

The Battle of Nashville

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Outline

Thesis: Major General George Thomas' planning and execution of the Battle of Nashville was critical to the overall success of the North during the Civil War.

I. Major General George Henry Thomas groomed to be a great leader and ultimately lauded for planning and executing the Battle of Nashville, the battle claimed to be the most critical to the success of the North during the Civil War.

A. Thomas educated in the best schools and academies of the region as a child.

B. Thomas initiated his military career with an appointment to the United States Military Academy.

II. The Battle of Nashville proved critical to the overall success of the North during the Civil War.

A. Thomas formed troops for the battle on 15 December.

B. Thomas' troops broke through Hood's units on 16 December.

C. North beats South at this decisive battle.

III. Hood faced numerous adversities at the beginning and during the Battle of Nashville.

A. The South contemplated rationale for attempting to move the Army of Tennessee to block Sherman's supply and communication lines.

1. Confederate President Davis desperately sought an acceptable and practical solution to the South's military and economic situation in spring of 1864.

2. Hood proposed to carry the war into Tennessee and Kentucky but this gave Sherman numerical superiority.

3. Hood intended to seize the initiative by maneuver despite a depleted army.

B. Hood faced a major dilemma as the will-o'-wisp raider against Hood's extended and vulnerable supply lines.

1. Hood could destroy the enemy-held Western and Atlantic Railroad from Chattanooga to Atlanta.

2. By swinging north, rather than defending in place, Hood considered the possibility of forcing Sherman to withdraw in an effort to protect his communications.

3. If Hood ignored this threat and moved south into Alabama or toward the Carolina coast he would leave an enemy capable of raiding further north or swinging south in rapid pursuit.

IV. Hood already failed while enroute to Nashville from Franklin.

- A. Hood missed opportunities because of costly delays.
- B. Hood made poor decisions that cost many soldiers' lives.
- C. Hood demonstrated inadequate leadership.

V. Thomas' planning and execution was not the overriding factor in the success of the North winning the Civil War.

- A. Facts prove that Hood was an uncooperative commander.
- B. Lack of communication played a key part in Hood's failure to execute plans.
- C. Hood was not physically fit to be in charge of the Army of Tennessee.

VI. Many oppose the view that it was Thomas' planning and execution of the Battle of Nashville was critical to the overall success of the North during the Civil War.

A. The Battle of Nashville was not critical to the overall success of the North during the Civil War.

- 1. Facts prove Gettysburg more critical and decisive than Nashville.
- 2. Hood's plan proved more "fantastic" rather than realistic.
- 3. Battle of Franklin affected Hood's defeat at Nashville than Thomas' planning and execution.
- 4. Critics likened battle to modern day prize fighting.

B. Gettysburg proved more critical than Nashville to the overall success of the North.

- 1. Although Nashville was the last aggressive action, Gettysburg considered as the high water mark of the Confederate action.
- 2. Of the more than 2,000 land engagements of the Civil War, Gettysburg ranked supreme.

3. The tide of the Confederacy swept to its crest, paused, and receded.

4. A decisive battle is a battle “of which a contrary event would have essentially varied the drama of the world in all its subsequent scenes”.

C. Modern military experts described Hood’s plan as “fantastic”.

1. Hood’s plan to use Nashville as a launching pad to carry the war to the North sounded similar to Lee’s plan ending at Gettysburg.

2. Grant prepared to make his way to Nashville to take charge of the battle.

3. Hood’s plan at Nashville compared to the German Battle of the Bulge.

4. Hood’s movement against Nashville lacked weight to give it complete victory.

D. Effects of the Battle of Franklin compared to the effects of Thomas on the outcome of the Battle of Nashville.

1. Losses suffered by Hood at Franklin weakened him to a point he was less difficult a victim for Thomas at Nashville.

2. After the great loss of life at Franklin, Hood’s Army failed to be in a condition to make a successful attack on Nashville.

E. Hood’s attempt to complete his plan at Nashville compared with a washed up prize fighter attempting one too many championship.

1. In the terms of the prize ring, Franklin was a knockdown that gave Hood a thorough shaking up and started blood to flowing.

