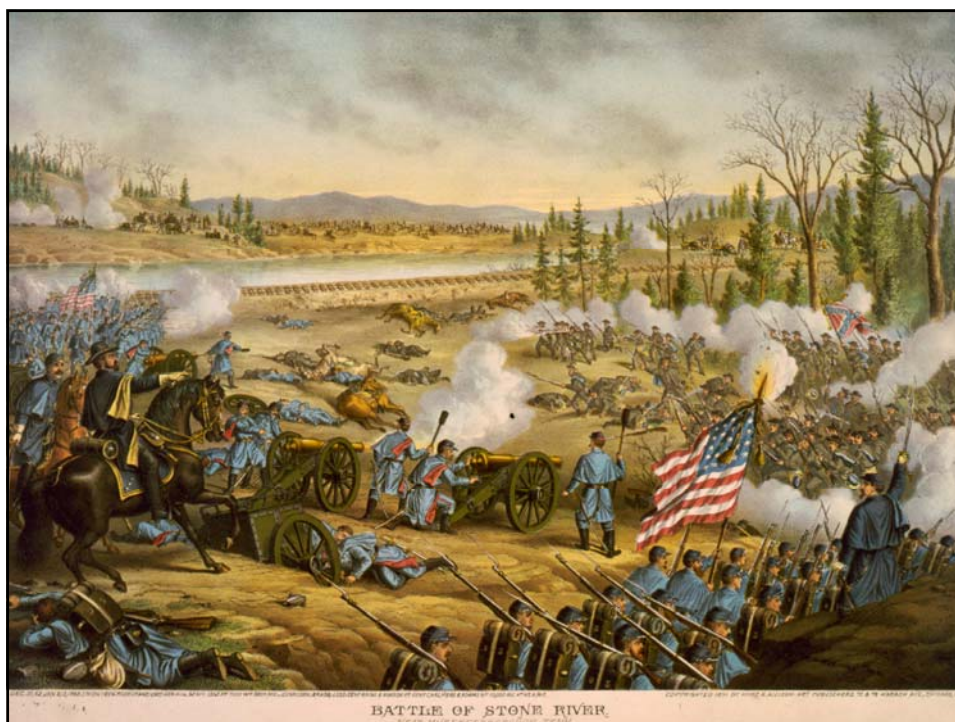






The Tennessee Campaign:  
Stones River to Chattanooga  
December 1862 to November 1863

Part I: Stones River

Presented by Howard Leemon



BATTLE OF STONES RIVER.

Battle of <b>Stones River</b> 	
Second Battle of <b>Murfreesboro</b> 	
Belligerents	
 United States (Union)	 Confederate States (Confederacy)
Commanders and leaders	
MG William Rosecrans <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• MG Alexander McCook, Right Wing</li> <li>• MG George H Thomas, Center Corps</li> <li>• MG Thomas L Crittenden, Left Wing</li> <li>• BG David S. Stanley, Cavalry Corps</li> </ul>	General Braxton Bragg <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• LTG Leonidas Polk, I Corps</li> <li>• LTG William J. Hardee, II Corps</li> <li>• BG Joseph Wheeler, Cavalry Corps</li> </ul>
Units involved	
Army of the Cumberland, 43,400 effectives <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 1st Div (Davis), 2<sup>nd</sup> (Johnson), 3<sup>rd</sup> Sheridan</li> <li>• 1<sup>st</sup> (Rousseau), 2<sup>nd</sup> (Negley), 3<sup>rd</sup> (Fry)</li> <li>• 1<sup>st</sup> (Wood), 2<sup>nd</sup> (Palmer), 3<sup>rd</sup> (Van Cleve)</li> <li>• 1 cavalry division w/ 2 brigades</li> </ul>	Army of Tennessee, 35,000 effectives <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cheatham's Division, Withers'</li> <li>• Breckenridge's, Cleburne's, McCown's</li> <li>• 4 cavalry brigades</li> </ul>
Casualties and losses	
1,677 KIA 7,543 WIA <u>3,686 CIA/MIA</u> 12,906 casualties (29.7% of 43,400)	1,294 KIA 7,945 WIA <u>2,500 CIA/MIA</u> 11,739 casualties (33.5% of 35,000)

## Lincoln's view (1)

- Two key views that Lincoln held are worth emphasizing for this campaign
- The southern states believed they had seceded to form a new country - the Confederate States of America
- Lincoln did not accept that states had a right to secede
- There was only one country and that was the United States
- Federal armies were NOT fighting the armies of another country
- The South was in rebellion against a lawfully elected government
- Gaining territory that was already part of the USA was meaningless unless it led to victory over the rebel armies in battle or by denying them access to vital resources
- He had to keep reminding his generals of this as they often resorted to terms like 'their country' and 'invasion'

