

Stones River

NATIONAL BATTLEFIELD • TENNESSEE



After his retreat from Perryville, Ky., in October 1862, Gen. Braxton Bragg concentrated his Confederate army at Murfreesboro. Maj. Gen. William Rosecrans' Union army followed as far as Nashville. On December 26, Rosecrans moved out of Nashville, intending to sweep Bragg aside and drive on to Chattanooga. Four days later Federal forces neared Murfreesboro.

Seven hundred yards apart the two armies camped, readying for battle. Tomorrow would be a day of carnage. Bragg's Confederates (about 38,000) and Rosecrans Federals (about 45,000) were too battlewise to expect anything else that cold night of December 30, 1862. As the fires flickered and the sentries tramped, the mood was tense but there was no firing. To-night was the time to snatch a few hours sleep and, if possible, a few moments of pleasure.

Somewhere along the line an army band struck up a patriotic air. From the opposing side came the chords of a rejoinder, and soon the hills resounded with "Hail Columbia" battling "Bonnie Blue Flag," and "Dixie" trying to drown out "Yankee Doodle." Some band struck up "Home Sweet Home," and the tough, sardonic westerners of both armies who sneered at the eastern "paper collar soldiers" began to sing the bittersweet song that brought back memories of home and family. Voices faded as "Tattoo" called for lights out in the frosty camps.

The next morning's chill dawn saw the Confederates charging the Union right flank. There was no music now, just the roar of musketry and the deep boom of cannon as the onslaught sent the Federals reeling backward through the dense cedar thickets which covered the battlefield. The noise was so intense that Confederate soldiers paused in their attack to stuff their ears with cotton stripped from the culled bolls left from the last harvest.

By 10 a.m. the Union line had been driven back almost to the Old Nashville Pike. There the Federals held, under orders from "Old Rosy" to "contest every inch of ground." And contest it they did, with Gen. Philip Sheridan's division and Maj. Gen. George Thomas' troops beating

off attack after attack with cannon and rifle, and with bayonet and clubbed musket when the ammunition ran out. Rosecrans brought in reserves and, by 4 p.m., established a new line along the old pike. The day's fighting sputtered to a close.

There were no band concerts that night, and no one celebrated New Year's Eve. The two armies remained in position the following day, but there was no fighting. On January 2, Bragg, confident the Federals would withdraw, was perplexed to find Rosecrans still in front of him. Late in the afternoon Bragg launched the brigades of Gen. John Breckinridge in an attack that drove back the Federal first line but which was stopped by massive artillery fire. The Confederates left 1,800 soldiers lying on the field and in the river.

Thus the battle ended. Both sides claimed victory. On January 3 Bragg retreated 40 miles and Rosecrans occupied Murfreesboro. Losses on both sides were heavy, with about 13,000 Federals and about 10,000 Confederates killed or wounded. Stones River was one more bloody milestone in the march that would see the battles of Chattanooga and Chickamauga, the destruction of Atlanta, Sherman's March to the Sea, and final victory.

ABOUT YOUR VISIT

The battlefield is 3 miles northwest of Murfreesboro and 30 miles southeast of Nashville on U.S. 41. It includes Stones River National Cemetery in which many of the Union soldiers killed in the battle are buried. The park is open daily from 8 a.m. to 4:45 p.m. Organized groups should make special arrangements with the superintendent for guided tours.

ADMINISTRATION

Stones River National Battlefield and Cemetery are administered by the National Park Service, U.S. Department of the Interior. A superintendent, whose address is Box 1039, Murfreesboro, TN 37130, is in immediate charge.

A TOUR OF THE BATTLEFIELD

Each stop on this self-guided auto tour, which begins in front of the visitor center, is marked and interpreted by exhibits.

1. The Chicago Board of Trade Battery. On the morning of December 31, 1862, thousands of Union troops burst from the cedars at this point, followed closely by victory-confident Confederates. The Chicago Board of Trade Battery, with 6 guns, sprang into action on this rise. Their charges of canister and solid shot forced the Confederates to withdraw to the cedars. A second battery joined in on the left, and the combined fire broke up the attack.

2. The Fight for the Cedars. The deep Confederate penetration at this point on December 31 forced Rosecrans to revise his plan to assault the Confederate right. He rushed reserves to this sector, and Union artillery along the Old Nashville Pike finally checked the drive.

3. Waters' Alabama Artillery. A few yards from this point, Waters' artillery battery (Confederate) tried to bring its guns into action, but because of the dense woods and limestone outcroppings, many pieces could not be brought to bear. Those that did were aimed at the sounds of the enemy's musketry.

4. Sheridan's Stand. Close by, the men of Gen. Philip H. Sheridan and Maj. Gen. George H. Thomas warded off determined Confederate assaults during the early hours of December 31. To crack the Union line at this point the Confederates wheeled up their guns to within 200 yards of Sheridan's position, but attack after attack still failed, with costly losses to both sides. Eventually Sheridan abandoned the position. His delaying action during the withdrawal gave Union troops time to form a new line along the Old Nashville Pike.

