

## **The Battle of Nashville**

**<http://civilwar150.longwood.edu>**

After losing Atlanta in mid-November of 1864, Confederate general John Bell Hood decided to detach from his enemy William Sherman and move northwest into Tennessee. Instead of pursuing Hood, Sherman continued on marching to the sea and left the confrontation with Hood to Union forces in Tennessee under Major General George H. Thomas.

Hood based his decision to head into Tennessee partly on his determination that Thomas's army was currently separated into two parts and he began by attacking Union troops under John Schofield at Spring Hill on November 29. Though Hood had Schofield outnumbered almost 2 to 1, a series of miscommunications between Confederate officers allowed Schofield to escape Spring Hill to the city of Franklin.

Upset at his failure, Hood launched another attack at Franklin the next day. Schofield was well dug in and the assault was a disaster. Hood suffered over 6,000 casualties in an attacking force of 20,000 men compared to only a little over 2,000 casualties for the Union. Again, Schofield was able to slip away after the battle, this time farther north to Nashville.

Entering Nashville, Schofield was finally able to reconnect with Thomas, bringing the total Union force in the city to over 55,000 veteran soldiers. The city, captured in 1862, was extremely well fortified. It was bounded on two sides by the Cumberland River, which was lined with Union gunboats. The other two sides contained a variety of well-built fortifications. Attacking such a citadel would be a tough task.

Hood and his men arrived outside Nashville on December 2. Still reeling from the defeat at Franklin, Hood decided to wait and see if Thomas might come out of his defenses to attack him. He also sent a number of troops, including his best fighters, the cavalry under Nathan Bedford Forrest, to create a diversion by attacking the railroads at Murfreesboro, about 30 miles southeast of Nashville. The diversion did not prompt Thomas to action, but it would deprive Hood of key troops in the coming battle.

Both Ulysses S. Grant and Abraham Lincoln became frustrated at Thomas's waiting strategy and were prepared to replace him with a more aggressive general, but on December 15 Thomas finally made his move. With some forces making a demonstration against the Confederate right flank, most of the Union forces made a huge circular movement from the city and came in on the left flank. The fighting was bitter and lasted through the 15<sup>th</sup> and most of the next day. But by nightfall, Hood's Army of Tennessee had been shattered and was withdrawing to the south. Before New Year's, the remnants of Hood's force would be withdrawn into Alabama.

Hood's campaign into Tennessee had been an utter disaster. He started in mid-November with over 38,000 soldiers and by January he could only muster about 15,000. The battle of Nashville effectively terminated actions by the Confederate Army of Tennessee. By mid-January, Hood had retreated to Tupelo, Mississippi and had resigned his command. The loss would accelerate the demise of the Confederacy in the East as well, as now Grant and Lincoln could focus all their attention on the remaining Confederates in Virginia and North Carolina.

An interesting sidelight to the battle came in 1977 when a body was found on the battlefield. At first thought to be a fairly recent homicide victim, it turned out to be

Confederate Colonel William Shy. Shy had been killed in the battle but exhumed by grave robbers searching for memorabilia. The preservation of the body was attributed to a cast iron coffin and embalming fluid containing arsenic.