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"The best move of my career" : Spring Hill and the failure of Confederate command in the West, Fall 1864

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**"The best move of my career": Spring Hill and the failure of
Confederate command in the West, Fall 1864**

Moody, David Rey, M.A.

San Jose State University, 1993

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Spring Hill and the Failure of Confederate Command
in the West, Fall 1864

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Presented to
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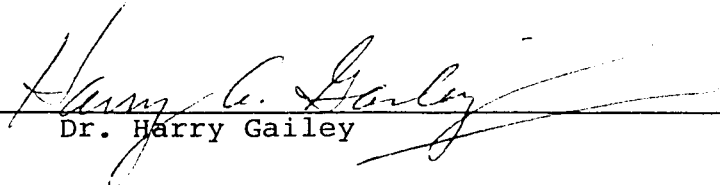
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Master of Arts

By
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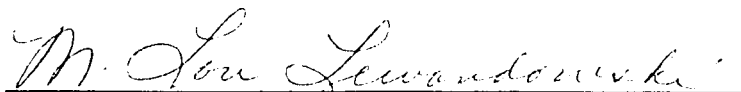
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ABSTRACT

"The Best Move of My Career:"
Spring Hill and the Failure of Confederate Command
in the West, Fall 1864

by David Rey Moody

This thesis examines the "Spring Hill Affair," a controversial incident of the American Civil War. It begins with a fairly detailed narrative of the campaign leading up to Spring Hill, as well as of what transpired there; this narrative, told from the perspective of command and control, takes up the first three chapters. A review of the historiography of Spring Hill, both by the participants and by modern historians follows in an effort to show the varying and changing interpretations of this controversial incident.

Research on this subject yields two main conclusions. First, it is argued that the legend of the "lost opportunity" of the Confederacy at Spring Hill was just that, i.e., a legend; the Confederates simply did not have time to mount a serious effort to take the town, due to the early sunset at that time of year. The Yankees, it is argued, simply "got there first with the most men." Secondly, and more importantly, the "Spring Hill Affair" is presented as a manifestation of the almost total collapse of the Confederate high command in the West during the latter stages of the war.

Acknowledgements

Those who have ever written such a scholarly work as this one realize, as I have come to over these many months of work, how important the assistance of others is in seeing it through to its conclusion. I therefore wish to take this opportunity to thank the following individuals for their assistance: Dr. Richard Cramer, my thesis advisor; Dr. Joseph Boudreau and Dr. Harry Gailey, the other members of my thesis committee; Santa Teresa Copy Print, for printing the many copies of this work that I needed; the members of the South Bay Civil War Round Table, to whom I first presented this work--especially to Donald Pfeuffer, who invited me to speak there, and Theodore Savas, who suggested, after the whole thing was about done, that I check out Embrace an Angry Wind before it was too late; and the late Bruce Catton, who inspired me, with his beautiful prose, to make the Civil War my passion.

Lastly, I want to dedicate this work to someone who is very special to me, someone to whom I owe not only my education and my well-being, but also my very life. Nana, this is for you.

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Chapter 1: "A Most Serious Question"

War is a strange and powerful thing: it can transform ordinary people and places and give them increased and often lasting importance. Ulysses S. Grant, for example, was a clerk in his father's tanning shop in the little town of Galena, Illinois, in 1861. A failure at business and farming, an unknown, by 1865 he was a Lieutenant General commanding the Armies of the United States, a brilliant general known all over the world; four years later, he was President. It would be safe to assume that very few people had ever heard of places like Gettysburg, Waterloo, Iwo Jima, or Khe Sanh until the bloody hand of war touched them and changed them forever, making their names resound across the pages of history as places where men fought and died, contesting the fate of nations. The transforming power of war, both for good and ill, cannot be underestimated.

There is another such place, nestled in Middle Tennessee, that would have remained largely obscure, even today, if not for the relentless drive of war and fate. Spring Hill is a sleepy little town, set in a pleasant, comfortable, agrarian community about thirty miles south of the city of Nashville, the capital of Tennessee. At first glance, the casual observer notices nothing remarkable about the town, except maybe the beauty of its setting, surrounded as it is by rolling bluegrass pastureland.

Here and there the great mansions still stand, relics of a bygone age; not far from one of them is an automobile plant, where Saturn, "a different kind of car company," makes cars for modern America. Other than the automobile plant, Spring Hill has hardly changed at all since the time of the Civil War. It still seems as it was: a small Middle Tennessee town, not particularly remarkable for anything.¹

Yet appearances are misleading. For it was at Spring Hill, over a century and a quarter ago, that one of the most controversial actions of the Civil War occurred. On November 29, 1864, the day before the bloody battle of Franklin (fought about eleven miles north of Spring Hill), the Confederate Army of Tennessee was given--according to the traditional account--a golden opportunity to trap a sizable Union force that had been blocking its route to Nashville and deal it a mortal blow. Success would possibly lead to the recapture of Tennessee, the invasion of Kentucky, and even perhaps victory for the Lost Cause; alas, it was not to be. Why, and if such an opportunity even existed, has been the subject of debate among Civil War scholars ever since. Since that time, the "Spring Hill Affair" has been one of the great "what if's" of the Civil War.

¹James L. McDonough and Thomas L. Connelly, Five Tragic Hours: The Battle of Franklin (Knoxville, Tennessee: University of Tennessee Press, 1983), 36.

We will never know for sure what happened at Spring Hill all those long years ago. Much ink has been devoted to it since 1864, and much more will surely follow. The present study is intended to present a narrative of the events from the fall of Atlanta up to and including the incident at Spring Hill, followed with a review of the literature devoted to Spring Hill over the years (with its varying interpretations). It concludes with the author's own interpretation: that the failure at Spring Hill was symptomatic of the larger failure of the Confederate high command in the West, and that the "lost opportunity" there was not as big an opportunity as supposed.

The story of Spring Hill really begins in September 1864. On the second of that month, after a protracted campaign, the city of Atlanta, Georgia, surrendered to Union forces commanded by Major General William T. Sherman. The Confederate Army of Tennessee, under the command of Lieutenant General John B. Hood, had withdrawn to Lovejoy's Station, twenty miles southwest of the city, to lick its wounds.² The army was not in the best of spirits, for the fall of Atlanta led to a general drop in the army's fighting spirit, and Hood sought to restore morale

²David Evans, "The Atlanta Campaign," Civil War Times Illustrated Special Atlanta Campaign Edition (Summer 1989), 61; Campbell H. Brown, "To Rescue the Confederacy," Civil War Times Illustrated Special Nashville Campaign Edition (December 1964), 13.

and reorganize his battered command.³

Part of the morale problem, it seemed, was with Hood himself. Lieutenant James A. Tillman, an officer in the 24th South Carolina Infantry, wrote to his brother that "General [Joseph E.] Johnston [who had commanded the army until July, when Hood replaced him] is all that is desired. The whole army would hail his return with the wildest shouts of applause, and yet our President will not reinstate him."⁴ His opinion was a common one, both in the ranks and at the higher echelons. There was much dissatisfaction with Hood in the army, dissatisfaction with the way he had handled the battles around Atlanta, and dissatisfaction with his style of command, which emphasized offensive operations; Hood believed that one of the problems with the army was that it had spent too much time retreating and fighting from behind breastworks. To his way of thinking, the army needed real soldiers, from the Army of Northern Virginia, where he had won his first laurels commanding the Texas Brigade under the legendary Robert E. Lee, to teach it how to fight. Indeed, he had gone so far as to ask Braxton Bragg, now in Richmond serving as Jefferson Davis' military advisor, to ask General Lee to "send me my old divi-

³McDonough and Connelly, 5; Stanley F. Horn, The Army of Tennessee (Norman, Oklahoma: University of Oklahoma Press, 1952), 371.

⁴Quoted in Walter Brian Cisco, States Rights Gist: A South Carolina General of the Civil War (Shippensburg, Pennsylvania: The White House Publishing Co., Inc., 1991), 132-133.

sion."⁵ Clearly, the army was in a bad way, and something had to be done about it.

It was, therefore, to "soothe the troubled upper echelons of the Army of Tennessee," that Jefferson Davis arrived at Palmetto, Georgia, on September 25 (where Hood had moved the army a few days earlier). Davis spent two days with the army, reviewing the troops, making speeches, and conferring with Hood and his officers.⁶ The general discontent within the army for Hood was revealed forcefully to Davis during one of his reviews, when he was greeted with shouts of "Give us back General Johnston!" The incident was rather embarrassing to Hood; he recorded his reaction years later in his memoirs, betraying his typical attitude towards the Army of Tennessee:

I regretted I should have been the cause of this uncourteous reception to His Excellency; at the same time I could recall no offence [sic] save that of having insisted they should fight for and hold Atlanta forty-six days, whereas they had previously retreated one hundred miles within sixty-six days.(7)

Davis, though, had no intention of restoring Johnston to command. He and Johnston were enemies, and to reappoint

⁵Richard O'Connor, Hood: Cavalier General (New York: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1949), 221; The War of The Rebellion: Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies (hereafter O.R.), Series 1, Vol. XXXIX, part 3 (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1892), 826.

⁶Christopher Losson, Tennessee's Forgotten Warriors: Frank Cheatham and his Confederate Division (Knoxville, Tennessee: University of Tennessee Press, 1989), 195.

⁷O'Connor, 222; John B. Hood, Advance and Retreat (Secaucus, New Jersey: Blue and Gray Press, 1985), 253.

Johnston to command would be tantamount to admitting he had made a mistake in July by replacing Johnston with Hood. Besides, despite the loss of Atlanta, Hood had proven to be a fighter and a man who would not accept defeat. Furthermore, Davis was not a man who would be swayed by public opinion. It was an interesting quirk of his that, whenever there was any outcry against one of his "favorites" (and Hood, apparently, was one of his favorites), his determination to keep them in position only stiffened. It had been thus with Braxton Bragg, John C. Pemberton, and Albert Sidney Johnston; the pattern was repeating itself with Hood.⁸ For the time being, then, Hood would remain in command of the Army of Tennessee.

There would be a shakeup in the army's high command, however. As mentioned previously, the discontent with Hood reached all the way up to the highest ranking officers of the army. The prevailing mood among Hood's officers can clearly be seen in a letter written to Davis from Lovejoy's Station on September 14 by General Samuel G. French, a division commander in Hood's army. According to French, "several officers" had asked him to write to Davis "in regard to a feeling of depression more or less apparent in parts of this army." He suggested that the President "send one or two intelligent officers here to visit the different divisions and brigades to ascertain if that spirit

⁸Cisco, 133; O'Connor, 222.

of confidence so necessary for success has or has not been impaired within the past month or two. They might further inquire into the cause, if they find in this army any want of enthusiasm."⁹ Such veiled remarks showed the level of distrust Hood's officers had for him.

The subordinate with whom Hood had the most problems was William J. Hardee, the senior corps commander of the army. Their mutual ire stemmed from a number of sources. Hardee had resented Hood's promotion to army command, mostly because Hardee had actually been senior to Hood while they had both been corps commanders under Joe Johnston. In addition, Hood's failures around Atlanta had done little to increase Hardee's confidence in him.¹⁰ Hood, for his part, blamed Hardee for the defeats of Peachtree Creek (July 20) and the Battle of Atlanta (July 22), as well as for that of Jonesboro (August 31). Hood and Hardee had observed a sort of "armed truce," as Stanley F. Horn put it, during the fighting around Atlanta, but that went out the window once Atlanta fell and a lull set in. Hood wrote both Bragg and Davis, asking that Hardee be relieved and another general, either Richard Taylor or Benjamin F. Cheatham, take his place. Hardee, meanwhile, no longer

⁹Horn, 371-372; O.R. XXXVIII, pt. 5, 836.

¹⁰Losson, 195. Ezra J. Warner, in Generals in Gray (Baton Rouge, Louisiana: Louisiana State University Press, 1959), noted that Hardee's promotion to Lieutenant General dated from October 10, 1862, while Hood's was made on February 1, 1864, to rank from September 20, 1863 (pages 124 and 143, respectively).

wanted to serve under Hood.¹¹ Davis had tried to make peace between them, writing to Hardee on September 16 and urging "harmony and unity" among the senior officers of the army so as "to bring back the absentees, to rally all who are able, even temporarily to render military service, and to inspire the army with the energy and confidence so essentially necessary at this time to secure success.

. . ."¹² His efforts were to no avail, however, and Davis, left with no alternative, relieved Hardee as corps commander and placed him in command of the Department of South Carolina, Georgia, and Florida, with headquarters at Charleston, South Carolina. Cheatham, a Tennessean who commanded a division in Hardee's corps, replaced him as corps commander.¹³ As we shall see, he would figure prominently in the incident at Spring Hill.

While at Palmetto, Davis and Hood had other things to discuss besides army morale and disgruntled subordinates: the future operations of the Army of Tennessee, something which Hood had already spent time considering. As he said in his memoirs, a "most serious question presented itself for solution: in what manner, and accompanied by the least detriment, to effect the riddance of a victorious foe,

¹¹Losson, 195; Horn, 373-374; Hood, 248-252; O.R. XXXIX, pt. 2, 832, 842.

¹²Dunbar Rowland, ed., Jefferson Davis, Constitutional-ist: His Letters, Papers, and Speeches, Vol. VI (New York: J.J. Little and Ives Company, 1923), 335.

¹³O.R. XXXIX, pt. 2, 879; Losson, 196.

who had gained possession of the mountains in our front, and planted his standard in the heart of the Confederacy."¹⁴ Finding a solution would not be an easy task. What Hood did was largely up to what Sherman decided to do. If the Yankee general moved from Atlanta, he would either go east towards Augusta; southwest towards Columbus, Georgia, and Montgomery, Alabama; or south towards Macon. If he adopted the last alternative, he would confront Hood in open ground that would favor the larger Union force. The other two alternatives--penetrating into the heart of vital areas of the Confederacy, such as the Alabama manufacturing region--were what the southerners feared Sherman would do, and intelligence indicated he was planning just such a move.¹⁵

Faced with these projected moves by his enemy, Hood had few choices. He realized nothing would be accomplished if he remained in camp below Atlanta; indeed, if Sherman moved towards Alabama as projected, Hood would be cut off from his supply source and destroyed if he remained in place, and he was too weak to fight a pitched battle with the Yankees. Furthermore, Sherman was growing stronger all the time as men and materiel came down the railroad

¹⁴Hood, 243.

¹⁵Richard M. McMurry, John Bell Hood and the War for Southern Independence (Lexington, Kentucky: University Press of Kentucky, 1982), 156; McDonough and Connelly, 12; Thomas L. Connelly, Autumn of Glory: The Army of Tennessee, 1862-1865 (Baton Rouge, Louisiana: Louisiana State University Press, 1971), 477.

from Chattanooga to make good his Atlanta losses and reinforce him. Hood's only hope was to find a way to delay the Union Army's preparations, and by so doing hopefully seize the initiative and perhaps maneuver Sherman out of Georgia. The only way to do this seemed to be to disrupt Sherman's communications, and there were good indications such a strategy might work. On September 10, Joe Wheeler, Hood's cavalry commander, reported he had destroyed fifty miles of track on the Nashville and Chattanooga railroad, as well as several key river bridges; on the fourteenth, he reported he had recrossed the Tennessee River at Florence, Alabama, and was preparing for another expedition. What Hood didn't know was that Wheeler had taken heavy losses and had in actuality only slightly damaged the railroad, but he nonetheless saw an opportunity. Accordingly, he telegraphed Richmond on September 11 that he intended to move by his left, resting it on the Chattahoochee river (which ran near Atlanta) and attempt to disrupt Sherman's communications. On the nineteenth, he moved to Palmetto Station, on the West Point Railroad about 25 miles southwest of Atlanta, with his left on the Chattahoochee, as he had planned it to be.¹⁶

Davis had initially been impressed with Hood's plan, and he was even more impressed with it once he discussed it with Hood at Palmetto. Intelligence indicated Sherman

¹⁶Hood, 245-247; Losson, 199; McMurry, 156; McDonough and Connelly, 12; Connelly, 477; O.R. XXXIX, pt. 2, 829.

was having supply difficulties at Atlanta, what with only one rail line linking him to Chattanooga. It was also reported that he was deficient in wagon transport and that his cavalry had not yet fully recovered its losses, and that the army was currently weakened by expiring enlistments. Now seemed the time to strike, and adding even more weight to this belief was the intelligence that Sherman was building up large quantities of supplies at Marietta, a sign that he was planning to cut loose from his railroad and move on Alabama by way of Columbus, Georgia. The last chance to stop Sherman appeared to be at hand.¹⁷

Davis and Hood decided, therefore, that the Army of Tennessee would cross the Chattahoochee River and move northeast towards the line of the Western and Atlantic railroad, Sherman's supply line. He was to seize this line, destroy parts of it, and generally wreak havoc. The idea was to draw Sherman out of the fortifications of Atlanta to give battle so as to protect his communications. If Hood judged Sherman too strong, he was to withdraw into the mountains towards Gadsden, Alabama, and there make a stand. If Sherman did not follow, but instead moved back to Atlanta preparatory to a move into the interior, Hood was to follow, even if it meant marching to the Atlantic coast. Davis was particularly clear on this last point,

¹⁷Connelly, 478; McMurry, 158; O.R. XXXIX, pt. 2, 862, 864; Steven E. Woodworth, Jefferson Davis and His Generals: The Failure of Confederate Command in the West (Lawrence, Kansas: University Press of Kansas, 1990), 292.

fearing Sherman would march through Augusta and take the gunpowder works there. At any rate, these were the plans as of September 27.¹⁸

It is interesting to note at this juncture that no mention was made in any official plans of the army of invading Tennessee. Davis in later years was quick to deny that he had had any notion of such an eventuality while he was in Georgia, saying only that he had left Palmetto with the understanding that Hood would follow Sherman if the latter moved towards the coast. His contentions seem to be valid ones; apparently, Davis had no idea that Hood would eventually turn his back on Sherman and march into Tennessee.¹⁹ This assertion can be made despite the remarks Davis made in the speeches he gave while he was in Georgia, in which he made allusions to the old Confederate dream of marching to the Ohio River:

I believe it is in the power of the men
of the Confederacy to plant our banners
on the banks of the Ohio. . . .

We must beat Sherman, we must march into
Tennessee. . . .we must push the enemy
back to the banks of the Ohio.²⁰

These speeches were reported to Sherman by spies and by captured Rebel newspapers, and the information he garnered from them influenced his subsequent strategy. "He made

¹⁸McDonough and Connelly, 12; McMurry, 158; Connelly, 478; Woodworth, 292.

¹⁹Horn, 374-375; Connelly, 479.

²⁰Connelly, 479.

no concealment of these vainglorious boasts," Sherman wrote years later, "and thus gave us the full key to his future designs. To be forewarned was to be forearmed, and I think we took full advantage of the occasion." Sherman thought one of Davis' speeches--given at Macon on September 22--to be of sufficient importance to send a copy to the War Department.²¹

Despite the significance Sherman assigned to them, it is reasonably clear that Davis never intended these speeches to be taken as statements of policy. It must be remembered that one of the major reasons Davis went to visit the army was to restore its morale. Now the Army of Tennessee had quite a few soldiers from its namesake state within its ranks; what better way to cheer them up than by making grandiose allusions to "redeeming Tennessee"? Such statements had been made before by Confederate leaders to whip up morale, and Davis was merely repeating the pattern. It is likely that he felt the need to raise morale was so pressing as to justify the loss of strategic surprise. It is also possible that he saw Hood's next move to be so obvious that anyone on either side who possessed reasonable intelligence could see it coming.²²

Davis did one more thing of importance before departing

²¹William T. Sherman, Memoirs of William T. Sherman (New York: The Library of America, 1990), 615-617; Horn, 374; O.R. XXXIX, pt. 2, 488.

²²Connelly, 479; Woodworth, 293.

Georgia. Partly to silence his critics who were calling for Hood's removal, partly because his tour of inspection showed him it was necessary to place operations under a more seasoned and experienced leader (without making any actual change in army command), he decided to call upon the services of General Pierre Gustave Toutant Beauregard, then serving in a minor capacity under Lee at Petersburg. Observers in Richmond had predicted Davis would never appoint Beauregard to any important post, but Davis was a smarter politician than his enemies credited him with being. He realized he had to do something to stop the criticism of the administration and raise public morale. If to do those things he had to use a general he despised, he would do so. Accordingly, he asked Lee to ask Beauregard if he would like to be transferred West again; so intense was their mutual hatred that Davis could not bring himself to ask personally. Lee replied in the affirmative, and on October 3, Davis and Beauregard met at Augusta. Beauregard agreed with Davis that Hood's only proper move was against Sherman's communications, whereupon Davis told Beauregard that he wanted him to take command of a new "Military Division of the West," comprising Hood's army and the Department of Alabama, Mississippi, and East Louisiana under Richard Taylor. Beauregard was probably surprised and disappointed that he wasn't getting a field command; apparently Lee, misunderstanding Davis' intent,

had led Beauregard to believe he was being considered for command of the Army of Tennessee (there is no evidence Davis considered any such notion). In any case, either Beauregard was a great patriot, or he didn't really care what he commanded at that stage of the war, for he accepted the post, one which, according to T. Harry Williams, was "as difficult and disagreeable a one as any general in the war was asked to assume." Davis had earlier written to Hood, explaining that he had been contemplating such an arrangement and inviting Hood's views on it. Hood raised no objection to it, so on October 17, Beauregard officially assumed command of his new Military Division.²³

Beauregard's appointment to the new command was a wise move in several respects. Many people had been calling for Beauregard to be appointed to a more important position; Davis' action would still that clamor. It would also provide for smooth coordination between Hood and Taylor. He would also be in a position to offer sound advice to the young, inexperienced Hood, but was to act only in an advisory capacity, however, and this awkward arrangement would cause some problems later. At any rate, the preparations for the new campaign were now complete. Hood wired Davis from Palmetto on September 28 that the army would

²³McMurry, 158; Horn, 372-373; O.R. XXXIX, pt. 2, 846, 880, 885; pt. 3, 785, 824-825; T. Harry Williams, P.G.T. Beauregard: Napoleon in Gray (Baton Rouge, Louisiana: Louisiana State University Press, 1955), 240-241.

begin moving the next day, and would be across the Chattahoochee in a day or two. "I am very hopeful of good results," Hood added. On September 29 and 30, 1864, Hood's army crossed the Chattahoochee, inaugurating a new campaign, one that would eventually take them to Spring Hill, Tennessee, and their rendezvous with legend.²⁴

At this point, a brief analysis of the proposed campaign, as planned by Hood and Davis at Palmetto, is in order. On the whole, the plan to operate on Sherman's communications was as sound a plan as the Confederates could have thought up. With luck and hard work, the Yankees could be lured back into the mountains of Georgia and Northern Alabama, where the Army of Tennessee could then fight them on ground favorable to the defense. Furthermore, so long as the Confederates threatened the railroad, Sherman would have difficulty collecting the supplies he needed to operate south of Atlanta. Indeed, Hood's presence athwart the Western and Atlantic might prove so great a threat that Sherman would not attempt to leave Atlanta and move into the interior, for fear of being cut off from his base and exposing his flank and rear to the enemy.²⁵ Hood and Davis' plan, then, had a good chance of success.

