

★ THE U.S. ARMY CAMPAIGNS OF THE CIVIL WAR ★

THE CIVIL WAR IN THE WEST

1863



Cover: *Battle of Mission [Missionary] Ridge, Nov. 25th, 1863, by Cosack & Co.*
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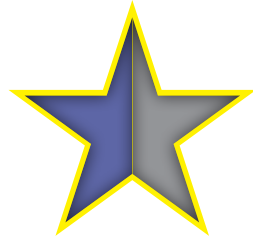
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by
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INTRODUCTION

Although over one hundred fifty years have passed since the start of the American Civil War, that titanic conflict continues to matter. The forces unleashed by that war were immensely destructive because of the significant issues involved: the existence of the Union, the end of slavery, and the very future of the nation. The war remains our most contentious, and our bloodiest, with over six hundred thousand killed in the course of the four-year struggle.

Most civil wars do not spring up overnight, and the American Civil War was no exception. The seeds of the conflict were sown in the earliest days of the republic's founding, primarily over the existence of slavery and the slave trade. Although no conflict can begin without the conscious decisions of those engaged in the debates at that moment, in the end, there was simply no way to paper over the division of the country into two camps: one that was dominated by slavery and the other that sought first to limit its spread and then to abolish it. Our nation was indeed "half slave and half free," and that could not stand.

Regardless of the factors tearing the nation asunder, the soldiers on each side of the struggle went to war for personal reasons: looking for adventure, being caught up in the passions and emotions of their peers, believing in the Union, favoring states' rights, or even justifying the simple schoolyard dynamic of being convinced that they were "worth" three of the soldiers on the other side. Nor can we overlook the factor that some went to war to prove their manhood. This has been, and continues to be, a key dynamic in understanding combat and the profession of arms. Soldiers join for many reasons but often stay in the fight because of their comrades and because they do not want to seem like cowards. Sometimes issues of national impact shrink to nothing in the intensely personal world of cannon shell and minie ball.

Whatever the reasons, the struggle was long and costly and only culminated with the conquest of the rebellious Confederacy, the preservation of the Union, and the end of slavery. These

campaign pamphlets on the American Civil War, prepared in commemoration of our national sacrifices, seek to remember that war and honor those in the United States Army who died to preserve the Union and free the slaves as well as to tell the story of those American soldiers who fought for the Confederacy despite the inherently flawed nature of their cause. The Civil War was our greatest struggle and continues to deserve our deep study and contemplation.

CHARLES R. BOWERY JR.
Executive Director



THE CIVIL WAR IN THE WEST 1863

Strategic Setting

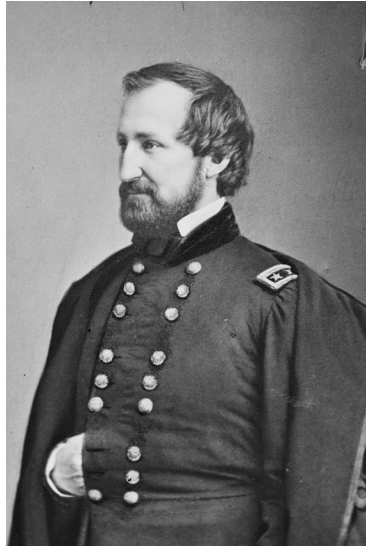
The campaign of 1863 in eastern Tennessee was primarily a struggle for the small city of Chattanooga, on the banks of the Tennessee River in the mountainous southeastern corner of the state. For most of the year, Union and Confederate forces maneuvered and fought for this key rail junction, and for the vital resources in the region that surrounded it, including food, horses, copper, and niter. Union forces also intended to cut rebel lines of communication between Virginia and the western states, and to block provisions from being transported to Confederate forces in the Eastern Theater. Moreover, whichever side had possession of Chattanooga and its rail lines controlled access to Atlanta, Georgia, the heart of the South's industrial production. Federal forces also sought to control eastern Tennessee, a stronghold of Southern Unionism, which U.S. President Abraham Lincoln had long sought to liberate.

The commander of the Federal Army of the Cumberland since October 1862 was 43-year-old Maj. Gen. William S. Rosecrans, a West Point graduate from Ohio. Having resigned

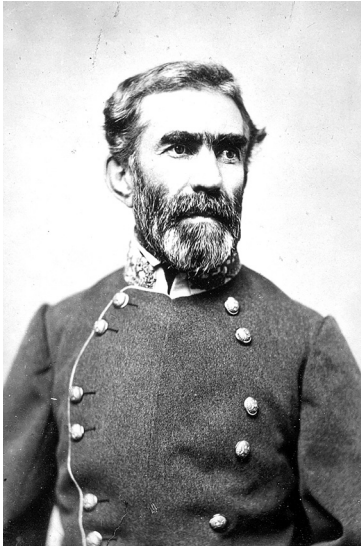
his commission in 1854 for employment as a civil engineer and architect, he returned to arms at the outbreak of the Civil War and became a major general of volunteers in March 1862. Profane and hot tempered, Rosecrans was a hard worker, whose active leadership style frequently led to exhaustion. He was by nature nervous and impatient, and often failed to delegate responsibilities. The army's rank and file affectionately dubbed him "Old Rosy."

In late December 1862, Rosecrans moved the Army of the Cumberland southeast from Nashville to Murfreesboro, the start of his campaign to capture Chattanooga. At Murfreesboro, his forces were attacked by the Confederate Army of Tennessee under General Braxton Bragg on 31 December. The Southerners initially were successful in driving back the Union right flank along the banks of Stones River, but Rosecrans did not retreat. After a relatively quiet New Year's Day 1863, the Army of the Cumberland repulsed a second rebel assault and counterattacked Bragg's troops on 2 January. The Confederates withdrew from the field late the next day to Shelbyville, about thirty miles southeast of Murfreesboro, but Rosecrans did not pursue them. Although Rosecrans claimed a victory due to Bragg's retreat, Union and Confederate losses were heavy: each side suffered about thirteen thousand casualties. Rosecrans chose to remain at Murfreesboro to rest and refit his battered army despite pressure from Lincoln and the Federal War Department to follow up his victory.

As the Army of the Cumberland settled into its winter encampment around Murfreesboro, the morale of Rosecrans' soldiers was excellent. Rosecrans had played a pivotal and inspiring role in the recent campaign, and had earned the respect of most of his officers. His army consisted of four infantry corps



General Rosecrans
(Library of Congress)



General Bragg
(Library of Congress)

and one cavalry corps. Maj. Gen. George H. Thomas, a West Point graduate from Virginia, led XIV Corps, and was a steady and reliable officer, although known for being slow and deliberate in moving his troops. The abilities of the army's other corps commanders, however, were questionable. Maj. Gen. Alexander M. McCook from Ohio commanded XX Corps. Although a West Point graduate, he had performed poorly at the recent Battle of Stones River and at the Battle of Perryville, Kentucky, in October 1862. At the head of XXI Corps was Maj. Gen. Thomas L. Crittenden, a political general from Kentucky with dubious military talents. Maj. Gen. Gordon Granger

commanded the army's Reserve Corps of three divisions. Granger, a West Point graduate and veteran of several Mexican War battles, was known for being outspoken and gruff, which alienated him from many fellow officers. Finally, Maj. Gen. David S. Stanley, another West Point graduate from Ohio, led the twelve thousand Union cavalymen, divided into two divisions. All told, Rosecrans had some sixty-nine thousand troops and thirty-three batteries of artillery in his field force by the late spring.

Logistics remained the principal vulnerability for Rosecrans' army. Equipment and rations were adequate as long as communications were intact, but the Cumberland River in central Tennessee was unreliable during low-water periods, and the Nashville and Chattanooga Railroad, along which the Union troops would have to advance, was subject to disruption by rebel raiders. Moreover, any approach to Chattanooga would require the Federals to traverse several ranges of rugged hills and mountains in an area of limited supplies. Additionally, Rosecrans' cavalry units were outnumbered and of poorer quality than Bragg's Southern horsemen. With difficult supply problems and



General Thomas
(Library of Congress)

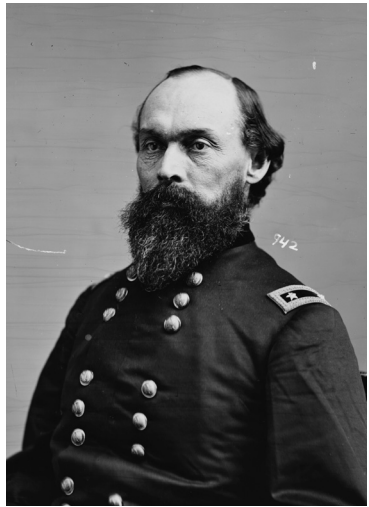


General McCook
(Library of Congress)

General Crittenden
(Library of Congress)



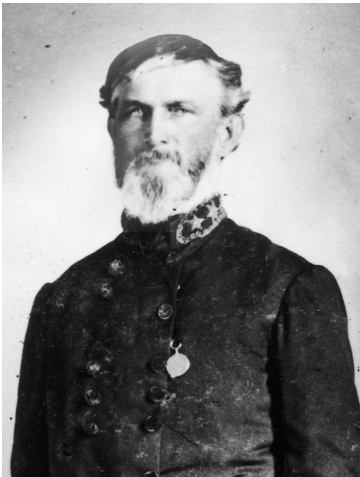
General Granger
(Library of Congress)



inadequate reconnaissance capabilities, Rosecrans was reluctant to begin operations against Bragg's rebel forces between Murfreesboro and Chattanooga. He bombarded Washington with requests for reinforcements and provisions, without which he claimed he could not advance.

Southeast of Murfreesboro behind a long wooded ridge called the Highland Rim was the Confederate Army of Tennessee, commanded by General Bragg. These fifty thousand rebels had won a reputation for long marches and hard fighting, notably at the 1862 Battles of Shiloh and Perryville, as well as the recent engagement at Murfreesboro. The Confederate troops were "in a high state of efficiency, well clad and fed, and marked with every evidence of good discipline, high courage, and capacity for endurance," according to a report. The army's leadership was a different matter. Bragg was an 1837 West Point graduate, had fought in the Mexican War with distinction, and remained in the U.S. Army until 1856. Despite his extensive military experience, he was an argumentative and abrasive officer who was rarely on good terms with his subordinates. He was often reluctant to take risks and had a reputation for missing opportunities to crush his enemies on the battlefield. After setbacks, he usually blamed

General Polk
(Valentine Richmond
History Center)



his officers, which led to deep resentments among the rebel army's leaders and hindered its performance on campaign. Although Bragg was considered a talented administrator, many Southerners believed he remained in command only because of his personal friendship with Confederate President Jefferson Davis.

Bragg's force was divided into two corps of infantry, under Lt. Gen. Leonidas Polk, bishop of the Episcopal Diocese of Louisiana, and Lt. Gen. William J. Hardee, a West Point graduate and Mexican War veteran from Georgia. Bragg's cavalry force consisted

of a corps led by Maj. Gen. Joseph Wheeler and an additional division under Brig. Gen. Nathan Bedford Forrest.

Operations

Early in 1863, the Army of Tennessee was encamped north of Tullahoma, Tennessee, about thirty-five miles from Rosecrans' position. Bragg deployed his troops in a wide arc north of the town, astride the Nashville and Chattanooga Railroad, which he presumed Rosecrans would use to advance as he moved toward Chattanooga. The Confederate commander posted Polk's corps in strong defensive works on the left (west) of the Confederate line around Shelbyville and Hardee's corps on the right (east) at Wartrace. Bragg placed a cavalry screen in front of his main army, which blocked the key gaps in the Highland Rim through which Rosecrans would have to pass as he advanced. Bragg also extended his mounted units on both flanks to detect any Federal advances.

General Rosecrans kept his army at Murfreesboro for almost six months after his victory there. President Lincoln, Secretary of War Edwin M. Stanton, and the general in chief of all Union armies, Maj. Gen. Henry W. Halleck, implored him to resume operations against Bragg. They feared that while Rosecrans remained idle in Tennessee, the Confederates would move troops from Bragg's army to Mississippi in an attempt to relieve the pressure that Union Maj. Gen. Ulysses S. Grant was applying against the rebel stronghold at Vicksburg, Mississippi. Frustration with Rosecrans' failure to move led Halleck to threaten to relieve him if he did not promptly advance. Both armies spent considerable time foraging and conducting cavalry raids in the first half of 1863, which caused Rosecrans some concern for his supply line, but not enough to induce him to begin marching toward the enemy.