2. Nashville resembled more of Ali losing to Larry Holmes in 1981.

VII. In conclusion, even though Thomas proved to be an adequate leader he should not be lauded for planning and executing the most critical battle of the Civil War. His opponent, Hood, simply faced more adversity while fighting Thomas and had little chance of winning.

The Battle of Nashville

“In a last desperate attempt to force Major General William T. Sherman’s army out of Georgia, General John Bell Hood led the Army of Tennessee north toward Nashville in November 1864 (“Battle Summaries”). During the Battle of Nashville, his units were decimated by the North. General Thomas, a Union commander, gained significant credit for the success of this battle. More significantly, many gave credit to General Thomas’ planning and execution of the Battle of Nashville as being critical to the overall success of the North during the Civil War.

Definitely lauded as a great leader in his prime, many identified his strengths in his youth also. As a young boy he was groomed to be a great leader. George Henry Thomas was born in Southampton County, Virginia, on 31 July 1816 and died in San Francisco, California, 28 March 1870. He was descended, on his father's side, from Welsh ancestry, and, on his mother's, from a French Huguenot family. Not much is known of his youth. At an early age he was distinguished for his thoroughness with which he mastered everything he undertook. His home life was pleasant and genial, and he was carefully educated in the best schools and academies of the region. At the age of nineteen he began the study of law (“George Henry Thomas”).

Thomas initiated his military career with an appointment to the United States Military Academy. At the United States Military Academy he rose steadily in rank, from 26th at the end of the first year to twelfth at graduation. He was nicknamed, after the fashion of the place, "George Washington," from a fancied resemblance in appearance and character to the great patriot. He graduated and was commissioned second lieutenant in the 3rd Artillery, 1 July 1840, and entered duty at New York. He was soon sent to Florida to take part in the Indian War, where, in 1841, he gained a brevet for gallantry. After a short stay at various posts on the south Atlantic coast, he was sent to Texas. When the Mexican War began, he accompanied the column

under General Zachary Taylor, distinguishing himself at Monterey, where he was promoted to captain, and at Buena Vista, 22 and 23 February 1847, bore a more decisive part. The success of that battle was largely due to the artillery which he was in charge. He was again honored for gallantry, thus earning three recognitions in a little more than six years after entering the service. The citizens of his native county in the following July presented him with a superb sword. He remained on duty in Mexico and Texas until 1849, and was again sent to Florida. In 1851 he was detailed as an instructor of artillery and cavalry at the United States Military Academy, where he remained until 1 May 1854. Soon afterward two cavalry regiments were added to the Army, and he was appointed commander of one of them. As a result he was promoted to junior major on 12 May 1855. In the composition of this new regiment unusual care was taken in the selection of officers. Jefferson Davis was the Secretary of War, and the choice was dictated not merely by ability but also by locality. Of the fifty-one officers that served in it prior to the beginning of the Civil War, thirty-one were from the south, and of these twenty-four entered the Confederate service, twelve of whom became general officers. More notable ones among these were Robert E. Lee, William J. Hardee, and John B. Hood. The Battle of Nashville was substantially the end of the rebellion in that quarter. For it he received the appointment of major-general in the United States Army. With the close of the war, General Thomas bent all his energies to the restoration of peace and order throughout his command. In May 1869, he was placed in command of the military division of the Pacific and held it until his death in San Francisco ("George Henry Thomas").

The Battle of Nashville proved critical to the overall success of the North during the Civil War. Critics argue that the success at Nashville for the North was the critical and decisive point, unfortunately for the South. Thomas' leadership and planning was credited for this success. He

overcame a lot of adversity during this period. Troops from both sides were amassing in Tennessee and Thomas received great pressure from the President and General Ulysses Grant to attack days prior to 15 December.