There were some problems with the plan, however; chief among them being the fact that the Confederates were

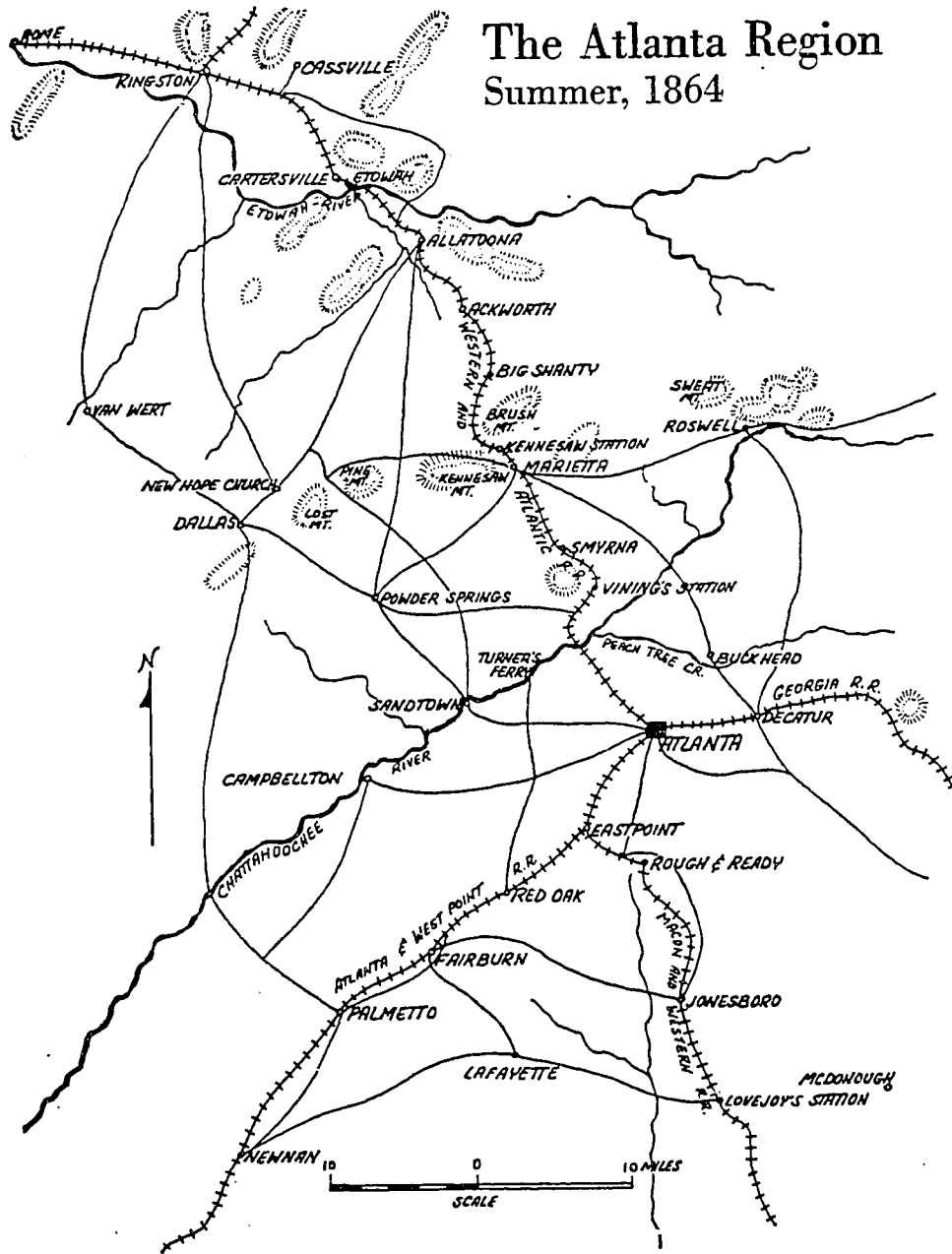
²⁴McMurry, 158; Connelly, 480; O.R. XXXIX, pt. 2, 880; Woodworth, 293.

²⁵McMurry, 158.

outnumbered (Hood having only about 39,000 men to Sherman's 60,000). This disparity in numbers meant that much would depend on luck and skilled generalship, which in turn meant that, in large measure, success or failure would depend heavily on the characteristics of the commanding general, John B. Hood. But Hood did not enjoy the confidence of his army or his subordinates, nor would he prove equal to the task at hand.²⁶

Supply and staff problems also would dog Hood. Hood's chief of staff, Francis A. Shoup, had left in mid-September while under investigation for stores that had been lost upon the evacuation of Atlanta. No one was appointed to replace him, and army administration fell apart thereafter. At one point, the army's command system was so bad that it was impossible to know whether or not Hood's orders even reached his corps commanders. He could have appointed a new chief of staff had he wanted to, but he didn't; he seemed to have had no real interest in or appreciation for staff work, so essential for any army, but tedious and time-consuming. The same was true of logistics; he realized supplies were necessary, but did not give much thought to where they came from. Consequently, he often planned operations and put them into execution before discovering that the logistical facilities he needed were

²⁶Craig L. Symonds, A Battlefield Atlas of the Civil War (Baltimore, Maryland: The Nautical and Aviation Publishing Company of America, 1983), 98; McMurry, 158; O.R. XXXIX, pt. 2, 850-851.



Map courtesy of Connelly, Autumn of Glory, 333.

either inadequate or non-existent. As a case in point, on September 20, while at Palmetto, Hood ordered all the rail lines within forty miles of Atlanta to be torn up so as to hinder the movements of Sherman. As a result, the northwestern terminus of the West Point Railroad (which ran through Palmetto and upon which Hood relied for supplies) became Newnan, Georgia, about fourteen miles southwest of Palmetto. In effect, Hood had torn up his own supply line.²⁷

Despite all these problems, the campaign seemed to go well enough at first. On September 29 and 30, Hood's army crossed the Chattahoochee at Moore's Ferry, veering northeast to strike at Sherman's communications. It was divided into three corps: Cheatham's (formerly Hardee's), with about 9,500 men; S.D. Lee's, with about 9,000 men; and A.P. Stewart's, with about 10,200 men. Wheeler's cavalry, raiding further north, numbered over 10,400 effectives.²⁸ By October 2, Hood's lead elements were in line of battle a few miles west of Marietta, with his left at Lost Mountain threatening Sherman's railroad. On October 4, Stewart's corps captured the Union garrisons at Big Shanty and Ackworth, tearing up a dozen miles of track; the next day, S.G. French's division of that corps went north to strike at Allatoona, where the Yankees had

²⁷McMurry, 153, 159; Woodworth, 295.

²⁸Connelly, 480; O.R. XXXIX, pt. 1, 850-851.

cached a large store of supplies.²⁹

Sherman, meanwhile, had been having some difficulty trying to obtain correct information regarding Hood's movements. By October 1, he "was satisfied" that the bulk of Hood's army was across the Chattahoochee and, after informing Grant (at City Point, Virginia) of that fact, he ordered Henry Slocum's XX Corps to hold Atlanta while he marched for Marietta with the other five corps of his army, about 65,000 men all together. Sherman's army crossed the Chattahoochee on October 3 and 4; by October 5, he was at Kennesaw Mountain, while the Confederates attacked Allatoona.³⁰

French attacked Allatoona on October 5, and made some progress until he received word--falsely, it turned out--that the enemy was moving up the railroad and was in his rear at Big Shanty. It is unclear where this information came from; Stanley F. Horn, historian of the Army of the Tennessee, postulates that a Union cavalry patrol might have been spotted by an excitable scout, or that the Confederates read Sherman's signal to Allatoona from Kennesaw, thirteen miles away: "Hold fast; we are coming." At any rate, French withdrew, and Sherman was credited with saving the day, although he actually hadn't participated in the fighting at Allatoona at all. A song entitled "Hold The

²⁹Horn, 375; Connelly, 480; O'Connor, 223.

³⁰Sherman, 619-622; O.R. XXXIX, pt. 3, 3, 43; Connelly, 480; Horn, 375.

Fort" was written about the incident; it later became a labor union song.³¹

Regardless of the failure at Allatoona, Hood's offensive seemed to be succeeding. Sherman's railroad had been cut at several places, and Sherman had been forced out of the defenses of Atlanta, which was what Hood was trying to do. At that point, however, Hood changed the plan. Instead of turning to fight Sherman, or retreating to Gadsden and fighting there (which would have followed the original plan), he decided to move westward via New Hope Church to Cedartown, Georgia, some seventy miles west of Atlanta. There, he telegraphed Bragg of his new plan. He would strike the Western and Atlantic again, this time by crossing the Coosa river about ten miles below Rome, Georgia, and then move up the west bank of the Oostenaula river, hitting the railroad between Kingston and Tunnel Hill. Hood believed such a move would force Sherman to either fall back to Chattanooga or move south and abandon the railroad. If the former, he would move to the Tennessee River; if the latter, he would move on Sherman's rear. While appearing to stick to the plan outlined by Davis at Palmetto, Hood nonetheless was considering the possibili-

³¹ Ibid., 376-377. For an account of the transformation of "Hold The Fort" from gospel song to labor union song, see Paul J. Scheips, Hold The Fort: The Story of a Song From the Sawdust Trail to the Picket Line (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1971).

ty of marching into Tennessee.³²

Beauregard, nominally Hood's superior (he had not yet officially taken command of his military division), came to Cedartown on October 9, and met with Hood near there that same day. The meeting was a confused one; Beauregard didn't know what Hood was doing; Hood, deliberately or not, misled him as to his (Hood's) intentions. He told Beauregard about his plan to strike Sherman's railroad further north, but said nothing about moving beyond Gadsden to the Tennessee River, thus leaving the impression that he still planned to stick closely to Sherman and follow him if he turned south, or offer battle if he pursued.³³

Beauregard listened to all this, and was "sadly impressed" that Hood had not fully considered the details of his campaign, having left a great deal to luck and future determination. Indeed, Hood's whole offensive seemed to be in trouble; its weaving, twisting pattern more resembled a raid than a change of position for a mighty army. In addition, the supply problem was enormous; the new supply line to Jacksonville, Alabama (Hood's projected base), had yet to be established, Hood's wagon transport was sorely lacking (he estimated he needed about 600 wagons, but he

³²McMurry, 159-160; Horn, 377-378; Connelly, 480-481; O.R. XXXIX, pt. 3, 805.

³³McMurry, 160; Connelly, 481; McDonough and Connelly, 13. See Advance and Retreat, 258, for Hood's reasoning behind the change of plans.

had only 300), and he was already talking about moving cross country to the Tennessee River!³⁴ Clearly, things were in quite a muddle.

Beauregard, however, did little to clear things up. The whole Confederate command structure in the west was in chaos at this time; Bragg was in Richmond, unaware of events in Georgia, while Davis was giving speeches in the Carolinas. Beauregard, as Hood's nominal superior, should have exercised some control, but didn't. Technically, he would not take command of his military division until October 17; furthermore, he knew little of the area in which Hood was maneuvering. For these reasons, he felt he could not order Hood to discontinue his present course, but could only give advice. This he did, telling Hood that his first strike against the railroad should only be attempted if he was sure of being able to recross the Oostenaula River above Rome before Sherman could move on him with a superior force, and he also recommended that Hood avoid battle unless he had numerical superiority or if the safety of the Army of Tennessee absolutely depended on it. Beauregard then went to Jacksonville to establish a supply base for what he thought would be Hood's future operations, and Hood moved out, crossing the Coosa on October 10.³⁵

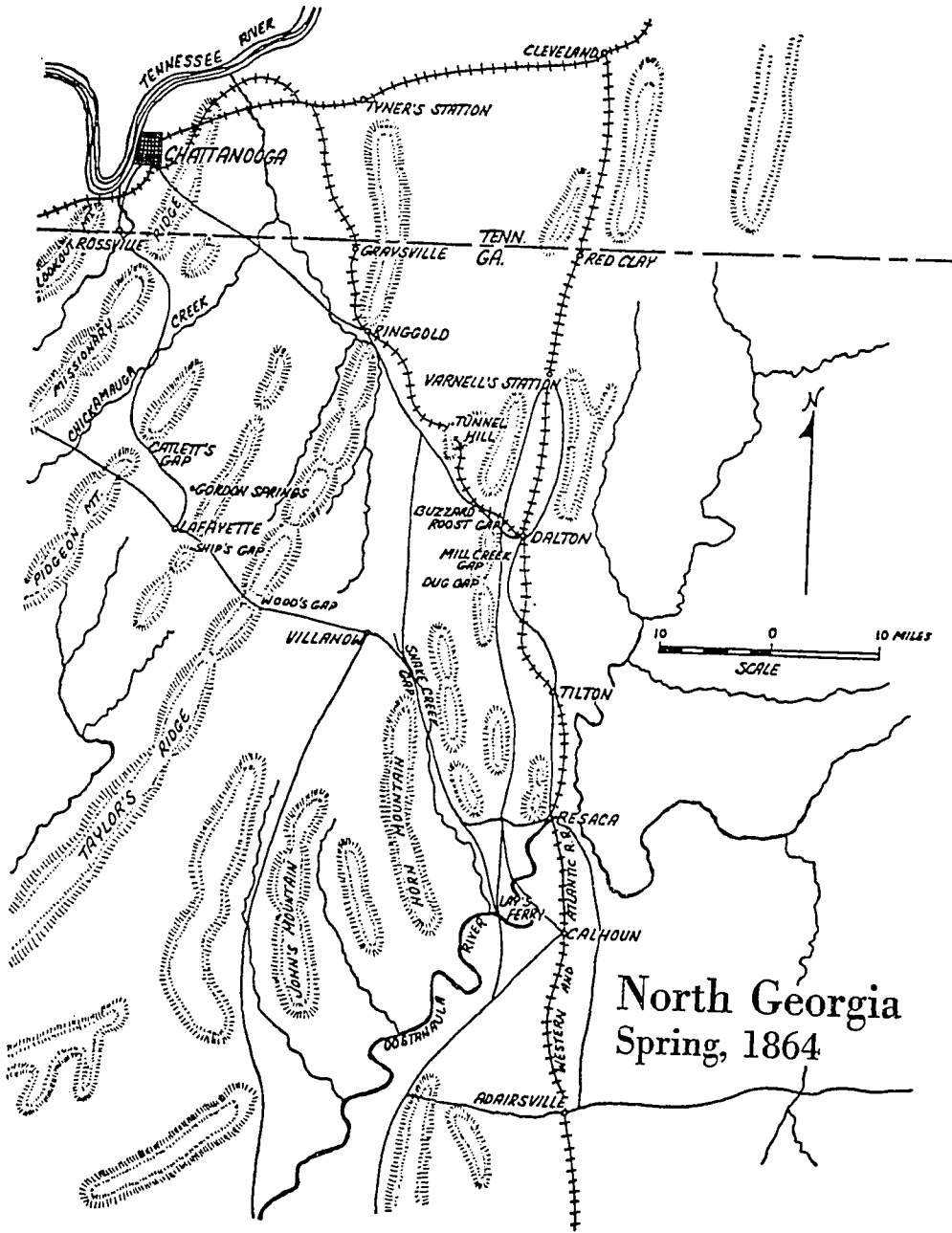
³⁴Connelly, 481-482; McMurry, 160; O.R. XXXIX, pt. 3, 804.

³⁵Connelly, 482; McMurry, 160-161.

Sherman, in the meantime, had arrived at Allatoona on October 9, very much unsure of Hood's intentions. At first, he thought it likely Hood was moving back south; he warned Slocum, in command at Atlanta, of this possibility on the seventh. Actually, as we have seen, Hood was moving north. Sherman grumbled in a letter to a subordinate that Hood was so unpredictable that "I can not guess his movements as I could those of Johnston, who was a sensible man and only did sensible things."³⁶ At any rate, upon arriving at Allatoona, Sherman found that Hood was moving northward in the vicinity of New Hope Church, scene of hard fighting during the Atlanta Campaign. He considered it impracticable to attack Hood there, due to the difficult ground and the still unclear intentions of the enemy. Sherman, however, had been formulating a plan of his own. He telegraphed Major General George H. Thomas, who he had sent back to Nashville at the end of September to defend that area from Rebel raiders under Nathan Bedford Forrest, that he saw no way to "defend this long line of road." The same day (October 9), he telegraphed Grant at City Point:

It will be a physical impossibility to protect the roads, now that Hood, Forrest, Wheeler, and the whole batch of devils, are turned loose. . . . I propose that we break up the railroad from Chattanooga forward, and that we strike out with our wagons for Milledgeville, Millen, and Savannah. . . .

³⁶Horn, 377; Sherman, 627; O.R. XXXIX, pt. 3, 125, 135.



North Georgia
Spring, 1864

Map courtesy of Connelly, Autumn of Glory, 395.

I can make this march, and make Georgia
howl! (37)

This famous dispatch is the first reference Sherman made to his "March to the Sea." It would be some time, though, before Sherman got approval from Grant to execute his daring plan.

Once he received word that Hood had crossed the Coosa, Sherman moved the army towards Rome, thinking that was Hood's objective. Just in case, however, he instructed Thomas to protect the Tennessee River west of Chattanooga and "be prepared for anything," lest Hood should enter Tennessee.³⁸ In the meantime, Hood had flanked Rome and struck northeast towards the railroad on October 12, near Resaca. The garrison there refused to surrender, so Hood moved northward to Dalton, wrecking track as he went. Dalton's 1,000 man garrison--mostly Colored troops--surrendered next day. This unfortunately resulted in the re-enslavement of the Negro soldiers; the Confederate government considered them to be escaped slaves in insurrection. At any rate, Hood's men tore up some twenty miles of track, from Resaca to Tunnel Hill. Scouts reported Sherman was in pursuit; his advance guard was at Resaca on October 13, and Hood was in an excellent position to meet him, protected by the Oostenaula and the mountains around Dalton.

³⁷Horn, 377; Sherman, 627; O.R. XXXIX, pt. 3, 125, 135.

³⁸Horn, 378; O.R. XXXIX, pt. 3, 191.

Once again, the plan seemed to be working.³⁹

And once again, Hood changed it. Instead of offering battle, Hood fell back westwards towards the old Chickamauga battlefield, stopping near LaFayette, Georgia, on October 14, leaving troops at Ship's Gap, off to the east, to hold off Sherman. According to his account in Advance and Retreat, Hood originally intended to give battle between LaFayette and Gaylesville, Alabama, but, after a conference with his officers, it was decided that "although the Army had much improved in spirit, it was not in condition to risk battle against the numbers reported by General Wheeler."⁴⁰ Hood spent the next two days in camp pondering what to do, while Sherman sat at Ship's Gap. It was then that Hood made the momentous decision to abandon Georgia and move into Tennessee. His plan was to cross the Tennessee River northwest of Gadsden at Guntersville, Alabama, and destroy Sherman's communications in the area of Stevenson and Bridgeport, then move on Nashville, defeating any defenders on the way. Once there, he would move on Kentucky and either threaten Cincinnati or move into Virginia to join Lee and crush Grant, then turn on Sherman.⁴¹

It was a daring and grandiose plan, to be sure, and

³⁹Connelly, 482; Horn, 378; Losson, 200-201; McDonough and Connelly, 13-14; O'Connor, 224; McMurry, 161.

⁴⁰Hood, 263; McMurry, 161; Connelly, 483.

⁴¹Horn, 379; Connelly, 483; McMurry, 161-162; Hood, 264, 266-268.

it represented a major departure from the one Hood and Davis had agreed to at Palmetto. It can be argued, though, as Richard McMurry, the most recent of Hood's biographers, has done, that Hood really didn't have much of a choice. His movement across the Chattahoochee had already opened up to Sherman all of Georgia south of Atlanta, and it was unrealistic to assume that Hood could, by rapid marches, get in front of Sherman if the latter turned south. Hood's new plan, therefore, was merely an acknowledgment of that reality. Furthermore, he suggests that, although Hood's plan was "a wild dream," it was difficult to imagine a viable alternative; a strong Confederate army in middle Tennessee would be an embarrassment to the Union. If it won a few battles, it could pose a serious threat. Earlier, Stanley Horn had written that Hood's dream "was by no means impossible."⁴²

In reality, however, Hood's plan was indeed no more than a dream, the culmination of his frustrations as an army commander. In Virginia, under Lee, he had won glory; he had been the "handsome cavalier" of the Army of Northern Virginia, the darling of Richmond society. Since then, he had been wounded twice; in the arm at Gettysburg, the leg (which he lost) at Chickamauga. He had failed before Atlanta, and he was no longer the great hero of the Confederacy. His anguish over his failures was intensified by

⁴²McMurry, 162; Horn, 379.

his painful wounds. Old before his time in body and spirit, he hoped to duplicate the grand maneuvers of his idols, Lee and Stonewall Jackson, and thus recapture some of the glory of "the good old days" under Lee. He conceived a dream-like ending to his travails: a reunion with Lee, and the two of them marching together to glory and victory.⁴³

Whatever his motivation, Hood started the army towards Gadsden, Alabama, on October 17, reaching that place on the twentieth. He said in Advance and Retreat that he planned to submit his new plan to Beauregard there, but this does not seem to have been entirely true, if his dispatches are to be believed. On the nineteenth, two days before he met Beauregard, he informed the government that he intended to move towards the Tennessee River within three days, and on the twentieth, he conferred with Richard Taylor about supply arrangements for his move, again before he met Beauregard. He spoke as though his invasion was a foregone conclusion, and that Beauregard's approval was not needed. Furthermore, Beauregard was not, as Hood wrote in his memoirs, "journeying in my direction." He was, rather, trying to find the army, which was not where he supposed it to be, since he was unaware of the change in plans.⁴⁴

⁴³McDonough and Connelly, 14; O'Connor, 225; Cisco, 135.

