



The Franklin-Nashville Campaign: The History of the Civil War Campaign that Destroyed the Confederate Army of Tennessee

By Charles River Editors

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*Includes pictures *Includes accounts of the campaign written by generals and soldiers on both sides *Includes online resources and a bibliography for further reading *Includes a table of contents “Never had there been such an overwhelming victory during the Civil War - indeed, never in American military history.” - Wiley Ford’s comment on the Franklin-Nashville Campaign As Sherman began his infamous march to the sea, Lincoln instructed Grant to redirect General George H. Thomas’ efforts back to Tennessee to protect Union supply lines and stop the offensive mounted by Confederate general John Bell Hood. Hood had broken away from Atlanta and was trying to compel Sherman to follow him, thus diverting him from his intended path of destruction. With Sherman marching east toward the sea, he directed Thomas to try to block Hood around Nashville. In late November, the Army of the Ohio, being led by Thomas’ principal subordinate John Schofield, all but blindly stumbled into Hood’s forces, and it was only through luck that some of them had not been bottled up before they could regroup together. Receiving word of Union troop movement in the Nashville area, General Hood sent for his generals while attempting to hold off Schofield’s advance. Hood knew that if Schofield reached Thomas’ position, their combined armies would number more than twice his. Though the Confederates successfully blocked Schofield’s route to Nashville, the Union general managed to execute an all-night maneuver that brought him to Franklin, about 18 miles south of Nashville. On November 30, the Union army began digging in around Franklin, and that afternoon Hood ordered a frontal assault on the dug in Union army which deeply upset his own officers. After repeated frontal assaults failed to create a gap in the Union lines, Schofield withdrew his men across the river on the night of November 30, successfully escaping Hood’s army. Meanwhile, Hood had inflicted nearly 8,000 casualties upon his army (men the Confederacy could scarcely afford to lose), while the Union lost about a quarter of that. Despite practically wrecking his army, which was now only about 25,000 strong, Hood marched his battered army to a position outside Nashville, Tennessee, where he took up defensive positions while awaiting reinforcements

from Texas. On December 1, General Thomas sent word to Grant that he had “retired to the fortifications around Nashville until I can get my cavalry equipped”, a reference to the fact that Forrest’s cavalry had more than double the manpower of the Union cavalry. But Thomas also added that “if Hood attacks our position, he would be seriously damaged, but if he makes no attack until our cavalry can be equipped, [I] or General Schofield will move against him at once.” The following day Grant wired back, “If Hood is permitted to remain quietly about Nashville, you will lose all the road back to Chattanooga, and possibly have to abandon the line of the Tennessee. Should he attack you it is all well; but if he does not, you should attack him before he fortifies. Arm and put in the trenches your quartermaster’s employees, citizens, etc.” Even with Grant constantly urging him forward, Thomas held back for nearly two weeks, partly because of a bad ice storm, and his delay nearly resulted in having Grant remove him from command. When it was clear reinforcements wouldn’t arrive by December 15, Thomas finally devised a complex two-pronged attack that feinted at Hood’s right flank while bringing overwhelming force on the left flank. During the two day battle, Thomas effectively destroyed Hood’s command, inflicting about 8,000 more Confederate casualties while losing less than half that. Upon reaching his headquarters at Tupelo, Mississippi, General Hood requested to be relieved of command rather than be removed in disgrace.

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