## Lincoln's view (2)

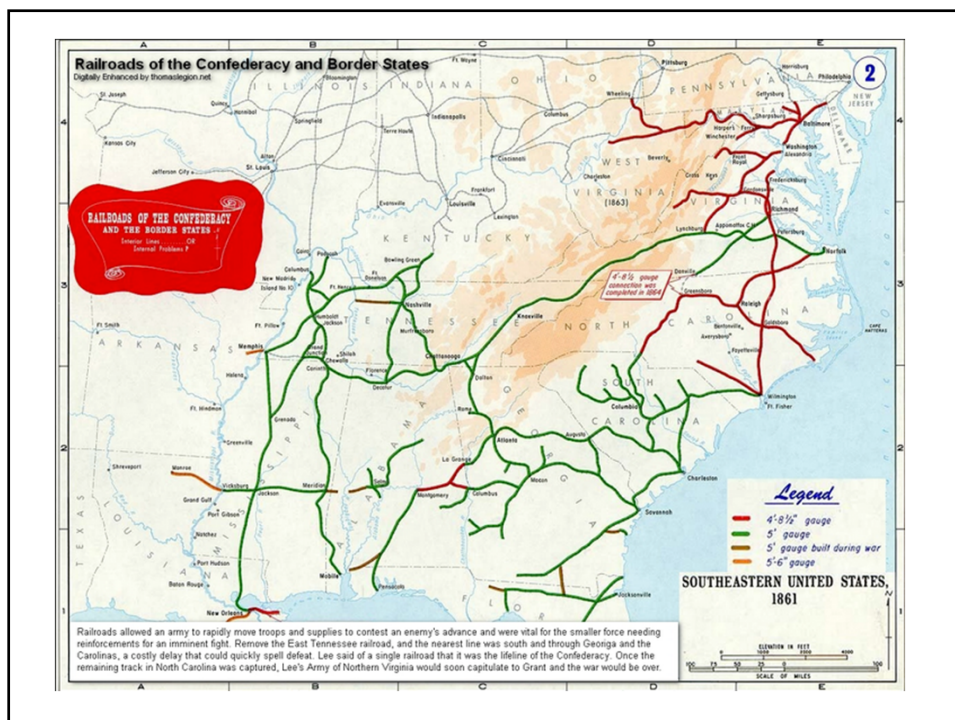
- His 'general idea' for a strategy was:
- 'That we have the greater numbers, and the enemy has the greater facility of concentrating forces upon points of collision;
- that we must fail, unless we can find some way of making our advantage an over-match for his;
- and that this can only be done by menacing him with superior forces at different points at the same time;
- so that we can safely attack, one, or both, if he makes no change;
- and if he weakens one to strengthen the other, forbear to attack the strengthened one, but seize, and hold the weakened one, gaining so much.'
- *13 January 1862, letter to Henry Halleck and Don Carlos Buell*
- Making it happen proved difficult!

## Tennessee



## The importance of Tennessee

- The fertile land south-east of Nashville provided great quantities of food and animals for the Confederacy
- Mountain caves contained niter for making explosives
- Mines near Ducktown produced 90% of the Confederacy's copper for making percussion caps and projectiles
- Eastern Tennessee (along with northern Georgia and NE Alabama) was an area strongly loyal to the Union, although not of great military importance apart from the railway line leading to Richmond
- Chattanooga in the south was a vital rail junction for the Confederacy and the gateway to Georgia
- Mountain ranges and the Duck, Elk and Tennessee Rivers were natural barriers to the movement of armies north to south
- **Most importantly, the rebel Army of Tennessee was there**



### The Western Theatre in Dec 1862 (1)

- Kentucky had been 'neutral' until Confederate MG Leonidas Polk sent troops to occupy Columbus in September 1861, a major blunder
- The Kentucky legislature requested Federal aid and Kentucky was now firmly under Federal control
- Union forces had extended their control of the Mississippi River and western Tennessee into Mississippi
- Grant was now starting his campaign to capture of Vicksburg, one of the two remaining obstacles to Federal control of the full length of the Mississippi River