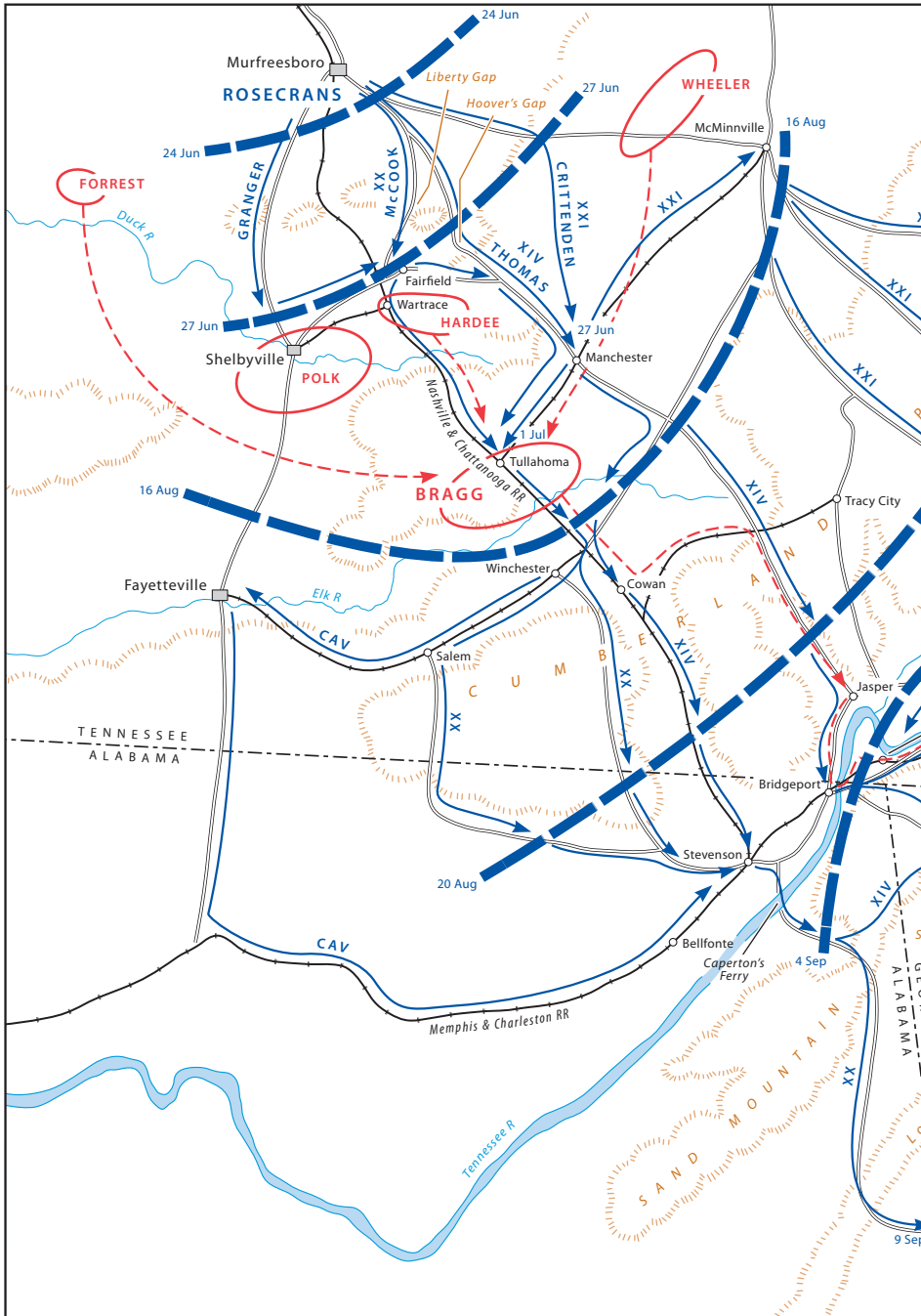
THE TULLAHOMA CAMPAIGN

Throughout the spring of 1863, authorities in Washington increased their pressure on Rosecrans to begin his campaign against Bragg. In June, Halleck telegraphed Rosecrans that if he was unwilling to move, some of his troops would be sent to Mississippi to reinforce Grant. Rosecrans responded that advancing the Army of the Cumberland would do nothing to prevent the Confederates from sending troops to Vicksburg,

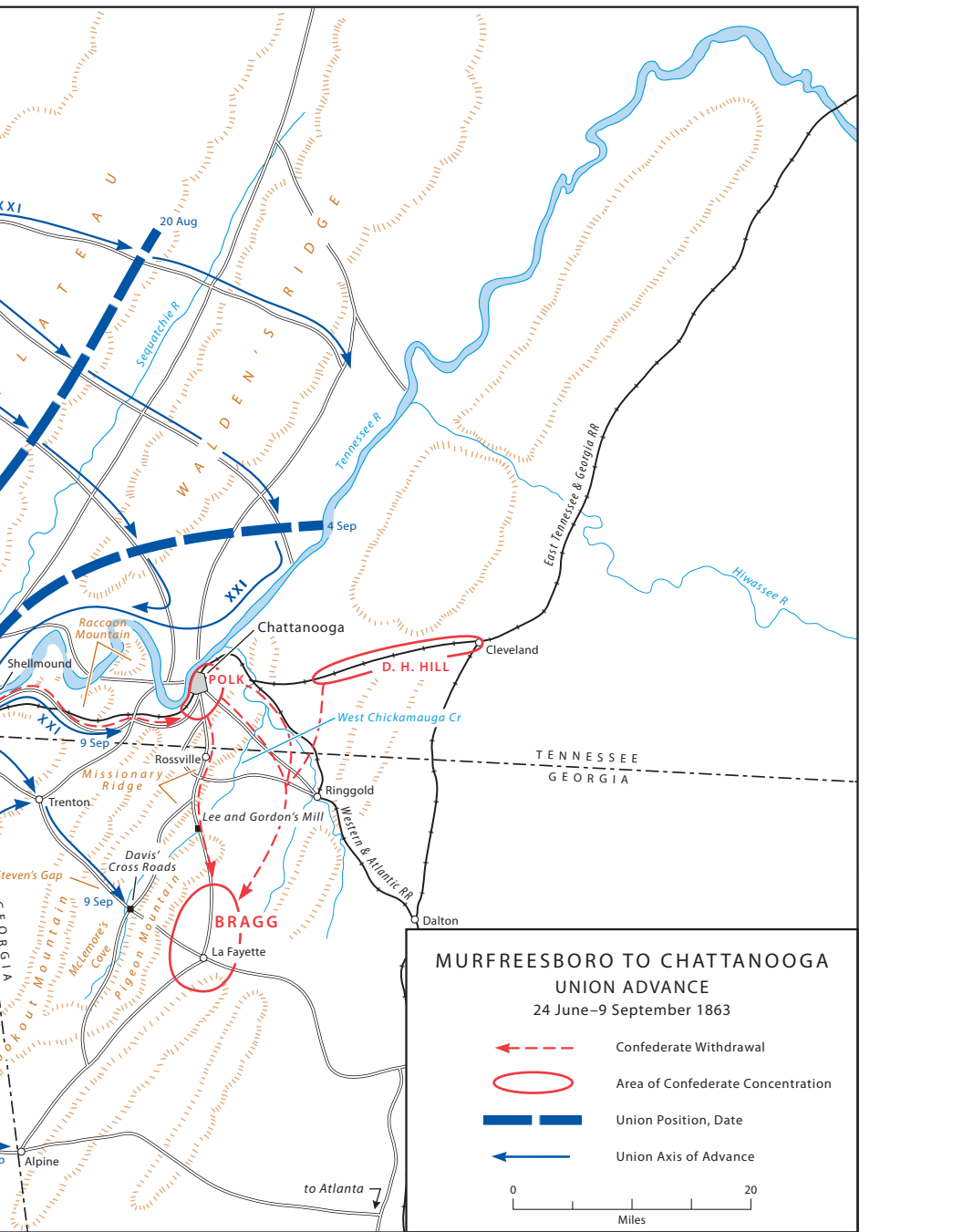
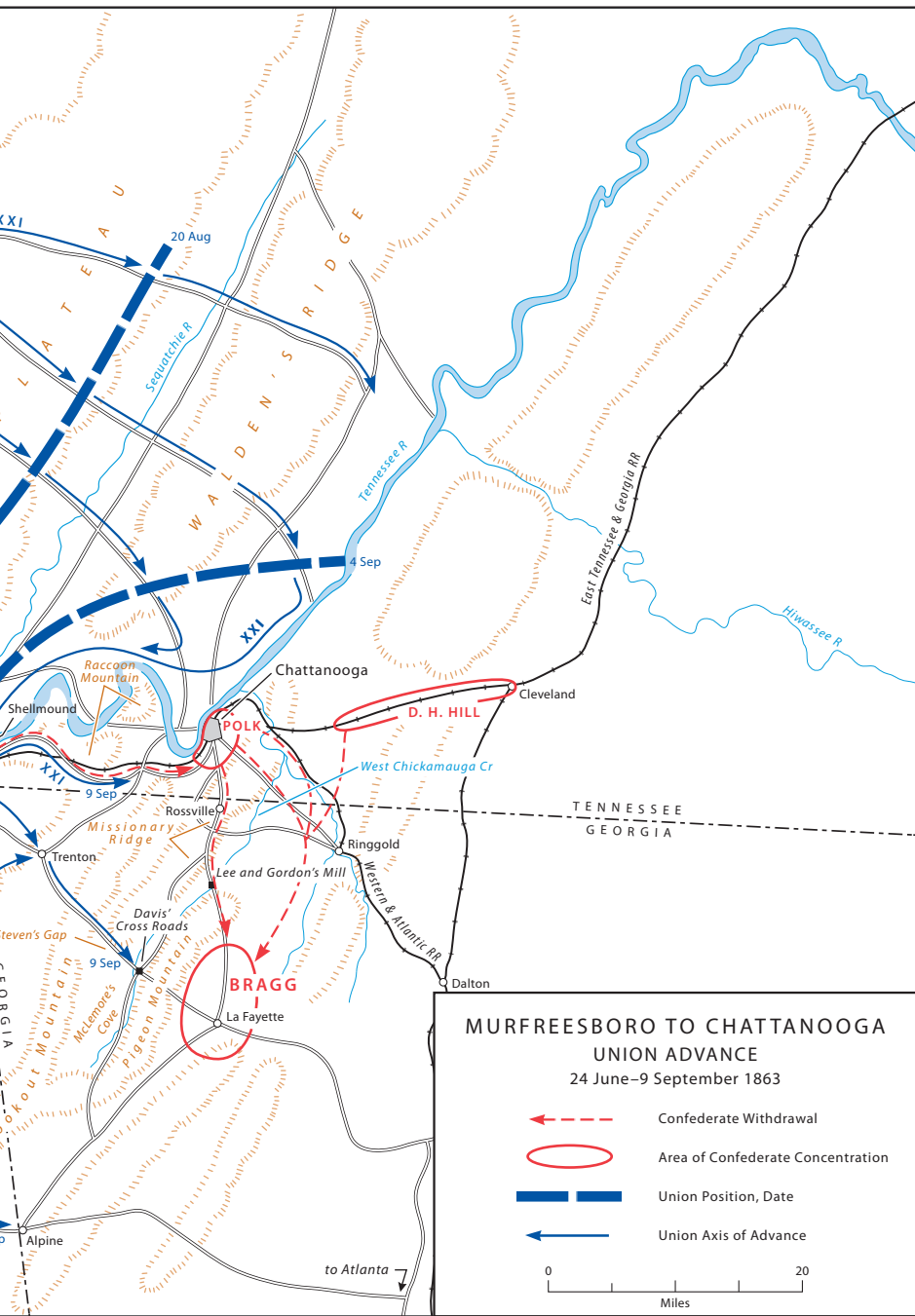
and that an immediate advance was unwarranted. Most of his senior generals supported Rosecrans' position and counseled against moving south. The only dissenter was his newly assigned chief of staff, Brig. Gen. James A. Garfield, who recommended an immediate advance. Under continued pressure from the War Department, Rosecrans finally ordered the Army of the Cumberland to advance on the morning of 24 June 1863 (*Map 1*). Heavy rains impeded the movement of men, horses, and wagons for the next two weeks.

Rosecrans planned to maneuver Bragg out of his prepared defenses in front of Tullahoma by turning the rebels' right (east) flank, rather than attacking the enemy's positions head-on. He intended to have Granger's Reserve Corps and a strong force of cavalry move west to attract Bragg's attention near Shelbyville on the rebel's left flank, while the rest of the Union forces moved to the east. Thomas' XIV Corps would march southeast on the Manchester Pike to threaten Hardee's right flank, as McCook's XX Corps would advance directly against Hardee's position around Wartrace. Rosecrans directed Crittenden's XXI Corps troops to head east and southeast toward Manchester and McMinville, which would put them in Bragg's rear and presumably force the Confederate army to retreat. In order to guard his supply lines and depots at Nashville and Murfreesboro, part of Granger's reserve troops would remain behind.

Rosecrans' plan of maneuver worked well despite the heavy rains and muddy roads. Critical to the plan was the quick capture of Hoover's Gap, through which passed the Manchester Pike. A brigade of mounted infantry from XIV Corps under Col. John T. Wilder, armed with privately purchased Spencer repeating rifles, captured the gap and held it against several rebel assaults. Six miles to the west at Liberty Gap, McCook's XX Corps advanced through hilly terrain and battled Hardee's troops north of Wartrace. Although Federal troops reached Manchester on 27 June, Confederate cavalry scouts failed to advise Bragg of the Union movement toward his rear. Moreover, mistrust and antagonisms among the general officers of the Army of Tennessee led to little direct communication about strategy, and neither Polk nor Hardee had a firm understanding of Bragg's plans. After Polk and Hardee objected to orders to attack the advancing Federals, Bragg withdrew his forces south across the Duck River to Tullahoma on 27 June.



