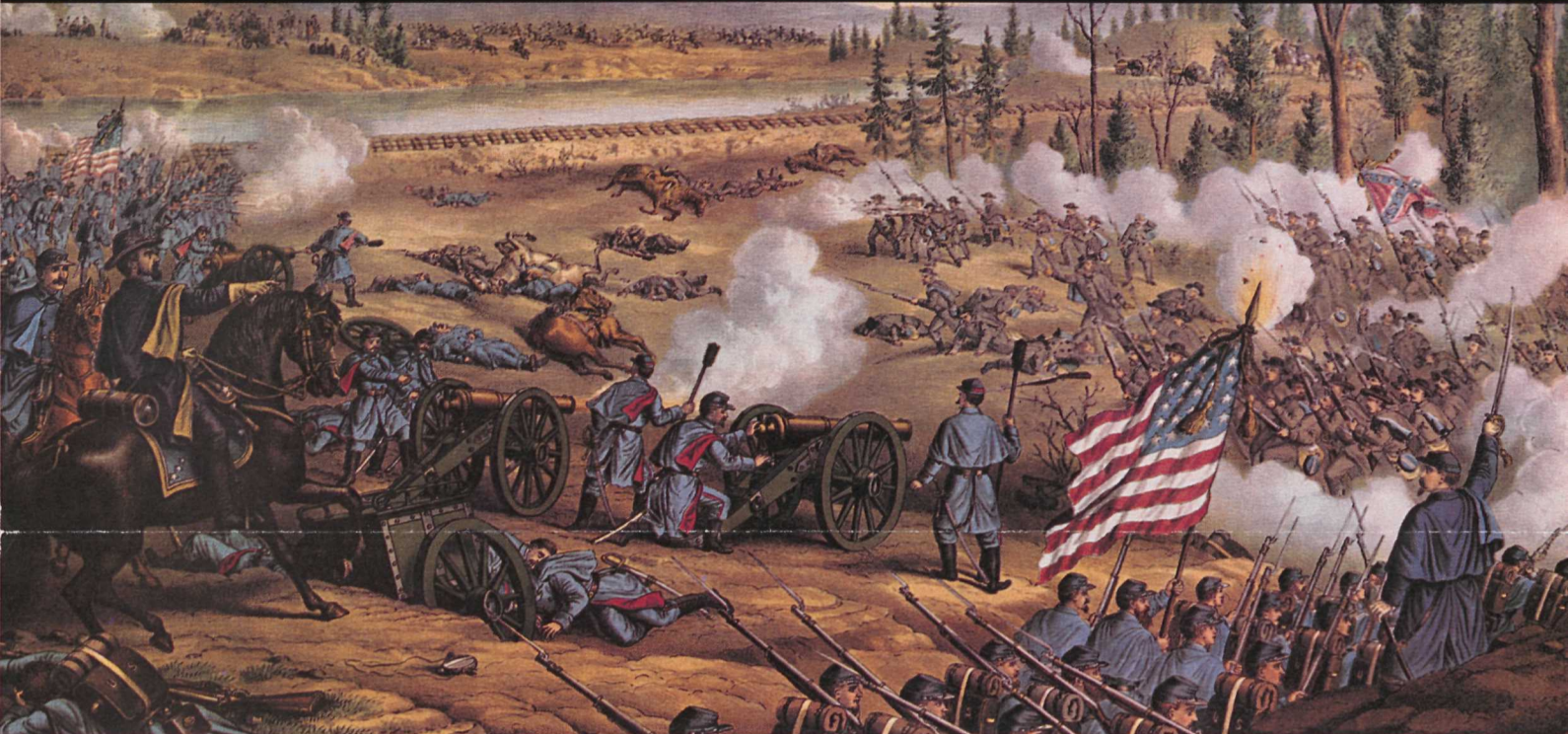


Stones River

National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior



National Battlefield
Tennessee



From "Battle of Stone River near Murfreesborough, Tenn.," by Kurz & Allison, 1891.

