

Battle of Nashville: Union Troops Broke Through the Confederate Line

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Nashville, Tennessee from Fort Negley looking northeast in March 1864, before that hard winter

CREDIT: Barnard, George N., photographer. Nashville, Tennessee, from Fort Negley Looking Northeast, March 1864. Prints and Photographs Division, Library of Congress. Reproduction Number LC-USZ62-98800.

December 16, 1864

Long before Nashville became the music capital it is today, it was the scene of a devastating Civil War battle. On the afternoon of December 16, 1864, in the heart of a cold, icy winter, Union troops, led by General George H. Thomas, crushed Confederate forces at Nashville, Tennessee. The battle had begun the day before, when Thomas initiated an attack. Finally, after two weeks of waiting, he had received the troop reinforcements and favorable weather he needed to begin.

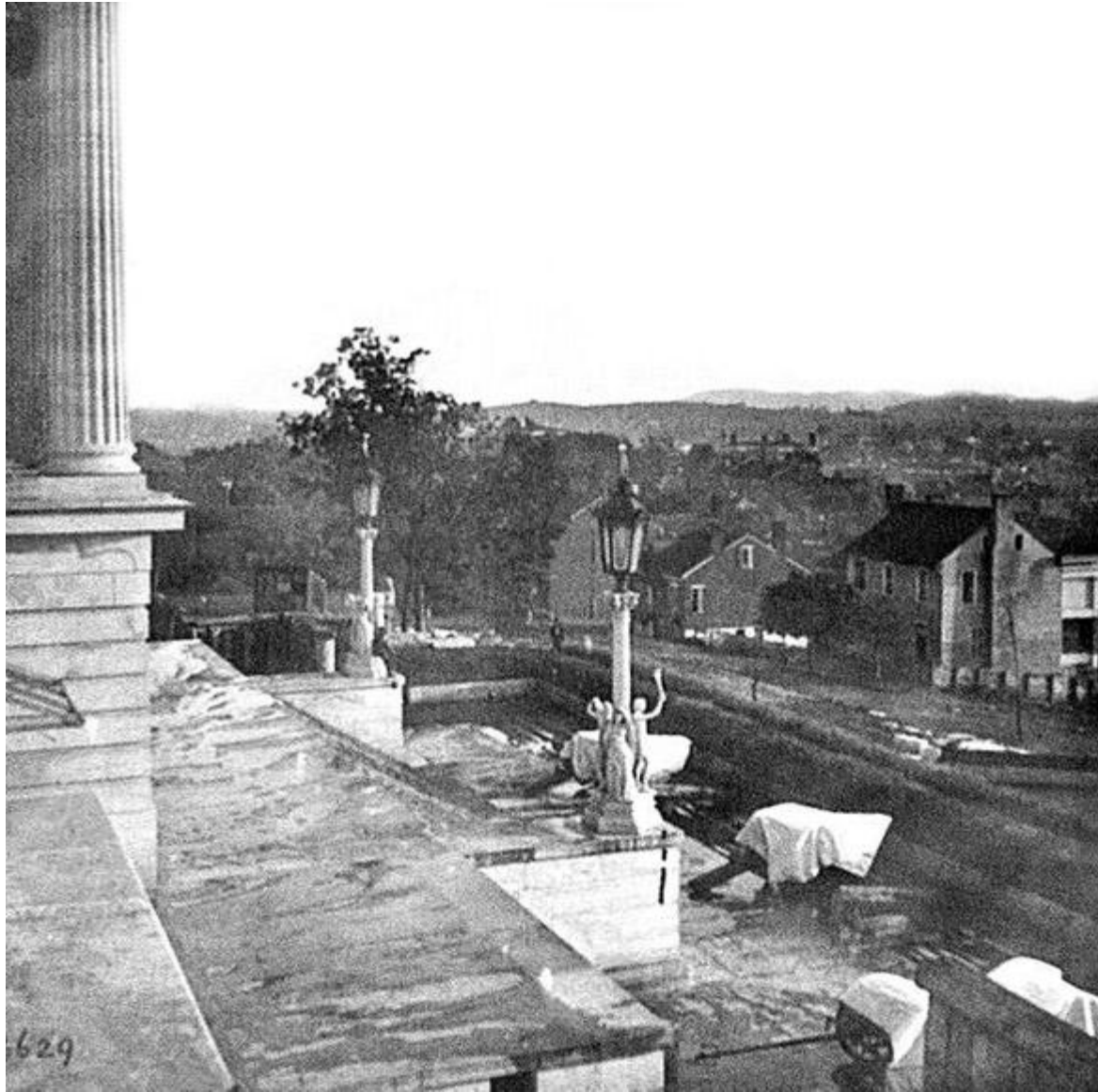
In November, Confederate General John B. Hood had led the Army of Tennessee out of Alabama toward Nashville in an effort to cut off Union General William T. Sherman's supply line. But conditions were hard: the ground was frozen, rations almost completely gone. Soldiers marching from Atlanta to Nashville described the long walk: "Our shoes were worn out and our feet were torn and bleeding . . . the snow was on the ground and there was no food." But they made the journey. Unfortunately for these weary Confederate soldiers, the Union army had arrived in Nashville first.

The Union built fortifications, gathered up troops, and planned Hood's demise. But for almost two weeks, both sides waited. Ice from freezing rain delayed the inevitable clash. As soon as the weather cleared, fighting began. Within less than 48 hours, Hood's troops were in retreat. Union troops trailed the Confederates for almost 10 days. By the time the Southerners had re-crossed the Tennessee River, the Army of Tennessee had disintegrated, as men were dying from cold or famine or taking off for shelter in different directions. This disarray ensured that the weakened Southern forces could not invade the North. A few weeks later, Hood resigned his command.



The Union outer line in Nashville, Tennessee, December 1864

CREDIT: Barnard, George N., photographer. Nashville, Tennessee, Federal Outer Line, 16 December 1864. Prints and Photographs Division, Library of Congress. Reproduction Number LC-DIG-cwpb-02087.



Steps of the Capitol with covered guns in Nashville, Tennessee

CREDIT: Barnard, George N., photographer. Nashville, Tennessee. Steps of the Capitol with Covered Guns; Vista of the City Beyond, 1864. Prints and Photographs Division, Library of Congress. Reproduction Number LC-DIG-cwpb-02070.