MAP 1



While Bragg pulled his forces back, Rosecrans concentrated XIV and XX Corps at Manchester, twelve miles to the northeast. This maneuver put the Federals closer to Chattanooga than the rebels. Polk advised retreating to save the army. Hardee refused to recommend a withdrawal, but neither did he propose to stay and fight. On 30 June, Bragg evacuated Tullahoma and retired across the Elk River, which allowed Rosecrans to occupy that town without a fight the next day. Bragg, exhausted physically and emotionally, now had his Army of Tennessee in strong positions behind the Elk River, but was persuaded by Hardee and Polk to retreat farther south to Cowan, along the Nashville and Chattanooga Railroad. Still dissatisfied with his army's position on 3 July, Bragg ordered a continuation of the rebel retreat to Chattanooga. Rosecrans did not vigorously press Bragg's troops as he retreated across the rugged Cumberland Plateau, which allowed the Confederates to cross the Tennessee River on 4 July at Bridgeport, Alabama, and concentrate near Chattanooga by 7 July. In a critical mistake, Bragg failed to ensure the destruction of the important railroad tunnel at Cowan, which would have made the Union army's supply operations more difficult.

With the loss of fewer than six hundred soldiers, Rosecrans had forced Bragg's Confederates out of middle Tennessee and pushed the rebels into a corner at Chattanooga. Rosecrans, however, failed to receive the acclaim he expected and that he thought his troops deserved. News of the Tullahoma campaign was overshadowed by the Battle of Gettysburg, Pennsylvania (1–3 July), and the Confederate surrender at Vicksburg (4 July). To Washington authorities, the Army of the Cumberland's recent operations seemed indecisive. Secretary of War Stanton telegraphed Rosecrans, "Lee's Army overthrown; Grant victorious. You and your noble army now have a chance to give the finishing blow to the rebellion. Will you neglect the chance?" Rosecrans indignantly responded, "I beg in behalf of this army that the War Department may not overlook so great an event [capturing middle Tennessee] because it is not written in letters of blood."

MOVING INTO GEORGIA

After his successful campaign of maneuver, Rosecrans faced additional difficulties. His army's supply lines needed extensive rebuilding to support any movement into the mountainous, barren territory surrounding Chattanooga. Rather than attack Bragg's

army at Chattanooga, Rosecrans intended to swing around the city to threaten the Confederate supply lines south and east of the rebel defenses. This maneuver would trap Bragg in the city, forcing the rebels either to abandon Chattanooga or to fight a battle that the Union commander was confident he could win.

Because of the poor roads and scarce supplies in eastern Tennessee, Union forces would have to advance from their camps at Winchester, Manchester, and McMinnville on a wide front. In order to hold Bragg near the city while the rest of the Army of the Cumberland crossed the Tennessee River downstream in northeastern Alabama, Rosecrans planned a feint with part of his command upriver from Chattanooga. He ordered Crittenden's XXI Corps to march over the Cumberland Mountains north of the city beginning on 16 August and to simulate preparations for a crossing of the Tennessee River in several places. Thomas' XIV Corps would march southeast and cross the Tennessee River near Stevenson, Alabama, while XX Corps under McCook and the Cavalry Corps led by Stanley would make a wide arc to the south, coming up the north bank of the Tennessee River to make their crossing near Stevenson. Once Thomas and McCook crossed the river, Crittenden's troops would then make their crossing near Chattanooga. Rosecrans' army would then advance over several high ridges into northern Georgia to seize the rail lines and cut off Bragg from his supplies. While these maneuvers would allow the three army corps to advance on separate roads and ease the supply problems, these movements also would separate them widely in mountainous terrain close to the enemy and make it difficult for them to support one another in case of trouble.

At Chattanooga, the fatigued rebel army attempted to regroup. President Davis asked Bragg if he could attack Rosecrans if reinforced by General Joseph E. Johnston's twenty-three thousand men in Mississippi, but Bragg preferred to remain on the defensive. Additionally, Bragg had to worry about Maj. Gen. Ambrose E. Burnside's slowly advancing Army of the Ohio, then threatening Knoxville, and the East Tennessee and Virginia Railroad to the north. Bragg worried that Burnside's troops would join Rosecrans' army for a combined attack on Chattanooga and his army's supply lines.

In late July, Maj. Gen. Simon B. Buckner's Department of East Tennessee was added to Bragg's overall command, which gave

Bragg an additional eighteen thousand troops but extended his responsibilities to Knoxville. It also added another subordinate to the list of those generals in his army who despised Bragg. However, Bragg must have been pleased when General Hardee transferred to Mississippi in mid-July, removing one of his harshest critics from the army. Bragg concentrated Polk's troops around Chattanooga, and stationed Hardee's old corps—now led by Lt. Gen. Daniel H. Hill—between the city and Cleveland, to the east. Buckner's men and a division of the Army of Tennessee encamped along the Hiwassee River thirty-five miles to the north, and Bragg extended his cavalry to cover the army's flanks from northern Alabama to near Knoxville.

On 16 August, Rosecrans started moving his army to the Tennessee River west and southwest of Chattanooga. Simultaneously he initiated XXI Corps' feint north of the city. On 21 August, several of Crittenden's brigades began creating the impression that rafts were being constructed for a river crossing upstream. On 21 August, a battery of Indiana artillery bombarded the city from across the river, surprising the rebels and the town's residents alike and destroying the Confederate pontoon train there. Bragg surmised that these Union movements upriver signaled Rosecrans' attempt to link his forces with those of Burnside near Knoxville.

On 29 August, with adequate supply depots established at Bridgeport and Stevenson, Rosecrans began crossing the Tennessee River by boat and pontoon bridges at Caperton's Ferry and Bridgeport, both in Alabama, and Shellmound and Battle Creek, in Tennessee. All elements of Rosecrans' army were safely across and moving south by 4 September, with little opposition from rebel forces. Crittenden's troops crossed the Tennessee at Shellmound, then marched east toward the city. To the south, XIV Corps moved across Sand Mountain to Trenton, Georgia. Farther south, McCook's soldiers crossed Sand and Lookout Mountains to Alpine, Georgia, supported by Stanley's cavalry brigades. Each column had to use rough roads across difficult mountainous terrain as the Army of the Cumberland pushed toward the Western and Atlantic Railroad, Bragg's main supply route.

Bragg finally recognized that the Union army's demonstrations north of Chattanooga were designed to deceive him and that Rosecrans' main thrust was to the south. On 7 September, he ordered the evacuation of the city, and the next day all of his



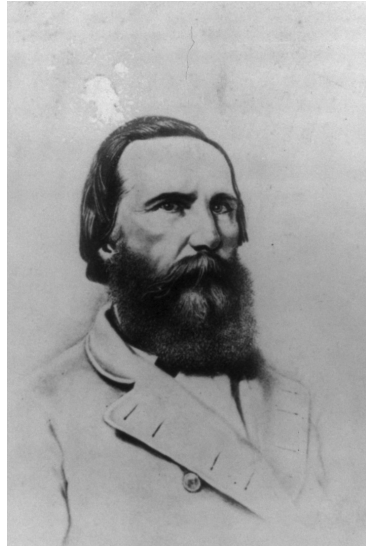
Pontoon bridge crossing, Tennessee River, 1863
(Library of Congress)

troops (including Buckner's corps) began moving toward La Fayette, Georgia, about twenty-five miles south of Chattanooga. Crittenden's troops occupied Chattanooga on 9 September without a fight, and Rosecrans telegraphed Halleck, "Chattanooga is ours without a struggle and East Tennessee is free." Rosecrans assumed that Bragg's entire force was in full retreat toward rebel supply points at Dalton and Ringgold, Georgia, and that the force could be destroyed while in flight. Rebel deserters attested to the desperate condition of the retreating Confederates. General Thomas warned Rosecrans against pursuing Bragg, since the advancing Union forces were spread too far apart to support each other quickly, but the triumphant Rosecrans ignored his advice.

In fact, far from being in flight, Bragg's rebel army halted east of Pigeon Mountain, near La Fayette. Bragg contemplated an attack on the advancing Federals, whom he had deceived by planting "deserters" with false stories of disorder within the southern ranks. The Army of Tennessee was also being reinforced. About eighty-five hundred troops in two divisions arrived from Mississippi in late August under Maj. Gen. William H. T. Walker and Maj. Gen. John C. Breckinridge, which Bragg combined with other troops to form a Reserve Corps under Walker. On 1 September, forty-eight hundred additional troops from East Tennessee under the command of Brig. Gen. William Preston further strengthened Bragg's ranks. Two Army of Northern Virginia divisions from Lt. Gen. James Longstreet's corps, those of Maj. Gen. John Bell

Hood and Maj. Gen. Lafayette McLaws (under the temporary command of Brig. Gen. Joseph B. Kershaw), traveled a circuitous route by rail from Virginia through Atlanta to strengthen Bragg's forces, although only five brigades (7,700 men) of these eastern troops arrived by 20 September. The Army of Tennessee now numbered some 67,000 men.

From his headquarters in La Fayette, Bragg recognized that with the Army of the Cumberland's three infantry corps advancing on a wide front from Chattanooga to Alpine, a distance of about fifty miles, the rebels could concentrate on an element of the Union army and destroy it. The Confederate commander decided to attack part of Thomas' XIV Corps, which was marching eastward from Trenton toward La Fayette. Bragg learned that on 9 September a XIV Corps division under Maj. Gen. James S. Negley had crossed Lookout Mountain at Steven's Gap and entered McLemore's Cove, a valley along West Chickamauga Creek hemmed in by Lookout and Pigeon Mountains. Negley was far in advance of any support as his men crossed the cove and headed for La Fayette. Bragg ordered Maj. Gen. Thomas C.



General Longstreet
(Library of Congress)



General Hood
(Library of Congress)

Hindman's division of Polk's corps to strike Negley from the north on 10 September, and commanded Hill to have Maj. Gen. Patrick R. Cleburne's division attack the Federal front by marching west across Pigeon Mountain. General Hill, however, did not order the advance, and although Hindman came within four miles of Negley's Union column at Davis' Cross Roads, he soon stopped his advance when he realized Hill was not attacking. Learning that Hindman's Confederates were approaching from the north, Negley took up defensive positions near Davis' Cross Roads and called for help. Although Bragg reinforced Hindman with two divisions of Buckner's corps, the rebels still failed to launch an attack. Infuriated, Bragg tried again on 11 September to bag the Federals. However, Brig. Gen. Absalom Baird's division joined Negley, and the two divisions withdrew from the cove westward to Steven's Gap in Lookout Mountain. Bragg's attempt to annihilate an isolated Federal division had failed.

Growing frustrated at his subordinates' inability or unwillingness to obey his orders, Bragg next sought to attack part of Crittenden's troops, moving toward Lee and Gordon's Mill, on West Chickamauga Creek in Georgia about ten miles south of Chattanooga. Bragg ordered Polk to attack at dawn on 13 September with his own and Walker's Reserve Corps, but by morning Crittenden was concentrated on the west side of

Lee and Gordon's Mill
(Library of Congress)



Chickamauga Creek, and Polk lost his opportunity to launch an assault against the Federals.

Rosecrans now realized that Bragg was not in full retreat and that he had narrowly avoided a trap. The Union commanding general began frantic efforts to concentrate his dispersed corps near Chattanooga, thus abandoning his offensive against Bragg's supply lines. On 12 September, he ordered McCook and Stanley to move north from Alpine to join Thomas at Steven's Gap. Both corps were to link up with Crittenden at Lee and Gordon's Mill. Once united, the combined forces of the Army of the Cumberland would join Granger's reserves at Rossville, Georgia, at a gap in Missionary Ridge near Chattanooga, and then retire to that city. McCook's troops met up with Thomas' corps on 17 September, then began to move toward Lee and Gordon's Mill. Within a few days, Rosecrans would have about fifty-eight thousand men concentrated near the mill on West Chickamauga Creek.

THE BATTLE OF CHICKAMAUGA

Rosecrans' concern for his army's safety was warranted, as Bragg planned to launch an attack on the Union position from the north along Chickamauga Creek to push the Army of the Cumberland south into McLemore's Cove, where the Confederates could trap and destroy it. Even if Rosecrans got away, Bragg could recapture Chattanooga, forcing the Federals back across the Tennessee River. Confirmation that reinforcements were en route from Virginia further encouraged Bragg to attack Rosecrans, a decision supported by his corps commanders. Bragg decided to have Polk's and Hill's corps demonstrate against the Federals to keep them in place around Lee and Gordon's Mill, the Army of the Cumberland's left flank. Meanwhile, a Confederate flanking force made up of Buckner's and Walker's corps, along with a provisional division under Brig. Gen. Bushrod R. Johnson, would cross Chickamauga Creek to the north at several fords and bridges, wheel to the left and attack southward. Rebel cavalry under Forrest and Wheeler would secure the army's flanks. If Confederate troops could reach and hold the La Fayette Road north of the Union army, they could prevent Rosecrans from reaching Chattanooga. Bragg's force numbered about sixty-eight thousand men on the eve of the offensive.