⁴⁴Hood, 264; Connelly, 483; O.R. XXXIX, pt. 3, 831, 835.

After making arrangements for the supply depot at Jacksonville, Beauregard had gone to Blue Pond, Alabama, thirty-six miles northeast on the road from LaFayette to Jacksonville, where Hood's army would be had it followed the plan of October 9. Instead, he found only Wheeler's cavalry, and was informed that Hood had begun to move north. Setting off to find him, Beauregard finally caught up with Hood at Gadsden on October 21. There, he learned for the first time that Hood was already preparing to move across the Tennessee. The two generals spent most of the night poring over maps and discussing the planned offensive. After consulting Hood's corps commanders about the condition of the army, Beauregard got the impression that a withdrawal south to fight Sherman near Atlanta would seem like a retreat and thus wreck the army's morale. Although he questioned some of the details of the plan, he nonetheless regarded it as promising and told Hood to go ahead with it. "The plan was a good one in itself," he said, "but success depended upon the manner in which it should be carried out." Indeed, the plan was similar to some of Beauregard's earlier strategic proposals to the Confederate government, which probably accounts for Beauregard's almost enthusiastic letters to Richmond explaining why he let Hood carry out the invasion.⁴⁵

Beauregard's primary objections were logistical.

⁴⁵Connelly, 483-484; Horn, 379-380; McMurry, 163; Williams, 244; O.R. XXXIX, pt. 3, 841.

Hood would need to change his base from Jacksonville to Tusculumbia, Alabama, near the terminus of the Memphis and Charleston railroad, which ran eastward from Corinth, Mississippi, where it linked up with the Mobile and Ohio. Both lines were in a state of disrepair, due to neglect and Federal raiders. Hood, though, said these lines could be repaired before he was likely to need them, and, besides, he believed he would capture ample supplies at Nashville, assuming he took it. His wagon transport was still bad as well. Noting these conditions, Beauregard decided to stay behind at Gadsden to take care of logistics while the army moved to Guntersville, noting that "General Hood was disposed to be oblivious" to them.⁴⁶

Beauregard had other objections too. Since the plan would leave Sherman more or less unopposed in Georgia, Beauregard insisted that Wheeler's cavalry be left behind to operate against Sherman's communications and attempt to impede any advance he might make. Such a move, however, would leave Hood with only the two cavalry brigades of W.H. Jackson, a force insufficient to screen a major move into Tennessee. Beauregard promised, therefore, that Forrest's cavalry would be sent to join Hood after it finished its raid into Tennessee. Beauregard also advised that Hood move quickly and cross the river at Guntersville so as to destroy the railroad north of it before Sherman could

⁴⁶McMurry, 163; Connelly, 484; McDonough and Connelly, 16.

repair the rail lines south of Chattanooga; if this was accomplished, Sherman would have to move north to protect his supply line.⁴⁷

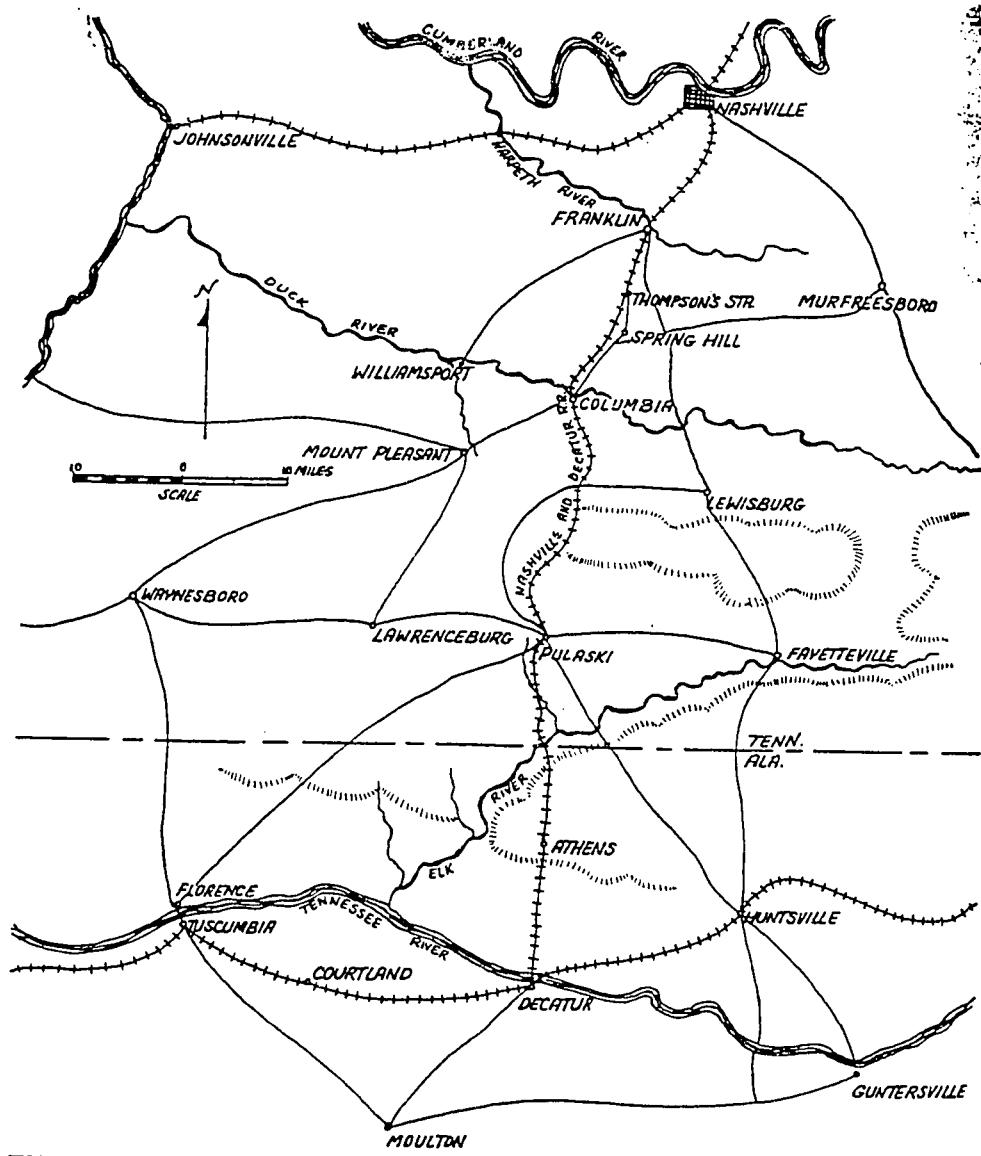
Thus Beauregard really had no major objections to Hood's plan, other than logistical considerations. It is doubtful, however, that he would have stopped Hood even if he had been completely opposed to the plan. As already noted, Hood had revised his strategy twice without telling Beauregard, and the tone of his notes to Richmond regarding the planned invasion of Tennessee and to Taylor about supply considerations indicated that he considered Beauregard's advice a mere formality. Hood most likely would have done what he wanted anyway, and it appears that he scorned Beauregard's authority, seeing him as his commander in name only, whose advice, although useful, did not necessarily have to be heeded.⁴⁸

While at Gadsden, the army received supplies in the form of shoes, clothing, and the like, and Hood informed them that they were headed for Tennessee, which, according to Hood's account, "created great enthusiasm . . . from the different encampments arose at intervals that genuine Confederate shout so familiar to every Southern soldier . . ."⁴⁹ This was to be expected, since there were many

⁴⁷Connelly, 484; Horn, 379; McMurry, 163; Hood, 269.

⁴⁸Connelly, 484-485; O.R. XXXIX, pt. 3, 831, 835.

⁴⁹Hood, 270; McMurry, 163.



Hood's Approach to Nashville

Autumn, 1864

Map courtesy of Connelly, Autumn of Glory, 498.

Tennesseans in the army. To take advantage of Southern sentiment in Tennessee--which was, after all, a Confederate state, although the Yankees occupied it--Beauregard suggested that Hood prepare a proclamation to be signed by Cheatham (a prominent Tennessee general) and distributed in Tennessee once the army got there, stating that his corps and that of "the chivalrous Forrest" had come to Tennessee "to enable her sons to redeem themselves from the yoke of a vile oppressor."⁵⁰ This was done, and on October 22, the army moved north towards Gunterville.⁵¹

Hood spent the next several days trying to find a good place to cross the Tennessee River. Gunterville was determined to be unsuitable; it is unclear why. Hood says in his memoirs that he learned on October 23 that Forrest was in West Tennessee and therefore would be unable to join him at Gunterville. Not wanting to cross without cavalry, he decided to move further west so as to link up with Forrest more easily. It is not known how he got that information, however, since Forrest wasn't even ordered to join him until October 26. This is also a different excuse than the one he gave Beauregard, who said Hood told him Gunterville was too heavily garrisoned. Whatever the reason, Hood decided to try Decatur, about thirty miles

⁵⁰ Losson, 202. The complete text of the proclamation can be found in O.R. XXXIX, pt. 1, 798.

⁵¹ Horn, 380; Connelly, 485.

west of Guntersville, arriving there on October 26.⁵²

Beauregard, meanwhile, had stayed behind at Gadsden, conferring with Taylor about logistical support for Hood. He had left late on October 24, expecting to join Hood at Guntersville. It was not until he arrived there that he learned Hood had gone to Decatur. Upset, Beauregard finally caught up with Hood at Decatur on October 27. Beauregard was angry because Hood hadn't informed him of the change in plan, and also because Decatur was so far west of Stevenson, the campaign's first objective. His irritation increased when Decatur was found to be too strongly garrisoned to be taken by storm. There wasn't time for a siege, but Hood's engineers reported on the twenty-eighth that a suitable crossing site might be found at Courtland, some twenty miles west. The army promptly moved there, arriving on October 30, but it was discovered that a crossing there could only be made with great difficulty. Hood also informed Beauregard that the army lacked enough supplies to move into Tennessee; many of his men had no shoes. For this reason, he suggested the army move on to Tuscumbia, twenty miles further west and almost one hundred miles west of Guntersville. There, the army would only be ten miles from the eastern terminus of the Memphis and Charleston railroad, upon which Hood planned to rely

⁵²Hood, 270; McDonough and Connelly, 17; Horn, 380; McMurry, 164; Connelly, 485-486.

for supplies. Beauregard reluctantly assented (what else could he do?), and decided that, since they were so far west, they might as well not try to double back to Stevenson and Bridgeport, but instead go north and try to take Nashville while Forrest attacked the rail lines to Chattanooga. If Hood moved fast enough--and Beauregard impressed on him the need for speed--there was still a chance that Sherman would be drawn back into Middle Tennessee to defend his lines of communication. Hood agreed, and the army moved to Tuscumbia, arriving there on October 30.⁵³

Sherman had been watching all this, puzzled. While at Ship's Gap, in pursuit of Hood, he received a message from Major General Henry W. Halleck, Chief of Staff in Washington, that "intimated the authorities there were willing I should undertake the march across Georgia to the sea."⁵⁴ Grant, however, was still against it, and would be for some time; he told Sherman that he should go after Hood, for, "with Hood's army destroyed you can go where you please with impunity."⁵⁵ At any rate, Sherman decided to continue pursuing Hood; he moved through Lafayette and went on to Gaylesville, at which place he arrived on October 21. He stayed there until the twenty-eighth, pondering what to do, uncertain over both Hood's

⁵³Horn, 380-381; McMurry, 164; McDonough and Connelly, 17; Connelly, 486-487; Hood, 271.

⁵⁴Sherman, 631.

⁵⁵O.R. XXXIX, pt. 3, 576.

and his own intentions. On October 26, he received word that Hood had moved from Gadsden northwards, and it was then that he made up his mind, finally convinced of Hood's "serious intentions."⁵⁶ As he put it in his official report:

Hood's movements and strategy had demonstrated that he had an army capable of endangering . . . my communications, but unable to meet me in open fight. To follow him would simply amount to being decoyed away from Georgia. . . . To remain on the defensive would have been bad policy . . . I was forced to adopt a course more fruitful in results than the naked one of following him to the southwest.⁵⁷

Sherman made a momentous decision. He would leave Hood for Thomas to deal with, while he marched with the main army to the Atlantic. He ordered the IV Corps, under Major General David Stanley (15,000 men) and the XXIII Corps, under Major General John Schofield (12,000 men) to report to Thomas and assist him in the defense of Tennessee, then moved back to Atlanta. He finally managed to convince Grant to let him go to the sea, and, after burning Atlanta, he set out for Savannah on November 16. Thus we have the interesting situation of two armies, who were theoretically supposed to be fighting each other, instead turning their backs on each other and marching in opposite directions.⁵⁸

⁵⁶Horn, 381; McDonough and Connelly, 17-18; Sherman, 634, 636; Battles and Leaders of The Civil War, Vol IV (New York: Thomas Yoseloff, Inc., 1956), 441.

⁵⁷O.R. XXXIX, pt. 1, 583.

⁵⁸Horn, 381; McDonough and Connelly, 17-18; Sherman, 636-641, 642-644; O.R. XXXIX, pt. 1, 583-584; pt. 3, 576-577, 594-595.

The story of the March to the Sea is out of the scope of this narrative; its attention shifts to Hood's moves against Thomas and Schofield in Tennessee, moves which eventually led to the little town of Spring Hill. So Sherman marched out of the story, on his way to glory of his own.

What, then, of Hood? What can be said of his performance in the weeks following the fall of Atlanta? It is that, in that period, he demonstrated that he lacked the most important attributes necessary for an army commander. He did have courage, audacity, and the ability to see the general strategic problems he faced, and devise reasonable solutions for them; in fairness, he was handicapped by shortages of men, supplies, and equipment, as well as his own physical limitations. His failure, however, was in the confusion and carelessness with which his campaign had been conducted, manifested in poor preparation, lack of attention to logistics, and poor reconnaissance, as well as strained relations with both his superiors and subordinates. He was confused and bewildered, crippled by wounds, led on by the wild dream of reaching Kentucky and the fervent desire to rejoin his hero, Lee.⁵⁹ Unfortunately, his dream would turn into a nightmare of disaster.

⁵⁹McMurry, 167.

Chapter 2: "Have Everything In Readiness"

Most military observers agree that one of the essential keys to victory in any campaign is speed of movement relative to your opponent. Time and time again, from Caesar's time to Napoleon's era to our own day, the side that wins wars usually moves faster than the side that loses. Swift movements keep the enemy guessing and denies him the ability to mass his forces quickly enough to counter opposing moves. A classic example is the Waterloo Campaign, where Napoleon, outnumbered by the combined Coalition armies in Belgium, attempted to redress the balance by moving between them via a series of forced marches, dividing them and attempting to defeat each in detail before they could concentrate and crush him. It ultimately didn't work, but Napoleon's skillful and rapid march at the beginning of the campaign earned the admiration of his opponents, and very nearly won the war for him.

John Bell Hood and the Army of Tennessee were in a similar situation at the beginning of November 1864. The army was at Tuscumbia, Alabama, preparing to cross the Tennessee River to "redeem the sacred soil of Tennessee." Awaiting them, in Tennessee, was a potential force of almost 70,000 men, counting the garrisons of such places as Chattanooga, Decatur, and Murfreesboro, plus the three corps (IV, XVI, and XXIII) on their way to reinforce Thomas from various places. It would take some time to concentrate

these forces, however, and if Hood moved fast, he would catch and probably defeat the Yankees before their overwhelming manpower could be brought to bear. Unfortunately for him, a series of "multitudinous and maddening" delays forced the army to wait three weeks before moving, a period of inactivity which would prove fatal to Hood's proposed campaign.⁶⁰

There were a number of reasons for the delay; in fairness, not all were avoidable. First of all, Hood had to wait for Forrest's cavalry to arrive from its raid into Middle Tennessee; Hood needed Forrest's veteran troopers to screen his movements. After finishing his attacks at Johnsonville (which included the capture of two Union gunboats and five transports--a feat which won the admiration of Sherman), Forrest moved up the Tennessee River to join Hood, as per Beauregard's orders of October 26. He first tried to cross at Perryville, but couldn't; heavy rains had caused the river to rise, making it uncrossable. Undeterred, he moved on to Florence and crossed the river to Tusculumbia, arriving there on 18 November. Once there, he was given the command of all the cavalry of the Army of Tennessee, some 5,000 troopers.⁶¹

The inclement weather that delayed Forrest also ham-

⁶⁰Horn, 382; Battles and Leaders, IV, 441.

⁶¹Sherman, 639; John A. Wyeth, That Devil Forrest: Life of General Nathan Bedford Forrest (New York: Harper and Row, 1959), 468-469, 471; O.R. XLV, pt. 1, 751-752; 1211.

pered Hood's preparations, turning the roads into quagmires and thus preventing movement. The Tennessee River rose, and Hood had to wait for a pontoon bridge to be laid so he could cross the river. No man can control the weather, and consequently Hood must have been frustrated by the frequent downpours, about which he could do nothing.⁶²

The heavy rains also further worsened Hood's logistical problems. The Memphis and Charleston Railroad ended at Cherokee, some ten miles from Tuscumbia; from there, supplies were hauled by wagon to the army, and the rain made this movement difficult. Furthermore, the rail line itself was not in the best condition; it had been undergoing repairs, but these were severely impeded by the bad weather. The result was that the army wasn't getting the supplies it needed, and Hood felt it necessary to amass sufficient supplies before moving. He wrote to Beauregard on 17 November that he needed about twenty days' rations for the army; he expected to capture abundant stores at Nashville, and felt the army could make do with twenty days' rations until then. Apparently, he didn't get the supplies he asked for, for the army's General Orders Number 35, dated November 20, noted a scarcity in the bread ration and asked the soldiers to endure the hardship until more stores could be captured. Logistics, then, were still

⁶² Stanley F. Horn, The Decisive Battle of Nashville (Baton Rouge, Louisiana: Louisiana State University Press, 1956), 13; Horn, Tennessee, 382; Woodworth, 295.

proving to be a major headache for Hood.⁶³

Some interesting improvisations were made by Confederate troops to alleviate the supply difficulties. In Cheatham's corps, for example, many men lacked shoes. Cheatham instructed the men to make shoes out of beef hides by putting the hairy side around their foot and then stitching the hide together. One of Cheatham's surgeons reported that the shoes thus fashioned "did fine to walk in, but did not smell well after a day or two."⁶⁴

Added to all these maddening delays were growing problems in the army's high command. The difficulties Hood had with his chief of staff (or, rather, his lack of a chief of staff) have already been mentioned; Hood had inherited the poor administrative system set up by Johnston, but had shown no inclination to change it. In those first few weeks of November, 1864, though, the growing tension between Hood and Beauregard--building up since the early part of the campaign--manifested itself even more.⁶⁵

The tension stemmed from a number of sources. Beauregard was somewhat ill-at-ease in his new command, mostly because his responsibilities were so poorly defined. In his confusion over what his responsibilities actually were,

⁶³Jacob Cox, The Battle of Franklin, Tennessee: November 30, 1864 (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1897), 5; McMurry, 165; Horn, Tennessee, 382; O.R. XXXIX, pt. 3, 868, 870, 871, 888; XLV, pt. 1, 1215, 1216; 1219; 1227.

⁶⁴Losson, 202.

⁶⁵Woodworth, 295; Connelly, 481.

he went so far as to write to Davis on October 31 for a clarification of his status. Specifically, he wanted to know whether his presence with an army in the field "imposes on me the necessity of assuming command, and whether in that case it relieves from duty the immediate commander." Davis replied the next day that he had placed Beauregard in command of the armies "in a section of country." "When present with either army," Davis continued, "you must exercise immediate command while there, but . . . you should not relieve the general of the particular army. . . ."66 In short, Davis intended Beauregard to act in something of an advisory capacity only, or so Beauregard seems to have interpreted it, based on his subsequent actions. T. Harry Williams, whose excellent biography of Beauregard is still considered to be one of the great works of Civil War history, noted that Beauregard understood his advisory position and was not disposed to go beyond it; indeed, he showed a definite desire to avoid responsibility. For example, although he was angry over Hood's constant revisions of plan, he avoided taking charge and even depicted Hood's moves as successful in his reports to Richmond. His misgivings about the Tennessee expedition continued, but, although he had the power to do so, he could not bring himself to forbid it. He later tried to explain his actions by saying he was reluctant to interfere with

⁶⁶Connelly, 487; Williams, 242; O.R. XXXIX, pt. 3, 870, 874.

Hood, who was sensitive to supervision, but this is no excuse. He was Hood's superior, and he either should have stopped the expedition or stayed with Hood to ensure its success. Although heartsick at Hood's continued delays and his refusal to take him into his confidence, he didn't really do much to alleviate matters.⁶⁷

Hood sensed this discomfort, but did little to soothe it; indeed, as we have seen, he repeatedly ignored Beauregard. More of the same continued at Tuscumbia. On October 30, Beauregard's A.A.G., G.W. Brent, wrote Hood asking for "a brief summary of the operations of your army from the date of its departure from Jonesborough, Georgia, to the present time; also a concise statement of your plans of future operations."⁶⁸ A reasonable request; Beauregard merely wanted to find out what Hood was doing and forward it to Richmond. Hood, however, responded in a vague, evasive manner. He wrote back four days later, saying he planned to cross the Tennessee on the morning of November 5, and that he had been too busy and too ill to comply with Brent's request, although he did send him copies of his telegrams to Richmond. This reply was not satisfactory to Beauregard, and Brent repeated Beauregard's request on November 4. Hood responded immediately; he ignored the request for a summary of operations and stated that

⁶⁷Connelly, 487; Williams, 242, 244-245; Horn, 383; O.R. XXXIX, pt. 3, 879.