A terrible storm of sleet and rain, freezing as it fell, came up on 9 December 1864 in Nashville rendering all movement impossible for troops fighting during the Civil War. On the 14th a thaw began and by noon on the 14th the ice had melted sufficiently to permit the movement of troops. At 3 p.m. Thomas called together his corps commanders and laid before them his plan of battle for the following morning. "Thomas's tactical plan was masterly: it was a coordinated attack . . ." (Boatner 579). Major General James Steedman was to make a feint against the enemy's right, while Major General Andrew Smith, with the three divisions of the Army of the Tennessee, was to form his troops on the Hardin Pike and make a vigorous assault on Hood's left. In this movement Smith was to be supported by Major General James Wilson, with three divisions of cavalry, and one division of cavalry was to be sent out on the Charlotte Pike to clear that road of the enemy and keep watch on Bell's landing. Brigadier General Thomas Wood was directed to leave a strong skirmish line in his works from Lawrens' Hill to his right, form the remainder of the 4th Corps on the Hillsboro Road to support Smith's left, and at the same time move against the left and rear of the salient on Montgomery Hill. Major General John Schofield, after leaving a strong line of skirmishers in the trenches from Lawrens' Hill to Fort Negley, was to move with the rest of the 23rd Corps and cooperate with Wood, protecting his left against any attack by the enemy. The troops under Brigadier General James Donaldson, Brigadier General John Miller and Brigadier General Charles Cruft were to occupy the inner line of works and guard the approaches to the city. "At four o'clock on the morning of December 15 the brassy blare of the reveille bugles was heard all along the

Federal lines, and the movements preliminary to the day's action were set in motion." (Horn 73)

A dense fog hung over the field during the early morning hours, completely concealing the movements of the Federal troops. A couple days earlier, General Ulysses Grant had earlier attempted to relieve Thomas since he was hesitating and not attacking earlier, he wanted to wait longer so he could gain more troops. Each officer seemed to feel the injustice of the blame and fault cast on Thomas, and all now moved as if determined to vindicate the valor of the Army of the Cumberland and the honor and judgment of its commander. At six o'clock in the morning Steedman moved out on the Murfreesboro Pike and two hours later began his demonstration against Cheatham's right. This demonstration was so vigorous that it was virtually an assault. The roar of his artillery and the rapid fire of his musketry soon drew General John B. Hood's attention, commander of Army of Tennessee, to that part of his line. Reinforcements were hurried to Cheatham as Steedman withdrew his men after they had carried part of the enemy's entrenchments, as they were subjected to an enfilading (a position subjecting them to sweeping fire) fire and the object of the feint had been gained. Though toward noon, Colonel Thompson, with three regiments of colored troops assaulted and carried the left of the front line of Confederate works on the Nolensville Pike, holding his position there until the next morning. Smith had to move farther than anticipated, and the movements of his men were slowed by the fog and mud, so that it was ten o'clock before he reached the first of the detached redoubts (encasements) which Hood had built between his left flank and the river. This was between the Hardin and Hillsboro Roads and was manned by a detachment of Walthall's infantry, with four pieces of artillery. More Union commanders, Brigadier General Edward Hatch and Brigadier General John McArthur opened fire on it with their batteries, Colonel Datus Coon's cavalry brigade dismounted and charged, carrying the redoubt and capturing the guns. At the same time

McArthur charged from another direction and as the enemy was retiring captured 150 prisoners. The captured redoubt was under the fire of another and stronger one, and the two commands now turned their attention to its reduction. Again Coon's brigade, armed with repeating rifles, advanced up the hill, firing as they went, while McArthur was in such close support that the Confederates saw they were doomed to defeat and made the attempt to abandon the redoubt. Just then McArthur ordered a charge, which was successfully made, and 250 prisoners were added to those already taken. In the meantime, Hatch had engaged a portion of Confederate Major General Samuel French's division near Richland Creek and driven it back beyond the Hardin house, where Colonel Spaulding, with the 12th Tennessee Cavalry made a brilliant charge, capturing 43 prisoners and the headquarters train of Chalmers' division ("Battle of Nashville").