On the morning of 18 September, Johnson's Confederates made the northernmost crossing of Chickamauga Creek at Reed's

Bridge, opposed by Union Col. Robert Minty's stubborn cavalry brigade for much of the day. Johnson's rebels were joined by newly arrived troops from Hood's division of the Army of Northern Virginia, and Hood assumed command of the combined force. Once across the stream, Hood marched the column south in the direction of Alexander's Bridge, where Walker's Reserve Corps was to cross and turn south as well. Walker's men met stiff opposition at the bridge around 1200 from Colonel Wilder's mounted infantry, detached from XIV Corps. Walker's troops had to use a ford north of the bridge to get across the creek at about 1630 and flank Wilder's men. With rebels now on the west side of Chickamauga Creek near Reed's Bridge and Alexander's Bridge, Minty and Wilder both retired toward Lee and Gordon's Mill. The Southerners did not advance to the La Fayette Road, but Buckner did cross the creek late in the day at two fords south of Alexander's Bridge.

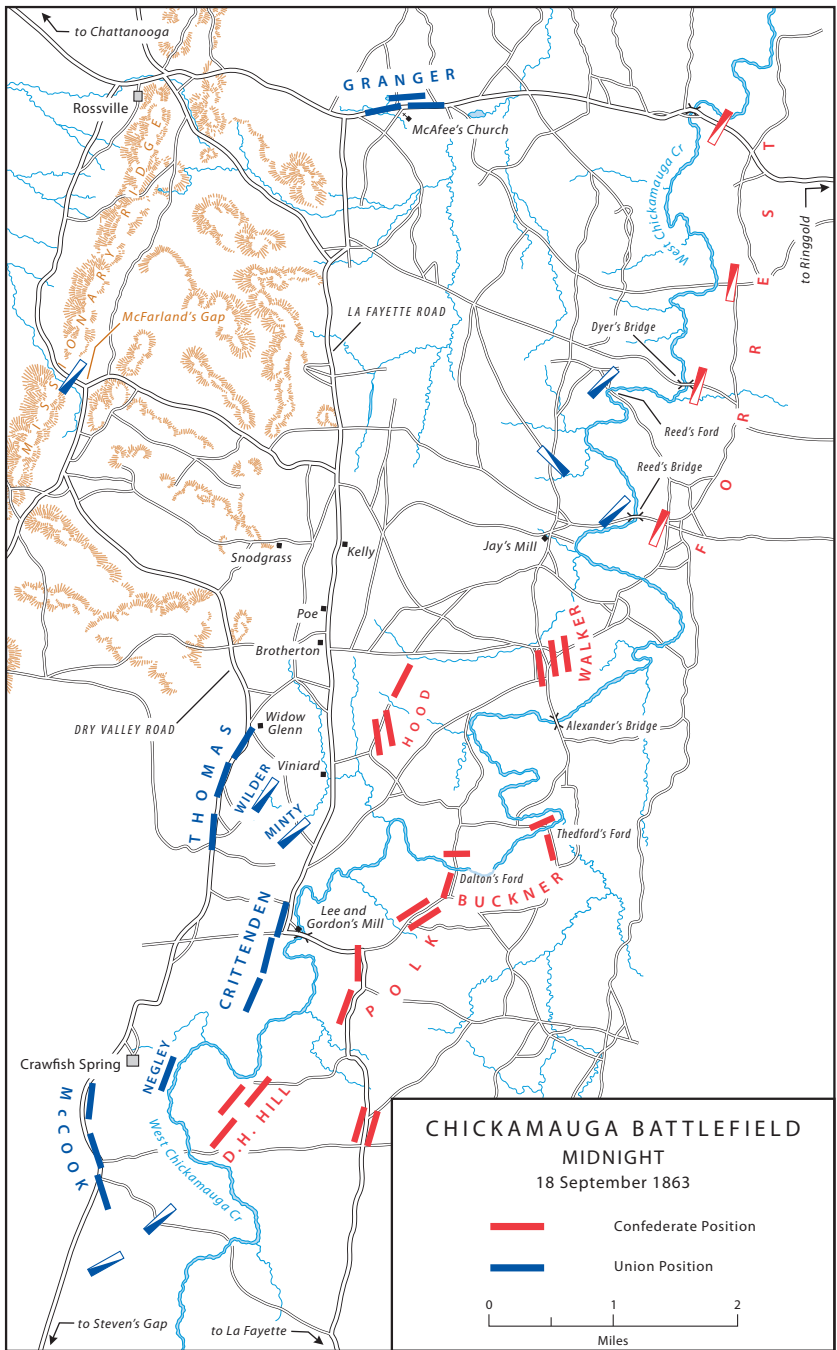
Battle of Chickamauga, by Alfred R. Waud
(Library of Congress)



Despite the delays caused by Union resistance and confusing marches, Bragg finally had much of his army one mile from the Federal's left flank by dusk, ready to move south through thick woods near Lee and Gordon's Mill the following day. He ordered Polk and Buckner to cross the creek the following morning with all of their troops, to join Hood and Walker in the attack.

Bragg's plan to crush the Federals with a flank attack was based on his assumption that Crittenden's XXI Corps occupied the northernmost position of Rosecrans' army along La Fayette Road at Lee and Gordon's Mill. During the night of 18 September, however, Rosecrans ordered Thomas to move three of his XIV Corps divisions north of Crittenden's troops at the mill. That evening, Thomas marched his men north on the Dry Valley Road, which ran parallel to the La Fayette Road less than a mile to the west, leaving Negley's division along Chickamauga Creek south of the mill. Thomas then shifted his troops over to the La Fayette Road and occupied ground around the Kelly farm, about two miles north of Lee and Gordon's Mill. By late evening, this put Thomas' Federals on the right flank of the unsuspecting Confederates west of Chickamauga Creek, who intended to hit Crittenden's men at the mill early the next day (*Map 2*).

While Thomas led his three divisions to the Kelly farm area, a brigade of Granger's Reserve Corps under Col. Daniel McCook moved south from its position at McAfee's Church near Rossville, about two miles to the north of the Kelly farm. Early on 19 September near Jay's Mill, west of Reed's Bridge, McCook's men clashed with some rebel troopers, damaged the bridge, then retired toward Rossville under Granger's orders. As the men began their return march, McCook met with Thomas, and informed the XIV Corps' commander that one enemy cavalry brigade was west of Chickamauga Creek and vulnerable to attack. Thomas decided to strike the rebels—under Brig. Gen. Henry Davidson, of Forrest's corps—at once, and sent Brig. Gen. John M. Brannan's division down the Reed's Bridge Road, where it struck the Confederates in thickly wooded terrain at about 0730, one-half mile west of Jay's Mill. Here, the Federals were stopped by Forrest's troopers and two brigades of Walker's reserve force, but the Southerners could make little headway against the Union infantry, the presence of which showed Bragg that Rosecrans' left flank was no longer at Lee and Gordon's Mill but farther north.



MAP 2

As the morning went on, more troops from each army became involved in the fighting near Jay's Mill. Thomas committed General Baird's division to the struggle, sending the troops into action south of Brannan's men, who were running low on ammunition. On the rebel side, Bragg directed Walker to send in Brig. Gen. St. John R. Liddell's division of two brigades against the Federals along Alexander's Bridge Road. Liddell's sudden attack near the Winfrey farm, south of Jay's Mill, routed Baird's division and captured much of its artillery. General Brannan, however, stymied the rebels' advance with a counterattack of his own from his position to the north, and not only drove Liddell's troops back but also recaptured Baird's lost cannons. Assisting Brannan's men was a division of XX Corps under Brig. Gen. Richard W. Johnson, which Rosecrans redeployed from McLemore's Cove on the Union right flank.

Johnson's Federals did not have long to wait before they too received a powerful attack. Earlier in the day, Confederate Maj. Gen. Benjamin F. Cheatham crossed Chickamauga Creek at Dalton's Ford with his large Tennessee division from Polk's corps, and by 1100 these soldiers were located south of Liddell's retreating rebels and available for action. On Bragg's command, Cheatham's men advanced through dense brush northwestward to the Brotherton Road, which ran east-west from Jay's Mill to the La Fayette Road, pushing back some of Baird's Federals as they came through the woods. Soon, however, Cheatham's brigades were hit by Johnson's Union division, which Thomas ordered to advance eastward toward the Winfrey farm. Johnson's bluecoats stopped the surging Confederates and were soon joined by reinforcements sent north by Rosecrans, including Maj. Gen. John M. Palmer's XXI Corps division, which deployed on Johnson's right (south) along the Brotherton Road, and that of Brig. Gen. Horatio P. Van Cleve, also of XXI Corps, along the La Fayette Road.

At about 1400, fighting broke out south of Cheatham's position when the Union Brig. Gen. Jefferson C. Davis' division of XX Corps moved north and met General Rosecrans north of Lee and Gordon's Mill. The Federal commander directed Davis to move northward in support of Van Cleve, farther up the La Fayette Road, and soon the division entered the woods where Davis could hear heavy firing. Almost immediately Davis' lead regiments were attacked by advancing rebels of Bushrod Johnson's division east of Rosecrans' headquarters at the Widow Glenn house along Dry

Valley Road. The Confederates pressed Davis hard and forced his division back. Both sides committed more troops to the fray. Fierce fighting swirled around the Viniard farm in particular, located one mile north of Lee and Gordon's Mill on the La Fayette Road. The Union lines along the La Fayette Road eventually were stabilized by the arrival of additional divisions of Brig. Gen. Thomas J. Wood (XXI Corps) and Maj. Gen. Philip H. Sheridan (XX Corps), as well as Wilder's brigade.

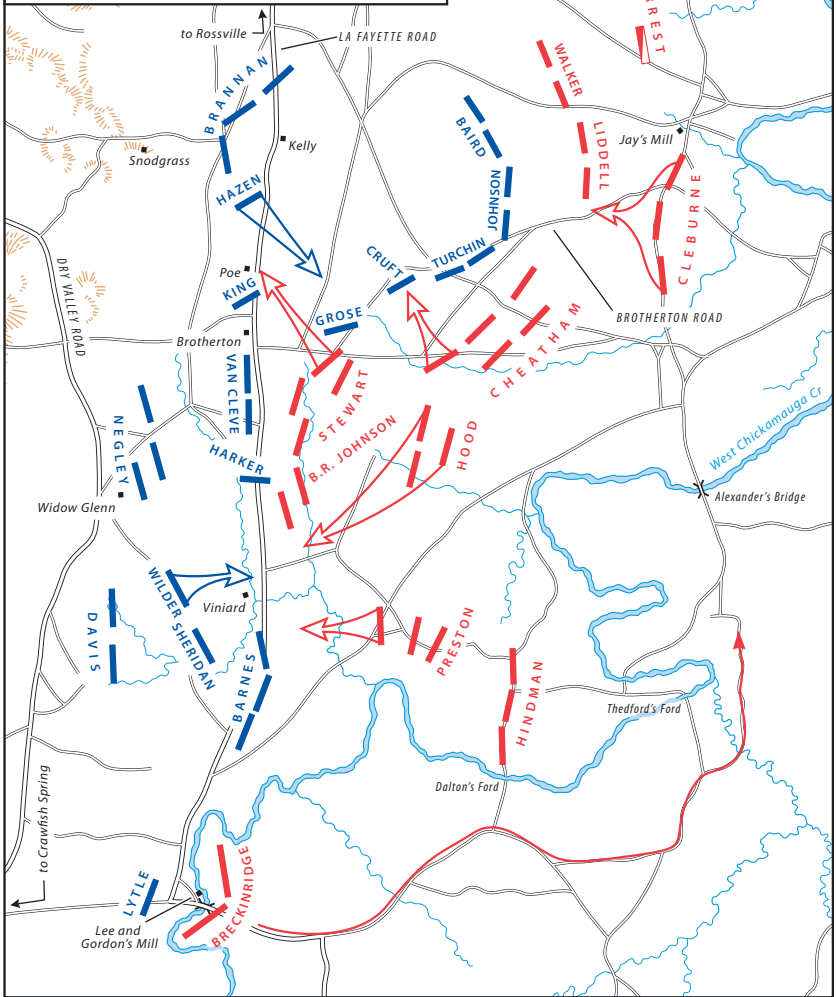
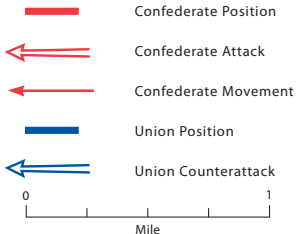
Late in the afternoon, Bragg called on Maj. Gen. Alexander P. Stewart of Buckner's corps to march north from Thedford's Ford and fall in on Cheatham's left (south) flank, still aligned on the south side of the Brotherton Road. Stewart attacked westward with his several brigades in column, hitting the Federals on the La Fayette Road at its intersection with the Brotherton Road. This powerful assault smashed into Van Cleve's division and other nearby Federal units at about 1600, and soon Stewart's rebels were joined by a brigade of Hood's command under Col. James Sheffield to their right. The leading troops of Stewart's attack crossed the La Fayette Road, splitting Rosecrans' forces in half. Lacking support, however, these Confederate troops had to withdraw under heavy pressure from advancing Federals. Still looking for a decisive blow against the Federal left to cut off Rosecrans from Chattanooga, Bragg ordered Hill's corps to cross the Chickamauga at Dalton's Ford and Alexander's Bridge, and proceed north, away from the army's original position at Lee and Gordon's Mill.