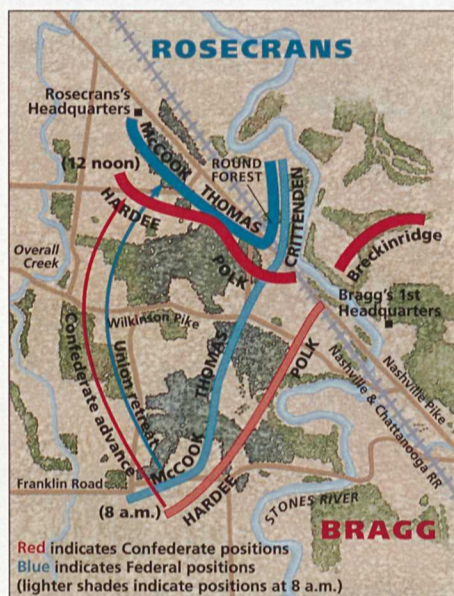
NPS

From the beginning of the Civil War, the strategy of the Union armies operating west of the Appalachian Mountains centered on two major objectives: (1) gaining control of the Mississippi River and (2) driving a wedge through the Confederacy along the railroads running southeastward through Tennessee and Georgia. By the end of 1862, only the Confederate strongholds of Vicksburg, Miss., and Port Hudson, La., thwarted the first goal. The second, of which the Battle of Stones River was a major step, would cost more time and more blood.

In the winter and spring of 1862, Federal troops advanced into Tennessee, capturing Forts Henry and Donelson on the Tennessee and Cumberland rivers and driving the Confederates from the field at Shiloh. By autumn Union armies occupied the western half of the state, including Nashville, the capital. In October, Confederate forces under Gen. Braxton

Bragg retreated from Kentucky after the Battle of Perryville ended hopes of bringing that state into the Confederacy and went into winter quarters at Murfreesboro. Union Maj. Gen. William S. Rosecrans's 14th Army Corps (soon to be renamed the Army of the Cumberland) followed as far as Nashville, 30 miles to the northwest.

On December 26, Rosecrans left Nashville with 43,000 men, intending to sweep aside Bragg's 38,000-man Army of Tennessee and drive on to Chattanooga, 125 miles farther southeast. Four days later the Federal army reached Murfreesboro and encamped within half a mile of Bragg's troops, drawn up northwest of town astride the main road and rail line. Ironically, both commanders planned to attack the other's right flank the next morning with similar goals in mind: Bragg's to drive the Union forces into the northern loop of Stones River; Rosecrans's to isolate the Confederates from their base.



The Battle, December 31, 1862

The Confederates seized the advantage by striking first. At dawn two of Lt. Gen. William J. Hardee's divisions, supported by divisions of Lt. Gen. Leonidas Polk, furiously assaulted the Union right wing under Maj. Gen. Alexander M. McCook. By 10 a.m. the Southerners had driven it and part of the center back through the surrounding cedar woods almost to the Nashville Pike. Only desperate and stubborn fighting by units under Brig. Gen. Philip H. Sheridan and Brig. Gen. James S. Negley prevented a Union rout.

In a desperate attempt to reinforce his right and center and stem the Confederate onslaught, Rosecrans rushed fresh troops from Maj. Gen. Thomas Crittenden's left wing into position along the Nashville Pike and the Nashville & Chattanooga Railroad. Told by "Old Rosy" to "contest every inch of ground," the Union infantry and artillery beat back one Confederate attack after another, inflicting very heavy casualties. Some of the hard-

est fighting took place in the area known as the Round Forest, near the present-day Hazen Monument, and at the junction of McFadden's (now Van Cleve) Lane and the Nashville Pike. At times, the noise was so intense that soldiers paused to stuff their ears with cotton.