⁶⁸McMurry, 165; O.R. XXXIX, pt. 3, 867.

it wasn't possible to furnish a plan for the future, since "so much must depend upon the movements of the enemy" and added that the matter had been "fully discussed" between himself and Beauregard. Beauregard did not press the matter further and, on November 6, with the army still in position at Tuscumbia, he forwarded the above correspondence to the War Department.⁶⁹

By November 13, Hood and Beauregard's working relationship had fallen apart completely. The final straw was a curious incident that occurred during the previous two days. It seems that Beauregard had expressed a desire to A.P. Stewart to review his army corps on November 12, weather permitting, and if Hood had given Stewart no other orders. Hood found out about it, and angrily wrote Beauregard on November 12, expressing his surprise that "one so familiar with the rule that all orders, whether for review and inspection, or whatever kind, relating to this army, must pass through me, its Commanding General, should have overlooked it in this instance." He added that he thought a review would be unwise because "spies and disaffected persons could observe it and obtain information about our army." Beauregard, through Brent, replied the same day that he had assumed Stewart would inform Hood of the review and noted that "you must have a low estimate of the intelligence and judgement [sic] of your wily adver-

⁶⁹McMurry, 165-166; Williams, 245; O.R. XXXIX, pt.3, 880, 887-888.

sary, if you suppose at this late day that he is ignorant of the position of your army and the strength of your corps." Pulling rank, he said he wished to review Cheatham and Lee's corps too. The review was held on schedule; Beauregard had won this little battle.⁷⁰ The above incident is a perfect example of how bad Beauregard and Hood's relationship was, for here we see a major dispute begun over a seemingly insignificant matter.

The relationship went downhill after that. Beauregard sent two dispatches to Hood, one regarding the discontinuation of independent scouts for the army, the other dealing with medical care for the slaves (many of whom were ex-soldiers captured at Dalton the previous month) who were repairing the Memphis and Charleston Railroad. Both these queries went unanswered. An almost comical aura was injected into the dispute when Hood moved his headquarters across the river to Florence on November 13, without telling Beauregard. Beauregard, not knowing about it, sent Brent to go find him and request a meeting "when and where it would be most convenient." Brent, unable to find Hood in Tuscumbia, went across the river and searched all over Florence for him. He finally found Hood, but was unable to convince him to return to Tuscumbia. So, the two generals remained on opposite sides of the river, communicating only in writing. Beauregard tried

⁷⁰McMurry, 166; Connelly, 487; O.R. XXXIX, pt. 3; 913-914.

again on November 17, asking for a conference. Hood refused, so Beauregard, disgusted, ordered him to take the offensive immediately and, realizing there was nothing more he could do for Hood, left for Corinth to check on the defenses there.⁷¹

It is difficult to see why Hood resented Beauregard so much and consequently ignored his authority. The fact that Beauregard, even after Hood moved to Florence, seemed to be bending over backwards to help him succeed (e.g., he offered to confer on Hood those powers necessary to operate efficiently in Taylor's department, and later authorized him to issue all necessary orders to secure the "efficient and successful administration and operation of your army" while in Taylor's department), makes it even more difficult to understand Hood's enmity towards Beauregard. It probably was due, as Steven Woodworth has recently proposed, to Beauregard's insistence on reminding him of military reality. As we have seen, Hood behaved less and less rationally over time. His conduct all summer (during the campaign for Atlanta) was of a man ridden with obsession. Possibly it was his severe wounding at Chickamauga the previous fall; maybe it was his failed courtship of Richmond belle Sally Preston and his desire to prove both to her and her aristocratic parents that he, a backwoods Texan, was worthy of her; perhaps it was merely ordinary ambition

⁷¹Connelly, 487-488; Williams, 245; McMurry, 166; O.R. XXXIX, pt. 3, 908, 914; XLV, pt. 1, 1215.

run amok in a man who had suddenly become aware of having risen very far in a short time. As his failures had mounted during the summer and fall as a result of the questionable execution of his often brilliant plans, he had become embittered against his generals, whom he saw as incompetent, and his soldiers, whom he believed to be cowards. By the fall of 1864, he was consumed with the "need to succeed," and consequently ignored the unpleasant facts that might stand in his way. Beauregard, in his capacity as commander of the Military Division of the West, called them to his attention, and Hood resented him for it. To avoid this unpleasantness, he simply avoided all contact with Beauregard, leaving him uninformed about almost everything, including the army's frequent changes of headquarters. When Beauregard showed up at Tuscumbia, then, Hood moved his headquarters across the river to Florence. This campaign would be run his way, without interference from anyone.⁷²

Bad weather, inadequate logistics, clashing personalities--all these things boded unfavorably for the success of Hood's Tennessee excursion. Nonetheless, the preparations continued at Tuscumbia for the great move, as Hood and Beauregard both believed Sherman was still moving north. It will be recalled that one of the original goals of the invasion of Tennessee was to draw Sherman north to defend

⁷²Woodworth, 296; O.R. XLV, pt. 1, 1210-1211; 1215.

his communications. Up until mid-November, Confederate intelligence reported that this strategy was working. By November 13, information was received that Sherman and most of his army was moving into Tennessee, towards Bridgeport; on the fifteenth, he was reported at Pulaski, Huntsville, and Decatur, almost astride Hood's planned line of march into Tennessee.⁷³

The Confederates soon learned this information was erroneous, as a series of conflicting reports came in, beginning about November 15. Wheeler reported that the Yankees appeared to be burning something at Atlanta, and noted that two of Sherman's corps were there, instead of at Bridgeport as previously believed. Rumors were that Sherman would head south towards Augusta and Savannah. On the sixteenth, Wheeler reported that the railroad north of Atlanta had been destroyed and that a Union force of unknown strength had left Atlanta in the direction of Jonesborough the previous morning. This was confirmed next day; Sherman was reported to be moving southeast in force, leaving Atlanta smoldering behind him.⁷⁴

Beauregard and Hood realized it would be no use to pursue Sherman, who had a head start of about three hundred miles, so they decided to go ahead and invade Tennessee, defeat Thomas' forces, and attempt (although the chance

⁷³Connelly, 488.

⁷⁴*Ibid.*, 488-489; O.R. XXXIX, pt. 3, 918; XLV, pt. 1, 1206.

was remote) to draw Sherman north once more. In fairness, the Confederates had no other choice, but this latest decision, like so many others, was based on faulty intelligence. Hood seems to have known little of the actual Union strength opposing him in Tennessee, which, if concentrated, would be very formidable indeed.⁷⁵

Sherman had left the defense of Tennessee in the capable hands of George H. Thomas, the "Rock of Chickamauga." He had originally been sent back to defend against Forrest's raids, but on October 19, Sherman had written him, saying:

I will send back to Tennessee the Fourth Corps, all dismounted cavalry. . . . I want you to remain in Tennessee and take command of all my [military] division not actually present with me. . . . If you can defend the line of the Tennessee in my absence of three months, it is all I ask.(76)

A few days later, Sherman issued Special Field Orders Number 105, authorizing Thomas to "exercise command over all the troops and garrisons [of the Military Division of the Mississippi] not absolutely in the presence of the General-in-Chief." While Sherman was marching to the sea, then, Thomas was to oppose Hood in Tennessee.⁷⁷

Thomas potentially had an irresistible force to use to repel the invasion. In Tennessee, he had, besides the

⁷⁵Connelly, 489-490.

⁷⁶Battles and Leaders, IV, 440-441; O.R. XXXIX, pt. 3, 377-378.

⁷⁷McDonough and Connelly, 20; O.R. XXXIX, pt. 1, 588.

railroad guards left by Sherman, the garrisons of Nashville (8,000-10,000 men, plus about that many clerks, etc., who could man the defenses in an emergency), Chattanooga (5,000 men, under James B. Steedman), Murfreesboro (5,000 men, under Lovell H. Rousseau), and Decatur (4,000 men, under Gordon Granger), along with numerous smaller garrisons. The two divisions of the XVI Corps, some 14,000 men under Andrew Jackson Smith, were on their way from Missouri. Sherman sent back two corps: the IV, under David Stanley (12,000 men) and the XXIII, under John M. Schofield (10,000 men). Counting the 10,000 cavalry being remounted at Nashville and in Kentucky, Thomas had a potential force of about 70,000 men.⁷⁸

Most of these troops would not join Thomas until after the affair at Spring Hill and the subsequent battle of Franklin, arriving only in time for the battle of Nashville (December 15-16). The only Union forces in the field directly opposing Hood on about November 21 were the IV and XXIII Corps, plus about 3,000 cavalry, all under the command of Major General John McAllister Schofield.

Schofield was thirty-three at the start of the campaign, the same age as Hood. Interestingly enough, he and Hood had been classmates at West Point, both graduating in the class of 1853 (Schofield was seventh, Hood forty-

⁷⁸Horn, Tennessee, 382; McDonough and Connelly, 22; Cox, 9; Sherman, 637-638; O.R. XXXIX, pt. 3, 494.

fourth, in a class of fifty-two). He had served in Missouri during the early part of the war, but in early 1864 was appointed to command the Department and Army of the Ohio, consisting of just one corps (XXIII). He led this unit throughout the Atlanta Campaign, giving a good account of himself, although James McPherson's Army of the Tennessee and Thomas' Army of the Cumberland did most of the fighting. He almost didn't get sent back to join Thomas; Sherman had originally planned to keep Schofield and his men with him. Schofield, however, told Sherman that he felt Thomas' force was too small to face Hood and therefore he asked to be sent back to help him. Sherman demurred at first, saying he needed Schofield with him. Schofield argued that his corps could also replenish itself with new regiments while in Tennessee. Finally, Sherman relented, and on October 30, ordered Schofield to march his corps to the nearest point on the railroad and report by telegraph to Thomas for orders.⁷⁹

Thomas first ordered him to move by rail to Tullahoma, then march to Pulaski, but Forrest's attack at Johnsonville necessitated Schofield's going straight to Nashville by rail to meet this threat. He arrived with the advance

⁷⁹John M. Schofield, Forty-Six Years in the Army (New York: The Century Company, 1897), 164-165; James L. McDonough, Schofield: Union General in the Civil War and Reconstruction (Tallahassee, Florida: Florida State University Press, 1972), 100; Mark M. Boatner III, The Civil War Dictionary (New York: Vintage Books, 1988), 407, 726; Horn, Nashville, 11; O.R. XXXIX, pt. 3, 511, 538, 583; XLV, pt. 1, 340.

guard of his corps at Nashville on November 5, and promptly went to Johnsonville with them to face Forrest. Forrest got away, however, so Schofield left two brigades there to organize a defense while he returned to Nashville. He took a train from there to Pulaski, some seventy-five miles south of Nashville, where Stanley's troops were, arriving there on November 13. Next day, he took command of the forces in the field opposing Hood--his own and Stanley's corps--while Thomas remained in overall command at Nashville.⁸⁰

There was some dispute over who was actually entitled to command at Pulaski. Stanley was senior in rank to Schofield (his commission as Major General dated from November 29, 1862; Schofield had originally received his Major General's commission on the same date, but it expired on March 4, 1863, because of the failure of the Senate to confirm it; he was duly reappointed and confirmed on May 12, 1863) and thus felt he should command the combined forces. Thomas put Schofield in overall command, however, because he felt Schofield to be more reliable, and because Schofield was a department commander. Unbeknownst to Thomas, the matter had already been settled by the War Department in favor of Schofield. Department command, according to the War Department, supercedes corps command, with seniority of rank not taken into account. Thus, Thomas' decision was

⁸⁰Schofield, 165-166; McDonough, 100-101; McDonough and Connelly, 22; O.R. XXXIX, pt. 3, 590; XLV, pt. 1, 340-341, 886.

upheld, and Schofield assumed command of the forces in the field at Pulaski. The decision does not appear to have interfered in any way with Schofield and Stanley's working relationship, although their relations post-bellum were not ideal, mostly due to a disagreement over who deserved credit for stopping Hood; Stanley felt Schofield took more of the credit than was his due.⁸¹

Schofield's instructions from Thomas were very simple: he was to hold the enemy in check long enough for Thomas to concentrate all his forces. As Schofield noted in his report, it was "of vital importance" to effect this concentration; all other considerations were secondary, and it was required that the enemy's advance be delayed as long as possible. A decisive battle was to be avoided, however, unless it could be fought on favorable ground. These considerations were the key reasons behind deploying the IV and XXIII Corps so far forward; Schofield, essentially, was fighting a delaying action.⁸²

Once at Pulaski, Stanley called Schofield's attention to the vulnerability of the position there. Pulaski is about thirty miles south of Columbia, at which point the main road to Nashville (and the railroad) crosses the Duck River, a tributary of the Tennessee. Off to the west of

⁸¹ Ezra J. Warner, Generals in Blue (Baton Rouge, Louisiana: Louisiana State University Press, 1964), 426, 470; Cox, 10; McDonough and Connelly, 28; Battles and Leaders, IV, 441; O.R. XXXIX, pt. 3, 64-65; 666, 684-685.

⁸² McDonough, 101; O.R. XLV, pt. 1, 340.

Pulaski, some sixteen miles away, is Lawrenceburg, through which runs a road directly to Columbia via Mount Pleasant. Theoretically, a larger Confederate force, such as Hood's, could move by this road and seize the bridges at Columbia (then guarded by a force of only 800 men), thus blocking the Union line of retreat to Nashville. Hood could then march directly on Nashville more or less unopposed and take the largest supply depot in the west while Thomas was still trying to get his forces together. Furthermore, since the Union had only some 3,500 cavalry under Edward Hatch, Hood could make all these moves undetected, protected by some 5,000 veteran troopers commanded by the best cavalry leader in America.⁸³

Schofield was not yet familiar with the ground in the area, so he wisely listened to Stanley. He decided to halt Jacob Cox's division of the XXIII Corps four miles north of Pulaski to watch the road from Lawrenceburg and be more suitably placed if needed while he pondered what to do. While he was thus engaged, Thomas sent him a message via telegraph on November 19, basically reiterating his earlier instructions and adding "If the enemy advances in force . . . have everything in readiness either to fight him at Pulaski if he advances on that place, or cover the railroad and concentrate at Columbia, should he attempt to turn your right flank. . . ." Schofield, by that time,

⁸³McDonough, 102; Schofield, 166; McDonough and Connelly, 28.

had formulated a plan. He telegraphed Thomas next day with his proposal to move the main body of his force to Lynnville, a town halfway between Columbia and Pulaski. If Hood advanced to strike either Pulaski or Columbia, he argued, he had to move through Lawrenceburg, which place he could probably reach under Forrest's cavalry screen without the Federals even knowing it; he could also most likely move one day's march towards Columbia virtually undetected, thus getting there ahead of Schofield. Hood could also demonstrate against Pulaski and then put his force on the pike north of it to cut Schofield off from Columbia and his reinforcements. Lynnville, Schofield concluded, was not as exposed as Pulaski, and therefore "would be free of these objections as a point of concentration for our forces." Thomas replied that Smith's forces would probably not arrive before the twenty-fifth, and although he expressed a hope that Pulaski could be held until then, he agreed Schofield had to withdraw to Columbia if Hood tried to cut him off from the crossings of the Duck River.⁸⁴

Schofield, having more or less received approval to move back to Lynnville, telegraphed Thomas on the twenty-first that he was sending two divisions to Lynnville, leaving Stanley at Pulaski with the other two. If Hood advanced, Stanley could move to Lynnville and join Scho-

⁸⁴McDonough and Connelly, 28-29; Schofield, 166-167; McDonough, 102-103; O.R. XLV, pt. 1, 944, 956-958.

field, or continue on to Columbia. Because of the bad weather, which rendered the roads almost impassable, Schofield didn't think Hood could get very far very fast, and consequently thought Smith would come up before Hood did much of anything. Believing he had sufficient time to make his dispositions, he counseled Thomas that we should "avoid the appearance of retreating when it is not necessary." So, on the morning of November 22, Schofield started Cox back to Lynnville, in accordance with the new plan. In the meantime, the Army of Tennessee had started north.⁸⁵

⁸⁵McDonough and Connelly, 29; McDonough, 103; O.R. XLV, pt. 1, 972.

Chapter 3: "One of Those Interesting and Beautiful Moves"

Hood had finally gotten his army across the Tennessee River to Florence and, on November 19, Forrest's cavalry started north. On November 21, the campaign began in earnest, as the Army of Tennessee headed northwards, proceeding in three parallel columns. Cheatham's corps (about 10,500 men) was on the left, advancing towards Waynesboro; Stewart's corps (about 8,700 men) was on the right, moving on Lawrenceburg; S.D. Lee (about 8,600 men) moved on the country roads between them. Out front was Forrest's cavalry corps (about 8,000 men), screening the army. The left of the cavalry, James R. Chalmers' division (with Forrest) moved towards Mount Pleasant; the right, consisting of the divisions of Abraham Buford and W.H. Jackson, moved on Lawrenceburg. The weather was awful: freezing cold, rainy, and muddy. A soldier in the Twenty-seventh Tennessee described the day the march began as "the coldest day I ever felt . . . a bitter cold wind was whistling, and almost cut us in two." There were fires every few hundred yards, with groups of ill-clad men hovering around each one to keep warm, although one soldier noted "you could hardly keep warm from one fire to the next." Despite all these hardships, the army was generally in high spirits, buoyed by the prospect of returning to Tennessee. The mood of the rank and file is best summed up by one soldier's comment: "The ground is frozen hard and a sharp cold wind

is blowing, but as my face is toward Tennessee, I heed none of these things."⁸⁶

Hood, apparently, was in high spirits too. He seemed to be feeling better after his three weeks of rest; he had momentarily lost his haggard, careworn look, and his withered arm and stump of a leg were no longer bothering him. Moreover, he was confident of success; although he knew the many delays at Tuscumbia had helped Thomas organize a defense, he nonetheless believed victory was within his grasp. In grand Napoleonic fashion, he addressed his troops as they marched north:

Soldiers: You march today to redeem by your valor and your arms one of the fairest portions of our Confederacy. This can only be achieved by battle and by victory. Summon up in behalf of a consummation so glorious all the elements of soldiership and all the instincts of manhood, and you will render the campaign before you full of auspicious fruit to your country and lasting renown to yourselves.

The above address was generally received with enthusiasm, reported Colonel Ellison Capers of the Twenty-fourth South Carolina; however, "many of the gallant soldiers who cheered were absolutely suffering for clothing and shoes."⁸⁷

⁸⁶Robert Selph Henry, "First With The Most" Forrest (New York: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, 1944), 385-386; William T. Crawford, "The Mystery of Spring Hill," Civil War History I (June 1955), 104; Thomas A. Wigginton, "Cavalry Operations," Civil War Times Illustrated Special Nashville Campaign Edition (December 1964), 40; McDonough and Connolly, 29, 31; Horn, Tennessee, 383-384; Wyeth, 472; Losson, 202-203; Woodworth, 296; O.R. XLV, pt. 1, 652, 657, 752.

⁸⁷O'Connor, 227; Woodworth, 296; Cisco, 136; O.R. XLV, pt. 1, 1236.

