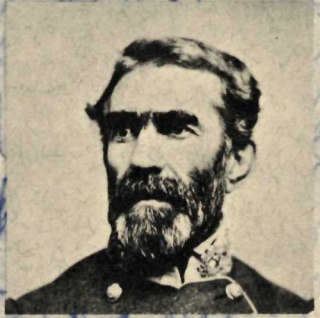


# STONES RIVER



NATIONAL BATTLEFIELD    TENNESSEE

*Stone River*

THE FIRST GREAT BATTLE IN THE UNION CAMPAIGN DESTINED TO END IN SHERMAN'S "MARCH TO THE SEA"

**S**eldom during the Civil War did two armies pour out so much blood for so little gain as here at Stones River in 3 days of desperate fighting. After artillery broke up their last assault in a waning sun on January 2, 1863, the Confederates yielded the field and withdrew unhindered into winter quarters, 40 miles southeast. In the

North the press and politicians showered praise on the Union army and its leader William S. Rosecrans. But in the rocky meadows and tangled thickets along Stones River thousands lay dead. Of 83,000 men engaged, nearly a third were casualties—expended in a battle that achieved no important object for either side.

In their operations west of the Appalachians the strategy of the Union Army centered on two major objectives: to gain control of the Mississippi, and to drive a wedge through the Confederacy along the railroads running southeastward through Tennessee and Georgia. By mid-1862 only the Confederate stronghold at Vicksburg thwarted the first goal. The second cost more time and more blood.

In the winter and spring of 1862 Union forces advanced into Tennessee, capturing Forts Henry and Donelson and driving the Confederates from the field at Shiloh. By autumn Union armies held the western half of the State. In October Gen. Braxton Bragg's Confederate army invaded Kentucky, hoping to bring that State back into the Confederacy. They halted the Union advance into Tennessee, but were themselves thrown back in the Battle of Perryville. As in the east at Antietam, the South had lost the initiative. Before the month was out, Bragg retired to Tennessee, passing through Cumberland Gap to Chattanooga.

In December 1862 Bragg marched his army northwest to Murfreesboro. Three miles past the town, he positioned his troops near a small meandering stream—Stones River.

Thirty miles away, at Nashville, stood poised the Union Army of the Cumberland, commanded by Gen. William S. Rosecrans. To continue the drive down the South's railroads, Rosecrans had first to get past Bragg's Army of the Tennessee at Murfreesboro. From there he could strike for Chattanooga, 125 miles farther southeast. The capture of this city would expose the lower South to invasion.

ROSECRANS ADVANCES

On December 26, 1862, Rosecrans started his men toward Bragg's position, harassed by Confederate cavalry. Moving swiftly, Gen. Joseph Wheeler raided the Union supply columns, burning and destroying wagon trains and sniping at the rearward. From the night of December 29 until his return to the Confederate lines early on December 31, he circled the advancing Union army, destroying nearly \$1 million worth of property and taking 700 prisoners. The raid only slowed Rosecrans. By December 30 his troops faced the Confederates near Stones River.



Late on the afternoon of January 2, 1863, Ohio and Illinois regiments pushed across Stones River to seize the field just swept of Confederates by Mendenhall's artillery barrage. The action took place on the extreme Union left and was recorded by Henri Louie.

**THE FIRST DAY OF BATTLE** That evening Bragg devised his plan of attack. By assaulting the Union right the next morning at dawn, he hoped to drive Rosecrans into the northern loop of Stones River. Rosecrans also had a battle plan, one—it turned out—almost identical with Bragg's. He would cross Stones River and attack the Confederate right, forcing it back upon the southerly course of the stream. If successful, this movement would thrust part of the Union army between the Confederates and their base at Murfreesboro.

By striking first, the Confederates seized the advantage. At daybreak on the 31st, they furiously assaulted the Union right and drove it and part of the center back through the surrounding cedar woods to the Nashville Pike. Only inspired fighting by Gen. Philip H. Sheridan's division on the right and stubborn holding by Gen. George H. Thomas in the center prevented a Union rout.