Bragg tried to revive his faltering offensive by sending Maj. Gen. John C. Breckinridge's brigades, which so far had taken no part in the fighting, against the Union center. Had Breckinridge executed his orders at the battle's critical point—just before noon—his attack might have crumpled the Union line along the pike and railroad. But his troops arrived too late and in such piecemeal fashion that several Ohio, Indiana, and Illinois regiments, their ammunition gone, were able to beat off the attacks with rifle butts and bayonets. That night, after the day's battle sputtered to a close, no one celebrated New Year's Eve. The armies remained in position the next day, but there was little fighting.

The Battle, January 2, 1863

Bragg, confident that Rosecrans would withdraw, was surprised to find the Federals not only still on the field but on the east side of Stones River occupying a hill that threatened his army's right flank. To remove this threat, Bragg ordered Breckinridge's five brigades, totaling 4,500 men, to seize the high ground and drive the enemy back across the river. The assault began about an hour before dusk and, despite a cold, driving rain, carried the crest after overcoming some initial resistance. The outnumbered Union soldiers fled in headlong retreat down the back slope to a shallow river crossing known as McFadden's Ford. There the pursuing Confederates encountered a deadly surprise.

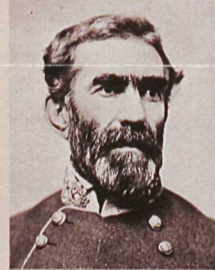
When the Southerners were first forming for their attack, General Crittenden ordered his chief of artillery, Capt. John E. Mendenhall, to provide support for the Union troops across the river. Within half an hour, Mendenhall assembled 58 guns—45 on the heights

about 100 yards west of McFadden's Ford, the rest in two batteries to the southwest—and trained them on the ground across which the Confederates would come. As Breckinridge's soldiers came into range, the Federal gunners opened fire. In minutes, 1,800 Confederates were killed or wounded; the rest withdrew, as Union troops spearheaded by men from Negley's division crossed the river and reclaimed the heights. Mendenhall's concentrated artillery fire had turned a dashing charge into a grim retreat.

Tactically indecisive, the Battle of Stones River cost 13,249 Federal casualties and 10,266 Confederate. After Bragg withdrew from Murfreesboro, Rosecrans claimed victory, providing a much-needed boost to northern morale following the disastrous Union defeat at Fredericksburg, Va., just three weeks before. President Abraham Lincoln thanked Rosecrans and his soldiers for their "skill, endurance, and dauntless courage."



Confederate Commanders



Braxton Bragg was one of the Confederacy's most controversial generals, what a modern historian has called "a puzzling mixture of competence and ineptness." An 1837 West Point graduate, he fought in the Second Seminole War and gained distinction in the Mexican War as an artillery officer under Zachary Taylor. After Stones River, political and military officials roundly criticized him for withdrawing the Army of Tennessee from Murfreesboro. Eight months later, he would meet Rosecrans again, at Chickamauga. This time Bragg came out the winner.



William J. Hardee was Bragg's senior corps commander. After graduating from West Point in 1838, he took part in the Second Seminole War and served gallantly in the Mexican War. In 1855 he wrote *Rifle and Light Infantry Tactics*, a system of drill

used by both Union and Confederate armies during the war. Hardee performed creditably at the battles of Shiloh and Perryville. Before and after Stones River, he questioned Bragg's competence and urged his removal from command.



Leonidas Polk graduated from West Point in 1827 but resigned his commission to enter the Episcopal ministry. Although Bishop of Louisiana when the Civil War began, he accepted a commission as major general in the Confederate army from his

friend, President Jefferson Davis. After commanding a corps at Shiloh, he served as Bragg's second in command at Perryville, which led to his promotion to lieutenant general. He was among those calling for Bragg's ouster, especially after Stones River.