### The Western Theatre in Dec 1862 (2)

- In August Gen. Braxton Bragg had taken his Army of Mississippi into Kentucky seeking to win back the state and recruit up to 10,000 new troops
- He won a tactical victory at Perryville in October but had retreated when supplies ran low, Union forces threatened and the new recruits had failed to appear - allowing the Union to claim a victory
- After a similar Union victory at Antietam in September, with Lee having withdrawn from Maryland after a tactical win/draw, the major European powers (Britain, France) remained reluctant to officially recognise the Confederacy
- The mid-term elections had not gone well for Lincoln's Republicans
- Further victories in the Western Theatre were essential to offset the impacts of regular defeats in the Eastern Theatre on domestic and international opinion, the latest being Fredericksburg in early December

### The Western Theatre in Dec 1862 (3)

- Bragg's poor relations with his subordinates deteriorated further after this retreat from Kentucky and they petitioned for him to be replaced – but no changes were made to the command structure
- Bragg positioned his army (now named the Army of Tennessee) near Murfreesboro 35 miles south of Nashville and waited
- The field of battle offered no particular advantages for defence but Bragg was reluctant to move further south
- And he wasn't interested in defence: he needed a victory as much as Lincoln did

### The Western Theatre in Dec 1862 (4)

- Lincoln was unhappy with MG Don Carlos Buell because of his overly hesitant approach and his loudly expressed views on slavery and the Emancipation Proclamation
- He replaced him with MG William Rosecrans who had a reputation for winning battles
- On 24 October, he was given command of XIV Corps (soon to be renamed as the Army of the Cumberland) based at Nashville
- Rosecrans now took his time to get moving causing considerable frustration in Washington, especially through his willingness to argue by telegram



## Union forces

MG William Rosecrans' Army of the Cumberland fielded approx. 44,000

- **The Right Wing** under MG Alexander McCook
  - 3 Divisions under by BG Jefferson Davis, BG Richard Johnson, BG Philip Sheridan
- **The Center** under MG George Thomas
  - 3 Divisions under by MG Lovell Rousseau, BG James Negley, BG Speed Fry
- **The Left Wing** under Maj. Gen. Thomas Crittenden
  - 3 Divisions under by BG Thomas Wood, BG John Palmer, BG Horatio Van Cleve
- **The Cavalry Corps** under BG David Stanley

## William Rosecrans

- Born 1819 in Ohio
- 5<sup>th</sup> in his class at West Point
- Successful engineer and inventor
- Highly intelligent and a good planner
- Personally brave and highly energetic
- Well liked by subordinates and soldiers
- A strong tendency to micromanagement
- Enjoyed arguing on philosophical and religious matters, particularly late into the night on campaign when he should have been sleeping
- Enjoyed arguing with his superiors in Washington
- 'Short of temper and long of tongue'
- Successful against Lee in West Virginia, although McClellan took the credit
- Had won the battles of Iuka and Corinth in Mississippi but had been criticised for lacklustre pursuit



## George Henry Thomas

- Born 1816 in Virginia of a slave-owning family
- A “traitor” in the South, suspect in the North
- Methodical, unflappable battlefield commander
- Won the first major Union victory at Mill Springs
- His loyalty to Buell saw him passed over for promotion



## Alexander McDowell McCook

- Born 1831 in Ohio
- Career soldier
- At Perryville his corps suffered heavy casualties
- It was driven back a mile
- This was to become a bit of a habit



## Thomas Leonidas Crittenden

- Born 1819 in Kentucky
- A lawyer and had served in the Kentucky militia
- His father had been Governor and a US senator
- His brother joined the Confederate army



## Philip Henry Sheridan

- Born 1831 in New York, or on a ship, or in Ireland
- Career soldier
- Initially in cavalry, shifted to infantry, back to cavalry
- Aggressive commander
- Rapidly promoted to BG
- Impressive performance at Perryville
- Rose to the top along with Grant and Sherman
- *"A brown, chunky little chap, with a long body, short legs, not enough neck to hang him, and such long arms that if his ankles itch he can scratch them without stooping."* A. Lincoln



## Confederate forces

- Gen. Braxton Bragg's Army of Tennessee fielded 37,713
- The First Corps under LTG Leonidas Polk comprised:
  - Cheatham's Division under MG Benjamin Cheatham
  - Withers' Division under MG Jones Withers
- The Second Corps under LTG William Hardee comprised:
  - Breckinridge's Division under MG John Breckinridge
  - Cleburne's Division under MG Patrick Cleburne
  - McCown's Division under MG John McCown
- The Cavalry Corps under BG Joseph Wheeler