Thomas' troops broke through Hoods' units on 16 December. "The morning of December 16 found most of Hood's force exhausted, as would be expected of men who have fought all day and worked all night-hardly the ideal preparation for another day of fighting" (Horn 112). The battle on the 16th was opened by the advance of the 4th Corps on the Franklin Pike. The enemy's skirmishers were driven back and Wood pressed forward to the main line of works on Overton's Hill. Steedman came up on the Nolensville Road and formed on Wood's left, while Smith connected with Wood's right, forming a continuous line of battle. Schofield occupied a position facing east, perpendicular to Smith's line, and Wilson, on the right of Schofield, was directed to gain the enemy's rear with his cavalry. By noon Wilson had reached the rear and stretched his line across the Granny White pike. Thomas then ordered an assault on Overton's hill, in the hope of gaining the Franklin Road, thereby cutting off the last avenue of retreat. Morgan's brigade of Steedman's command, with the left brigades of the 4th Corps, moved

forward to the assault, advancing in the face of a heavy fire of infantry and artillery until near the crest, when a line of reserves arose and opened such a destructive fire that the column was compelled to fall back. The heaviest losses sustained by the Union Army were in this attack on Overton's Hill. Immediately following Wood's repulse here Smith and Schofield moved against the enemy's works in their front, carried everything before them broke the line in a dozen places, captured all the artillery and several thousand prisoners. At the same time Wilson attacked the enemy in the rear, clinching his possession of Granny White Pike and completely shutting off retreat by that road. Wood and Steedman, hearing the shouts of victory on their right, now made another assault on Overton's Hill, and although they were met by the same heavy fire as before, the onset was irresistible. As the Federal lines advanced, the enemy broke in confusion, leaving all his artillery and many prisoners in the hands of the victorious assailants. On through Brentwood Pass the Confederates fled, a disorganized mob, closely pursued by the 4th Corps for several miles or until darkness put an end to the chase for that day. The pursuit was continued for ten days, but owing to the delays encountered in crossing Rutherford's Creek and Duck River, both swollen by recent rains and the bridges destroyed, Hood got so far in advance that he crossed the Tennessee River at Bainbridge on the 26th and the chase was abandoned ("Battle of Nashville"). "General Hood does not seem to have issued any general orders for the action of the sixteenth" (Horn 112).

The North beats South at this decisive battle. The Union loss in the battle of Nashville was 387 killed, 2,562 wounded, and 112 missing. No detailed report of the Confederate losses was made. Hood reached Tupelo, Mississippi with about 21,000 men. Thomas officially reported the capture of 13,189 prisoners, and it is known that the Confederate loss in killed and wounded at the Battle of Franklin alone was about 5,000 to say nothing of Nashville and the other

engagements of the campaign. In addition to the prisoners reported by Thomas, the Union army captured 72 pieces of artillery and a large number of battle-flags. Notwithstanding Grant's severe criticisms of Thomas' delay, he sent a telegram congratulating him on his victory, and Secretary Stanton ordered a salute of 100 guns to be fired on the 16th to celebrate the event ("Battle of Nashville"). On the 15th and 16th, in exact accordance with the detailed order of battle, the confident troops of General Thomas, who had never lost faith in their leader, by skillful and energetic movements, completely overthrew the last organized Confederate Army in the southwest. A feeble remnant, despoiled of guns and transportation, came together some weeks later at Tupelo, Mississippi, nearly 250 miles distant. As an army it never again took the field ("George Henry Thomas").

On the Confederate side also there were many devastating events that led up to the Battle of Nashville and Jefferson Davis believed he had a General who would be decisive and provide the leadership that had been so sorely lacking in the Army of Tennessee up to this point. The General he had in mind was John B. Hood, at six feet two inches tall, muscular in physique and broad shouldered he looked a bit like a lumberjack masquerading as a Confederate General. Hood had barely managed to prod and squirm his way through West Point with the Class of 1853, accumulating in his senior year 196 demerits, four short of expulsion. His grades were low, particularly in mathematics, and when he graduated as a second brevet lieutenant in July 1853, he stood forty-fourth in his class of fifty-two. Part of the problem may have been a lackluster education at a school in rural Kentucky. Thanks to this bare bones high school equivalency, Hood appeared to be relatively simplistic in his thinking and was not regarded as having a refined or calculating mind.

However, what Hood lacked in intellect he more than made up in physical courage which he demonstrated on the frontier in Texas and during the early days of the Civil War. Through his demonstrated valor Hood rose from Lieutenant to the command of the vaunted Texas Brigade, of which General Lee had considered to be his best shock troop (Sword 25).

