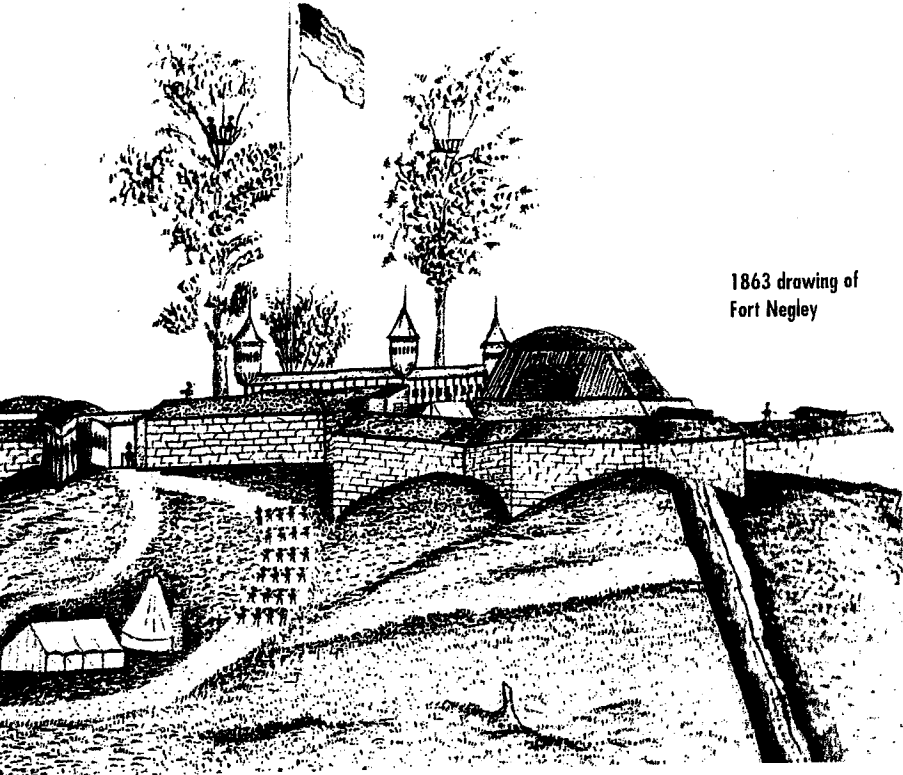
★ **Confederate Defenses— Dec. 15, 1864**

Stewart's Corps, Army of Tennessee, held this part of Hood's original line, extending east about 1500 yards, and west and south about 1 mile to Hillsboro Pike. After the turning of his left, about 4:00 p.m., Stewart established a new position extending southward, to the west of Granny White Pike.

Location: 3506 Granny White Pike

★ **Confederate Defenses— Dec. 15, 1864**

After being outflanked by the advance of



1863 drawing of
Fort Negley

the Federal XVI Corps (Smith), Loring and Walthall put their divisions in a defensive line west of this road, facing westward. Here, their determined defense brought Federal advances against the Confederate left to a close for the day.

Location: *Granny White Pike and Shackleford Road*

❖ **Cheatham's Line—Dec. 15, 1864**

Holding a line running N.E. and S.W. and with its right on the N.C.& St.L. R.R. at Rains' Cut, Cheatham's Confederate Corps stood off the attacks of Steedman's brigades. Part of Cheatham's Corps was moved to the support of Stewart's line late in the afternoon: collapse of the left wing forced Cheatham's withdrawal southward during the night.

Location: *Nolensville Road and Peachtree Street*

DECEMBER 16

❖ **Confederate Position— Dec. 16, 1864**

Stewart's Corps, badly mauled during the first day, withdrew at night to a line extending eastward. Lee's Corps, forming the right wing, extended the line across the Franklin Pike. Cheatham's Corps, on Stewart's left, extended the line westward, and following the hills, curved south. Chalmers' Cavalry Division covered the left flank.

Location: *4700 block of Granny White Pike*

✱ **Battle of Nashville—Stewart's Line**

Loring's division of Stewart's Corps, Hood's Confederate Army of Tennessee, fought behind this stone wall Dec. 16, 1864. All Federal attacks were beaten back until the Confederate line was broken a mile to the west. The

division retreated south through the hills toward Brentwood.

Location: 4616 Lealand Lane

★ **Smith's Assault—Dec. 16, 1864**

The Federal XVI Corps attacked southward along this road. After violent artillery bombardment, McArthur's Division took the hill to the west about 4:00 p.m., precipitating the route of Hood's Army. This hill is named for Col. W. M. Shy, 20th Tenn. Inf., killed in the desperate defense which he commanded.

Location: 4600 block of Granny White Pike

★ **Battle of Nashville— Federal Main Line**

On Dec. 16, 1864, the Federal 16th Corps under General A. J. Smith joined the 23rd Corps under Gen. John M. Schofield at this point. From this line at about 4:00 p.m. the 1st Brigade of Gen. John McArthur's 1st Div. launched the assault that broke the Confederate line at the salient on Shy's Hill to the south which resulted in the route of Hood's Army.

Location: 4515 Shy's Hill Road

★ **Battle of Nashville—Shy's Hill**

On this hill was fought the decisive encounter of the Battle of Nashville December 16, 1864. At 4:15 p.m. a Federal assault at the angle on top of the hill broke the Confederate line. Col. W. M. Shy, 20th Tenn. Inf., was killed and Gen. T. B. Smith was captured. The Confederates retreated over the Overton Hills to the Franklin Pike.

Location: 4619 Benton Smith Road

★ **Schofield's Assault—Dec. 16, 1864**

The Federal XXIII Corps attacked southeastward from positions about $\frac{3}{4}$ mile west. Coordinating with the attack

of Smith's XVI Corps, and assisted by pressure by Wilson's encircling cavalry from the south, its action brought about the final collapse of Hood's defenses.

Location: Granny White and Harding Place.

★ **Confederate Defenses— Dec. 16, 1864**

Lee's Corps held the right flank of the line in the final stages of the battle, linking with Stewart to the west. Here it extended east, then south around Peach Orchard Hill. Violent attacks by Steedman's brigades were repulsed bloodily; Lee did not withdraw until the left and center of the Confederate line had collapsed.

Location: 4400 block of Franklin Road

★ **Battle of Nashville— Peach Orchard Hill**

On Dec. 16, 1864, Gen. S. D. Lee's Corps, Army of Tennessee, held this right flank of Hood's defense line which ran south along the crest of this ridge. Violent artillery fire and infantry attacks by the corps of Wood and Steedman failed to dislodge the defenders who withdrew only after the collapse of the Confederate left and center in late afternoon.

Location: Franklin Road and north side of ridge on Harding Place

★ **Hood's Retreat—Dec. 16, 1864**

In this neighborhood, late in the evening of his decisive defeat at Nashville, Hood reorganized his army for withdrawal southward. Lt. Gen. Stephen D. Lee's Corps, supported by Chalmer's Cavalry Division, covered the withdrawal, fighting continuously until the army bivouacked near Spring Hill, 21 miles S., the night of Dec. 17th.

Location: Franklin Road and Lakemont Drive

THE CIVIL WAR BATTLE OF NASHVILLE

December 15 and 16, 1864