## Leonidas Polk

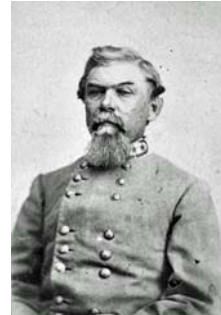
- Born 1806 in North Carolina
- Bishop of the Episcopal Diocese of Louisiana
- A graduate of West Point
- Impressive academic record
- Little military experience
- Farmer and slave owner in Tennessee
- Popular with soldiers
- Politically important

*“Besides being a basically incompetent general, Polk had the added fault of hating to take orders.”*



## William Joseph Hardee

- Born 1815 in Georgia
- Career army officer
- Highly capable and professional
- *Hardee's Tactics\** was used by both sides



✧ *Rifle and Light Infantry Tactics for the Exercise and Manoeuvres of Troops When Acting as Light Infantry or Riflemen*

## Joseph Wheeler

- Born 1830 in Georgia
- Grew up in Connecticut but remained a southerner
- West Point graduate
- Career soldier turned cavalryman
- Led many damaging raids throughout the war
- Some historians rate him second to Forrest
- But he did not get along with Forrest



## John Cabell Breckinridge

- Born 1821 in Kentucky
- Lawyer and politician
- Cousin to Mary Lincoln
- Vice President 1857-1861
- Presidential candidate in 1860 for Southern Democrats
- 72 Electoral College votes vs 180 for Lincoln
- Commissioned as BG in November 1861
- Commanded the Orphan Brigade - 1st Kentucky
- Expelled from the US Senate in December 1861
- Regarded as a capable and courageous leader
- Believed Bragg was incompetent

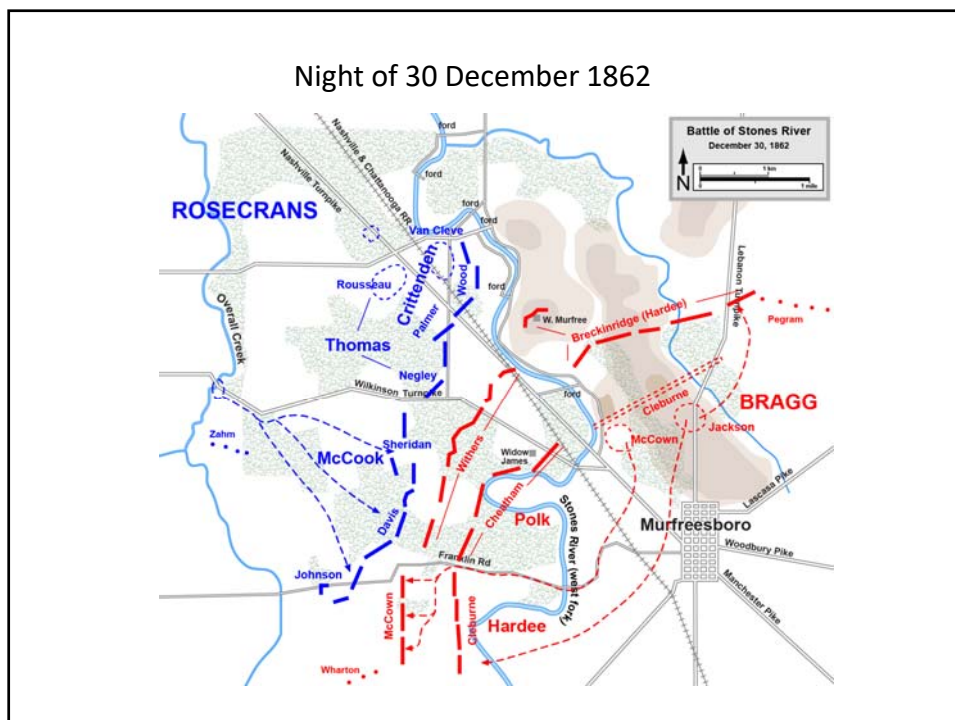


## 26 to 30 December 1862

- When Rosecrans finally moved, he took only a little over half of his available forces since he needed to defend his supply base at Nashville and other locations against cavalry raids by Morgan and Forrest
- In any case, his baggage trains were badly mauled by Wheeler's cavalry
- His plan was to attack from the left with Crittenden's wing, supported by Thomas in the centre
- McCook would hold the right, withdrawing 'inch by inch' if required