The final action of the day came at about 1800, when one of Hill's divisions under Cleburne moved to the north end of the battlefield and launched an attack "in magnificent style" toward the Winfrey farm from Jay's Mill Road behind Walker's exhausted troops (*Map 3*). Cleburne's men hit Johnson's Federals, along with Baird's division on Johnson's left (north) flank, and the fighting quickly became confused and chaotic in the smoky woods and growing darkness near a clearing at the Winfrey farm. By 2100, Cleburne's attack had driven the Federals back to the Kelly farm, on the north edge of the day's battleground, where General Thomas had been working to establish a new defensive line that evening.

The Army of the Cumberland had suffered serious casualties during the day's battle, as Rosecrans had shifted brigades and divisions to parry Bragg's attack on his left. While the ad hoc deployment of his units disturbed the army's organization, the Federals now controlled two roads leading over Missionary Ridge

CHICKAMAUGA BATTLEFIELD EVENING

19 September 1863



MAP 3

toward Rossville and Chattanooga and were no longer in danger of being trapped by Bragg's turning movement. Rosecrans and his chief lieutenants gathered at the Widow Glenn house to discuss the next day's possibilities. A retreat to Chattanooga was ruled out due to the proximity of enemy forces. Rosecrans was also hesitant to abandon the thousands of Union wounded at field hospitals at Crawfish Spring to the south of Lee and Gordon's Mill. Due to heavy casualties suffered throughout the day, none of the officers present recommended a Federal counterattack. Rather, Rosecrans decided to remain in place, with Thomas fortifying his position on the Union left at the Kelly farm, McCook's troops deployed to the south with his right near the Widow Glenn house, and Crittenden's two divisions in reserve behind the army's center. General Granger was at McAfee's Church with three brigades of the Reserve Corps, about three miles north of Thomas' lines.

Bragg decided to continue his attack on Rosecrans' army the next day, 20 September. Of about sixty-six thousand soldiers, Bragg had twelve fresh brigades available to him, and received word that General Longstreet would soon join him with reinforcements. To better coordinate his army's movements in the dense woodland, Bragg divided his army into two wings. General Polk led the right wing on the northern side of the rebel line, made up of the corps of Walker and Hill, in addition to Cheatham's division. Longstreet was assigned the left wing, which included his own troops under Hood, Buckner's corps, and Hindman's division. Bragg planned to have Polk attack the Federal left flank at dawn, to push the Union troops south, away from Chattanooga. As the Union lines collapsed, the rebel left wing would join in the attack to overwhelm Rosecrans' army in a decisive southern victory. However, due to the confusing terrain, darkness, and ineffective staff work that night, several key leaders, including Generals Hill and Breckinridge, did not receive orders until late, forcing Bragg to delay the attack several hours.

On the opposite side of the smoky battleground, Rosecrans also made preparations during the early morning of 20 September. He repositioned units of XX and XXI Corps, and anchored his southern flank on the Widow Glenn house. Riding north, he saw that Thomas' men were positioned in a half circle to the east of the Kelly farm, with both flanks resting on the La Fayette Road. Thomas' lines did not cover the key intersection of that road with the McFarland's Gap Road, which would have to be used to move

to Chattanooga if the army retreated. Thomas asked for Negley's division, detached from his corps to the south, to join him so he could secure the road junction. Rosecrans ordered that division to join Thomas, and for General Crittenden to replace Negley's troops. Crittenden sent Wood's division to fill the lines, and Negley marched north at 0930.

At the same time, the Confederate assault on Thomas' fortified position on the Union left finally began. Breckinridge's division hit the Federals along the La Fayette Road, south of the McFarland's Gap Road and shattered the Union line in that sector. Now in Thomas' rear, the rebel troops rushed southward but were thwarted by two Union brigades arriving at the Kelly farm. Breckinridge's flank attack was supposed to have been supported by Cleburne's division to the south, but Cleburne's troops could make no headway against Thomas' men firing from behind strong log breastworks, hastily constructed during the night, and some of the Confederate units lost alignment in the smoky forest and confusion of the assault. Although additional rebel brigades from Polk's wing attacked Thomas' Union lines that morning, all were repulsed by noon with heavy losses in what General Hill called "an obstinate contest."

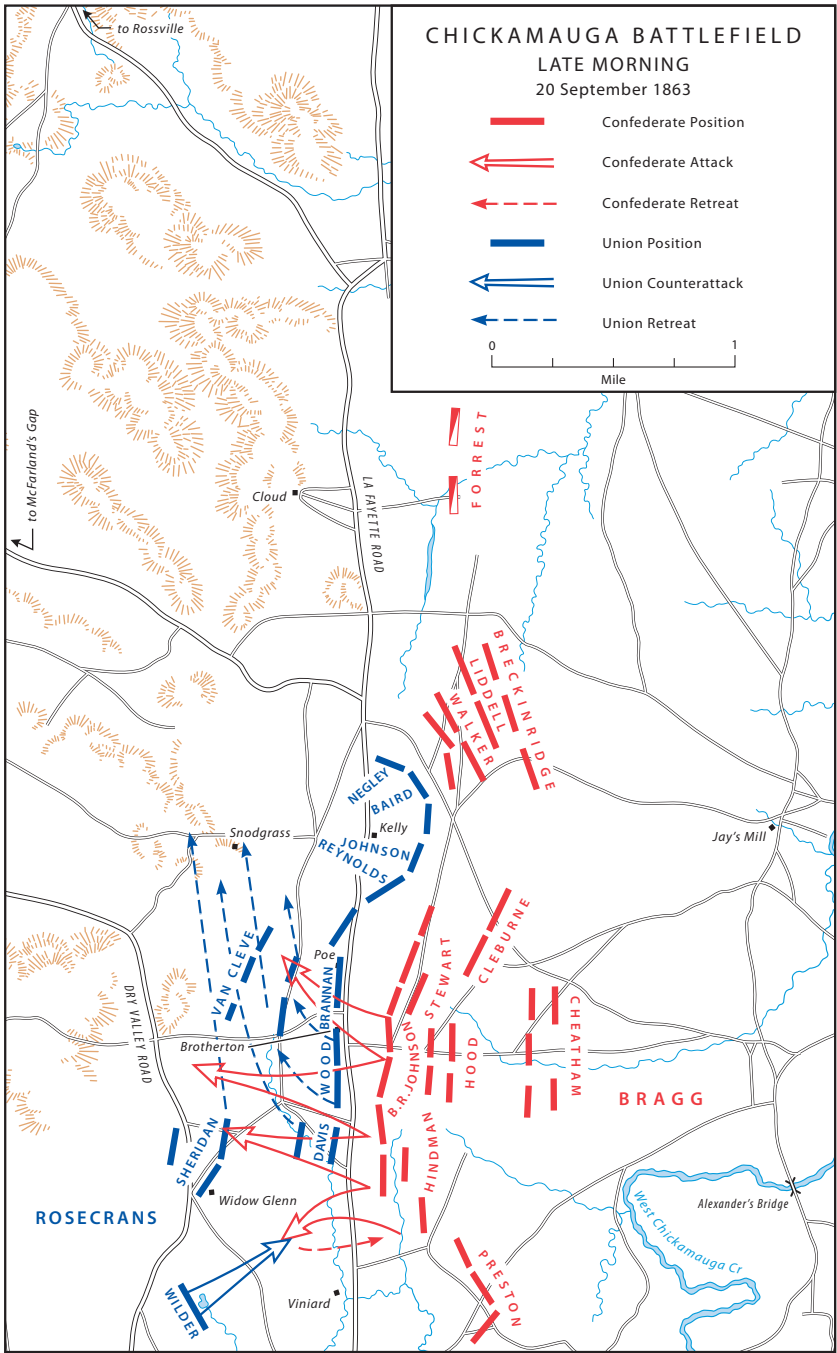
The strong Confederate attacks against the Kelly farm defenses alarmed Thomas, prompting him to make urgent calls for more troops to secure the Army of the Cumberland's left flank. After a confusing sequence of misunderstandings among several of the Union army's generals on the south end of the lines—including Rosecrans, McCook, and several division commanders—General Wood withdrew his division from the Union line near the Brotherton farm at 1100 and moved behind Maj. Gen. Joseph J. Reynolds' division (XIV Corps), to his north. Unknown to Rosecrans, Wood's movement left a dangerous 600-yard gap in the Union line, into which other Federal troops should have been posted. As he proceeded northward to support Reynolds in the center, Wood soon encountered General Thomas, who ordered him to help shore up the Union left flank.

While the Federals shifted more troops to the north in response to rebel assaults on Thomas' lines, Bragg struggled to coordinate his army's morning attacks. At Bragg's urging, General Stewart's three brigades hit the Union lines north of the Brotherton Road at the Poe farm, although he failed to notify his wing commander, Longstreet, of his initiative. Some of Stewart's

troops pushed across the La Fayette Road, broke Brannan's right flank, and routed Van Cleve's division in Brannan's rear. Federal troops, however, were able to push Stewart's Confederates back to their starting point with heavy losses.

After Stewart's repulse, Longstreet launched a powerful attack just after 1100, with his right aligned on the Brotherton Road. Hood led the combined divisions in column of Bushrod Johnson, Maj. Gen. Lafayette McLaws (from the Army of Northern Virginia), and his own men under the temporary command of Brig. Gen. Evander M. Law. Hindman's division deployed south of Hood's troops (*Map 4*). These rebels advanced against the Union soldiers west of the La Fayette Road on the southern end of the battlefield, as many Federal units were moving north to reinforce Thomas' position. Johnson's men struck the Union position just where Wood's division had left a gap in Rosecrans' line moments before. "On they came like an angry flood," wrote one Union officer. The Confederates hit Brannan's and Reynolds' divisions near the Brotherton and Poe farms. Hindman's Confederate division soon emerged from the woods to Johnson's left, into open fields west of the La Fayette Road, striking Sheridan's and Davis' Federal divisions. Longstreet's successful assault routed thousands of Union troops and captured scores of wagons and Union artillery pieces as the rebels managed to reach the Dry Valley Road and create panic in the Federal rear. General Hill wrote a vivid description of the stunning Confederate onslaught: "On they rushed, shouting, yelling, running over batteries, capturing trains, taking prisoners, seizing the headquarters of the Federal commander, at the Widow Glenn's."