Union Commanders



William S. Rosecrans possessed "a somewhat impulsive excitable personality," whose independent and candid nature often irritated his superiors. After his graduation from West Point in 1838, he served in the Engineer Corps until 1854, when he went into private business. He led a brigade at Rich Mountain during McClellan's 1861 western Virginia campaign. Before taking over the 14th Army Corps from Gen. Don Carlos Buell in October 1862, he commanded the Army of the Mississippi. He was very popular with his troops, who affectionately called him "Old Rosy."



Thomas L. Crittenden was the son of a former Kentucky senator and the brother of a Confederate general. Profane and egotistical, this former lawyer and businessman had had no meaningful military experience before the Civil War, although he had

served as an aide on Gen. Zachary Taylor's staff during the Mexican War. In September 1861 he was commissioned a brigadier general in the Union army. He was promoted to major general for his performance as a division commander at the Battle of Shiloh.



Alexander M. McCook, one of the 14 famous "Fighting McCooks" of Ohio, was an 1852 West Point graduate whose performance at First Manassas and Shiloh earned him promotion to major general. Many, however, doubted his ability to handle large

bodies of troops, especially after Perryville. Col. John Beatty, one of Thomas's brigade commanders, called him a "chucklehead," while a reporter dubbed him "an overgrown school boy." Despite his good nature, jovial attitude, he was not popular.



George H. Thomas was Rosecrans's most competent corps commander. An 1840 West Point graduate, he was attached to Capt. Braxton Bragg's light artillery battery in Texas and during the Mexican War. After the Civil War began, he served briefly in

the Shenandoah Valley and early in 1862 defeated a Confederate force under Thomas L. Crittenden's brother at Mill Springs, Ky. After Shiloh, he took part in the siege of Corinth and served throughout the campaign against Bragg in Kentucky.

Below: Union troops crossing Stones River, January 2, 1863. From a lithograph by A. E. Mathews. All illustrations Library of Congress, except cover and maps.



Touring the Battlefield

Stones River National Battlefield encompasses only a small part of the original battlefield. The major points of interest can be reached on the following self-guiding auto tour. Each stop is identified by a numbered marker. Short trails and exhibits explain the events at each site. Use caution when crossing heavily traveled highways.

Before beginning your tour, walk to the back of the visitor center and look across the field where Union and Confederate soldiers fought. The Union troops made their final stand here, defending the Nashville Turnpike and the railroad, both vital lines of supply. The scene today differs little from what it was in 1862. The railroad and turnpike are still in the same location, and farm fields are still planted between cedar thickets. With a little imagination, you should be able to conjure up in your mind's eye a picture of two opposing armies totaling 81,000 men battling for control of Middle Tennessee in one of the bloodiest encounters of the Civil War.

1 The Eve of Battle On December 30, after Rosecrans's Union army arrived at Murfreesboro, troops from Maj. Gen. George H. Thomas's corps occupied this area along McFadden's (now Van Cleve) Lane. The day was spent getting into position and skirmishing with the Confederates to the east, beyond the lane. That night, despite a steady drizzle and freezing temperatures, campfires were forbidden in order to conceal the positions of the opposing forces. Soldiers from both sides spent a cold, damp night wrapped in their blankets. They knew that a major battle was imminent. For many of those who slept that night, it would be their last.



The Slaughter Pen

2 The Slaughter Pen Near here the men of Sheridan's and Negley's divisions warded off several determined Confederate assaults. In an attempt to crack the Union line, the Confederates wheeled up artillery to within 200 yards of Sheridan's position, but attack after attack still failed, with costly losses to both sides. Although Sheridan finally had to abandon his position, his delaying action during the withdrawal gave Union troops time to form a new line along the Nashville Pike.

3 The Cotton Field Union troops retreating from the south on December 31 established a last line of defense along the railroad and turnpike. As pursuing Confederates emerged from the woods and entered the cotton field they were greeted by "three lines of battle with Napoleon guns [12-pounder smooth-bore cannons] between the regiments." A Tennessean recalled that "the Nashville and Chattanooga Railroad, running parallel to our lines, was plainly visible . . . while in front of it a long line of blue coats was stretched." The Confederate attacks were stopped due to the lack of artillery support. The fighting died down after sunset and

both sides dug in for the night. Although units of Rosecrans's army had been pushed back three miles, the Confederates had failed to capture its lifeline: the Nashville Pike.