Rosecrans now dropped all thought of attacking Bragg's right. He rushed troops assigned to the attack back to the highway to form a new defensive line along the higher ground near the pike and along the embankment of the Nashville & Chattanooga Railroad. As the Confederates charged out of the cedar woods, they met heavy fire from these fresh troops. Stunned by their losses, the Confederates finally fell back to the protection of the woods.

Gen. John C. Breckinridge held the Confederate right with five brigades. To support his faltering offensive, Bragg ordered Breckinridge to send a strong force into the Union center. Had Breckinridge executed these orders at the battle's critical point—just before noon—it is possible that the weight of his blow would have crumpled the Union line along the pike and railroad. As it was, Breckinridge's support arrived too little and too late, and men of Ohio, Indiana, and Illinois, their ammunition expended, desperately beat off the piecemeal attack with rifle butts and bayonets. The fighting was hardest in the vicinity of the Hazen Brigade Monument and the junction of Van Cleve Lane and the Nashville Pike.

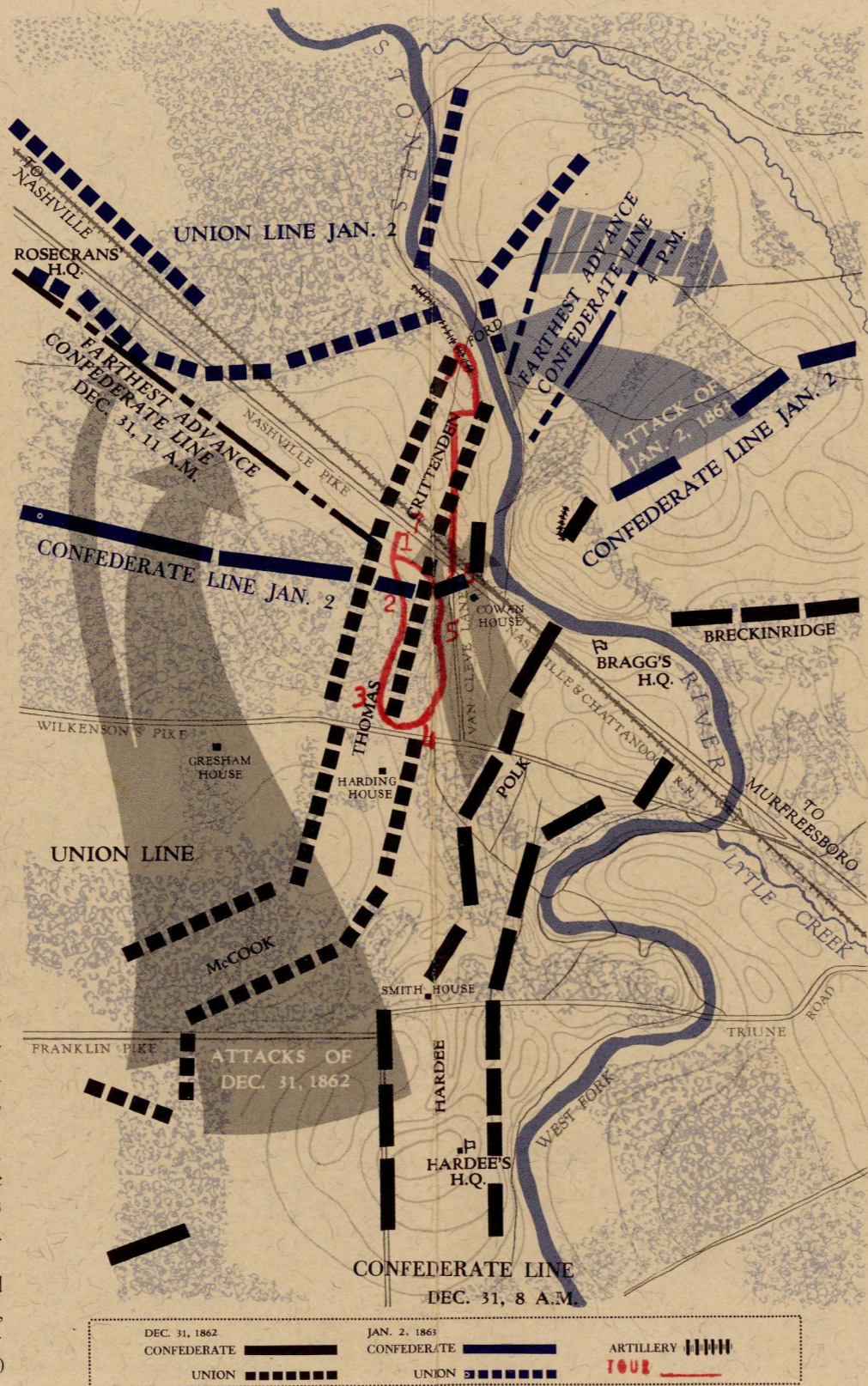
**DECISION BY ARTILLERY** All the next day the two armies faced each other without fighting. When Rosecrans moved part of his left wing to high ground across Stones River—a strong position that commanded the Confederate right—Bragg felt that he had to remove the threat. Assembling his best troops, he sent them forward to seize the hill about an hour before dusk on January 2. The assault carried the crest, and Union troops fled in headlong retreat down the back slope and across Stones River.