Some Union troops managed limited resistance to Longstreet's assault. Several artillery batteries around the Dyer field briefly halted Johnson's attack, and the Union brigade of Col. Bernard Laiboldt of Sheridan's division made a desperate charge against part of Hindman's rebels east of the Dry Valley Road. Sheridan's other two brigades also attempted to hold back the tide of onrushing Confederates, but soon had to retreat in confusion. "Fugitives, wounded, caissons, escort, ambulances, thronged through the narrow pathways," a Federal officer observed. His shattered men, along with Davis' demoralized division, made their way to McFarland's Gap, en route to Chattanooga. Rosecrans, McCook, and Crittenden also left the field with the fleeing soldiers, unable to rally the troops. Although Wilder's mounted brigade on



MAP 4

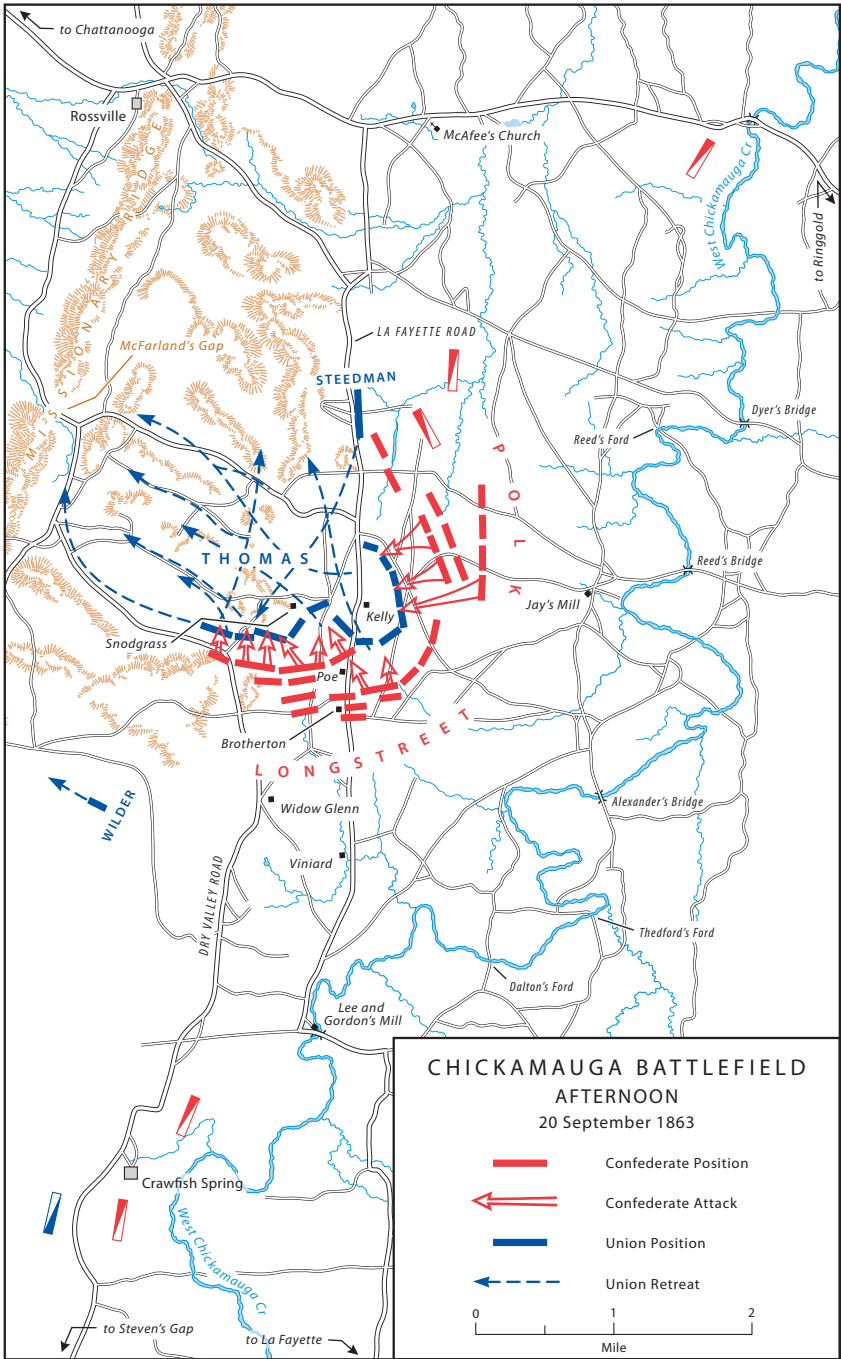
the far right of the Union line repulsed a small Alabama brigade of Hindman's division, Wilder's men could not follow up on this success and soon left the field as well.

General Longstreet "had now swept away all organized opposition in his front," noted a Union witness. Longstreet decided not to turn south in accordance with Bragg's original battle plan but to attack northward against Thomas' position around the Kelly farm. The Confederates could not leave Thomas in their rear, and by noon Longstreet wheeled Hood and Hindman to the right, facing north, and advanced upon the Federals. General Hood was severely wounded as he rode among his attacking divisions and was no longer able to lead his men.

While much of the southern end of the Union line had collapsed and was in flight, other Federal units escaped Longstreet's onslaught by moving north, including two brigades of Wood's division that had created the fatal gap in Union lines, and men from the divisions of Brannan, Negley, and Van Cleve. Many of these soldiers from a mix of shattered brigades and divisions took up defensive positions on Horseshoe Ridge, wooded hills immediately west of the Kelly farm and the La Fayette Road, including Snodgrass Hill, closest to La Fayette Road. To steady and encourage the troops on the ridge, General Thomas rode among his men in his stoic, confident manner, for which he would become known as the "Rock of Chickamauga."

Beginning about 1300, Longstreet's divisions (except Stewart's) launched a series of hard-hitting but disjointed assaults against the Federals on Horseshoe Ridge over a six-hour period (*Map 5*). With Hood out of action, the rebels had difficulty coordinating their offensives throughout the afternoon. Longstreet and his generals were also unaware of a 500-yard gap in the Union lines between Federal units around the Kelly farm and those on Snodgrass Hill, which Thomas had no troops to fill. Thomas' Federals managed to repulse repeated southern charges against their lines but quickly began to deplete their ammunition. The far right of the Union line was the scene of bitter hand-to-hand fighting, and it appeared that Longstreet's Confederates would overpower the hard-pressed bluecoats and make for Thomas' rear. "The bayonet was used," one witness recalled, "and men were killed and wounded with clubbed muskets."

Just in time, however, Brig. Gen. James B. Steedman's forty-five hundred Federal troops from General Granger's Reserve



MAP 5

Corps arrived to rescue the right flank, bringing with them almost one hundred thousand rounds of ammunition for Thomas' beleaguered men. Granger had heard the fighting from his position near Rossville Gap, and without orders marched to the sound of battle with all but one of his brigades. "Swift was the charge and terrible the conflict," Rosecrans wrote of Steedman's arrival on the field.

To reinforce the assault on the ridge, Longstreet requested reinforcements from Bragg, although he had not deployed his own reserves of Preston's fresh division into the fight. Rather than strip Polk's right wing of troops, Bragg instead ordered the former bishop to attack Thomas' Kelly farm lines "with his whole force." Late that afternoon, Polk's Confederate troops under Walker, Cleburne, and Breckenridge attacked the Federals behind their strong breastworks around the Kelly field "with alacrity," while at 1600 Preston's Confederates finally got into action against Snodgrass Hill from the south.

General Rosecrans, who had reached Chattanooga at 1540, ordered Thomas to abandon his defensive positions and retreat to Rossville. Under heavy pressure from simultaneous attacks by Longstreet and Polk, Thomas gave the necessary orders to withdraw via McFarland's Gap at about 1630, while his men were still under attack. Before he rode over to the Kelly farm to oversee the retreat of his troops there, he tasked Granger with overseeing the withdrawal of Union troops on Snodgrass Hill. Granger did not remain long on the high ground and soon left the field without giving further instructions to his subordinates. Without orders to retire, three Union regiments held their ground obstinately until captured by Confederate troops swarming over the high ground. Sheridan's division, which had retreated through McFarland's Gap earlier in the day, attempted to return to the battlefield using Rossville Gap to the north, but the division was unable to arrive in time to support Thomas.

Victorious Southern units cheered the capture of the Union position as the Federals fled. "Disorganized masses of men were hurrying to the rear," wrote General Hill, "batteries of artillery were inextricably mixed with trains of wagons; disorder and confusion pervaded the broken ranks struggling to get on." Heavy casualties, disorganized units, and approaching darkness, however, precluded a rebel pursuit of Thomas' fleeing bluecoats.

The battle had been costly for both belligerents. Bragg's losses were over 18,000 men (2,312 killed, 14,674 wounded, and 1,468 captured or missing), replacements for which would be difficult to

find. Rosecrans lost over 16,000 men (1,657 killed, 9,756 wounded, and 4,757 captured or missing), and 600 of his wounded soldiers had to be abandoned in nearby field hospitals and were captured by Bragg's army. These were the highest losses of any battle in the Western Theater during the war and, after Gettysburg, the second highest of the war overall.

THE CHATTANOOGA CAMPAIGN

Although Rosecrans feared a rebel attack on 21 September, Bragg did not actively pursue the Federals after the Battle of Chickamauga. In fact, he seemed to doubt that his army had won a victory. Some Confederate officers criticized him for not pressing the retreating Union army: "What does he fight battles for?" pondered General Forrest. Grateful for the reprieve, Rosecrans had regrouped his army at Chattanooga by the evening of the twenty-first and begun organizing the city's defenses.

Chattanooga was a rail junction town of two thousand people, situated in a low plain alongside the Tennessee River in the Cumberland Mountains. Two miles east of town was Missionary Ridge, which stretched about fifteen miles from Chickamauga Creek on its north end into Georgia to the south. South of Chattanooga was Lookout Mountain, a high ridge beginning just downstream from the city and running eighty-five miles south into Georgia. The northern peak of Lookout Mountain was a huge promontory, some eighteen hundred feet high, overlooking the city and its environs. On the opposite side of the Tennessee River from Chattanooga was Walden's Ridge, a rugged mountain crossed by a few poor roads.

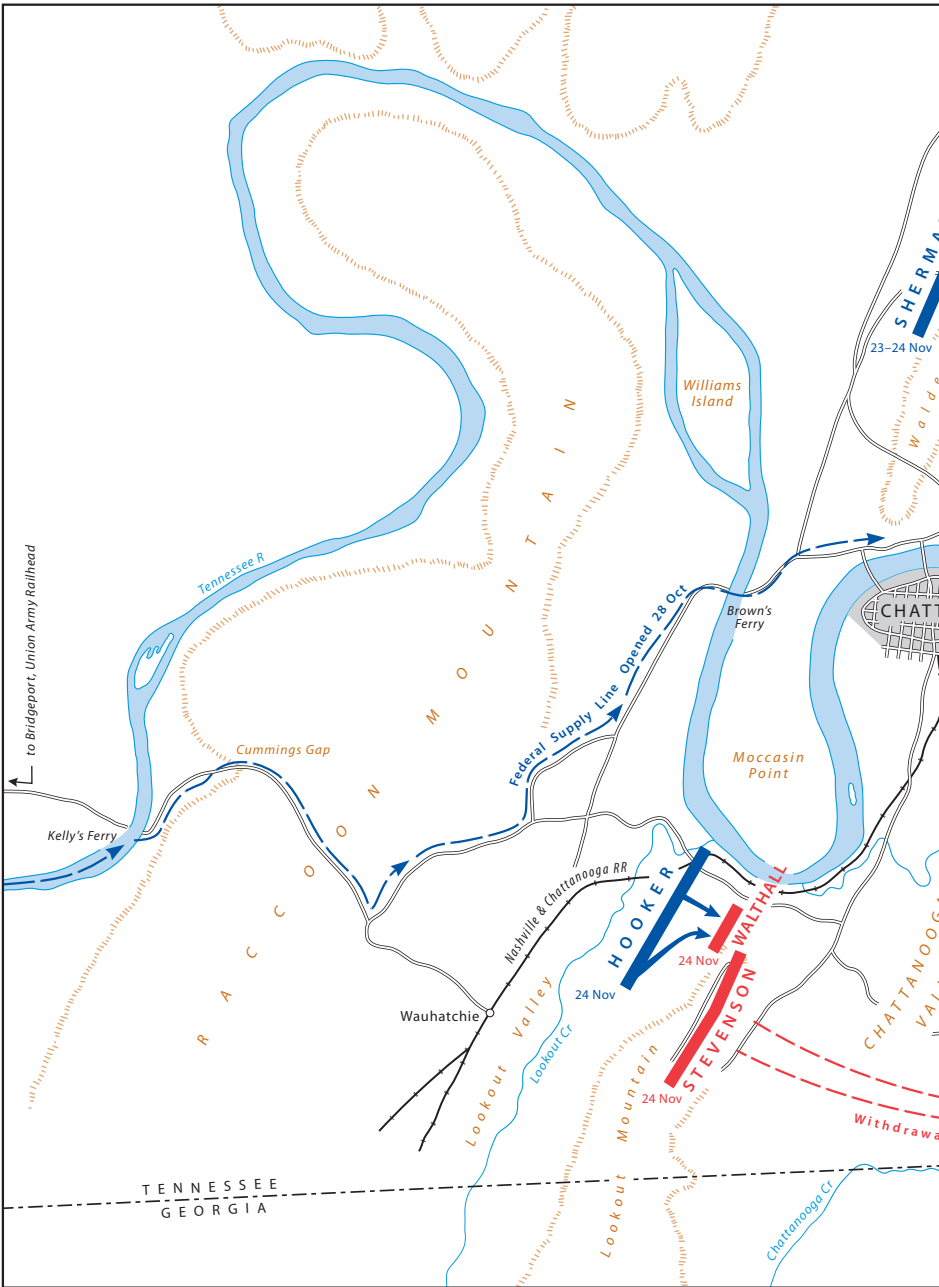
Despite the losses and defeat the North suffered at Chickamauga, the morale of the Army of the Cumberland's soldiers was surprisingly high. General Rosecrans now had about thirty-five thousand troops available to him and contemplated retreat, but President Lincoln demanded that he defend the city and promised reinforcements. The War Department instructed the commander of the Army of the Tennessee, Maj. Gen. William T. Sherman, to march with twenty thousand men from Vicksburg to Chattanooga. Lincoln and Halleck also urged General Burnside to march from Knoxville to Rosecrans' relief, but they could not prompt the general to cooperate. Frustrated with Burnside's recalcitrance, they decided instead to send troops from the Army of the Potomac in Virginia. Beginning on 25 September, Maj. Gen.