## The night of 30 December 1862

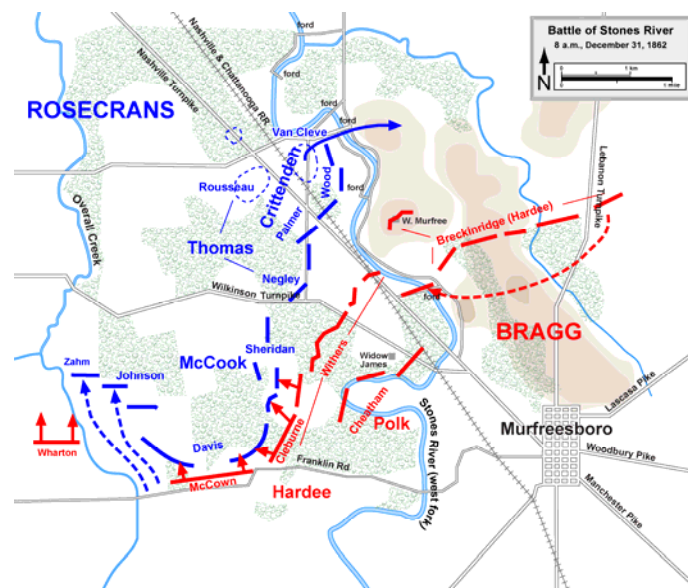
- Rosecrans told McCook to set lots of camp fires to fool Bragg into moving troops away from his right
- Bragg took the bait and moved Cheatham's and McCown's Divisions to strengthen his left
- He now had Cheatham and Cleburne, two of his heaviest hitters, in position to hit the Union right
- In essence his battle plan was the same as Rosecrans' - attack from the left, hold with his right
- The night was bitterly cold
- Troops from both sides were camped near enough to sing songs to each other and finally together, the night before one of the bloodiest battles of the war



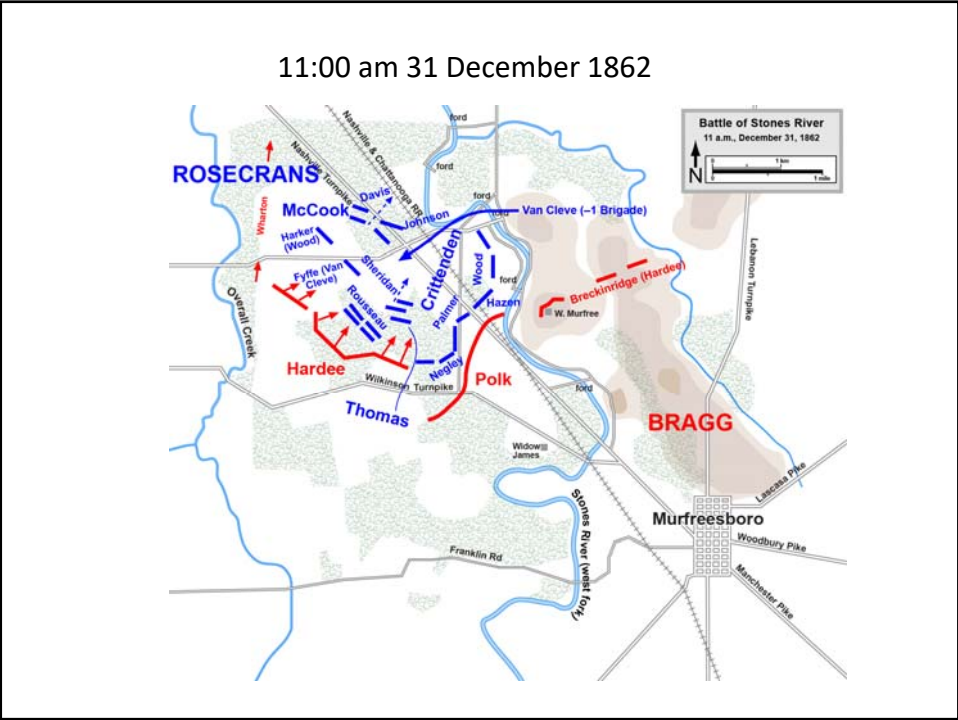
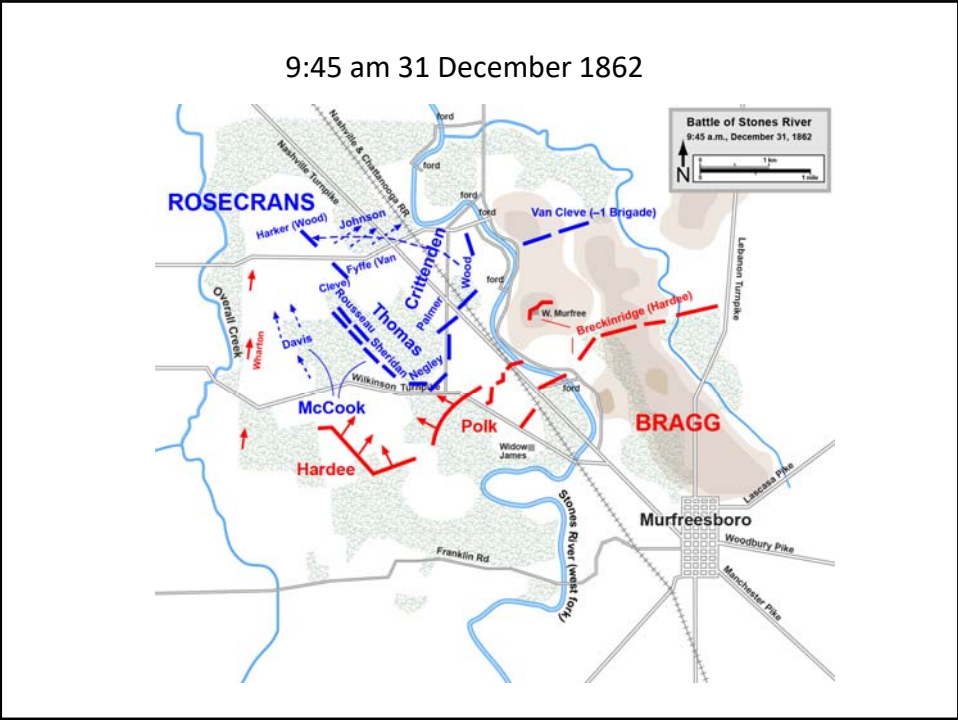
## 31 December 1862 (1)