As the Confederates formed for the attack, they were observed by Gen. Thomas L. Crittenden, commander of the Union left. He quickly ordered his chief of artillery, Capt. John E. Mendenhall, to support the infantry.

Within the next half hour Mendenhall brought together 57 guns—45 on the heights about 100 yards from McFadden's Ford and the rest in 2 batteries southwest of the ford—trained them on the path of the Confederate advance, then waited for a clear shot. As the gray flank came into range, the massed guns opened and poured over 100 rounds a minute into Breckinridge's brave 4,500. The result was carnage. A dashing charge turned into retreat, then rout. In minutes 1,800 Confederates fell, either killed or wounded, and Union troops reclaimed the heights.

Thus did Mendenhall's concentrated artillery abruptly turn the fortunes of battle. It was perhaps the outstanding instance of field combat in the Civil War where artillery was the decisive factor. On January 3, under the pall of the preceding day's disaster, Bragg ordered his army to withdraw to Tullahoma, some 40 miles southeast. The next day Rosecrans entered Murfreesboro.

Both sides had some claim to victory. Bragg's men captured 28 Union cannon and took over 3,000 prisoners. But the Federals held the field and occupied Murfreesboro, while the Confederates retreated. Each army suffered terrible losses. Of 38,000 Confederates engaged, some 10,000 were casualties; of 45,000 Union troops, about 13,000 were casualties.

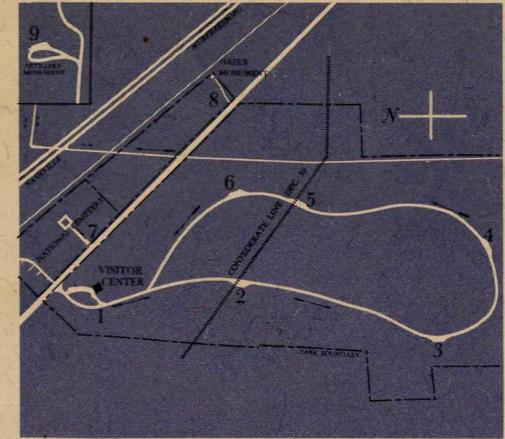


**ABOUT YOUR VISIT** The National Battlefield is 3 miles northwest of Murfreesboro and 30 miles southeast of Nashville on U.S. 41. Besides the scenes of the major attacks, the battlefield includes a National Cemetery with about 6,100 burials, all of them Union. The park is open daily from 8 a.m. to 4:45 p.m. Organized groups may make special arrangements with the superintendent for guided tours. **ADMINISTRATION** Stones River National Battlefield is administered by the National Park Service, U.S. Department of the Interior. A superintendent, whose address is Box 1039, Murfreesboro, Tenn. 37130, is in immediate charge. **THE DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR**—the Nation's principal resource agency—works to assure that our expendable resources are conserved, that our renewable resources are managed to produce optimum benefits, and that all resources contribute to the progress and prosperity of the United States, now and in the future.

