

Foreword

It was August 1966. I was six years old. The war in Vietnam was escalating; riots were beginning across the United States and the world. These were times of great change. I was oblivious to all of this when my father moved us from Mt. Juliet, Tennessee to Oak Hill just south of Nashville. In our backyard on Oak Valley Lane was an old stacked stone wall that ran for miles. The wall fascinated me. When was it built? Why was it built? Why was it located where it was? Why was the trail along the wall named Kirkman Lane? I walked this bridle path almost every day to school at Robertson Academy. Others rode horses on the well worn path. I would walk to the battlefield marker showing Stewart's Line which noted fighting at this wall. One day I found an arrowhead and a few weeks later a minie ball. In looking at old maps I discovered that our home was in the center of the second day of fighting of a great Civil War battlefield. In that month, I discovered my passion in life – The Battle of Nashville.

There have been numerous books since Thomas Hay first published his essay in 1928 on the battle. Stanley Horn's, "The Decisive Battle of Nashville", was the first in 1954 and many have followed. I have read and studied every publication since. I most enjoyed the writings of Wiley Sword and my Auburn friend James McDonough-who, like me, was fascinated by the Nashville battlefield at an early age. Unfortunately, none of the authors, other than McDonough, ever lived on the battlefield, to my knowledge, and many authors spent little time traversing over the hills and valleys to precisely pinpoint where the lines and batteries were located on December 16, 1864.

The Nashville battlefield today has virtually been obliterated. The Battle of Nashville Preservation Society, Inc. has preserved Redoubt 1 on Benham Avenue and the Shy's Hill site on Benton Smith Road. Other than Ft. Negley, Travelers Rest, Granburys lunette and Kelley's Point, there is really no place to go to visit any of the original sites. All have succumbed to the bulldozer and "progress". This is even more startling when considering that Nashville was one of the largest battlefields of the war encompassing over 20 square miles. I still live today in Oak Hill approximately 600 yards from where we moved in 1966. I walk the battlefield daily. I know where each brigade was formed and where the charges were made, where the men died and where those that did not die surrendered or retreated. I know where the hidden remnants of the trenches still run in my neighbors' back yards. On my land is a part of the old earthworks from Dent's Alabama battery where 13 live shells were discovered in one deep hole in the seventies. There are only a handful of us left that know these little gems of the Nashville battlefield. Hank Williams, Jr., Mark Swann and Thomas Cartwright traversed these places in the 1960's and early 1970's as teenagers with their metal detectors. My old friend Paul Clements stood on Redbud Hill in the early eighties and wept as he watched the development of Burton Hills and the tear down of the Compton mansion where

Lt. Col. William Shy was taken after his death. A few other good men also know where the treasures still lie but there are only a handful left. Soon we will all be gone. Unless others step up now, this history will be forever lost.

I am so pleased that Dennis Belcher asked me to write this forward and assist him with some technical aspects and troop positions. The author has taken the time to walk and drive with me the sites pertinent to the cavalry action during the Battle of Nashville. Unless you live in the area and walk the terrain, it is impossible to determine from the official reports which hill was occupied, fortified or attacked during the battle. There are so many tall hills in Oak Hill and Forrest Hills that unless you are on site, you simply cannot envision what positions some of the eyewitnesses were really discussing over 150 years ago. The author took the critical time needed to learn this information first hand and I thoroughly enjoyed our time together standing on the ridges and in the driveways of some of my friends who allowed us access where I could point out precisely where the troops moved, fought and died.

This work gives details that most of the prior authors either missed or did not include. Specifically, the retreat by Cheatham's corps through the "gap in the hills", which is present day Lakeview Drive and through the Radnor Lake State Park, and the work of Colonial David Coleman with Ector's Brigade in protecting this retreat are finally noted. Furthermore, the author's work on the Battle of the Barricade which sprawled over the present-day Richland Country Club and south to present day Maryland Way have really not received the depth from other authors that were necessary. I am so pleased that the author took the time to describe these encounters in detail and provide the finest Nashville action maps ever published.

Just like the 1960's, we live in a changing time and a changing world. Political discussion in virtual reality is beyond aggressive and the American Civil War and its 620,000 American casualties is a thing of the past. Fortunately, a very few remain to protect the record for history the blood that was spilled into the Nashville dirt. The author is one of these men. I know that you will enjoy this fine work.

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