The Confederate government's position was that the Army of Tennessee must prevent further penetration of Confederate territory by assuming the offensive. This meant carrying the war northward into Tennessee and Kentucky.

No longer did the South have the luxury of facing poorly led Union armies, the Union through trial and misfortune had finally produced aggressive competent leaders in Grant and Sherman. Sherman continually out maneuvered General Johnston the Commander of the Army Tennessee and methodically advanced towards Atlanta. All of this proved too much for President Davis who sent General Bragg his personal military advisor to visit the Army of Tennessee, Bragg conferred with General Polk and General Hood the two Corps commanders and then sent a scathing report to Davis condemning Johnston for his poor leadership, that was all President Davis needed to hear. On 17 July a telegram was sent to Atlanta relieving General Sydney E. Johnston of command of the Army of Tennessee (Sword 31).

General John B. Hood was immediately appointed commander of the Army of Tennessee; he would now have the opportunity to demonstrate that President Davis was correct in his assessment of his fighting spirit and love of the offense. However; General Sherman continued to display greater leadership and skill through his continued out-maneuvering of the Confederate forces. By September Sherman was in control of Atlanta and the Army of Tennessee was in retreat. This was too much for the Confederate populace to stomach and was a major

embarrassment to Davis who decided to visit with Hood to see how this situation could be rectified.

The president arrived at Palmetto, Georgia, on 25 September 1864 and serious discussions that would decide Hood's fate and command of the Army of Tennessee promptly began. During this meeting Hood laid out his plans for the Army of Tennessee to move into Tennessee, which Hood knew would please Davis immensely.

The Confederate President Davis was desperately looking for an acceptable and practical solution to the South's military and economic situation in spring 1864. General Hood proposed to carry the war into Tennessee and Kentucky rather than fight Sherman in a full-scale pitched battle, which given Sherman's overwhelming numerical superiority would most likely prove unprofitable. Hood with a depleted army intended to seize the initiative by maneuver.

General Hood knew his army was not strong enough to challenge Sherman's full command, but fully capable of doing great harm as a will-o'-the-wisp raider against the enemy's extended and vulnerable supply lines. By destroying much of the enemy-held Western & Atlantic Railroad from Chattanooga to Atlanta, Sherman's critical railroad would be broken. By swinging north, rather than remaining on the defense in southern Georgia and Alabama, Hood might be able to force Sherman to withdraw to protect his communications. If, however, Sherman ignored this threat and moved south into Alabama or toward the Carolina's coast, he would he would leave in his rear a dangerous enemy capable of raiding further north or swinging south in rapid pursuit (Sword 35).

If Sherman followed Hood North as fully expected, the Confederate commander might compel Sherman to attack him on favorable defensive terrain, thus negating much

of the Federal numerical superiority. The alternative to remaining on the defensive, Hood seemed to realize was impractical both political and strategically. To delay would only allow Sherman to gather strength for an anticipated move into southern Alabama, where destruction of the Confederacy's vital war making resources would continue. Furthermore, it might cost Hood his command.

Hood's concept was both offensive and defensive: to act against the enemy's lines of supply would in essence serve to protect the Confederacy's. To seize the initiative and force Sherman to react to Hood's movements would forestall any further conquest of Southern territory in the region. By drawing Sherman away from Atlanta in pursuit of an evasive Confederate Army, Hood might thwart Sherman with deft maneuvering (Sword 37).

The Battle of Nashville in December 1864 was a battle that should have never taken place or should have been engaged at a later date. This can be supported by what General James said, in his memoirs written thirty years later, "Hood's movement against Nashville lacked nothing but weight to give it complete victory" (Wilson 16). General Hood was defeated at the Battle of Nashville before he ever arrived.

Opportunities for victory were missed because of costly delays. From the first movement of Hood's Army, difficult at best and dependent for success on speed, had encountered obstacles (Horn 13). After the battle of Atlanta, many times General Hood had to slow down assault executions because he had to wait for General Forrest's cavalry brigade. Forrest at the time was engaged in his raid into West Tennessee. For General Forrest to assist General Hood it would have taken a day and half worth of travel to reach him.