Hood's confidence at the beginning of the move north was due in part to his mistaken notion (already mentioned) of the actual Yankee dispositions. Apparently, he knew Schofield's men were at Pulaski, and had only vague warnings of other Federals at Memphis and Paducah. He probably didn't know that a sizeable Union force was concentrating at Nashville to meet him. Although he later claimed to know that Thomas was at Nashville, separated from Schofield by the Duck River, his actions at the time belie this notion. In Advance and Retreat, he said he was trying "by a rapid march to get in rear of Schofield's forces . . . before they were able to reach Duck River," thus cutting them off from Thomas. Most historians have accordingly portrayed the opening moves of the campaign as an attempt by Hood to interpose his army between Schofield and Nashville. Thomas Connelly argued, however, that Hood probably didn't know for sure where he was going. For the long-term, he had his dream of marching to the Ohio Valley; in the short-term, he was probably heading for Nashville and seemed to think the force at Pulaski was his only impediment to taking it. If his intention was as he later claimed--that is, to cut off Schofield at Columbia--he certainly didn't march from Florence in a manner consistent with that purpose. If he desired to crush Schofield while he and Thomas were separated, why didn't he simply march to Pulaski? If he was aiming for Schofield,

why did he march seventy miles from Florence to Columbia, when he could have simply stopped at Lawrenceburg and moved from there to Pulaski? He didn't even find out Schofield had left Pulaski for Columbia until **after** he had passed through Lawrenceburg on the way to Columbia! Furthermore, only one of his corps marched on the main road to Columbia via Lawrenceburg and Mount Pleasant; Cheatham's corps, the strongest of the three, had to make a circuitous march through the rugged country around Waynesboro. Hood kept his headquarters with this column, on a route about thirty miles farther to Columbia than on the main road and almost completely isolated from the other two corps, a further indication of his lack of interest in taking Columbia before Schofield got there. From the evidence Connelly has presented, it seems clear that Hood, at the start of his move into Tennessee, had no more plan--other than to take Nashville and march to the Ohio Valley--than he had had at any time since his odyssey began in early October.⁸⁸

Hood certainly did not move very fast if he really intended to cut Schofield off from Thomas, for by November 25, his headquarters was still twelve miles from Columbia, at Mount Pleasant; Schofield, meanwhile, had already gotten to Columbia. By the twenty-second, Schofield had received

⁸⁸Connelly, 490-491; McMurry, 169; Hood, 281; Crawford, 104-105; Horn, Tennessee, 384; Jacob Cox, The March to the Sea; Franklin and Nashville, Vol. X of Campaigns of the Civil War (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1882), 64.

word that Hood was advancing. The divisions of Jacob Cox and George Wagner had already been sent to Lynnville that morning, Schofield now decided to send the rest of Stanley's men back too (Cox's division belonged to XXIII Corps, but Wagner's was part of IV Corps). This was done on the twenty-third, while Cox pushed on to within seven miles of Columbia, halting there for the night; Stanley arrived at Lynnville that night, joining Wagner's men there. Part of Thomas H. Ruger's division of XXIII Corps, meanwhile, had finally come up by rail to Columbia, bolstering the weak defenses there. On the evening of the twenty-third, Ruger sent word to Schofield (now at Lynnville) that Colonel Horace Capron's cavalry brigade had been driven back to Mount Pleasant by Forrest's troopers, and that the enemy was now very close to Columbia.⁸⁹

Schofield now realized the gravity of the situation. He had depended too much on the idea that bad weather would slow Hood's advance; consequently, he had executed his moves as if he had all the time in the world to get back to Columbia. Now, Hood was pressing him more closely than anticipated, and the situation looked bad. Although Hood's infantry was not as close to Columbia as Schofield thought, he nonetheless had to be concerned about Forrest. Accordingly, he sent a message to Cox, commanding his most advan-

⁸⁹Schofield, 168; McDonough and Connelly, 29, 31; Battles and Leaders, IV, 442-443; McDonough, 103-104; O.R. XLV, pt. 1, 974, 995, 997-998.

ced units, early in the morning of November 24. "All information indicates that Hood is nearer Columbia tonight than I am," Schofield told Cox. "I desire you to march at once to or near Columbia and hold the enemy in check as far out as practicable long enough for Stanley to get in. . . . The question is to concentrate the entire force at Columbia in time." Cox received this dispatch at about four in the morning, and set out at once for Columbia.⁹⁰

Forrest, meanwhile, was moving on Columbia, driving Capron's hapless brigade before him. Forrest had pretty much had his way with the Union cavalry so far in the campaign; for three days there had been almost constant skirmishing, and Hatch's men had been driven back from position after position. The pattern was continuing this day, as Forrest pushed Capron back along the pike from Mount Pleasant to Columbia. At about seven-thirty, Cox was two miles south of Columbia, at a point where a crossroad intersected the Pulaski-Columbia pike and ran west to the Mount Pleasant-Columbia pike, meeting it about three miles south of Columbia. Hearing the sounds of battle to the west, Cox sent the wagons on into Columbia and then double-quickened his division along the crossroad. He travelled about a mile or so and arrived just in time to observe Capron's men falling back in disorder before Forrest. Cox hurried his men up and interposed them between Capron and Forrest,

⁹⁰McDonough, 104; McDonough and Connelly, 31, 33; O.R. XLV, pt. 1, 1020.

forming a line along a stream called Bigby Creek. A "lively skirmish" ensued, which lasted most of the morning. Forrest's advance was checked. At about ten o'clock, Schofield and Stanley, with the rest of the army, arrived and marched into Columbia; Schofield had won the race.⁹¹

Forrest invested Columbia (inasmuch as 8,000 dismounted cavalry can invest anything), awaiting the arrival of Hood's infantry. In the meantime, Schofield looked over the field, and sent a message to Thomas giving his view of things. His force was not large enough to cover the town and the railroad and pontoon bridges across the Duck in the present defensive line, he believed. Nonetheless, he intended to hold that line and fight Hood on it on the twenty-fifth (when he expected Hood to attack, if at all). If Hood didn't attack, Schofield then reasoned that he would try to turn his position by crossing the Duck River either above or below the town. To meet such an attempt, Schofield was preparing a shorter, interior line, to be held by 7,000 men, covering the bridges. He intended to withdraw most of his force north of the river and leave the rest to hold the new line. Thus deployed, Schofield felt Hood could not catch him off guard. He also advised Thomas that he thought it best not to risk much at that time, for a few days' delay (if the Yankees concentrated quickly enough)

⁹¹ McDonough, 104-105; McDonough and Connelly, 33-34; Wyeth, 472-473; Henry, 385-386; Cox, March, 65; O.R. XLV, pt. 1, 400-401, 752.

would make them strong enough to drive Hood back. Thomas sent Schofield his approval of the above arrangements next morning, and the army spent the next two days digging two lines of earthworks in a semi-circle south of town, the flanks resting on the Duck River above and below the town. James H. Wilson, who had been sent from Virginia to command all of Thomas' cavalry, arrived to take command of the cavalry in the field; Schofield was also reinforced by one brigade of Ruger's division, which had moved from Johnsonville to Columbia. The remainder of Ruger's command was deployed at several points along the river to Schofield's right; Wilson and the cavalry moved to cover the left. The army's wagons were sent to a safer location across the river. Skirmishing continued with Forrest's men until November 27, at which point Hood's infantry came up and went into line of battle opposite Schofield.⁹²

It should be noted at this point that, although Thomas and Schofield could theoretically communicate readily by telegraph line, a number of problems with the message sending and receiving network arose which severely hampered communications between the two. The War Department Telegraph Corps men attached to the army were the only ones who knew the cipher by which the messages were encoded; neither Schofield, Thomas, nor anyone on their staffs knew

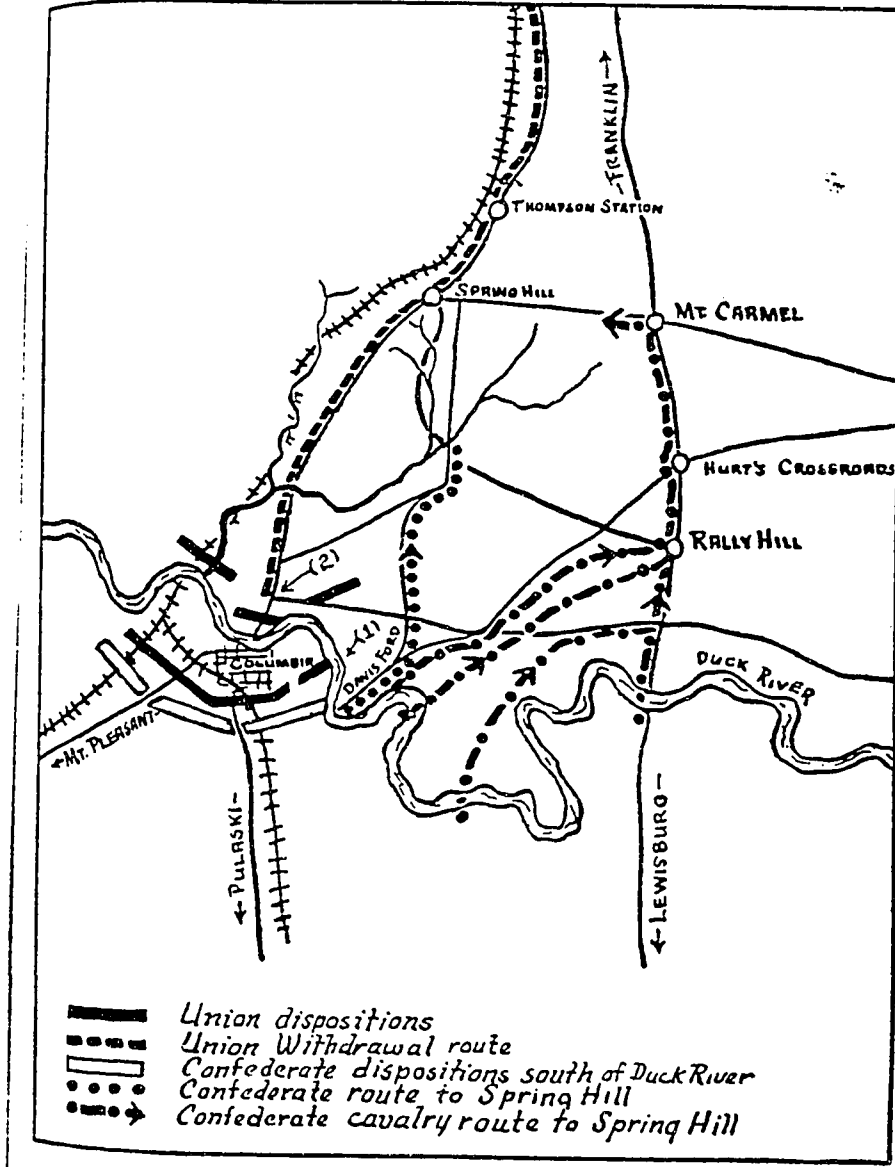
⁹²McDonough, 105; McDonough and Connelly, 34; Schofield, 168; Battles and Leaders, IV, 444; Crawford, 105; Cox, March, 67; O.R. XLV, pt. 1, 341, 1016, 1017, 1036.

the code. This problem was worsened by the fact that the telegraph work was so badly done that eight to forty-eight hours were consumed in sending and delivering dispatches from Thomas to Schofield, when the telegraph should have made it much quicker. To make matters worse, Schofield's telegraph operator deserted his post at Columbia and went to Franklin, where it was safer, adding to the time it took to communicate back and forth (a courier now had to ride from Franklin to Columbia with the decoded message). The upshot of all this was that Thomas was unable to render much assistance to Schofield at this stage of the campaign; Schofield was basically acting on his own initiative. A good example is the dispatches mentioned in the previous paragraph. By the time Schofield got Thomas' approval for his proposed dispositions, he had already started on them! Thomas recognized this situation in his report; he referred only to "instructions already given before Schofield went to Pulaski," not to any given during the campaign itself.⁹³

Work continued on the new line all during the twenty-fifth, as skirmishing with Forrest's cavalry continued. That evening, Wagner's men and one of Cox's brigades remained in the original line; Cox was sent across the river with two brigades; two divisions of the IV Corps held the interior line. Skirmishing continued on November 26, and

⁹³Schofield, 169; O.R. XLV, pt. 1, 590.

VICINITY OF COLUMBIA, TENNESSEE



Map courtesy of Crawford, 107.

Schofield was more convinced than ever that Hood intended to cross the river and turn his flank. Believing he had held on as long as it was safe to, he ordered the rest of the army to cross the Duck that evening, but heavy rains delayed the crossing until the night of November 27. By that time, Hood's infantry had arrived.⁹⁴

The lead elements of Hood's infantry reached Columbia late on November 26, but the whole of the army did not come up until the next day. Hood deployed his men into line opposite Schofield's position south of Columbia (Schofield did not withdraw across the river until that night); Lee's corps held the left, Stewart's the center, and Cheat-ham's the right, with the extreme right resting on the Duck River. Hood made no effort to attack Schofield's rather formidable lines; he had something else in mind. As he later wrote:

The situation presented an occasion for one of those interesting and beautiful moves upon the chessboard of war, to perform which I had often desired an opportunity. . . . I urgently appealed [at Gettysburg] for authority to turn the Federal left at Round Top Mountain. I had beheld with admiration the noble deeds and grand results achieved by the immortal Jackson in similar maneuvers; I had seen his Corps made equal to ten times its number by a sudden attack on the enemy's rear, and I hoped in this instance to be able to profit by the teaching of my illustrious countryman. (95)

⁹⁴Schofield, 168; McDonough, 105; Cox, March, 67-69; Crawford, 106-108; O.R. XLV, pt. 1, 341, 1085-1087.

⁹⁵Hood, 283.

That evening, Hood held a council of war to present his plan to his generals. Forrest's cavalry was to move up the river next day and seize several fords within a twelve-mile distance. He could then drive back any Yankee cavalry while Hood laid a pontoon bridge at Davis Ford. Then, on November 29, Hood would march across the river with Cheatham and Stewart's corps, plus Edward Johnson's division of Lee's corps, and move on Spring Hill (about thirteen miles north of Columbia on the main road to Nashville) via the Davis Ford Road. Lee's other two divisions and the artillery would remain at Columbia and demonstrate against Schofield so as to pin him there.⁹⁶

What Hood actually intended to do after he got to Spring Hill is still open to debate. He later stated, in both his official report and in his memoirs, that his goal was to cut off Schofield and trap him between Spring Hill and the Duck River and "put to rout and capture, if possible, their Army . . ." Thomas Connelly argued, however, that the evidence suggested he had no such intention, but rather was more interested in gaining the pike in Schofield's rear so he could outrace him to Nashville. The chief evidence for this contention was a conversation that took place on the night of the twenty-seventh, related by Chaplain Charles T. Quintard. According to the chaplain,

⁹⁶Ibid., 282-283; Crawford, 106, 108-109; Connelly, 491; McDonough and Connelly, 35; Horn, Tennessee, 384; McMurry, 170-171.

after the council of war, the commanding general "detailed to me his plan of taking Nashville and calling for volunteers to storm the key of the works about the city." Hood further expounded on this theme with the chaplain during the next two days; he told him on November 28 that the army "will press forward with all possible speed" and that he would either beat the enemy to Nashville or make him go there fast and on the twenty-ninth that "the enemy must give me a fight, or I'll be in Nashville before tommorrow night."⁹⁷

If the above remarks reported by Quintard are to be accepted as an indication of what Hood intended to do once he got to Spring Hill, then one question immediately comes to mind: why would Hood impose only two corps between Schofield and Thomas? The only plausible answer is that he still knew little of Thomas' true strength; he might even have believed that Schofield was the only real obstacle between him and Nashville. This determination to outrun Schofield to Nashville goes far towards explaining his almost total lack of planning for the move to Spring Hill; Cheatham and Stewart marched without specific orders, most of their artillery, and their ammunition wagons. This lack of planning was a major reason for Hood's failure at Spring Hill.⁹⁸

⁹⁷Connelly, 491-492; Hood, 282; O.R. XLV, pt. 1, 657.

⁹⁸Connelly, 492.

While Hood was having his council of war, Schofield was executing a withdrawal to the north bank of the Duck River. The withdrawal was executed in stages, with the last troops making it across at five a.m. on November 28, after which the railroad bridge was burned and the pontoon boats scuttled. Schofield deployed his forces on the north bank so as to counter a flank attack, which he expected Hood to deliver. Ruger's division held the railroad crossing over the Duck; Cox held the center of the line, facing Columbia; Wilson was off to the east watching the fords; Stanley was in reserve behind Cox, along the Columbia-Franklin pike, ready to move to any sector of the line as needed. Schofield hoped to hold this position until the arrival of reinforcements, which were expected any day.⁹⁹

Meanwhile, Forrest's troopers rode off to the east to commence their first task: forcing a crossing of the Duck at the fords upstream from Columbia in preparation for the laying of a pontoon bridge for the infantry to cross. The river was swollen by heavy rains, so much so that Wilson accepted partially the opinions of the local citizens that the river was unfordable. Forrest, however, didn't share this opinion, and by four o'clock in the afternoon, he had gotten two of his divisions across the river in the vicinity of Davis' Ford, about five miles east of Columbia. His right flank division (Buford's) ran into

⁹⁹Crawford, 106, 108; Battles and Leaders, IV, 444; Cox, March, 68-69; O.R. XLV, pt. 1, 341, 1085-1087, 1105.

strong resistance from Capron's brigade at the point where the Lewisburg-Franklin pike crossed the Duck and was consequently unable to join Forrest until the next morning, but it was nonetheless quite an auspicious start for the move.¹⁰⁰

Schofield, back at Columbia, received word about Forrest's advance at about four p.m. from a dispatch sent two hours previously by Wilson, who, to his credit, did his best to keep both Schofield and Thomas informed of what was going on. His first dispatch noted that his pickets had detected movement by the enemy's cavalry, that these pickets had been driven in, and that the enemy was crossing the river. He also stated his intention to concentrate his force near Hurt's Crossroads and Rally Hill, on the Lewisburg pike, so as to prevent the enemy from taking that road and using it to march to Franklin. This concentration was accomplished at seven o'clock that night. Once there, Wilson sent two more dispatches to Schofield. One was sent at eight-thirty; it arrived at two the next morning and told Schofield that Forrest's entire command had crossed the river. The other was sent at one in the morning of November 29, and portended more ominous events to come. From prisoners he had captured, he learned that pontoons were being laid across the river and Hood's infantry was expected to cross over them shortly. He concluded

¹⁰⁰Crawford, 108-109; Wyeth, 475; Henry, 387; O.R. XLV, pt. 1, 752-753.

with his own supposition (erroneous, as events proved) that "it is very clear that they [the Confederates] are aiming for Franklin," and a suggestion that Schofield should head for Spring Hill by ten a.m. and "get back to Franklin without delay," for "the rebels will move by this road towards that point."¹⁰¹

Schofield, upon receipt of Wilson's first dispatch, passed along the information to Thomas and asked for instructions. Specifically, he asked Thomas where he wanted to concentrate his force if it was indeed true that Hood was heading for the Union rear. Because of the difficulties already mentioned regarding the telegraph, Schofield did not receive Thomas' reply until after daybreak on November 29. By that time--shortly before seven a.m.--Wilson's one a.m. dispatch had arrived, giving Schofield additional information about Hood's intentions. While it was now clear Hood was crossing the Duck in force, his objective once he got across was still unknown to Schofield. For all he knew, Hood's move was merely a feint designed to force him to retreat from Columbia so Hood could gain possession of the hard surfaced pike to Nashville for his artillery and wagons. Still, if Wilson, who had come from

¹⁰¹Crawford, 109; Battles and Leaders, IV, 466; Henry, 388; Cox, March, 69-70; O.R. XLV, pt. 1, 588, 1113, 1143. It should be noted that, while Wilson's dispatches at the time clearly indicate his belief that the rebels were going to Franklin, he said in his postwar account in Battles and Leaders that he knew all along that Spring Hill was the actual objective. Hindsight, apparently, was 20/20 one hundred years ago, too.

the East highly recommended by both Grant and Phil Sheridan, believed in the information so strongly, then it would be prudent to act upon it. Accordingly, he sent Stanley back to Spring Hill with two divisions, under Wagner and Nathan Kimball. Ruger was also ordered to go there, while the divisions of Cox and Thomas J. Wood remained in position at the river. Wood was also ordered to send a brigade up the river to see what Hood's infantry was doing.¹⁰²

No sooner had Schofield made these dispositions than Thomas' dispatches sent the previous evening arrived. Thomas told Schofield that "If you are confident you can hold your present position, I wish you could do so until I can get General Smith here." He added that "If Wilson cannot succeed in driving back the enemy, should it prove true that he has crossed the river, you will necessarily have to make preparations to take up a new position at Franklin behind Harpeth [River], immediately, if it becomes necessary to fall back." In addition, Lee's artillery south of the Duck had begun to open up, clearly indicating that most of Hood's cannon were still around Columbia. This situation suggested that Hood might be planning to strike down the right bank and roll up Schofield's left. That, and Thomas' request to hold on a little longer, convinced Schofield "to keep the main body of troops together

¹⁰²McDonough, 106-107; McDonough and Connelly, 40-44; Cox, March, 69-70, Franklin, 24-28; Crawford, 110; O.R. XLV, pt. 1, 147, 148, 341, 1142, 1143.

and trust to Stanley's one division to hold Spring Hill until the army could reach that point." He therefore modified his orders, as follows: Stanley was to take only one division (Wagner's) to Spring Hill; Kimball's division, instead of going to Spring Hill with Stanley, was to go into line east of the pike between the Duck River and Rutherford's Creek so as to protect the left; Wood was to join Kimball there; Ruger, instead of going on to Spring Hill, was to take position just north of Rutherford Creek, about halfway to Spring Hill; Cox remained at Columbia. Thus Schofield had arrayed his forces so as to meet either a move by Hood on Spring Hill or an attack down the river. At about ten a.m., Wood's reconnaissance located "a considerable force . . . on this side of the river." Schofield sent word of this to Thomas, and informed him that he would try to hold the enemy until dark and then retreat to Franklin, which basically was what Thomas had asked for in his dispatches received that morning. Unbeknowst to Schofield, however, Thomas had sent him an order to retreat to Franklin, but that order, sent at three-thirty in the morning of the twenty-ninth, never reached Schofield, being captured by the Confederates. Schofield, then, was acting without orders, and taking a great risk.¹⁰³

While Schofield was making preparations to receive

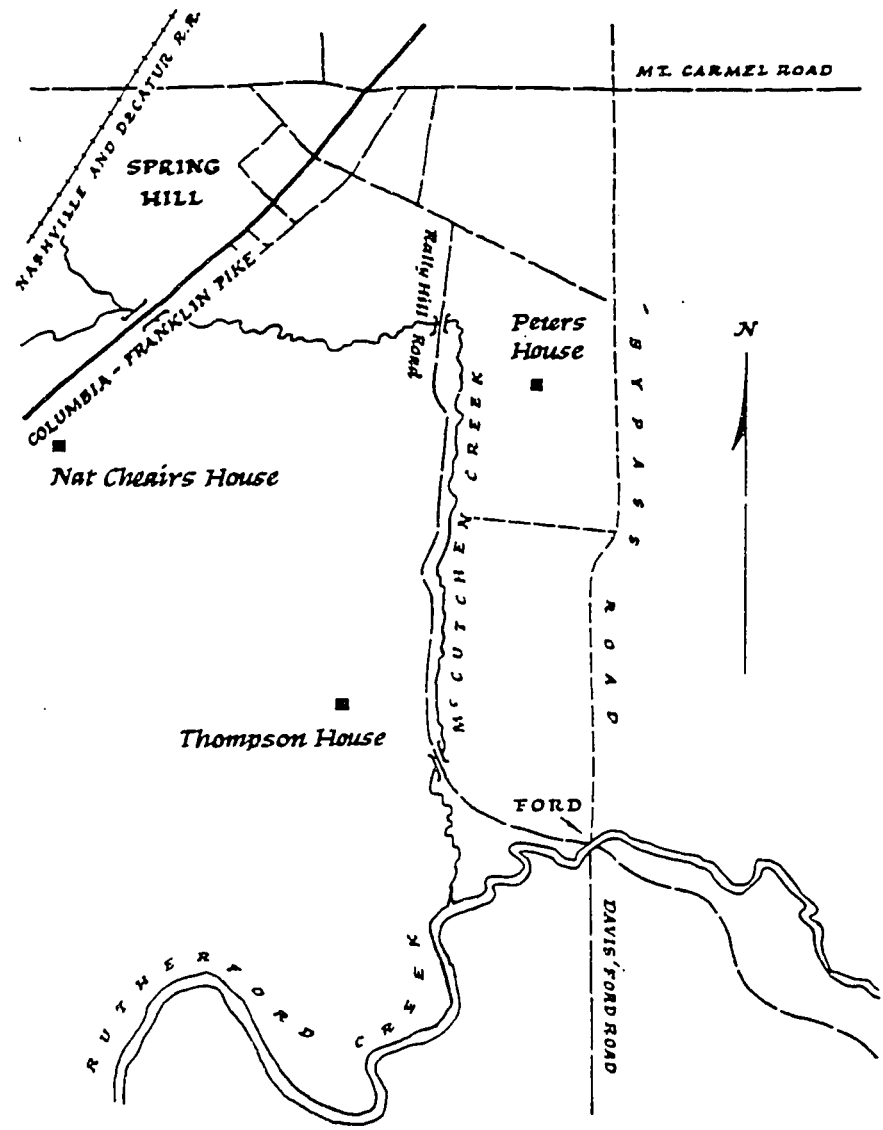
¹⁰³McDonough, 107-108; McDonough and Connelly, 44; Cox, March, 70-71, Franklin, 25, 28-29; Schofield, 211-212, 214-215; 230; O.R. XLV, pt. 1, 1108, 1137, 1141.

the Confederates, Forrest was regrouping his cavalry for his second task of the operation: drive Wilson away. After Buford's division came up, Forrest moved on Wilson and met him at Hurt's Crossroads and, after a sharp engagement, drove him back five miles to Mount Carmel Church, pushing him out of the battle for all intents and purposes. Forrest sent a brigade to cover Wilson's rear, and then turned with the remainder of his force and headed west for Spring Hill. Wilson, erroneously thinking the Confederates were bound for Franklin, went there, playing no part in the action at Spring Hill and thus depriving Schofield of his cavalry at this critical juncture.¹⁰⁴

Behind Forrest came Hood's infantry. After the pontoon bridge was laid during the night of the twenty-eighth, Hood crossed the river early the next morning at the head of Pat Cleburne's division of Cheatham's corps, the vanguard of his army. The other two divisions of Cheatham's corps, under William B. Bate and John C. Brown, followed, with Stewart's three divisions (under William W. Loring, Edward C. Walthall, and S. G. French) right behind; Edward Johnson's division of Lee's corps brought up the rear. The whole column was across the river by seven-thirty in the morning, and headed north along the Davis Ford Road. It was a beautiful fall day, and Hood and his men were in

¹⁰⁴Henry, 389; Crawford, 109-110; McDonough and Connelly, 40; Cox, March, 71-73; O.R. XLV, pt. 1, 343, 558-559, 753, 1138, 1144-1146.