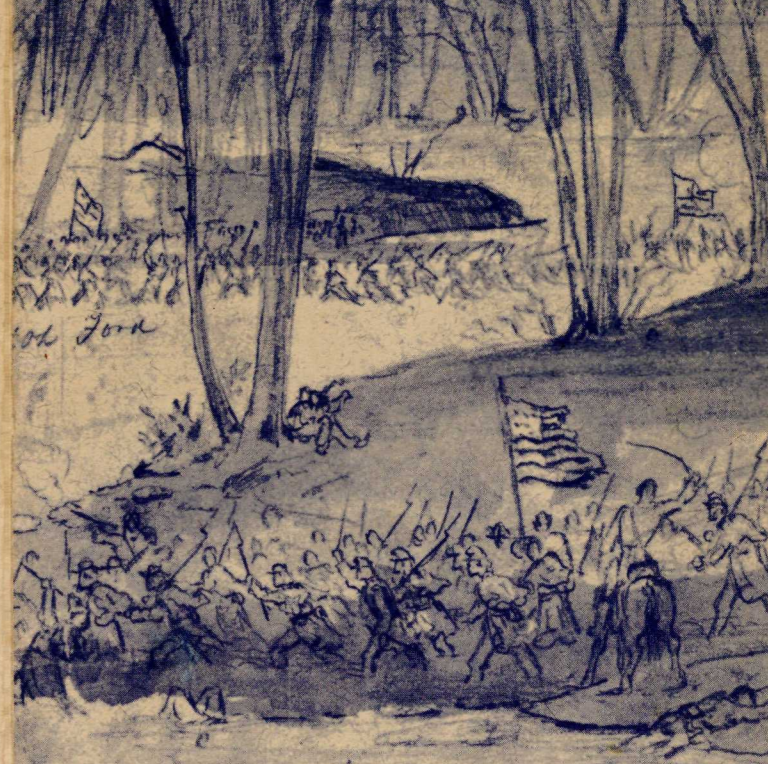
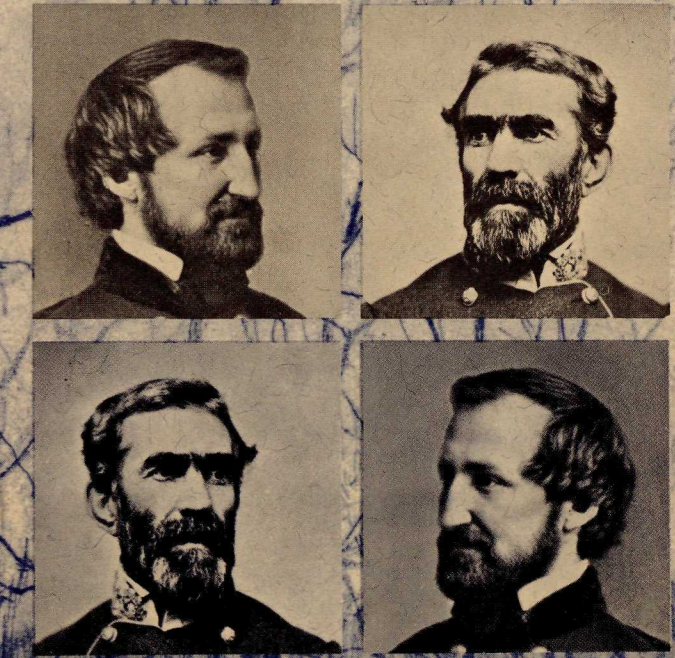
**A TOUR OF THE BATTLEFIELD**

Follow the markers for a tour of important points during the battle of Stones River.

- 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, now sprang into action on this rise. Their charges of cannister and 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 plans to assault the Confederate right and rush reserves to this sector. 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 the dense woods and rough limestone outcroppings posed obstacles, and many pieces could never 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 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 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 battleline 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 win 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 are unknown.
- 8. STRUGGLE FOR THE ROUND FOREST.** This was the only Union position to hold throughout the first day of 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 hard-driving Confederates. Union batteries, firing from the rise above the river ford, broke the assault with hails of shot, shell, and cannister. Some 1,800 Confederates were killed or wounded in less than an hour in this final action of the battle.



**STONES RIVER**



U.S. DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR National Park Service



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