- Rosecrans ordered the Federals to move after breakfast
- The Confederates didn't do breakfast: they moved at dawn
- The Divisions of Johnson and Davis collapsed and were forced back, mile by mile rather than inch by inch
- Sheridan's Division held firm against three concerted attacks until they were down to their last three rounds and had to fall back to re-stock
- During course of the day Sheridan lost his 3 brigade commanders
- Rosecrans was supervising Crittenden's move on the right when he realised that he was facing a disaster
- He cancelled that attack and started reinforcing the collapsing line on the left with troops drawn from the right, improvising all the time
- He was right in the battle – his chief of staff lost his head, literally, to a cannon ball

8:00 am 31 December 1862





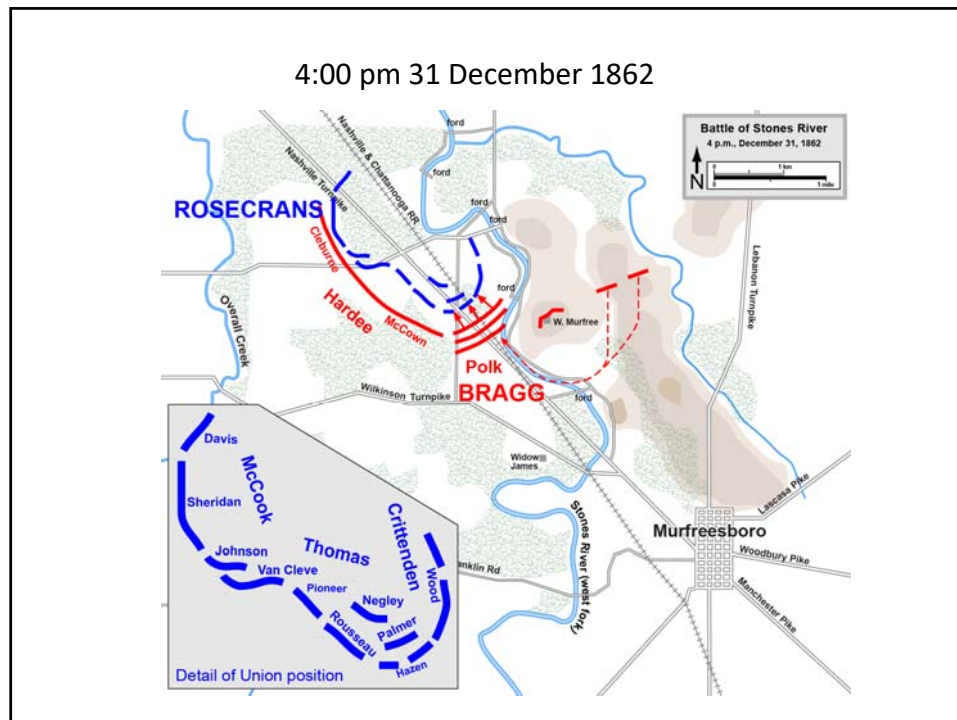


### 31 December 1862 (2)

- Surprisingly, the situation started to shift in the Federals' favour
- Their lines, though disorganised, were being compressed, improving their defensive position
- Cleburne's and McCown's Divisions were exhausted from the distance they had covered and could not contribute any more