Vicinity of Spring Hill, Tennessee



Map courtesy of McDonough and Connelly, Five Tragic Hours, 41.

high spirits. Perhaps at last Hood would achieve what he had dreamed of for so long: a flanking maneuver worthy of Stonewall Jackson at his best. After the column had proceeded about a mile north, however, Hood soon discovered that the map he was using (a copy of the one Schofield had left behind in Columbia) was inaccurate, differing significantly from the route the column was actually following. Hood's local guide explained to him that the road twisted and turned along property lines, so much so that, while it was only about twelve air miles to Spring Hill, the distance via the road was actually closer to seventeen and a quarter miles. As if that wasn't bad enough, at about 10:00 a.m., Hood's advance elements were fired on by Yankee skirmishers, men from the brigade Wood had sent out on reconnaissance. Hood was now fearful that Schofield had anticipated his move to Spring Hill and was moving to attack the Rebel flank. Somewhat shaken by these new developments, Hood ordered Cheatham's corps to leave the road and march in two parallel columns, so as to be able to form line of battle more easily if attacked in flank. This deployment had the effect of totally wearing out Hood's men by a cross-country march over rough ground, and also seriously delayed their arrival at Spring Hill.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰⁵Crawford, 111; Horn, Tennessee, 385-386; Cox, March, 73-74; O'Connor, 229; Hood, 283-284; Wiley Sword, Embrace an Angry Wind--The Confederacy's Last Hurrah: Spring Hill, Franklin, and Nashville (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, Inc., 1992), 114-115.

What happened next has been disputed by both the participants and historians for almost one hundred and thirty years, and will continue to be disputed for years to come. The following account is merely intended to be an overview of what is generally agreed to have transpired at Spring Hill on the afternoon of November 29, and as such will be the basis for the more detailed analysis and discussion which follows in succeeding chapters. Matters of blame, controversy, and interpretation will be examined later. For now, it is sufficient that the reader gain at least a general knowledge of the sequence of events at Spring Hill so as to facilitate later discussion.

Forrest's men were the first Confederates to reach Spring Hill, shortly before noon. He came very close to taking the town--which at the time was held only by a garrison of two regiments--and would have, if not for the timely arrival of David Stanley with Wagner's division. At eleven-thirty, the lead elements of this division were two miles south of town, when what Stanley described as "a cavalry soldier, who seemed badly scared" rode up and told Stanley that Forrest was riding west on the Mount Carmel pike, only about four miles away from Spring Hill. Stanley responded quickly with "the biggest day's work I ever accomplished for the United States," double-quicking Wagner's men into town. The lead brigade, under Emerson Opdycke, marched into position at about twelve-thirty,

just in time to assist the garrison in driving Buford's division back from the village. With the town temporarily saved, Stanley moved to strengthen his position. Sending the wagons to park off to the west of town, between the turnpike and the railroad, Stanley quickly deployed the three brigades of Wagner's division. Opdycke took position to the north of town, with his left on the railroad to the west and sitting astride the pike; John Q. Lane's brigade went into line east of town; Luther P. Bradley's men were sent to occupy a wooded hill about three-quarters of a mile southeast of town. Supporting these men were some thirty-four field pieces, and the infantry began to quickly construct breastworks of fence rails. It was about two o'clock before all these men got into position, and the wagons were still going into park at four p.m. All together, Stanley had some 6,500-7,000 men in line.¹⁰⁶

Forrest sent in Chalmers' division after the repulse of Buford, and was surprised to find strong resistance; this attack was driven back too. Here the vagueness of Hood's objective worked against the Confederates, for Forrest seemed unsure of what to do. If Hood had actually wanted to seize the pike and trap Schofield, Forrest could simply have ridden around Spring Hill and occupied the pike north of it. Instead, lacking specific orders, Forrest

¹⁰⁶Henry, 389-390; McDonough and Connelly, 44-45; McDonough, 109; Horn, Tennessee, 385; O.R. XLV, pt. 1, 113, 229-230, 753.

decided to attack. He sent in one mounted charge, which was repulsed, and one dismounted charge, which made little progress. These sporadic attacks lasted until about three in the afternoon, when Hood's infantry came up to Rutherford's Creek, about two and a half miles to the southeast of town.¹⁰⁷

Hood didn't bother to consult Forrest as to the strength and location of the enemy. Instead, he ordered Cleburne's division to advance towards the pike and take it; he was supposed to find out from Forrest where the enemy was. Cheatham was to await the arrival of Bate's division and lead it forward; Hood would then return to the creek and send in Brown when he arrived. Thus, Cleburne formed his men into line and, supported by one of Forrest's brigades, he moved forward at about a quarter to four.¹⁰⁸

Cleburne never did find Forrest, so his men moved on, blissfully unaware of where the Yankees were until the division's right flank ran into Bradley's brigade, posted to the southeast of town, and received heavy fire. Cleburne proceeded to swing his division around to the north and assault Bradley's line. The Yankees fought well and finally were overwhelmed; Bradley was seriously wounded, and his men were forced back. Cleburne pursued, but ran

¹⁰⁷Henry, 389-390; Connelly, 494; McDonough and Connelly, 44; O.R. XLV, pt. 1, 753.

¹⁰⁸Crawford, 112; McDonough and Connelly, 45-46; Connelly, 495; McMurry, 171; Losson, 204.

into heavy fire from Stanley's massed guns and was compelled to fall back and reform. Instead of moving to seize the pike, Cleburne was now occupied with the force in his front at the town.¹⁰⁹

In the meantime, the Confederate effort was faltering, due largely to confusion over what the objective actually was, which resulted in Hood and Cheatham working at cross purposes. First, Cheatham did not personally conduct Bate to the front as instructed; had he done so, he would have learned that Cleburne had stopped at the town rather than proceeding on to the pike as ordered. Hood, returning from deploying Cleburne, encountered Bate's men and promptly sent them forward to link up with Cleburne's left (supposed by Hood to be on the pike) and "sweep toward Columbia." Bate formed his men into line of battle and moved west towards the pike. At about a quarter to six, when it was almost dark, Bate's troops encountered a large body of Federal troops moving up the pike and attacked them near the Cheairs house.¹¹⁰

These troops belonged to Ruger's division, with Schofield personally accompanying them. At about three o'clock, Schofield had decided that Hood would not attack him at Columbia, and that the real danger lay at Spring Hill.

¹⁰⁹Crawford, 112-114; McDonough and Connelly, 46; Connelly, 495; Losson, 204-205; Cox, March, 75-76; Battles and Leaders, IV, 445-446.

¹¹⁰Crawford, 114; McDonough and Connelly, 46; Connelly, 496; McMurry, 171; Losson, 205; O.R. XLV, pt. 1, 742.

He then personally ordered Ruger's two brigades to march to Spring Hill and went with them, leaving staff officers to order Wood and Kimball's men to follow. Cox was to hold on until dark, and then move to Spring Hill; the other two divisions were to follow, as the Union right curled back towards Franklin.¹¹¹

Bate prepared to assault these troops and take the pike, but orders from Cheatham arrived ordering Bate to fall back and form on Cleburne's left, facing Spring Hill. Cheatham had earlier gone over to Cleburne's line and found out about his situation. Now he planned a full-scale assault on Spring Hill. Bate reluctantly withdrew, and reported his encounter on the pike to Cheatham, who seemed unimpressed; his attention was now focused on the Yankees at the town.¹¹²

Hood was not aware of any of this. After ordering Brown's division of Cheatham's corps to form on Cleburne's right (which he thought would put it on the pike), he retired to his headquarters at the Absalom Thompson house to await news that Cheatham held the road to Nashville. He also sent orders to Alexander Stewart to hold his corps at the creek crossing. Thus, he was more than two miles away from Cheatham's position, unaware of what was happening

¹¹¹Schofield, 172-173; Cox, March, 77; McDonough, 113; O.R. XLV, pt. 1, 342.

¹¹²Crawford, 114; McDonough and Connelly, 48; Connelly, 496; Losson, 205; O.R. XLV, pt. 1, 742.

at Spring Hill. At that place, Cheatham was preparing his assault. Brown was to open the attack, and Cleburne and Bate were to advance as soon as they heard Brown's attack start. Meanwhile, Hood, wondering what was going on, finally sent one of his aides, Isham Harris, former governor of Tennessee, to find out what was happening. At about the same time (around five p.m.) Stewart rode up to ask why his corps was not being deployed. Hood's answer (and a look at the map) betrayed his almost total ignorance of the situation: Stewart was being held in reserve to block any Federal retreat down the Rally Hill Road!¹¹³

Cheatham's attack never went in. Brown's division was supposed to begin the attack, but Brown saw that the Yankees outflanked his line and thus did not attack. Harris rode up and Brown informed him of the above situation. Brown also told Cheatham what had happened; Cheatham said he told Brown to refuse his flank and attack anyway, but Brown said he was told to wait for Stewart and for further orders which never came. Harris sent a message to Hood telling him all this and suggesting that Stewart march past Brown's right and take the pike north of town. Hood agreed, and gave the appropriate orders to Stewart.¹¹⁴

¹¹³Crawford, 114, 117-118; McDonough and Connelly, 48; Connelly, 496; McMurry, 171-172; Losson, 205; O.R. XLV, pt. 1, 712.

¹¹⁴Crawford, 115; McDonough and Connelly, 48-49; Connelly, 496-497; McMurry, 172; O.R. XLV, pt. 1, 712.

By now it was past six o'clock, and quite dark. Stewart got lost in the darkness, finally reaching Forrest's headquarters well to the north. While Stewart stopped to talk with Forrest, Harris and Cheatham arrived at Hood's headquarters and requested that Stewart be placed on Brown's right. Apparently Cheatham did not inform Hood of the actual position of his forces, for Hood now ordered Stewart to form on Brown's right and curve his line so that his right would reach across the pike. Cheatham, meanwhile, was ordered to put his troops into bivouac.¹¹⁵

Stewart did as he was ordered, but upon his arrival at Brown's line, he realized that if he followed current orders, he would be hundreds of yards from the pike and unable to extend his line to it. Puzzled, he rode to Hood's headquarters for a clarification of orders. On the way, he met Forrest again, and the two of them rode together to the Thompson house, arriving about eight o'clock. Once there, Stewart explained the situation, and for the first time, it seems, Hood understood the actual situation (at least generally) at Spring Hill and realized that no one had seized the pike. Strangely, though, he seemed unconcerned. Apparently thinking that Schofield would have difficulty reaching Spring Hill due to bad roads (he must have forgotten the turnpike had a hard surface), he believed he had plenty of time to attack Schofield and cut him off

¹¹⁵Crawford, 118; Connelly, 497-499; McMurry, 172; O.R. XLV, pt. 1, 712-713.

in the morning. He merely asked Stewart if he could spare a brigade to block the road. Stewart demurred, saying his men were tired and hungry. Hood told him to bivouac his corps for the night, then turned to Forrest and asked if he could block the pike. Two of Forrest's divisions were out of ammunition; the ammunition wagons were all back at Columbia, but W.H. Jackson's division had captured a little ammunition from the Federals. Forrest replied that he would do the best he could, and left. Hood, who had been up for about twenty hours, tried to get some rest, confident the next morning would see Schofield still between Columbia and Spring Hill.¹¹⁶

Hood had not been asleep very long (it was now about eleven p.m.) when he was awakened by Bate, who had decided it might be a good idea to report his encounter with the Yankees on the turnpike before Cheatham had pulled him back. Hood listened to Bate's story and then said (according to Bate) "It makes no difference now . . . for General Forrest . . . has just left and informed me that he holds the turnpike with a portion of his forces north of Spring Hill, and will stop the enemy if he tries to pass toward Franklin, and so in the morning we will have a surrender without a fight. We can sleep quiet tonight." Bate left, and Hood went back to bed, only to be awakened several

¹¹⁶Crawford, 118-119; McDonough and Connelly, 49-50; Connelly, 499-500; McMurry, 172; Henry, 393; O.R. XLV, pt. 1, 713, 753.

hours later by a barefoot private who reported that infantry and wagons were moving on the pike. Hood told one of his staff officers to send a message to Cheatham to send a regiment to fire on the pike and then went back to bed.¹¹⁷

Unlike Hood, Schofield was not idle that night. He arrived at Spring Hill about seven that night and conferred with Stanley. He learned that Wilson could not be expected to render any assistance and that Forrest's troopers had been seen at Thompson's Station north of town. Schofield hurried there with Ruger's division, but found only smoldering campfires. Schofield then ordered his chief engineer, Captain William J. Twining, to take the headquarters cavalry troop down the road to Franklin and report the situation by telegraph to Thomas. Schofield "sat motionless on my horse . . . until the clatter of hoofs [sic] on that hard road died out in the distance, and I knew the road was clear." Schofield then rode back to Spring Hill; he arrived there about midnight, just in time to meet Cox and the head of his column. Cox was ordered to take the advance with three divisions--his own, plus those of Wood and Kimball--and head for Franklin. Ruger followed; his men marched alongside the wagons on the wide road. Stanley brought up the rear with Wagner's division.¹¹⁸

¹¹⁷Crawford, 120; McDonough and Connelly, 49, 50-51; Connelly, 500; McMurry, 172-173; O'Connor, 231.

¹¹⁸McDonough and Connelly, 52-53; Schofield, 173-174; Henry, 394; McDonough, 113-114; Cox, March, 78-79; O.R. XLV, pt. 1, 114, 342, 404, 1139-1140.

The march was in many instances a harrowing one, for the Confederates lay very close to the road in some places. Stanley reported that "when a column was not passing, it was difficult for a staff officer or an orderly to get through on the road." Jackson's troopers attacked the wagons at about two or three in the morning, doing some damage, but Union infantry drove them back. Schofield heard nothing of the attack; he was "sleeping quietly on my horse as we marched along!" Johnson's division of Lee's corps, sent forward to investigate by Cheatham, found the road empty; either the end of the column had just passed, or Johnson saw a gap in it. In some places, Confederates reported that Union soldiers came to their campfires to light their pipes and were captured. All along the turnpike that night, in the darkness, the Yankees marched in silence, knowing only by the position of the man in front whether or not the march was proceeding. Those who were there never forgot it, regardless of whether they lived for seventy more years or just a few more days.¹¹⁹

Not all the Confederate generals were asleep that November night. Two of Brown's brigadiers, States Rights Gist and Otho F. Strahl, along with Colonel Ellison Capers, whose Twenty-fourth South Carolina was in Gist's brigade, became impatient at the delay and rode up to the pike,

¹¹⁹Crawford, 120; McDonough and Connelly, 52-53; Schofield, 174; Henry, 394; Cox, March, 79; McDonough, 114; O.R. XLV, pt. 1, 114, 342, 753.

watching incredulously as the Yankees marched away in the deepening twilight. "This state of affairs was, and still is, inexplicable to me, and gave us a great disappointment," Capers later wrote. Finally, the frustration became too much for him, and he emptied his revolver at the voices he heard in the darkness as he and the others turned to ride back to their lines. But for a few more men with such initiative, Hood might have stopped Schofield at Spring Hill that night. Alas, it was not to be, and Cox, with the head of the column, reached Franklin shortly before sunrise on the morning of November 30; the rest of the army filed in behind him. The golden opportunity of Spring Hill was lost.¹²⁰

¹²⁰Cisco, 138; O.R. XLV, pt. 1, 404, 736.

Chapter 4: "The Merest Bosh"

When Hood awoke the next morning to find that Schofield had slipped away during the night, he was furious. "The best move in my career as a soldier," he later wrote, "I was thus destined to behold come to naught." As he had done before Atlanta, he blamed his subordinates (chiefly Cheatham) for the failure. By all accounts, breakfast in the Confederate camp on November 30 was a grim affair; Hood lashed out at his subordinates, accusing them of lacking spirit and ability. Brown told one of his staff officers that "General Hood is mad about the enemy getting away last night, and he is going to charge the blame of it on somebody. He is as wrathful as a rattlesnake this morning, striking at everything." Apparently, the accusations almost resulted in a duel, but cooler heads prevailed. Still, the high command of the Army of Tennessee remained on edge.¹²¹

Even worse than Hood's attempt to blame his generals for the failure at Spring Hill, though, was his condemnation of his soldiers as cowards who had let him down. In Advance and Retreat, he wrote:

The discovery that the Army, after a forward march of one hundred and eighty miles, was still, seemingly, unwilling to accept battle unless under the protection of breastworks, caused me to experience grave concern. In my inmost heart I questioned whether or not I would ever succeed in eradicating this

¹²¹O'Connor, 234; McDonough and Connelly, 53-55; Losson, 217; Connelly, 502; Hood, 290.

evil. It seemed to me I had exhausted every means in the power of one man to remove this stumbling block to the Army of Tennessee.

Hood's remedy for the problems he felt the army had were drastic indeed. All the frustrations of the previous months welled up inside him. He was emotionally distraught, in pain, sick, and tired; probably unfit for command. In his confusion, he somehow convinced himself that a good frontal assault was what the army needed to restore its morale and fighting spirit. Accordingly, as the army drew up before the Union lines at Franklin (where Schofield had withdrawn during the night and Hood had followed next morning) on the afternoon of the thirtieth, he ordered exactly that. The result was a bloody slaughter. 6,000 of the slightly over 20,000 attackers of Cheatham and Stewart's corps went down under murderous Yankee fire; twelve generals were among the losses, including six killed. Among the dead were Pat Cleburne, whose division had been the first to reach Spring Hill, and Otho F. Strahl and States Rights Gist, who had ridden out to observe the Yankee withdrawal the night before. Hood had no cause to doubt the bravery of his men after that day; some Unionists counted thirteen separate assaults, and in some places the men had crowded in so thickly that the dead could not fall, remaining in an upright position.¹²²

¹²²Hood, 290; McDonough and Connelly, 58-59; Connelly, 502; McMurry, 174-175; Symonds, 99; Bruce Catton, The American Heritage Picture History of the Civil War (New York: The American Heritage Publishing Co., Inc., 1960), 555.