Oliver O. Howard's XI Corps and Maj. Gen. Henry W. Slocum's XII Corps, led by Maj. Gen. Joseph Hooker, began a circuitous rail passage from Virginia through Ohio, Indiana, and Kentucky to the Tennessee River. After a journey of 1,159 miles in nine days, these 23,000 troops would reach Bridgeport in the first week of October.

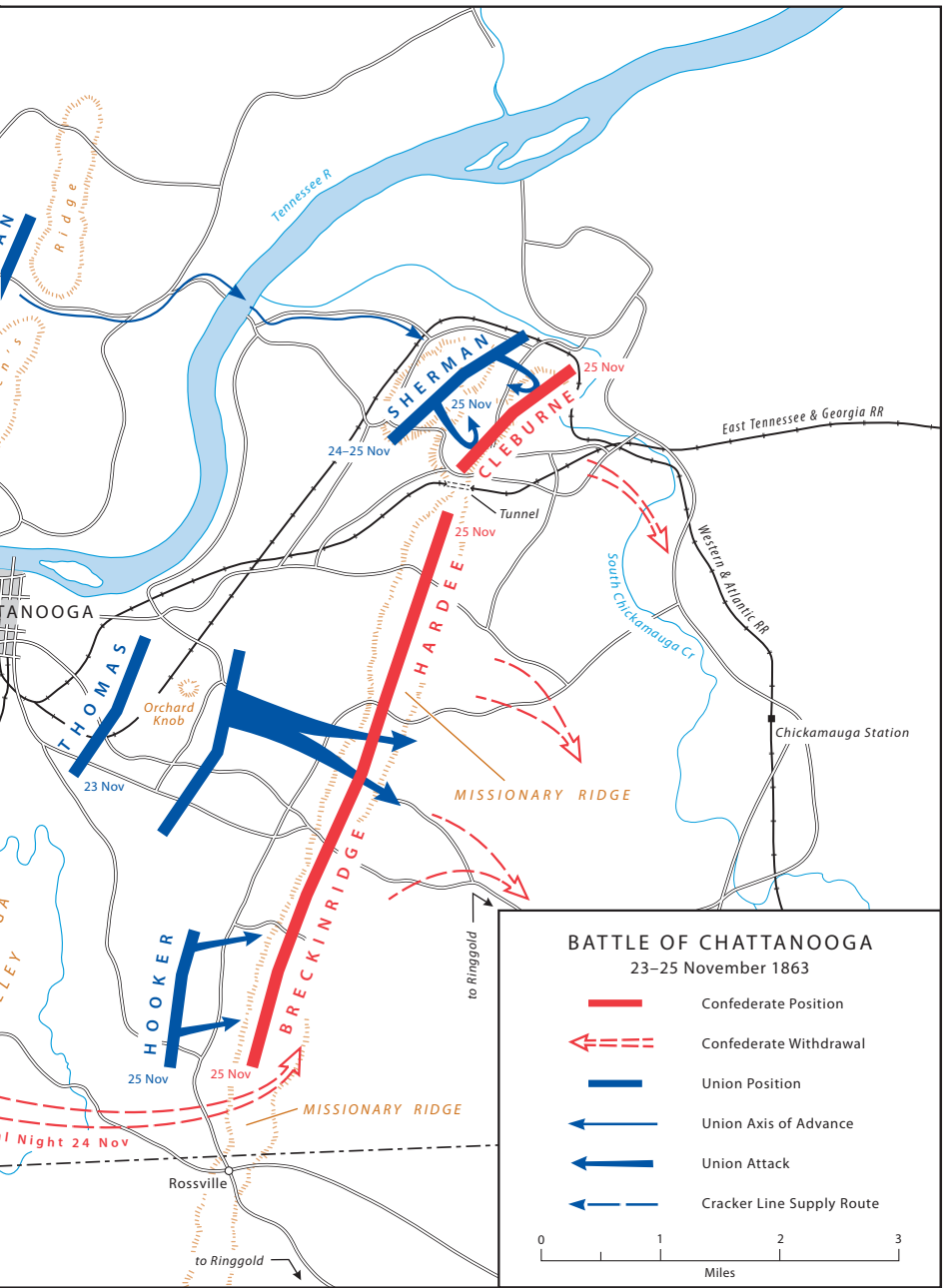
As Northern leaders decided on measures to reinforce the Army of the Cumberland, General Bragg moved his army into positions around the city on 23 September. His men occupied Missionary Ridge, Lookout Mountain, and the valley of Chattanooga Creek between them. Bragg put Longstreet on the left to block Union access around Lookout Mountain and deployed Breckenridge's corps to Missionary Ridge. Polk's corps occupied the right flank of the rebel lines to close off Chattanooga from the north. The only remaining Union access to the city was across the Tennessee River onto Walden's Ridge (*Map 6*).

In no hurry to attack, Bragg sought to rid his army of several senior officers with whom he had poor relationships. On 29 September, he relieved from their commands General Hindman for his poor performance at McLemore's Cove and General Polk for failing to attack the Union forces at Chickamauga early on 20 September. In response, twelve senior generals petitioned Confederate President Davis on 4 October to relieve Bragg from command. Davis traveled to Bragg's headquarters to hear the officer's complaints and meet in person with Bragg's detractors on 9 October. When Davis announced he would sustain Bragg, the rebel army commander relieved Hill of his duties and reduced Buckner from corps to division command. General Hardee superseded Polk and brought one brigade of troops with him from Mississippi. Davis convinced Polk to transfer to Mississippi, along with Forrest, who refused to serve under Bragg any longer. Bragg reorganized his army once Davis departed: Breckenridge became a corps commander along with Hardee, and Longstreet retained command of his own troops from Lee's army.

In addition to Bragg's Confederate forces deployed around Chattanooga, Rosecrans' chief concern was providing for his men, mules, and horses as winter approached. The Confederates on the high ground dominated Union lines of communication and made resupply difficult for the Federals. The main Union supply depot was at Bridgeport, on the Tennessee River. Bragg's army controlled the Tennessee River and the Nashville and Chattanooga Railroad from their defensive positions at the base of Lookout Mountain,

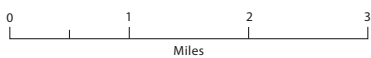


MAP 6



BATTLE OF CHATTANOOGA
23–25 November 1863

- Confederate Position
- - - Confederate Withdrawal
- Union Position
- ← Union Axis of Advance
- ← Union Attack
- - - Cracker Line Supply Route



on the south bank. The Confederates could also fire on a rough wagon road along the north bank as well, making that route a risky prospect for bringing in supplies. Another wagon road ran north from the city and crossed Walden's Ridge about sixteen miles away, before it turned south along the Sequatchie Valley to Jasper, Tennessee, and on to Bridgeport. This sixty-mile route, however, was narrow, rough, and almost impassable in wet weather, which began in earnest on 1 October.

On 2 October, Rosecrans cut the soldiers' rations by one-third, although many regiments had been able to issue only half rations—consisting of hardtack and small portions of rancid pork and beef—for days before that. The Federals' lack of provisions was made more difficult by an enemy cavalry raid conducted by General Wheeler that same day, in which his troopers attacked a Union supply train and burned over four hundred wagons. The shortage of supplies also meant that Rosecrans would have no way to feed the approaching reinforcements from Hooker and Sherman once they arrived in the city.

Just as Bragg reshaped his army after Chickamauga, the Union high command reorganized its own forces. In late September, Rosecrans relieved McCook and Crittenden and consolidated the XX Corps and XXI Corps into a new IV Corps, led by General Granger. In mid-October, the Lincoln administration promoted Grant to command all the territory from the Appalachian Mountains to the Mississippi River, called the Military Division of the Mississippi, which included the Departments of the Cumberland, the Tennessee, and the Ohio. This organization would facilitate coordination of the Union war effort, particularly in Tennessee, where Burnside still showed no inclination to cooperate with Rosecrans.

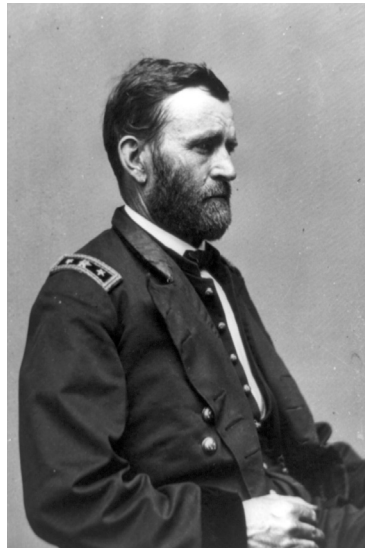
Lacking confidence in Rosecrans, Stanton ordered Grant to go to Chattanooga himself, with the authority to replace Rosecrans if he desired. Grant relieved Rosecrans and selected Thomas to command the Army of the Cumberland. Rosecrans immediately left Chattanooga for Cincinnati, Ohio, on 20 October, to await further orders. Grant, still suffering from a painful leg injury resulting from his horse falling on him in September, arrived in Chattanooga on 23 October, having traveled the difficult road over barren Walden's Ridge. After promoting General Palmer to command XIV Corps, Thomas reluctantly assumed command of the Army of the Cumberland.

The immediate challenge Grant faced at Chattanooga was how to supply the Union troops. Upon his arrival in the city, he discussed options with Thomas and Brig. Gen. William F. “Baldy” Smith, the Army of the Cumberland’s acting chief engineer. Smith recommended opening a route from Chattanooga on a road that ran directly west of the city across Moccasin Bend to Brown’s Ferry, on the Tennessee River. Across the river, in rebel-held territory, was Raccoon Mountain, over which a road passed through Cummings Gap, then on to Kelly’s Ferry, where a pontoon bridge was situated to allow passage to the west side of the Tennessee. From there, an adequate road led to the Federal supply depot at Bridgeport. If Union forces could drive the rebels away from Brown’s Ferry and emplace a pontoon bridge there, then secure Cummings Gap, supplies could be brought to Chattanooga along this route, avoiding the rebel positions at Lookout Mountain. Grant approved the plan, and preparations to open this logistical route began at once.

Smith’s plan called for securing Brown’s Ferry, while Hooker advanced from Bridgeport toward Lookout Mountain. On the night of 26–27 October, Brig. Gen. William B. Hazen’s brigade floated down the Tennessee River in pontoon boats from Chattanooga without being detected by Confederate pickets along the south bank of the river. Hazen secured the rebel-held southern side of Brown’s Ferry by 0440. The troops fortified their landing site, while additional Federals began to come across the Tennessee in pontoon boats. A weak Confederate attack failed to dislodge Hazen’s men, and after some delays Hooker brought up the XI Corps and Brig. Gen. John W. Geary’s division of XII Corps from Bridgeport, marching on the south side of the river to clear Confederate forces from Raccoon Mountain and Lookout Valley. The Confederate reaction was slow and confused, particularly on the part of General Longstreet, whose continued hostility toward one of his own brigadiers and General Bragg hindered the effectiveness of his leadership. By the afternoon of 28 October, the new supply route dubbed the “Cracker Line” was open, and Hooker was positioned on the rebel left flank.

Unable to starve the Federals into submission, Bragg announced a new plan on 3 November. Longstreet’s corps of twelve thousand infantry and Wheeler’s five thousand cavalry would move north against Knoxville to push Burnside’s Army of the Ohio out of East Tennessee and prevent Burnside from marching to join

Grant. If successful, this plan would also clear a rail line to Virginia and open a new supply line to Bragg's army. Bragg may also have sought to rid the army of Longstreet, one of his chief detractors. For his part, Longstreet objected to the plan. He did not believe that Bragg had allocated him sufficient force to overcome Burnside's twelve thousand infantry and eighty-five hundred cavalry. Moreover, while the maneuver would threaten Grant's left flank, it also weakened the main rebel army just as Grant was being reinforced by Hooker and Sherman. General Bragg overruled his subordinate, and Longstreet and his men began marching toward Knoxville on 5 November.



General Grant
(Library of Congress)

With Bragg's fighting strength reduced, Grant sought to end the siege with an attack by all of his forces, including Sherman's reinforcements, which were still marching toward the city. The plan called for Sherman's troops to move upriver from Chattanooga, cross the Tennessee River near the mouth of Chickamauga Creek and attack the northern end of Missionary Ridge, the rebel's right flank. Thomas would demonstrate against the Confederate center to pin down the enemy. Hooker would attack the Confederate left flank at Lookout Mountain and push onward to Rossville, where he would turn north on Missionary Ridge and continue his advance. If all worked as planned, Bragg would be cut off from his rail connections, and his army destroyed. Sherman reached Grant's headquarters on 14 November, but his troops did not begin to arrive until 20 November. Under pressure from Lincoln and Staunton about Longstreet's threat to Knoxville, Grant ordered the attack to commence on 23 November.