While attempting to cross the Tennessee River at Guntersville, Alabama they came upon a bridge they expected to be in place had been destroyed by the Union Army. General Hood and

his army had no way of crossing the river so they were forced to trudge on across the state to Tuscumbia to cross the river. This detour cost them three weeks.

Arriving there on 30 October, Hood had suffered his first disappointment: supplies, which he was expecting to find there, had not arrived, and the rebuilding of the railroad from Corinth to Tuscumbia had not been completed. Then came the heavy rains arrived, making it difficult to move the wagons. A pontoon bridge had to be built across the Tennessee. All in all, three precious weeks had been lost. These were weeks that Hood could not afford to lose, weeks that were of supremely vital value to General Thomas in building up his defensive force. Finally on 20 November, with rain still falling and the roads hub-deep in mud, General Hood and his men began to move northward.

Hood made poor decisions that cost many lives. During General Hood's march to Nashville on afternoon of 29 November, he encountered General Schofield and had a plan to trap him with flanking maneuvers, which were carried out smoothly, but Hood's men, due to fatigue, could not complete the task until General Forrest arrived with more men. But Schofield did not stay idle. He took this opportunity to seize the strategic importance of Spring Hill, he marched one of his divisions to Spring Hill where he entrenched a strong defensive position when Hood's advancing forces began to arrive. Forrest did not arrive until nightfall. Here is one of the unexplained mysteries of the war. Confusion and lack of communication caused General Hood to halt operations and bivouac for the night. Even though, he knew how important it was to secure Spring Hill. And on top of the confusion and lack of communication, Hood allowed Schofield's entire army to bypass him during the night along the road through Spring Hill in the direction of Nashville without any confrontation from the Confederates.

The next morning when Hood woke up and realized what had happened, he angrily berated his subordinates and lashed his army into a double-quick pursuit of the fleeing Federals (Horn 18). This was insane because Schofield and his men had several hours lead and were already in Franklin. Hood's army reached Franklin in the late afternoon.

After Hood and his worn out men reached Franklin, Hood made another drastic mistake and decided to order his men to engage in an immediate frontal assault. Before making this call he was either unaware or not impressed by the great strength of the enemy's position. He didn't even take into account that his men had been "double-timing" all day just to catch up. Now he wanted to attack an enemy who had been resting the last four to five hours. General Forrest, his Calvary commander, advised him not to do this but General Hood totally disregarded his advice. Because of his ignorance he lost 7,000 men to death, injury, or capture, including a heavy toll of officers. Included in this toll of officers were twelve generals, six colonels, two lieutenant colonels, three majors, and three captains.

This devastating loss caused General Hood to make another fatal mistake. Would he admit his defeat by being outmaneuvered, admit his Tennessee campaign was a failure and retreat, and fight another day? No, he continued to march toward Nashville.

General Hood showed signs of inadequate leadership. General Hood knew he was low on manpower but refused to wait for reinforcements from the Army of Tennessee from Texas. Instead of waiting for re-enforcements from Texas, he decided to take his chances and head to Nashville and set up a defensive perimeter on the hills south of Nashville.

General Forrest and his men were not utilized to their maximum possibilities in the actual fighting at Nashville. General Hood failed to wait for Forrest and his men to arrive from

Springdale, Tennessee where he was battling the forces of Wilson's Union Calvary. If Hood had shown true leadership skills he would have waited until Forrest arrived before he attacked.

From this point on, the morale of his troops dwindled. While he sat on the hills of Tennessee waiting for the right moment to attack and for re-enforcements from Texas, inclement weather set in and destroyed morale. General Hood and his men had no supplies and many of his soldiers performed duties barefooted or used rawhide from animals to suffice. His inadequate leadership began after the Battle of Franklin. A true leader would have made a better decision after the loss at Franklin and retreated his battered troops. There he would have had adequate supplies, shoes for his soldiers and cover from the inclement weather. He would have had a better chance at Nashville.