Hood's army was badly weakened after Franklin; he was now down to about 23,000 effectives. Nonetheless, he decided to follow Schofield to Nashville, hoping to entice Thomas' force (now augmented by A.J. Smith, among others) to attack him in prepared positions. Hood arrived on December 2, and attempted to lay siege, but his force was too small. For two weeks, the army sat there "besieging" Nashville, enduring the terrible December weather (including an ice storm on December 10). Thomas waited until everything was ready, as was his habit; then, on December 15, he attacked, throwing more men at Hood's left than Hood had in his entire army. Hood pulled back two miles the next day and made a stand, but Thomas attacked again and rolled up Hood's line, forcing him to retreat southward down the Franklin pike. The battered Army of Tennessee retreated southward through winter snows, with Thomas in pursuit; by the end of the year, 18,000 survivors made it to Tupelo, Mississippi. On January 23, 1865, as the Confederacy reeled in its death agonies, Hood was removed from command (at his own request) of what was left of the once-proud Army of Tennessee. His military career was over, but the controversy over Spring Hill was just beginning.¹²³

That controversy rages to this day. Even now, it is quite difficult to find out the truth about Spring Hill,

¹²³Symonds, 99; Catton, 557-559; Warner, Gray, 143.

despite the many accounts that have been written since 1864. A large part of this difficulty is due to the unwillingness of any of the major participants on either side to accept blame for the many mistakes that led to the Confederate failure there. B.H. Liddell-Hart, the eminent British military historian, once remarked that "amid the uncertainties of war, mistakes must be made"; he added that "nobody knows the general who admits he has made one." That certainly holds true in the case of Spring Hill. In addition, it must be remembered that most of the men who were there did not record their recollections until many years after the war; consequently, their memories were clouded not only by the passage of time, but by bitter postwar accusations. As for the accounts in the Official Records, which typically were filed soon after the battle or campaign in question, they are sadly lacking; Cheatham and Cleburne, for example, filed no reports on Spring Hill. The absence of these reports is attributable to the high number of officer casualties at Franklin and the disorganization of the army after Nashville; Cleburne was dead, so he couldn't file a report, and Cheatham was deprived of the regimental, brigade, and divisional reports he would normally have used to file his own report. The modern-day researcher, then, must wade through a morass of conflicting accounts and contradicting stories to get at the truth. It is a daunting task, and it had therefore

been impossible to determine the actual, irrefutable truth about what happened at Spring Hill.¹²⁴

That is not to dismiss the postwar accounts of those who were actually there as worthless. Quite the contrary; these accounts, since they are all we have in the way of first-hand narrative, are important and necessary for any understanding of what happened at Spring Hill, and are also a good place to start a discussion of the historiography of that incident. Over the years, many different theories, ranging from divine intervention to drunkenness, have been advanced as reasons for Schofield's ability to escape Hood's trap that November night so long ago. On the Confederate side, there was much finger-pointing, as has been noted; Hood blamed Cheatham, while Cheatham blamed Hood. Each man presented his case in his respective postwar account, though Hood also maintained Cheatham's culpability in his official reports. Hood filed three different reports on his campaign into Tennessee: one on December 11, from near Nashville; one on January 9, from Tupelo; and his main report on his tenure as army commander, dated February 15. In them, Hood basically attempted to justify his offensive into Tennessee and downplay its disasterous results. In his January 9 report, he wrote of his campaign, "I regard, however, our situation far better in having the grand army of the Federals divided, with one wing in Tennes-

¹²⁴Losson, 212-213; McDonough and Connelly, 55.

see and one in Savannah, than to have had their entire force now lying in the heart of Georgia. . . ." In his major report of February 15, he went so far as to make the preposterous contention that "notwithstanding that disaster [at Nashville] I left the army in better spirits and with more confidence in itself than it had at the opening of the campaign." With fewer men, too. Clearly, Hood was attempting to defend his failed campaign by whatever means necessary; he even adopted the "if you think it's bad now, well, it could have been this bad sooner" defense, asserting that Sherman would have been upon Lee's communications in October, instead of in February, had Hood not marched into Tennessee.¹²⁵

Even more interesting (and more important for our purposes) are Hood's statements regarding Spring Hill. In his reports, Hood asserted that "Major General Cheatham was ordered at once to attack the enemy vigorously and get possession of [the] pike, and, although these orders were frequently and earnestly repeated, he made but a feeble and partial attack, failing to reach the point indicated." "Had my instructions been carried out," Hood added, "there is no doubt that we should have possessed ourselves of this road." He also stated that Cheatham "has frankly confessed the great error of which he was guilty, and attaches all blame to himself. While his error lost so much

¹²⁵O.R. XLV, pt. 1, 656, 662.

to the country, it has been a severe lesson to him, by which he will profit in the future." According to Hood, then, it was all Cheatham's fault that Schofield had gotten away at Spring Hill.¹²⁶

The best source for Hood's view of Spring Hill, though, can be found in Advance and Retreat, his postwar memoir, which has been quoted from time to time here. Published posthumously in 1880 after Hood's death (along with his wife and one of his children) in a yellow fever epidemic in New Orleans in 1879, it is, in the words of Robert Selph Henry (a prominent biographer of Nathan Bedford Forrest), "less a history of the campaign in Tennessee than a pathetic attempt at self-justification by laying the blame for failures upon others, and even upon the army as a whole." The book, as Cheatham was quick to point out, shows frequent memory lapses and recalls events that more than likely could not have happened as described. For example, Hood wrote that he led the main body of the army to a point about two miles away from and in full view of the pike that ran through town. He stated that he then halted and called up both Cheatham and Cleburne and pointed out to them the Yankee wagons and men moving along the pike and told them to go take the pike at or near Spring Hill "at once." He added that he told them Stewart was nearby and "'I will have him double-quick his men to the front.'"¹²⁷

¹²⁶Ibid., 652, 657.

¹²⁷Henry, 395; Warner, Gray, 143; Hood, 284-285.

Hood continued by saying that he sent staff officers not once, but twice, to tell Stewart and Johnson to hurry up, while he waited for the sound of Cheatham's musketry. "Listening attentively to the fire of the skirmishers [from Spring Hill] . . . I discovered there was no continued roar of musketry, and being aware of the quick approach of darkness, after four o'clock at that season of the year, I became somewhat uneasy, and again ordered an officer to go to General Cheatham, inform him that his supports were very near at hand, that he must attack at once, if he had not already so done, and take and hold possession of the pike." He supposedly sent this message forward three times; Governor Harris was finally sent to see what was going on. Hood said his intelligence was that Schofield was still at Columbia until late in the day, so "I knew no large force of the enemy could be at Spring Hill," and therefore Cheatham could have taken the town without opposition or simply not encountered any major Yankee force on the pike. To find out the truth, though, he sent another officer to see if Cheatham was on the pike and tell him of the arrival of Stewart, who he intended to place on Cheatham's left so as to assail the Yankees in flank as they approached and formed to attack Cheatham. At that point, said Hood, the last messenger he had sent returned with news that Cheatham did not hold the pike.¹²⁸

¹²⁸Hood, 285-286.

Hood related that he then ordered Stewart to proceed to Cheatham's right, so as to extend across the pike north of Spring Hill. Cheatham rode up shortly thereafter, and Hood turned to him and said "with deep emotion . . . General, why in the name of God have you not attacked the enemy, and taken possession of that pike?" Cheatham's reply, according to Hood, was that the enemy line was too long, and Stewart should therefore form on his right first. Hood wrote of this turn of events:

I could hardly believe it possible that this brave old soldier, who had given proof of such courage and ability upon so many hard-fought fields, would ever make such a report. After leading him within full view of the enemy, and pointing out to him the Federals . . . and then giving him explicit orders to attack, I would as soon have expected midday to turn into darkness as for him to have disobeyed my orders.

He then asked Cheatham whether or not Stewart's line would extend across the pike if he formed his troops on Cheatham's right. Cheatham said yes, so Stewart was sent there, but, due to the gathering darkness, Stewart's corps was forced to bivouac at about eleven-thirty, near, but not across, the pike. About that same time, Hood said he received word that the Yankees were marching north along the pike "almost under the light of the campfires of the main body of the Army." He sent a message to Cheatham, asking him if he could send some troops to investigate and perhaps delay the Federals until an attack could be made in the

morning, but nothing was done, and the Yankees escaped, although "General Forrest gallantly opposed the enemy further down to our right to the full extent of his power."¹²⁹

Hood was furious over Schofield's successful evasion of his trap, as has been noted, and his assessment in Advance and Retreat betrays both that fury and his later incredulity, as well as his attempt to shift the blame to Cheatham. "One good division . . ." he wrote, "could have routed that portion of the enemy which was at Spring Hill; have taken possession of and formed line across the road; and thus have made it an easy matter to Stewart's Corps, Johnston's [Johnson's] Division, and Lee's two Divisions from Columbia, to have enveloped, routed, and captured Schofield's Army that afternoon and the ensuing day." That did not happen, and the blame, according to Hood, was Cheatham's. "Had I dreamed one moment that Cheatham would have failed to give battle, or at least to take position across the pike and force the enemy to assault him, I would have ridden, myself, to the front, and led the troops into action," he asserted. He further illustrated Cheatham's guilt by producing a confession, as it were, from Cheatham himself. Hood, it seems, had recommended Cheatham for promotion to Lieutenant General some time previously but, "much pained" by his failure at Spring Hill, Hood telegraphed Richmond on December 7, withdrew

¹²⁹ Ibid., 286-287.

the above recommendation, and asked for another general to command Cheatham's troops. Before the Richmond authorities could reply, though, Cheatham apparently came to Hood's headquarters and "standing in my presence, spoke an honest avowal of his error, in the acknowledgement that he felt we had lost a brilliant opportunity at Spring Hill to deal the enemy a crushing blow, and that he was greatly to blame." Hood telegraphed the War Department again and told them that, since Cheatham had admitted his error, he thought it best that Cheatham remain in command, believing that "inspired with an ambition to retrieve his shortcoming, he would prove in the future doubly zealous in the service of his country." Thus reads Hood's account of Spring Hill.¹³⁰

Cheatham wasted no time in challenging Hood's version of events. In 1881, Cheatham released a paper that presented his account of what happened at Spring Hill, which was published in Volume IX of the Southern Historical Society Papers late that year. In this paper, Cheatham first told his story of the activities of his corps on November 29, then proceeded to refute Hood's argument point by point. Cheatham related that he was ordered by Hood to send Cleburne to Spring Hill with instructions to contact Forrest, find out where the enemy was, and attack him; meanwhile, Cheatham would wait for Bate's division and

¹³⁰ Ibid., 287, 289-290.

lead it to support Cleburne. Hood himself would send Brown's men forward. Cheatham proceeded to carry out these instructions as best he could; he had just given Brown orders to form on Cleburne's right when he received word from Cleburne that his right flank had been hit by the enemy and that he had therefore been forced to change his front and reform. Apparently Cleburne's line of advance had been slightly south of west so that he did not advance directly on Spring Hill, but rather just south of it. Cleburne was killed next day, so Cheatham never did find out what the cause of all this was. Brown, meantime, had formed on Cleburne's right, but he reported that he was outflanked and therefore it would be suicidal to attack. Cheatham told him to refuse his flank and attack anyway. He noted that he had already sent a courier to recall Bate, who had gotten as far as the Cheairs house; interestingly, he neglected to mention Bate's encounter with the Unionists on the pike before he was recalled, though Bate mentioned it in his report. Cheatham's memory, it seems, was as selective as Hood's in regards to some matters.¹³¹

According to Cheatham, the next few hours were spent making preparations for an attack on Spring Hill by Cheatham's men. Hood told him Stewart was nearby, and Cheatham asked that his men be placed on Cheatham's right; Hood

¹³¹ Benjamin F. Cheatham, "The Lost Opportunity at Spring Hill: General Cheatham's Reply to General Hood," Southern Historical Society Papers IX (1881), 524-526; O.R. XLV, pt. 1, 742.

assured him that this would be done. Cheatham informed Cleburne and Brown of the above, then headed off to get Bate into position to attack. When he had finished, he rode off to open the attack with Brown and Cleburne; although it was now dark, he was still eager to attack, knowing that Bate and Stewart would be in position to support him. While on his way to the right of the line, however, he received a dispatch from Hood, calling him to headquarters. Going there, Cheatham was informed by Hood that he had decided to wait until morning, and accordingly told Cheatham to be ready to attack at daylight. Cheatham was "never more astonished" than when Hood informed him of this decision. "The road was still open . . . and nothing to prevent the enemy from marching to Franklin."¹³²

About midnight, Cheatham added, one of his staff officers reported that he had heard troops moving along the pike. While he was telling his story to Cheatham's chief of staff, a courier arrived with a note from Hood, which said that Hood had learned of movement on the pike and that Cheatham "had better order your picket line to fire on them." Cheatham sent Edward Johnson's division, which had come up about an hour earlier, to investigate; he found everything quiet on the pike. "This suggestion that I had better order my pickets to fire upon stragglers passing in front of my left," Cheatham wrote, "was the only order,

¹³²Cheatham, 526.

if that can be called an order, that I received from General Hood after leaving him at his quarters early in the night, when he had informed me of his determination to wait until daylight to attack the enemy."¹³³

After the above attempt to give his side of the story, Cheatham then proceeded to pick apart certain elements of Hood's account in Advance and Retreat. Many of his criticisms were over nit-picky details (such as, for example, the exact brigade with which Hood marched to Spring Hill), or restatements of what he had already said and how that differed from Hood's account, but he did make some important observations. First of all, he noted that Hood's description of how he pointed out the Yankees on the pike to Cheatham and Cleburne at the Rutherford's Creek crossing and thus ordered them to take the pike was a physical impossibility. As Stanley Horn noted (and he went there himself to verify this), "It is a physical fact that from the point where the Davis' Ford road crosses Rutherford's Creek one cannot see the turnpike road." Furthermore, Cheatham pointed out that even if Hood could have seen the pike, there wouldn't have been anything to see, because there wasn't anybody on the road at three o'clock when these events were transpiring. Wagner's men and the wagons were already at Spring Hill, and the rest of Schofield's men were still in the vicinity of Colum-

¹³³ Ibid., 526-527.

bia. Cheatham concluded, "There is not a bit of truth in this entire paragraph."¹³⁴

Cheatham also refuted Hood's story that he had accepted the blame for the failure to destroy Schofield. According to Cheatham, the first indication from any source that his conduct at Spring Hill was being questioned was a note from General Hood, sent and received on December 3 (although Cheatham dated it December 13; why is unclear.). In this note, Hood told Cheatham that he did not blame him for the failure at Spring Hill, and was "satisfied that you are not responsible for it." The inspiration for this note was a conversation between Hood, his chief of staff, Major A. P. Mason, and Isham Harris, soon after Spring Hill. In the presence of Mason and Harris, Hood condemned Cheatham for not making the night attack at Spring Hill as ordered in his last message, shortly after midnight, and for disobeying orders. Shortly thereafter, Mason told Harris (and later Hood, at Harris' urging) that he had never sent the note, but fell asleep before writing it. Hood, according to Harris (writing of the event in 1877), then said he had done Cheatham a great injustice, and sent him the above mentioned note. On December 4, Cheatham added, he went to Hood's headquarters and said "A great opportunity was lost at Spring Hill, but you know that I obeyed your orders there, as everywhere, literally

¹³⁴ Ibid., 527-529; Horn, Tennessee, 386-387.

and promptly." Hood agreed, Cheatham said, and "exhibited the most cordial manner, coupled with confidence and friendship." Cheatham concluded his treatment of the matter by stating that neither he nor Hood, so far as he knew, ever alluded to the subject again; therefore, when Hood wrote to James Seddon, Secretary of War, that Cheatham had confessed his error at Spring Hill, "he made a statement for which there was not the slightest foundation."¹³⁵

This account begs another question, however: If Mason admitted to Harris that he did not send Cheatham a note asking him to fire on the pike after midnight, then why did Cheatham indicate he received such a note, on page 527 of his account? Did Mason actually send the note, and simply have been so tired that he forgot he did it (which often happens when one is extremely tired; a person can do things almost automatically and forget about them later), or did Cheatham simply imagine he received such a message? We will never know for sure, and that fact is an excellent indication of the confusion surrounding Spring Hill, even to this day.¹³⁶

At any rate, Cheatham appended to his statement a number of "corroborative statements," in the form of letters from various individuals who were at Spring Hill. These letters were intended to support Cheatham's assertions

¹³⁵Cheatham, 531-533.

¹³⁶Horn, Tennessee, 390-391.

of the falseness of Hood's account. Among them was a copy of the above mentioned letter of December 3, in which Hood absolved Cheatham of all blame in the matter (this time correctly dated). The most important, for our purposes, are the statements of A.P. Stewart and Cheatham's two division commanders, Bate and Brown. Stewart's statements, which supplemented his official report, refuted Hood's contentions about the activities of his corps at Spring Hill. Contrary to Hood's story that he had repeatedly sent for Stewart's corps to come up, and his assurances to Cheatham of that fact, Stewart said that he had actually been halted at the crossing of Rutherford's Creek and held in reserve south of there until after sunset. This state of affairs had seemed unusual to Stewart, for, as he wrote years later, "A staff officer of his [Cheatham's] informed me that an attack was to be made. I expected to be hurried forward to support the attack." At any rate, it was not until after dark that his corps was finally ordered forward, and Stewart, although provided with a local guide, had some problems finding where he was supposed to go. Finally, he found Forrest's headquarters and talked to him for a while until a staff officer from Cheatham, sent by Hood, came to put Stewart's men into position. Feeling that it was a bit unusual for the commanding general to send someone else's staff officer to put him in position, he nevertheless followed the officer to the line held by Brown,

which was oblique to the pike; his left was closer to it than his right. Realizing that it would take all night to position his men there, and that his line would thus extend away from, rather than across, the pike, as had been originally intended, he rode off to talk to Hood about it. He arrived shortly at Hood's headquarters, where Hood told him that he hadn't changed his mind about placing Stewart across the pike, but that Cheatham had said "there ought to be somebody on Brown's right." Stewart explained his uncertainty about where he was supposed to be, and that he had ordered his men into bivouac (they had been marching all day, and it was then about eleven p.m.). Hood remarked that it did not matter; let the men rest, and then take the advance towards Franklin before daybreak. This statement of Hood's, if true, would seem to agree with Cheatham's contention that it was Hood, not himself, who had decided to wait until morning.¹³⁷

The fault, Stewart agreed, was Hood's. His "fatal error" was to have left Stewart's corps in reserve behind Rutherford's Creek. It was his impression that Cheatham and his subordinates thought they were about to be outflanked by the Yankees at the town; if Stewart's command had been within supporting distance, Stewart felt they would not have hesitated to attack. As for Hood's excuse, when asked by Stewart why he had been held reserve, that

¹³⁷Cheatham, 534-535; O.R. XLV, pt. 1, 712-713.

he was needed to block any Federal retreat towards Murfreesboro, Stewart replied that Johnson's division, coming up behind him, was sufficient for that task. His two divisions, he asserted, should have been rushed to the front. He also censured Hood for not seeing to it that his orders were executed, when he was there at the front himself.¹³⁸

Stewart's account generally supports Cheatham's contentions; nowhere does Stewart criticize Cheatham's performance at Spring Hill. The statements of Cheatham's two surviving division commanders, William B. Bate and John C. Brown, are a different matter. While basically supporting Cheatham's story, they nonetheless call some details into question. Brown, for example, noted that, when his flank was threatened because of the departure of Forrest's cavalry, he and his brigadiers decided that, since they had no artillery or cavalry, they had better suspend the attack or "meet with inevitable disaster." Cheatham said he told Brown to refuse his flank and attack anyway; Brown said, however, that both Cheatham and Hood approved of his action, and decided to wait until Stewart came up before advancing. Bate, in his account, mentioned that it was Hood, not Cheatham, who led him to the front; both Hood and Cheatham agreed that Hood had ordered Cheatham to conduct Bate's men to the front. Bate also wrote of his encounter with Ruger's men on the pike south of Spring Hill, and how he was pulled

¹³⁸Cheatham, 534-535.

back from there to support Cleburne at the town; Cheatham did not refer to this incident anywhere, nor did he bother to report it to Hood. Bate did report his encounter to Hood later that night, but Hood told him not to worry about it, for Forrest was on the pike north of town, and would stop the Yankees if they tried to advance, "and so in the morning we will have a surrender without a fight." Satisfied, Bate returned to his lines. "At daylight," Bate stated in his official report, "there was no enemy in my front."¹³⁹ Clearly, although Cheatham's account seems to be the best supported, and therefore probably the more accurate, of the two major first-hand Confederate versions of what happened at Spring Hill, it does contain many flaws and thus cannot be accepted as entirely truthful. Cheatham, like Hood, also had an axe to grind.

And what of Pat Cleburne? His was the first Confederate infantry division on the field that day; consequently, his account of Spring Hill would be invaluable. Alas, as has been mentioned, Cleburne was killed the next day at Franklin, and thus was unable to write any report of what his division did at Spring Hill. We do have, however, a hint of what he might have said. In his statement, appended to Cheatham's account, Brown related the details of a conversation between Cleburne and himself on the thirtieth of November, while the army was marching to Franklin.

¹³⁹ Ibid., 538, 539-541; O.R. XLV, pt. 1, 742.

Brown said that Cleburne sent him a message asking to talk awhile (apparently Cleburne and Brown "enjoyed very close personal relations"). Brown stopped and waited for Cleburne to ride up, after which the two men rode off at a distance from the column. According to Brown, Cleburne said "with much feeling" that Hood was trying to blame him for the fiasco of the previous day. Brown replied he hadn't heard any such thing, and supposed Cleburne might be mistaken; Cleburne told him that he was not, for his information came from "a very reliable channel." Cleburne was quite angry, and said he could not afford to remain under such a censure; consequently, he would have the affair investigated as soon as the army was away from the enemy. Brown then asked who was responsible for Schofield's escape. Cleburne "indulged in some criticisms of a command occupying a position on the left [Bate's division?]" and concluded that "the responsibility rests with the Commander-in-Chief, as he was upon the field during the afternoon and was fully advised during the night of the movement of the enemy." Orders from either Hood or Cheatham arrived at that point, terminating the conversation; Cleburne expressed a wish to continue it at a later date, but was killed in battle before he could; thus we have only a tantalizing hint of Cleburne's view of the affair at Spring Hill.¹⁴⁰

An analysis of the above account (assuming it to be

¹⁴⁰Cheatham, 538-539.

true, yields the following conclusions. First, Hood seemed to be shifting blame for the failure at Spring Hill to other subordinates than Cheatham, which is understandable and fully consistent with reports of "the morning after"; Cleburne, being the first one there, would have been an easy target. Secondly, Cleburne assigned blame chiefly to Hood, for much the same reasons Cheatham and Stewart did; namely, that he was on the field and should have seen that his orders were obeyed. Then there is the matter of the unnamed command on the left, which is puzzling. Only Bate was on Cleburne's left until well after dark, when Edward Johnson came up and took position near Bate. Why would Cleburne blame Bate? Was it because Bate did not support him in his attack on Bradley's men near the town? Was it because Bate failed to block the pike after encountering Ruger's division there (if Cleburne even knew about that encounter)? We will never know for sure, and it remains a fascinating mystery.