Bragg was uncertain about Grant's intentions in the city below him. When Bragg sent Wheeler's cavalry with Longstreet to

Knoxville, he limited his ability to reconnoiter the opposing Union forces. He knew that Hooker and Sherman were approaching Chattanooga, but he expected that Sherman's troops would follow Longstreet to Knoxville. Although outnumbered, the Confederates occupied what appeared to be strong defensive positions. Concerned for his left flank, on 12 November he placed Maj. Gen. Carter Stevenson in charge of the defense on Lookout Mountain, with his division on the summit and three brigades on a narrow plateau that wrapped around the northern end of the mountain about halfway down from the peak. The rebel defenses here looked stronger than they were, as the chosen positions lacked effective fields of fire covering Union avenues of approach.

Similar problems arose further along the Confederate line. In the center, Breckinridge had only sixteen thousand men to cover five miles. The situation became worse on 22 November when Bragg directed Cleburne's and Buckner's divisions to reinforce Longstreet at Knoxville, potentially subtracting another eleven thousand men from his already weakened host. Federal scouts observed these movements and reported on 23 November that two enemy divisions were leaving their positions. Grant, worried that Bragg was attempting to reinforce Longstreet, ordered Thomas to reconnoiter Bragg's lines with a strong force. Thomas ordered General Wood, supported by Sheridan's division and Howard's XI Corps, to seize Orchard Knob, the forward-most position held by Confederate infantry. The troops were to return to their positions when Confederate strength and intentions were clear. Thomas deployed about twenty thousand soldiers in parade-ground alignment some two thousand yards west of Orchard Knob and overran the six hundred stunned Confederate defenders shortly after 1300. The hill was so advantageous that Grant and Thomas had Wood's troops remain there.

Surprised by the attack, Bragg recalled Cleburne and Buckner, who returned to their former positions after dark that evening. Bragg also moved a division from his left to a post south of Tunnel Hill on his far right flank under Hardee's overall command. The divisions led by Brig. Gens. William B. Bate and Patton Anderson, which had been entrenched in rifle pits along the forward base of Missionary Ridge, were ordered to move half of their men to the crest. Inexplicably, they were placed in positions at the top of the ridge, where they could not directly support the units remaining below.

Grant had to adjust his plans as well. The pontoon bridge at Brown's Ferry broke after three of Sherman's four divisions had crossed north of the Tennessee River, leaving Brig. Gen. Peter J. Osterhaus' division in Lookout Valley. Sherman assured Grant that his force was sufficient to attack the northern end of Missionary Ridge as planned, so Grant reassigned Osterhaus' men to Hooker, which gave the latter three divisions to attack the rebel defenders on Lookout Mountain.

Grant wanted Hooker to be cautious. On 24 November, he ordered Hooker to "take the point only if his demonstration should develop its practicability." Instead, Hooker ordered his forces "to cross Lookout Creek and to assault Lookout Mountain, marching down the valley and sweeping every rebel from it." Of Hooker's three divisions, only General Geary, on the right, crossed Lookout Creek without significant opposition, but then faced Brig. Gen. Edward C. Walthall's Confederate brigade. Geary pushed along the base of Lookout Mountain, forcing Walthall back to the Cravens house, just below the northern end of the mountain. This allowed Hooker's other two divisions to cross Lookout Creek close to the river.

On the mountaintop, Brig. Gen. John C. Brown's Confederate brigade was unable to affect the combat below the cliffs. Stevenson brought Brig. Gen. John C. Moore's brigade forward in support of Walthall around 1300 and the fighting became heavy. When Moore was unsuccessful in holding Geary, now supported by a Union brigade under Brig. Gen. Walter C. Whitaker, Stevenson committed Brig. Gen. Edmund Pettus' rebel brigade. At about 1500, a thick fog cloaked the mountain, which gave the fight the name "Battle Above the Clouds." Both sides continued the struggle for the rest of the afternoon, but realizing that his chances of restoring the Lookout Mountain position were gone, Bragg ordered Stevenson's units back behind Chattanooga Creek under the cover of darkness. That night the rebel defenders retreated across Chattanooga Creek, burning the bridges once across.

While Hooker attacked the Confederates at Lookout Mountain, Sherman crossed the Tennessee River on the morning of 24 November with his three divisions and captured what he thought was the north end of Missionary Ridge at Tunnel Hill. His inadequate reconnaissance failed to reveal that it was actually a completely separate hill. Seeing that Cleburne's forces were well entrenched across a deep ravine to his front, Sherman dug in for



Battle of Lookout Mountain, by Kurz & Allison
(Library of Congress)

the night. He advised Grant that he would make a dawn attack on the enemy's Tunnel Hill defenses. Intending for Sherman to make the main assault on the twenty-fifth, Grant directed Hooker to be ready to attack the Confederate left and for Thomas to advance against the Confederate center, ready to support either Sherman or Hooker as the situation developed. Specifically, Grant ordered Thomas to "either carry the rifle pits and ridge directly in front of [Sherman] or move to the left, as the presence of the enemy may require."

Bragg queried his two corps commanders that night about what the Army of Tennessee should do. Hardee counseled retreat, but Breckinridge convinced Bragg that the position on Missionary Ridge was too strong to give up. On the morning of the twenty-fifth, Bragg withdrew Stevenson's division from his left flank to bolster Cleburne's men against Sherman's anticipated assault.

Sherman began his assault against Missionary Ridge at 0930. Cleburne's infantry and artillery put up a stout defense from their strong works on the slopes of Tunnel Hill. Sherman's veterans could make no progress against the Confederates, so Grant looked to the southern end of the battlefield to add pressure to Bragg's thin line on the ridge. He ordered Hooker

to advance against the rebel's left flank on Missionary Ridge, and then to turn north. Hooker began moving east at about 1000 but was delayed crossing Chattanooga Creek, which had to be bridged. Hooker left his artillery and wagons behind and continued with his infantry, but the holdup cost him three hours. His men finally reached Rossville Gap at the southern end of the rebel lines at about 1530. Osterhaus' Federals arrived just before a Confederate brigade commanded by Col. James T. Holtzclaw appeared under orders from General Breckinridge to hold the gap. The rebels were too late. Aware that he had now outflanked the Confederate line, Hooker attacked to the north along the ridge and on its slopes. Holtzclaw tried unsuccessfully to resist the Union onslaught but was pushed back and surrounded, and seven hundred of his men surrendered.

Agitated by Sherman's lack of success at Tunnel Hill and by the slowness of Hooker's advance on Rossville Gap, Grant at 1400 ordered Thomas to move the Army of the Cumberland forward to capture the enemy rifle pits at the base of Missionary Ridge. At about 1530, Thomas' attack began with twenty-three thousand men from the divisions of Baird, Wood, Sheridan, and Johnson crossing open ground toward the ridge in what Grant called "a grand panorama." The Federals easily took the undermanned line of rifle pits at the foot of Missionary Ridge, but the attackers found themselves under rifle and artillery fire from the Confederate positions on the ridgeline above them. Although the Union high command had not ordered the attack to continue up the ridge, many junior officers were unwilling to remain under enemy fire and spontaneously led their men forward up the steep slope. Because of the shape of the hill, Bragg's artillery and infantry on the crest were unable to fire effectively on the advancing Federals the higher they climbed. Seeing the unauthorized continuation of the attack up the ridge, Grant angrily demanded to know who had ordered it. When Thomas and Granger told him that they did not know, Grant responded tersely, "Somebody will suffer if they don't stay there."

Grant need not have worried. Thomas' soldiers advanced to the ridgetop in an unstoppable wave. Because Breckenridge's Confederate defenders were too few and their defenses poorly planned, they were unable to resist the Federals. By 1630, the impromptu assault had shattered the center of Bragg's line. Thousands of rebel soldiers fled the field to the south and east



Battle of Chattanooga, by Thure de Thulstrup
(Library of Congress)

“in a panic I had never before witnessed,” reported Bragg. Grant confirmed the chaotic nature of the moment, writing that “the retreat of the enemy along most of his line was precipitate, and the panic so great that Bragg and his officers lost all control over their men.” Most of the disordered rebels retreated to West Chickamauga Creek and the railroad beyond it.

On 26 November, Bragg’s troops continued retreating toward the rail junction at Dalton, Georgia. Grant ordered a pursuit the following day. Hooker’s men marched off after the enemy but encountered Cleburne’s division, which occupied defensive positions between Dalton and Chattanooga. Cleburne ordered his troops to hold their line until their wagons and artillery were safe, then he waited until the Federals were almost upon his position before opening fire. Surprised, Hooker tried to push through, but Cleburne’s four thousand soldiers and two cannons defied Hooker’s twelve thousand men for five hours until the Southerners retired to Dalton.

Union casualties at Chattanooga were 5,824 (753 killed, 4,722 wounded, and 349 missing) of about 56,000 engaged. Bragg reported casualties of 6,667 (361 killed, 2,160 wounded, and 4,146 missing, mostly prisoners) of about 44,000, although Grant counted 6,142 prisoners taken at the battle. Bragg blamed

Breckinridge for the defeat, relieving him from command and accusing him of drunkenness during the battle. At the same time, President Davis accepted Bragg's resignation from command of the Army of Tennessee on 1 December for what the general called "the disaster." Hardee acted as the temporary army commander until General Joseph E. Johnston replaced him at the end of the month.

THE KNOXVILLE CAMPAIGN

Although President Lincoln and his advisers were pleased with the news of the Union victory, they did not overlook other important objectives. Lincoln's message of congratulations to Grant after Missionary Ridge said only: "Well done. Many thanks to all. Remember Burnside."

Indeed, Knoxville was still threatened by rebel forces under Longstreet. On 16 November, nine days before Thomas' men swept up Missionary Ridge, General Burnside had marched from Knoxville to Campbell's Station, about fifteen miles to the west, with the intent of delaying the Confederate advance. After repulsing Longstreet's attempt at a double envelopment, Burnside had led his men back to Knoxville the following day.

Longstreet had intended to attack the city on 20 November but decided to wait for reinforcements. The delay lasted a week. Short of supplies and lacking the heavy artillery and engineers needed to conduct a siege, he decided to launch a surprise assault. His reconnaissance of the Union defenses led him to conclude that the only vulnerable place in the position was at Fort Sanders, which topped a steep hill northwest of Knoxville. Consequently, on 29 November, following a brief artillery bombardment, three Southern brigades attacked the fort. The Confederate troops encountered difficult obstacles as they advanced, including a Union innovation, entanglements made by connecting tree stumps with telegraph wire in the cleared ground in front of the embankments. Farther on, the attackers came upon a ditch twelve feet wide and from four to ten feet deep with steep sides. Crossing the ditch under devastating Union fire was impossible, particularly since the Confederates failed to prepare scaling ladders. "Flesh and blood could not stand the storm of shot and shell that was poured upon them, and they soon broke in confused retreat," reported a Union officer. The costly attack ended in just twenty minutes, with the Confederates suffering 813 casualties and the Union defenders 13.



Fort Sanders, Knoxville, Tennessee
(Library of Congress)

As he planned his next move, Longstreet learned that Grant had defeated Bragg at Chattanooga. Although ordered to rejoin Bragg, he decided to maintain the siege of Knoxville as long as possible and then to rejoin Lee's Army of Northern Virginia. He remained outside of Knoxville until 4 December, when word that Sherman was approaching with twenty thousand Federals led him to abandon his positions and move to Rogersville, sixty-five miles to the northeast. On 9 December he went into winter quarters. With the threat to the city ended, Sherman returned to Chattanooga immediately with the bulk of his army.

Analysis

The operations in Tennessee in 1863 were significant on several counts. Not only had the Union gained control over most of the state, but by seizing Chattanooga, it also had gained an important base from which to invade the Deep South in 1864, an endeavor that would culminate in the capture of Atlanta in September of that year. The campaign also highlighted the growing strategic significance of railroads, as first the Confederacy, and then more spectacularly the Union, moved large numbers of troops rapidly

from the Eastern to the Western Theater in bids to gain a decisive advantage. Finally, the campaign illustrated the timeless importance of leadership in determining the outcome of military operations. Talent and mediocrity were demonstrated on both sides, but ultimately it was the Union that was able to put together a winning team. As a result of the Vicksburg and Chattanooga campaigns, President Lincoln was able to identify two men—Generals Grant and Sherman—upon whom he could rely to bring the war to a successful conclusion. President Lincoln then empowered these men to overcome the dysfunctional command arrangements that had often bedeviled Union operations in the past, first by putting Grant in charge of all Federal forces in the Western Theater in October 1863, and then by making him commander of all Federal armies in March 1864, with Sherman taking over command of the Western Theater. By contrast, the Confederacy proved unable to rationalize its command structure and bring talent to the fore.

The mutual antipathy of Bragg, Polk, Hardee, Buckner, and Longstreet impeded effective operational and tactical coordination and contributed to several lost opportunities for the Confederates to defeat Union forces in middle and eastern Tennessee. Even the intervention of Confederate President Davis was ineffective in repairing the dysfunctional command situation. Without an effective command structure, the South would be hard pressed to keep the more numerous Federal forces in check. The Union victory left its armies poised to invade the Deep South in 1864.



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For more information on the U.S. Army in the Civil War, please read other titles in the U.S. Army Campaigns of the Civil War series published by the U.S. Army Center of Military History (www.history.army.mil).

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