4 Defense of the Nashville Pike Thousands of retreating Union troops burst from the cedars located across the field in front of these cannon and were followed closely by victory-confident Confederates. The six-gun Chicago Board of Trade Battery, so called because the Board of Trade provided the money to establish and equip it, sprang into action on this rise. Their charges of canister forced the Confederates to withdraw to the cedars. A second battery joined in on the left, and the combined fire broke up the Confederate attack.



The Hazen Monument

5 Fight 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 on the other side of the Nashville Pike and was broken up by Union artillery. An hour later another attack 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 the nation's oldest intact Civil War memorial.

6 McFadden's Ford As Union soldiers crouched here behind breastworks of stone and rail, a battered advance division fled back across the river pursued by Breckinridge's hard-driving Confederate brigades. Mendenhall's massed Union batteries, firing from the rise above McFadden's Ford, halted Breckinridge's pursuit with shot, shell, and canister. Some 1,800 Confederates were killed or wounded in less than an hour in this the battle's final action.



Stones River National Cemetery

Stones River National Cemetery After the battle, most of the dead were buried on the field. When the national cemetery was established in 1865, the Army reburied the Union dead from this and other battles here. Of the more than 6,100 Union burials, 2,562 were not identified. Most of the Confederate dead were taken to their home towns or the nearest southern community. Some, however, were buried in a mass grave south of town and later reinterred in another mass grave in Evergreen Cemetery in Murfreesboro. The national cemetery is landscaped according to an 1892 plan.



Curtain Wall No. 2 and traverse, Fortress Rosecrans

Fortress Rosecrans The outcome of Stones River gave the Lincoln administration a psychological boost at a time when Federal armies had suffered stinging defeats in Virginia and Mississippi. Rosecrans planned to follow up his success by pressing the Confederates south to Chattanooga. Because his army was far from its base at Louisville, he ordered his soldiers to build a depot, along with fortifications to defend it, at Murfreesboro to distribute arms, food, and equipment to the troops. From January through June 1863, they labored to complete the 200-acre earthen fort, which was named Fortress Rosecrans. It was the largest enclosed earthen fortification built during the Civil War.

Thanks to Fortress Rosecrans, the Union army was able to launch a successful attack on the Confederate rail center in Chattanooga and complete the wedge through the Confederacy along the transportation routes running southeastward through Tennessee. It was abandoned in April 1866, a year after the Civil War ended. Today Lunettes Palmer and Thomas and Curtain Wall No. 2 are among all that remain of the original 14,000 feet of earthworks. Of the original four interior forts, only Redoubt Brannan survives.

About Your Visit

Stones River National Battlefield is open daily from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. It is closed December 25. The visitor center contains an audiovisual program and a museum to help orient you to the battle. The cannon in the lobby, a 3.8-inch James rifle, was manned by the 4th Indiana Battery of Sheridan's division that helped to stem the Confederate attack on December 31. The visitor center and restrooms are accessible to visitors with disabilities. A captioned version of the audiovisual orientation program and information about paved trails are available on request. An audio tour is also available. Lunettes Palmer and Thomas and Curtain Wall No. 2 can be seen in Old Fort Park during daylight hours. Redoubt Brannan is on West College Street. Stones River and Lytle Creek greenways offer places for recreational activities like biking and skating and opportunities to view significant battle sites. Relic hunting and climbing on earthworks are prohibited.

Safety Tips Watch for exposed roots, uneven trails, poison ivy, ticks, and slippery rocks when walking in the park. It is unsafe to climb or sit on cannons.

For More Information

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www.nps.gov/stri

For information on other National Park Service areas: www.nps.gov

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