Facts prove that General Hood was an uncooperative commander. According to the website, "Hood, John Bell", it stated that Hood excelled as a brigade and division leader but was uncooperative as a corps commander. He was known as an "unqualified disaster at the head of an army, which he all but destroyed" ("Civil War in Miniature"). After the defeat at Franklin, Hood's generals advised that they were low on manpower and should consider retreating with his surviving army intact and fight another day. Hood's combative temperament blinded him from good advice from his subordinates. Any good general knew that cooperation among leadership was important, but not Hood.

Lack of communication played a key part in Hood's failure to execute. During the battle at Spring Hill, General Hood failed to communicate with his division commanders numerous times, while maneuvering troops in pursuit of General Schofield. This became one of the many times Hood failed to stop and make sure everyone was on the same sheet of music.

Hood failed to listen to the advice of General Nathan Forrest, Major General Benjamin Cheatham or Patrick Cleburne. He deployed battle lines for a direct frontal assault. Hood believed a head-on attack and "cold steel" were the foundation of a man's character. Some believe he was mad at his men for allowing Schofield to escape from Spring Hill to Franklin, but it was Hood's vague orders or lack of communication that allowed Schofield to escape ("Civil War In Miniature")!

General Hood was not physically fit to be in charge of the Army of Tennessee. If Hood had been in good physical shape during the Civil War, the Battle of Nashville would have had a different outcome. After service in southeastern Virginia he led his division at Gettysburg where he suffered a crippling wound to his right arm. This took a physiological effect on Hood, which took months for recovery. He should have been discharged at that time but was able to stay in. Then, while commanding the corps at Chickamauga, he was wounded in the leg, which was amputated. It was at this time that Hood underwent a change. He had a great deal of difficulty in coordinating with the other corps commanders during the Atlanta Campaign ("Hood, John Bell"). A person in their right mind would have discharged Hood, but instead he received a permanent promotion with the Army of Tennessee. This was a fatal mistake allowed by Jefferson Davis, which cost the Confederation many lives and probably cost them the war.

Union Major General George H. Thomas' planning and execution of the Battle of Nashville was not critical to the overall success of the North during the Civil War. Major General Thomas planned and executed the battle more successfully than Confederate General John B. Hood, but this fact does not defend identifying this battle as critical. The argument presented below outlines that Gettysburg proved more critical than Nashville to the overall success of the North,

that Hood's plan proved fantastic rather than real, and that the Battle of Franklin had more to do with Hood's defeat at Nashville than Thomas.

Stanley F. Horn attempts to portray the Battle of Nashville as "decisive" in his book, The Decisive Battle of Nashville. Excerpts from his writings prove the opposite.

The battle fought at Nashville in December of 1864, the high water mark of the Southern Confederacy's last aggressive action, was the decisive battle of the Civil War (Horn v). Although Nashville was the last aggressive action, you must consider Gettysburg the high water mark of Confederate action.

Of the more than 2,000 land engagements of the Civil War, Gettysburg ranks supreme ("Battle of Gettysburg"). If Gettysburg ranks supreme among all battles of the Civil War, how can Nashville be the decisive battle?

At Gettysburg on 1, 2, and 3 July 1863, more men actually fought and died than in any other battle before or since on North American soil. The tide of the Confederacy had "swept to its crest, paused, and receded" ("Battle of Gettysburg"). The tide never rose again. There were other battles, but none possessed the magnitude or significance of Gettysburg.

In his Fifteen Decisive Battles of the World, Sir Edward Creasy says, a decisive battle is a battle "of which a contrary event would have essentially varied the drama of the world in all its subsequent scenes" (Horn v). Creasy defines Gettysburg, not Nashville.

Hood's plan to use Nashville as a launching pad to carry the war to the North sounds similar to General Robert E. Lee's plan ending at Gettysburg. Lee, too, planned to carry the war to the North. Since it would take months for the routed force at Gettysburg to reorganize, victory for Lee would ensure free travels throughout the North. The North would see the carnage and horror

of war in their on backyard. Lee was soundly defeated at Gettysburg. Hood developed a similar plan with far less chance of success.