### 31 December 1862 (3)

- The attack now focused on a Union salient in the centre known as the Round Forest, and later as Hell's Half-Acre, defended by Col. William Hazen's Brigade of Negley's Division under Thomas
- First Withers and then Cheatham hurled their forces against it, to no avail and with considerable losses
- Bragg commanded Breckinridge to send troops
- Breckinridge initially refused because he was worried about the attack from Crittenden which he did not realise had been cancelled
- And Bragg had previously told him to defend his position at all costs
- When he finally sent 4 of his 5 brigades, they were fed into the attack on the Round Forest piecemeal and were as unsuccessful as the previous attacks
- Nightfall was 4.30 pm and the fighting ceased



### 31 December 1862 (4)

- Bragg's losses had been heavy, about 9000, but he had reason to believe the Federals' had been worse
- He believed that the Federals would retreat because otherwise they would face annihilation
- He received reports of massive movements of wagons northwards that suggested a retreat was underway
- He was hoping to pick them off on the road back to Nashville the next day
- He claimed victory in a telegram to Richmond

### 31 December 1862 (5)

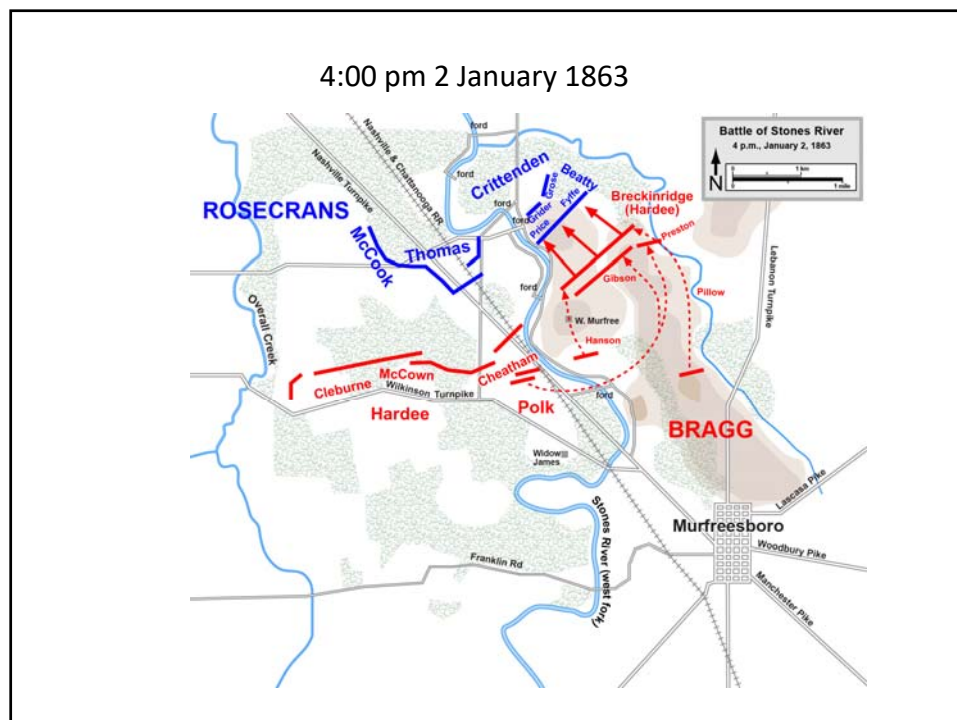
- Rosecrans' losses had been heavier – around 12,000
- The wagons were ferrying wounded soldiers back to Nashville
- Rosecrans called a meeting of his commanders to discuss the options
- Retreat was mentioned
- Thomas woke up, said “This army does not retreat” and went back to sleep again
- No conclusion was reached
- On an inspection Rosecrans saw firebrands to the north suggesting that retreat was not an option
- But they were actually his own cavalry defying orders because of the freezing night
- He issued the command “Prepare to fight or die”

### 1 January 1863

- Nothing much happened
- The Federals had quit the Round Forest but only to straighten their lines
- Bragg tested the new lines out, but was still hoping that the Federals would admit defeat and retreat
- Rosecrans had no plan apart from defending his position and getting more supplies to replace the ones lost during the original march