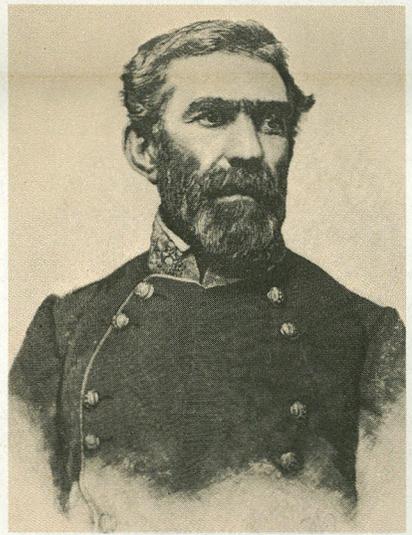
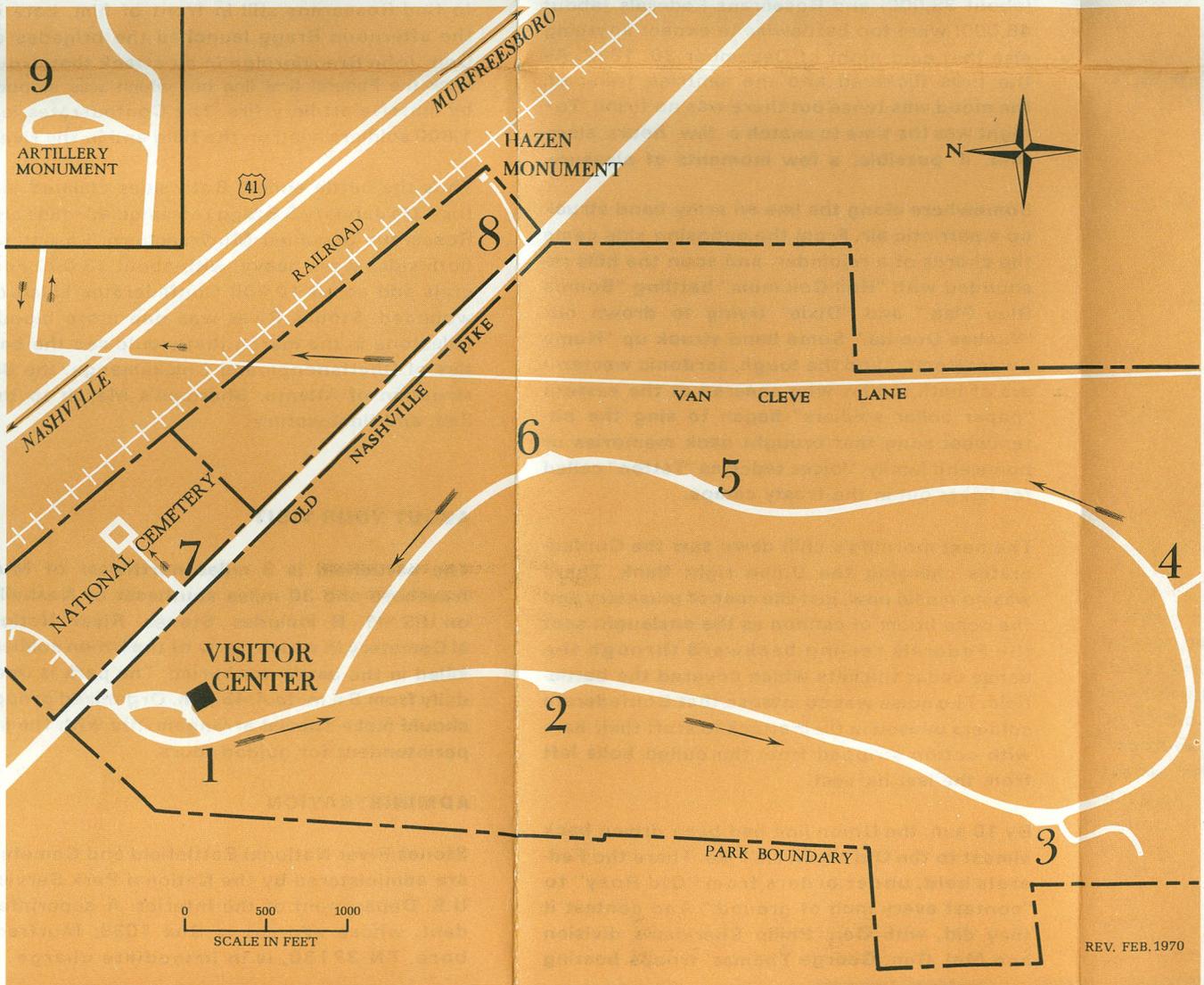
5. Confederate High Tide. Union troops under Gen. Thomas L. Crittenden held this part of the line on the morning of December 31, 1862. When battle suddenly overtook them, they gathered behind a rail fence and opened fire. The attack collapsed when the Confederates divided their forces to pass around the ruined Cowan Mansion. An hour later the Confederates again reached these cedars, and the Federal troops retreated.

6. Rosecrans Establishes A New Line. When the attacking Confederates saw the new Union battle-line drawn along the Old Nashville Pike and into the Round Forest, they fell back into the cedars. As long as the Federals clung to the Round Forest, the Confederates could not gain a victory.

7. Stones River National Cemetery. After the battle, most of the dead were buried on the field. When the National Cemetery was established in June 1865, the Government disinterred the Union dead and reburied them here. Of the more than 6,100 Union burials, 2,562 were not identified.

8. Struggle for the Round Forest. This was the only Union position to hold throughout the first day of the battle. The first Confederate attack came at 10 a.m. across the field before you and was broken up by Union artillery. An hour later another charge carried to within 150 yards of the Union line before being stopped. The monument erected in 1863 by the survivors of Col. William B. Hazen's brigade, is one of the Nation's oldest Civil War memorials.

9. Breckinridge's Attack. As Union soldiers crouched here behind breastworks of stone and rail, a battered advance division fled back across the river pursued by Gen. John C. Breckinridge's hard-driving Confederate brigades. Union batteries firing from the rise above the river ford, broke the assault with shot, shell, and canister. Some 1,800 Confederates were killed or wounded in less than an hour in this final action of the battle.



GEN. BRAXTON BRAGG



MAJ. GEN. WILLIAM S. ROSECRANS

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U. S. Department of the Interior
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