General Grant knew the importance of defeating the Confederates at Nashville. Concerned about the ability of Major General Thomas to defeat General Hood, Grant prepared to make his way to Nashville to personally take charge of the battle. On the 13th, Grant himself was on the way there when the result of the first day of the Battle of Nashville (15 December) stopped further action in that direction (Cox). Grant's presence would have ensured a Union victory. Only after hearing of the success of day one did he turn around.

A Confederate victory at Nashville could not have happened. Grant's planning to take personal control of the battle provides one reason. The plan provides a second. It developed that this plan was impractical in the existing circumstances. Some modern military experts have therefore felt free to describe the plans as "fantastic" (Horn viii).

Hood's plan at Nashville compares to the German Battle of the Bulge. It poses a grand conclusion without the reality of accomplishment. The only question remained the cost of defeating such a fantastic plan.

General James H. Wilson said that Hood's movement against Nashville lacked nothing but weight to give it complete victory (Horn ix). Wilson admits that Hood did not have the weight to achieve victory. That sounds like saying that all a 5'9", 150-pound young man needs to whip Ray Lewis on the football field is weight. Ladies and gentlemen, weight matters! Hood did not have it. Hood's plan resembles a pipe dream with little chance of becoming reality. On the other hand, General Lee had a very real chance of success at Gettysburg.

After Nashville, there were no more battles of material import. Within four months, the war was over (Horn vii). After Gettysburg, there were no more battles of material import. Who

surrendered after Nashville? The Confederacy surrendered after General Lee surrendered the Army of Northern Virginia at Appomattox. Nashville simply presented another battle along the way between Gettysburg and Appomattox.

The losses suffered by Hood at Franklin did so weaken him that he was a less difficult victim for Thomas at Nashville (Horn xii). Due to Hood's crushing defeat by Brigadier General John M. Schofield at Franklin, Hood's army possessed little chance of victory at Nashville. Beauregard, in his preliminary report to the Confederate War Department, said: "It is clear to my mind that after the great loss of life at Franklin, the army was no longer in a condition to make a successful attack on Nashville" (Cox). The Battle of Franklin represents a more critical and decisive battle than Nashville.

In the terms of the prize ring, Franklin was a knockdown that gave Hood a thorough shaking up and started blood to flowing. Franklin was the knockdown; Nashville was the knockout for Hood (Horn xiii). At Franklin, the referee should have stopped the fight on a technical knockout. Hood was finished. His effort at Nashville proved valiant, but Franklin doomed his army to defeat.

Nashville resembled more of Ali losing to Larry Holmes in 1981. Although Holmes was a world champion at the time, he had been Ali's sparring partner. Ali had long since been finished as a prize fighter. He could only dream of another victory. The Confederacy, too, had long since been finished. After General Lee's defeat at Gettysburg 3 July 1863, the Confederacy never again posed a major offensive threat to the Union army. Every battle from that point on was a defensive battle or a dream. General John B. Hood's plan was merely a dream.

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DEPARTMENT OF THE ARMY
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FORT BLISS, TEXAS 79918

ATSS-BAR

14 February 2005

MEMORANDUM FOR Faculty Advisor, Group Room R09, ATTN: SGM Moore, United States Army Sergeants Major Academy, Fort Bliss, Texas 79918

SUBJECT: Battle of Nashville

1. Thesis Statement. Major General George Thomas' planning and execution of the Battle of Nashville was critical to the overall success of the North during the Civil War.
2. Discussion. Major General George Thomas received great amounts of credit for the Union's success at Nashville against General Thomas Hood of the Confederate Army. Many perceive this battle as the most critical battle for the North.
3. Conclusion. Thomas was groomed to be a great leader even as a child. Success at Nashville con
4. Counterpoint. General Hood's Army was already compromised and Thomas' planning and execution of the battle had little to do with the success of the North. JH
5. Haines Award. We (do/do not) request that the Haines Award Selection Board consider this paper for the General Haines Award for Excellence in research. *Writing Research Papers*, Tenth Edition by James D. Lester and James D. Lester, Jr., is the Guide used in the preparation of this research paper.

VICTORIA L. PANZER
MSG, USA
Chairperson

SGM Donald McCrory
SGM Paul Shaw
MSG Melvin Ford
MSG Marjan Horvat