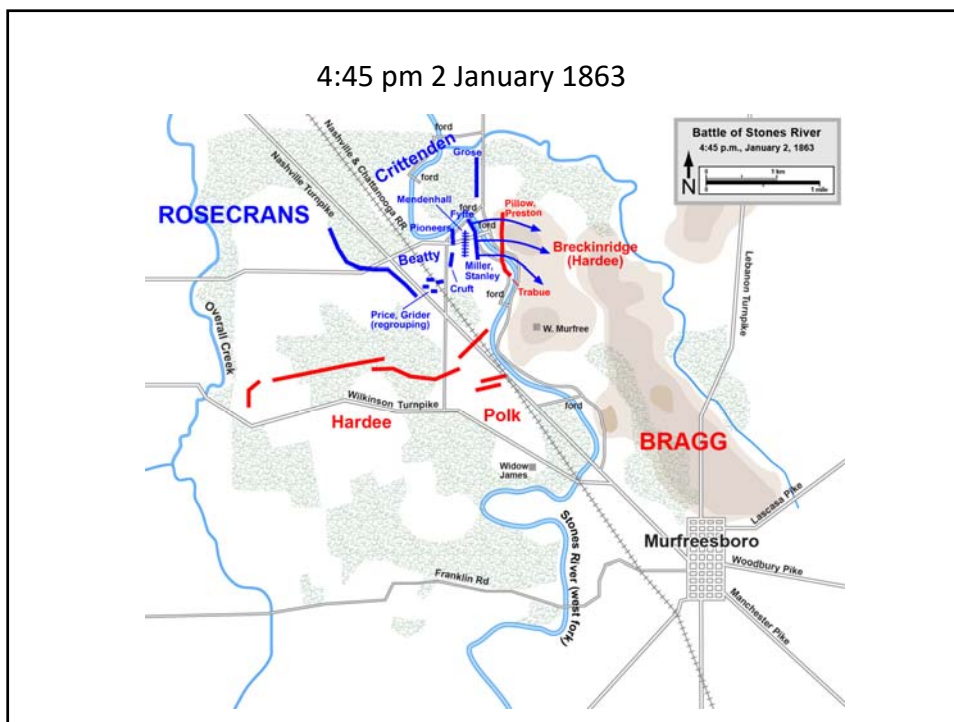
## 2 January 1863 (1)

- The Federals were still there
- Van Cleve's Division now occupied high ground on the eastern side of the river
- Bragg saw this as a threat to his position and ordered Breckinridge to clear the position
- But he proposed 4:00 pm as the start to limit the time available for a Federal response
- Then the Confederates could resume their attack on the following day
- Breckinridge believed that this was suicidal and protested strongly
- Bragg ignored his protests, partly because of Breckinridge's initial refusal to send troops on the first day



## 2 January 1863 (2)

- Breckinridge's troops were from Kentucky and were known as "the Orphans" because they had no state to go back to
- His preparations were observed by the Federals
- Crittenden's artillery chief, Medenhall, rushed his guns into position on the western side of river, 37 guns wheel to wheel on the high ground and 21 on the low ground, to provide enfilading fire
- When Breckinridge's 5 brigades (4500 men) attacked, the Federals fled
- The artillery opened fire, 100 rounds per minute, into the flank of the attackers
- They reeled back in disarray losing 1700 men
- Breckinridge was in tears for "My poor orphans! My poor orphans!"



## The aftermath (1)

- 3<sup>rd</sup> January nothing much happened
- Total losses for the two sides were almost 25,000
- South: 1,294 KIA; 7,945 WIA, 2,500 MIA; total 11,739 (31%)
- North: 1,730 KIA; 7,802 WIA; 3,717 MIA; total 13,249 (30%)
- As a proportion of the combatants, it was the bloodiest battle of the war
- With rain now falling after a long drought, and Federal reinforcements arriving, Bragg feared being trapped and retreated to Tullahoma
- Rosecrans's pursuit was ineffective

## The aftermath (2)

- Bragg got all the criticism for yet another retreat, despite his aggressive and initially successful tactics
- Breckenridge resigned and challenged him to a duel and Cheatham refused to fight under him again
- Polk and Hardee continued to despise Bragg
- Bragg responded by court-martialing McCown for disobeying orders, accused Cheatham of drunkenness and Breckenridge of inept leadership
- It was one big happy family in the Army of Tennessee!
- Rosecrans got all the praise, despite nearly losing his army, having given the North a much needed victory
- It would be 6 months before the opposing armies met again

To be continued ...

## References

1. Wikipedia: The Battle of Stones River
2. Shelby Foote: The Civil War – A Narrative
3. National Park Civil War Series: The Battle of Chickamauga
4. David Powell & David Friederichs: The Maps of Chickamauga
5. James McPherson: Battle Cry of Freedom