

On this site, the evening of December 2, 1864, the Confederate Army of Tennessee initiated a two-week siege of Nashville. This was to be the last significant offensive military operation of the Civil War by the South. It was also one of the most significant battles between the Confederate Cavalry and the United States Navy.

Since late winter 1862, Nashville had been a key staging and supply base for the Union Army in the western theater of the war. Since February 25, 1862 it had been under Union occupation longer than any other major Confederate city. Many of the southern soldiers from here had not seen home in over three years. They would find that Nashville, as well as their army, had changed dramatically since the beginning of the war.

Advancing here after the bloody Battle of Franklin, Confederate General John Bell Hood anchored his left flank at this point. More than 25,000 Confederates began an investment line running from this position, arching more than 12 miles east, in an attempt to hem in Nashville on the south side of the Cumberland River. The farthest position reached on the other end of the line, was between Nolensville and Murfreesboro pikes at Granbury's Lunette. This made Nashville the most extensive geographical battlefield of the Civil War in terms of sheer distance.

Detached from Maj. Gen. Nathan B. Forrest command in Murfreesboro, Col. David C. Kelley initially commanded approximately 300 Confederates here, thus beginning a two-week blockade of the Cumberland River in Nashville. This included two artillery batteries and a subsurface line of mines (then referred to as torpedoes) strung across the river. Kelley's manpower was gradually increased to more than 1200 cavalry, and decreased to less than 800 before the Battle of Nashville commenced on the 15th of December. The U.S. Navy estimated up to fourteen artillery pieces employed between this site and another position one half mile upstream. It is doubtful if more than 4-6 artillery pieces were employed by the Confederates here.

Early on the morning of December 3, the Confederates captured two Union supply transports: Prairie State and Prima Donna. This included 56 prisoners, 197 horses and mules, as well as food provisions of corn and oats. Kelley's men disabled a third supply ship the Magnet, which was later found four miles downstream. Shortly after partially unloading the captured vessels, the U.S. Navy arrived on the scene, driving away the Confederates whom had depleted their ammunition. The Navy flotilla subsequently recovered the captured vessels.

Between December 3 and 15, up to seven regiments of Alabama, Mississippi and Tennessee Confederate cavalry effectively blockaded all transportation along the Cumberland River against seven heavily armed Navy gunboats at this location. The U.S. Navy unsuccessfully tried to dislodge the river batteries in six separate engagements in the week preceding the Battle of Nashville. During the fourth engagement on December 6, the U.S.S. Neosho was hit more than one hundred times by artillery rounds without being sunk. The sailors in blue came close to losing her however, when two of the Confederate rounds breached the monitor's iron plating, and one lodged, unexploded, in the vessel's powder magazine. The ship's Quartermaster, John Ditzenback with Pilot, John H. Ferrell, became recipients of the Medal of Honor for their actions that day, saving the boat's colors when they were shot away by heavy Confederate gunfire. Kelley's artillery had the Navy uncertain about the force they were up against.

By the deceptive movements of their mobile gun emplacements along the high ground here, elements of the Kelley's cavalry convinced the Navy that they were a force over four-times their actual strength. This was a military tactic that was characteristic of the Confederate cavalry under Forrest's command. Colonel Kelley had previously fought the Navy in the battle of Fort Henry and Donelson, East Port Mississippi, on the Ohio River, and the daring Johnsonville raid only weeks before Nashville. Known as the "Fighting Parson", because of his status as a Methodist minister and regimental chaplain, he later played a key role in the formation of Vanderbilt University in 1873. He unsuccessfully ran on the prohibitionist ticket for governor of Tennessee in 1890.

By December 15, the Union combat ready forces were increased to more than 49,000. By feinting an attack on the other end of the battlefield while dividing the Confederate left along Richland Creek, the Union would crush the Army of Tennessee in the center; one of the most decisive battles of that war. Kelley's artillery, along with five regiments from Gen. Chalmers's cavalry, were one of the few Confederate units to hold their ground and force the overwhelmingly larger Union cavalry into retreat on the opening day of the Battle of Nashville.

Noteworthy in this counter-charge, near present day Interstate 40 and Charlotte Pike, was the participation of the prominent seventy five-year-old civilian: Mark Robertson Cockrill. It is said that he led the charge and galloped into the fray with the use of only one arm, holding his father's revolutionary war musket in one hand, and the reins to the horse in his mouth. He was latter imprisoned for his assault on a Union soldier after an argument over destruction of his property and prized livestock.

When it was learned that Federal forces had overrun the Gen. Chalmers cavalry headquarters at the Belle Meade Plantation, 3 miles southeast of here, Colonel Kelley withdrew in an attempt to rendezvous with the main force in retreat 6 miles to the east. The night of December 15, under cover of darkness, they abandoned their position here, moving through Bellevue, to the Little Harpeth River, eventually, reconnecting with the extreme rear of the Army of Tennessee near Hillsboro Road and the present day Old Hickory Boulevard. This was just in time to provide a critical rear guard that fought a delaying action from Brentwood, south more than 100 miles, crossing into Alabama and then over the Tennessee river above Muscle Shoals, where the Union pursuit was called off. Thus ended the last great attempt by the South to reclaim the State of Tennessee, or advance to recover any of its lost territory. The once great Army of Tennessee would be surrendered by Gen. Joseph E. Johnston four months later at Bennett's House, near Durham Station, North Carolina April 26, 1865.