There is one piece of evidence which, if it was still extant, would do much to clarify Cleburne's comments. In the bibliographical essay to his excellent biography of Hood, Richard McMurry noted that Cleburne kept a diary of his experiences during the war, and that this diary was with him during the Spring Hill campaign. As his body lay on the field of Franklin, though, it was looted, and the diary has since been lost. McMurry speculated that

it might still exist somewhere, possibly gathering dust in some long-forgotten depository of Civil War documents. If it is, its discovery would be a major find, not only because of what it would tell us about Spring Hill, but for the insights it would offer into Cleburne's character and views.¹⁴¹

Thus far, we have examined the statements of the major Confederate leaders present at Spring Hill, and have seen how much they contradict one another, making it difficult to get at the truth. Fortunately, on the Union side, there was not as much confusion. There the two major Union protagonists, John Schofield and David Stanley, were worried not so much about what had really happened at Spring Hill than about who deserved the most credit for the Union's ability to escape the trap. Schofield wrote about the incident in his memoirs, Forty-Six Years in the Army, published in 1897, two years after his retirement from the army (he had served as General-in-Chief from 1888 to 1895). He addressed Spring Hill twice; once in his general narrative of the events of the campaign, and then again in more detail in a chapter "necessary to a full understanding of the operations preceeding and immediately following the battle of Franklin. . . ." This last chapter was primarily devoted to a detailed study of the campaign, particularly as it concerned Schofield's relations with

¹⁴¹McMurry, 223.

his superior, George Thomas. As such, Schofield freely criticized Thomas for such things as not rushing available troops (particularly those of Granger and Steedman) to Schofield's force at Columbia. This action would have, in Schofield's opinion, enabled him to hold the line of Duck River, from which Thomas could have assumed the offensive against Hood. Schofield also noted that, because of the delay in sending and receiving messages, he had basically been on his own with regards to what to do, as Thomas' dispatches usually arrived too late to be of any value. One gets the impression that, if Schofield hadn't been there, Hood would have taken Nashville.¹⁴²

Schofield's estimate of the Spring Hill affair was, until fairly recently, a unique one. Eschewing the popular notion that the Confederates bungled a golden opportunity to win the war, Schofield wrote that "I did not apprehend any serious danger at Spring Hill; for Hood's infantry could not reach that place over a wretched country road much before night, and Stanley, with one division and our cavalry [not actually there; Wilson had been driven to Franklin by Forrest] could easily beat off Forrest." Schofield then went into detail about how he deployed his forces so as to meet a Confederate move either at Spring Hill or at his left flank along the river, thus trusting to Wagner's division (under Stanley) to hold the pike in the

¹⁴²Schofield, 189-190; 194-200; 205; Warner, Blue, 426.

rear until the rest of the army could come up, and giving Thomas a little more time for A.J. Smith to come up. Schofield calculated that, if he needed to race Hood to Spring Hill, he could easily beat him there, moving on the good hard-surfaced road while Hood slogged north in the mud. Even if the Confederates had taken a point on the pike, Schofield reasoned, the army could merely have marched around them to the west via country roads and thus moved to Franklin; "veteran troops are not so easily cut off in an open country." The only real danger, Schofield asserted, would have been if the Rebels had gained a position at Spring Hill which the Yankees could not have passed around; however, as Schofield had calculated, the enemy did not have time for that. This was due largely to "the gallant action of Stanley and his one division," whose "stubborn resistance" prevented the Rebels from achieving such a lodgement. According to Schofield, then, Spring Hill was not the lost opportunity that was commonly believed.¹⁴³

Schofield also mentioned the controversy between Hood and his subordinates, already examined in detail above, over the failure to entrap the Unionists at Spring Hill. To that debate, Schofield added his own two cents' worth. He felt that the fault was Hood's, in that he attempted too long a march over bad roads in too short a time. In-

¹⁴³Schofield, 171, 215-217, 219; McDonough, 108; McDonough and Connelly, 44.

stead, Schofield suggested, Hood should have turned left and moved along the north bank of the river, rolling up Schofield's left; "That was his best chance of success, but he did not try it." Hood thought he was deceiving Schofield by his demonstration at Columbia, and attempted to duplicate the grand flanking maneuvers of Stonewall Jackson, but Schofield was not fooled: "I was watching him all day." Besides, Schofield noted, Hood went to bed that night, while Schofield stayed in the saddle and directed his forces in person; perhaps, he speculated, that was the difference between success and failure.¹⁴⁴

Not everybody on the Federal side agreed with Schofield's viewpoint, however. David Stanley, in particular, strongly disagreed. Stanley and Schofield did not enjoy the most cordial relations, primarily because of the command dispute mentioned earlier; Stanley was senior to Schofield, yet Schofield was placed over him by virtue of his holding department command (Department of the Ohio), and Stanley resented this. Consequently, his memoirs, written shortly after Schofield's, do not present Schofield in a favorable light. Of Schofield's assertions that he apprehended no serious danger at Spring Hill, Stanley wrote, "all said in Schofield's book as to his foreseeing and providing to meet the events as they unfolded, is the merest bosh." Stanley said that Schofield "assumes a grand superiority

¹⁴⁴Schofield, 171-172.

and wisdom, in each case at variance with the facts, and appropriates circumstances entirely accidental and the run of luck in our favor as a result of his wise foresight." There is some truth to these accusations, for the affair at Spring Hill was a more near-run thing than Schofield anticipated it would be; if, say, Stanley had been a little later, or Forrest a little earlier, things might have been very different indeed, although it is questionable whether Forrest's men could have withstood an assault by Wagner's men. Still, this is Nathan Bedford Forrest we are talking about; maybe he could have held on until the infantry arrived. In Schofield's defense, though, it is quite reasonable to assume that he would have considered all the possibilities--including a move by Hood to Spring Hill--and therefore have made the necessary calculations and allowances to determine whether or not Hood could have gotten enough men there to make a serious lodgement on his line of retreat. Indeed, as James McDonough has noted, it would have been surprising if Schofield had not made such a calculation, for it took no great intellect to recognize Spring Hill as a possible objective for Hood; also, Schofield had been the best in his class in tactics at West Point. It thus follows that he would have taken into account all the possibilities, though he probably overstated a bit in giving himself credit for doing so.¹⁴⁵

¹⁴⁵McDonough, 108-109; McDonough and Connelly, 44; O'Connor, 228.

Other Union accounts generally accepted the Confederate view that Spring Hill was a great missed chance to win the war. In Battles and Leaders, Henry Stone, who had been one of Thomas' staff officers, wrote that "A single Confederate brigade . . . planted squarely across the pike, either south or north of Spring Hill, would have effectually prevented Schofield's retreat, and daylight would have found his whole force cut off from every avenue of escape by more than twice its numbers, to assault whom would have been madness, and to avoid whom would have been impossible." He concluded that "The afternoon and night of November 29, 1864, may well be set down in the calendar of lost opportunities." Jacob Cox, who commanded a division of XXIII Corps, echoed similar sentiments (though not as emphatically) in his books on the campaign. Cox wrote two books about Hood's Tennessee invasion after the war; one just on Franklin, and an earlier one on the March to the Sea and Hood's campaign. He gave a more thorough treatment of Spring Hill in the latter book, although he was not actually there; it will be recalled that he was at the river, watching S.D. Lee's demonstration. He implied that Spring Hill was indeed a lost opportunity for the South, and placed the blame on Hood. He wrote:

But a commander who is personally with the head of a column in such a movement and upon the field, has the means of enforcing his own orders by direct commands to the divisions. Had his own confidence not wavered . . . his own energy would

have carried his subordinates with him. . . . But he seems to have lacked the grasp of mind which enables a general to judge and to act with vigor in the presence of circumstances which throw doubt upon his plan, and he proved inferior to his opponent in a strategic contest, which has been generally regarded as one of the most critical and instructive conjunctures of the war. The circumstances . . . show that Hood had an access of hesitation at the very moment when the success of his movement demanded that all doubts should be thrown to the winds and everything risked upon a desperate stroke.

The first thing that Napoleon would ask about any general was "Is he lucky?," and by that the Emperor meant not luck in the traditional sense, but more the ability to take calculated risks. In Cox's estimation, Hood needed to take a calculated risk which would have won the war for him, but failed to muster enough courage to do so. Though Cox did not assert that the Confederates had as great an opportunity as Stone did, he nonetheless implied that, had it not been for Hood's hesitation, the Confederate army could have won a great victory.¹⁴⁶

It was Hood's fault; it was Cheatham's fault; they couldn't have succeeded anyway--such were the opinions of the men who witnessed one of the greatest mysteries of the war unfold. Yet all the speculation and finger-pointing left unanswered the simple question: why did the Confederate generals show such a lack of focus and initiative at Spring Hill? The men in the ranks, and those resi-

¹⁴⁶ Battles and Leaders, IV, 447-448; Cox, March, 80.

dents of Spring Hill who witnessed the event, had their own theories. According to local legend, either Hood or Cheatham was drunk that day, and that was why the town (and the pike) were not taken. There might be some truth to this theory; few generals in either army in those days could claim to be total abstainers (those who could were religious types like Stonewall Jackson, who refused brandy as a pain-killer on his deathbed so he could meet the Almighty with a clear head), and the soldiers often took a perverse pride in having hard-drinking generals over them, as witness the following verse to a song that the soldiers of the Army of the Potomac sang about one of their many commanders, Joe Hooker:

Joe Hooker is our leader,
He takes his whiskey strong.

Hood and Cheatham fell into that category as well, if the allegations are accepted. Robert E. Lee, employing a typical Victorian euphemism, said that Hood's conduct off the field was "careless." It must also be remembered that Hood was a crippled man in much pain, pain that was more than likely increased by the long ride from Columbia to Spring Hill over a bad road. It is entirely possible that he would have turned to the bottle to ease his pain, and that could have led to his strange complacency and inaction at Spring Hill. As for Cheatham, he was known throughout the army as a great partaker of potent potables. Though it is unlikely he would have risen all the way to corps

command if he had been a habitual drinker, it is still possible that he might have been inebriated at Spring Hill. Christopher Losson, Cheatham's biographer, has dismissed that charge and instead asserted that one of Cheatham's division commanders, John C. Brown, was actually the drunken officer in question, and that Cheatham, who was his close friend, covered up for him. Stephen D. Lee, who for years blamed both Hood and Cheatham for the failure, changed his mind after reading an account of the affair written by Memphis Judge J.P. Young, a veteran of Forrest's cavalry. In a 1902 letter to Ellison Capers, Lee wrote that Young's account "proved conclusively" that it had been Brown who was drunk, which had caused him to postpone the attack on Spring Hill, and that Cheatham covered it up. None of the above allegations can be proven or disproven today, of course, but if they are true, then they would certainly go a long way towards explaining the puzzling inertia in the high command of the Army of Tennessee at Spring Hill.¹⁴⁷

Others have said that it was not Mars, but Bacchus, who was being worshipped that night. At Spring Hill there lived a certain Dr. George B. Peters; he had married a beautiful brunette named Jessie Helen McKissack. Apparently the good doctor was out of town a lot, so Mrs. Peters had to satisfy her desires elsewhere; this she had done with

¹⁴⁷ Bruce Catton, The Army of the Potomac: Glory Road (Garden City, New York: Doubleday and Company, Inc., 1952), 141; Horn, Tennessee, 392; Losson, 209-212; McDonough and Connelly, 31, 40.

one Major General Earl Van Dorn of the Confederate Army. Their not-so-secret rendezvous led the enraged Dr. Peters to kill Van Dorn at the Martin Cheairs House (which still stands at Spring Hill; it is now part of an orphanage) on May 7, 1863.¹⁴⁸

On November 29, 1864, Mrs. Peters was once again alone at home; her husband had apparently gone to Nashville. Captain H.A. Tyler of Forrest's staff reported seeing a woman standing on the porch of a house at Spring Hill. He approached her to ask directions; as she came to the gate, he "was struck by her great beauty." He asked about the roads and the lay of the land; she answered, then asked whose troops were there. He told her they belonged to Forrest, and pointed out the great general. She said that she wanted to meet him and speak to him. Tyler asked who she was, and she answered, "Mrs. Peters. General Forrest will know me." Tyler rode over to Forrest and delivered the message, whereupon Tyler led the general over to Mrs. Peters "and left them talking." Now it is wise not to jump to conclusions here; Forrest, at least, was happily married, and it is possible for a man and a woman to talk without jumping into bed; the whole thing could have been entirely innocent. Still, one is left to wonder, given Mrs. Peters' reputation and the legends that have persisted to this day of a wild party thrown by Mrs. Peters that

¹⁴⁸McDonough and Connelly, 36; Warner, Gray, 315.

night at which both Forrest and Cheatham were among the guests. According to Henry Stone--whose account in Battles and Leaders has already been quoted--"there was music and dancing and feasting, and other gods than Mars were worshipped" at Mrs. Peters' party. While all this carousing was going on, said Stone, "the whole of Schofield's . . . force moved silently and fearfully by. . . . But in the morning there was much swearing Cheatham and Forrest and the others who had given themselves up to the charms of society the night before were more chagrined at the disappearance of the enemy than at their own lapse from duty."¹⁴⁹

Whether the above legend is true, or merely just a legend, will never be known. It should be noted that the Union troops marching along the pike that night did not report hearing any sounds of a wild party emanating from the Confederate lines. The Peters' House, however (see map, page 77), is well to the east of Spring Hill, and therefore quite a distance from the pike; it is probably highly unlikely that anybody on the pike could have heard any of the revelry (if indeed there was any to hear) at the Peters' House. Still, sound travels fairly far on a still, clear night such as that of November 29/30, and the Union troops were marching more or less in silence, for fear of alerting the Confederates that they were moving.

¹⁴⁹McDonough and Connelly, 58.

It is possible that someone could have heard something unusual coming from the Confederate camps. The fact that no one reported such noises proves nothing. In short, the evidence is inconclusive; the story is probably just a legend after all. Nevertheless, it is an excellent example of the many wild theories that have been put forth as explanations for the inactivity of the Confederate generals at Spring Hill which allowed Schofield to escape.¹⁵⁰

Some of those theories have bordered on the fantastic. A Yankee private, J. D. Remington of Company I of the Seventy-third Illinois, claimed that he and a cousin, posing as Rebel couriers, spread countermanding, confusing, and contradictory orders to various Confederate generals, thus destroying all Confederate attempts at effective action.¹⁵¹ That story is certainly difficult to believe, as are most of the others; one gets the feeling after a while that the National Enquirer ought to do a story on Spring Hill, what with all its sordid tales of revelry and espionage.

¹⁵⁰I am indebted to Dr. Richard Cramer, of San Jose State University, who has been to Spring Hill, and consequently was able to give me the location of the Peters' House in relation to the present Franklin/Nashville pike (which more or less follows the same course it did in 1864), thus shedding new light on this old local legend.

¹⁵¹McDonough and Connelly, 37.

Chapter 5: "God Just Didn't Want 'at War to go on no Longer"

By now, anyone who has read the preceding chapter realizes the difficulty that succeeding generations of researchers have had in trying to piece together what happened at Spring Hill so long ago. The accounts of the various participants are confused, contradictory, and almost all written years after the fact, by men with reputations to protect and, consequently, with often selective memories. In many cases, it boils down to one man's word against another's, and sifting out what actually did happen is a formidable task indeed.

Not that historians haven't tried, of course. Since 1864, there have been numerous books and articles on those aspects of the Civil War that deal with Spring Hill at least tangentially. The authors of these have tried their hand at making sense of the events of November 29, 1864, and have assigned blame accordingly. Recently, some have even argued that Spring Hill was not really the great "lost opportunity" that we have been led to believe, that Hood either didn't have enough men or got there too late in the day, or that Schofield had alternate routes to Nashville if Hood had taken the pike. A sampling of the best scholarly work of the past fifty years that deals with any aspect of Spring Hill follows, in an attempt to show how indeed varied the interpretations of this event are.

Since World War II, there have been two major histories

of the Army of Tennessee. The first of these was Stanley Horn's The Army of Tennessee (1953). Horn's interpretation of Spring Hill was quite interesting in that he changed it after writing his book; his differing views also illustrate perfectly the confusion surrounding the events of November 29, 1864. In his book, Horn asserted that Spring Hill was indeed "the greatest of all the 'lost opportunities' of the Confederate armies" and that "some sort of tragic bungling" allowed Schofield to escape the trap. He then entered into a "detailed consideration" of the events of Spring Hill, relying heavily on the post-war accounts of Hood, Cheatham, and other Confederate generals present. His conclusion was that Cheatham's account was the truer of the two, being backed by both physical evidence and corroborating testimony. Indeed, Horn seemed to shift the blame primarily onto Hood, although in a subtle manner; he did not say it outright, but he used the accounts of Cheatham, Bate, and others to cast doubt on Hood's story in Advance and Retreat. He also noted the great contrast between the actions of the two opposing commanders (which was expanded upon by later writers); while Hood slept at the Thompson House, Schofield remained awake and in the saddle, leading his army to safety. As a possible explanation for this inactivity of Hood, Horn brought up the local tradition of Hood's drunkenness, mentioning it as a possible, probable, yet unable to be proven or disproven theory about

why Hood allowed Schofield to escape, although he "was not uninformed of the opportunity" to block the pike and destroy him.¹⁵²

The main point of Horn's assessment in The Army of Tennessee, though, was that Spring Hill did indeed represent a tremendous lost opportunity for the South. He cited, for example, the "conspicuous failure to attack Wagner's sole and unsupported division with overwhelming power" as soon as possible. This oversight might have been offset by a deployment across the pike to block Schofield's retreat, but that was not done either. A re-reading of the evidence, however, caused him to change his mind.¹⁵³

Sixteen years after the publication of The Army of Tennessee, Horn wrote an article for Civil War Times Illustrated about the Spring Hill affair. Titled "The Spring Hill Legend: A Reappraisal," it presented an entirely different view. Horn, after "a close scrutiny of all the available evidence," came to the conclusion that Spring Hill was not that great a lost opportunity after all. Instead of taking Schofield by surprise, Horn wrote, Hood's maneuver was known to Schofield almost from the moment it started. Hood was undertaking a long march across fields and unfamiliar roads to get in the rear of an enemy who had only to march twelve miles on a hard-surfaced road

¹⁵²Horn, Tennessee, 386-393

¹⁵³Ibid., 389.

to escape, whereas he had to travel fifteen miles. There was simply not enough time to accomplish such an ambitious maneuver. Furthermore, his men approached Spring Hill single-file over a dirt road, and he never had them all in line against Schofield at any time; there just wasn't enough time (with sunset at 4:26 p.m.) to deploy them for anything. Although Forrest's men did arrive at Spring Hill before Stanley did, a careful reading of Wagner's report indicated that the Union garrison of two regiments (one of cavalry, the other of entrenched infantry) were sufficient to stop Forrest's advance elements until Wagner's division arrived. By the time the rest of Forrest's men came up, Wagner had two brigades dug in, which were all that was needed to hold off Forrest. By the time Hood got there with the lead elements of the infantry, there were 5,500 Yankees at Spring Hill, dug in and supported by artillery. The Unionists, Horn argued, got there first with the most men, to quote Nathan Bedford Forrest's oft-repeated maxim of war, which prevented any chance Hood had of entrapping and destroying Schofield.¹⁵⁴

Even if Forrest had gotten to Spring Hill a little earlier, and thus had taken the town before Stanley came up, it would not have mattered, said Horn; it was not likely that Forrest could have held off Wagner's entire division

¹⁵⁴Stanley F. Horn, "The Spring Hill Legend: A Reappraisal," Civil War Times Illustrated VIII (April 1969), 22, 23, 25, 26, 32; O.R. XLV, pt. 1, 229-230.

for very long. Furthermore, Stanley could easily have bypassed Forrest and gone around the town via country roads to the west. In addition, according to Horn's analysis, it probably would have been a bad idea for Cheatham's men to have gotten on the pike south of town as originally planned. If Cleburne had not been sidetracked by Bradley's attack on his flank south of town, but instead had gone on with Bate and taken the pike, the two Confederate divisions would most likely have gotten trapped between Wagner's division at Spring Hill and Schofield's main body advancing north along the pike! In such a situation, Cleburne and Bate would have been hard-pressed to escape capture or destruction; the trappers would have ironically become the trapped. Thus Horn argued that the Spring Hill legend was just that, a legend, and Hood never really had a chance for success.¹⁵⁵

The view that there really hadn't been a great opportunity to win the war at Spring Hill, first enunciated by John Schofield in his memoirs and expanded on later by Horn, has been the traditional interpretation of modern historians when writing of the incident. Thomas Connelly, in his two volume history of the Army of Tennessee, also looked at Spring Hill from that perspective. In his second volume, Autumn of Glory (1971), which told the story of the army from the summer of 1862 to the end of the war,

¹⁵⁵Horn, "Spring Hill," 32.

Connelly reaffirmed that the Spring Hill affair was not the last great chance for the South to win the war. Even if Hood had placed his entire force across the road to Nashville, Connelly wrote, Schofield still could have gotten around him to Nashville on one of three routes: the roadbed of the Alabama Railroad and the Carter's Creek Turnpike, both of which lay west of Spring Hill and led to Franklin; or the old Hillsboro/Nashville pike, which could have been reached by country roads of fairly good quality and led directly to Nashville. Connelly also reiterated the notion that Schofield had gotten there "firstest with the mostest," to misquote Forrest. At seven p.m., Connelly noted, while Stewart's corps was still at Rutherford's Creek, there were two Yankee divisions (Wagner's and Ruger's) plus all the reserve artillery at Spring Hill; two more divisions (Wood's and Kimball's) were only a few miles away. By midnight, all of Schofield's army had either reached Spring Hill or started on to Franklin. With sunset at around 4:30 p.m., and with most of his troops exhausted by the long march from Columbia to Spring Hill, Hood did not have enough time to get his men into position for any "significant action." In short, Schofield beat him to Spring Hill that evening, and there was nothing he could do.¹⁵⁶

Connelly, in assigning blame for the fiasco, spread the guilt around more than Horn had (in the CWTI article,

¹⁵⁶Connelly, 501-502.

Horn blamed Hood once more, citing his orders to Cleburne to take the pike, not to attack the troops Forrest had been engaged with at Spring Hill, as proof of Hood's lack of understanding of the situation); although Connelly still pointed out Hood's mistakes, he noted that Hood's subordinates had not served him well that day. Connelly asserted that Hood most likely didn't have a clear plan, except to outrace Schofield to Nashville. For this reason, he seemed to have an incorrect picture of what was going on at Spring Hill, e.g., his curious orders to Stewart to halt his corps at the creek, etc. In addition, his ignorance of the terrain in the area caused him to believe that Schofield would have just as much trouble getting to Spring Hill as he had; consequently, he showed little interest in blocking the pike north of town during the night, sending only Forrest's men, low on ammunition, to try and see what they could do. Connelly also faulted Hood for not personally seeing to matters at the town, but rather returning to his headquarters to wait for news. As possible explanations for Hood's inaction, Connelly cited both Hood's overconfidence that Schofield was still at Columbia and his painful wounds, which more than likely were irritated by the long ride to Spring Hill. These things, Connelly theorized, would have put Hood in a poor state of mind to make command decisions.¹⁵⁷

¹⁵⁷Horn, "Spring Hill," 27; Connelly, 499-502.

The performance of Hood's subordinate leaders at Spring Hill was subpar at best, Connelly argued. A.P. Stewart, though his men were relatively fresh, had been disinterested in trying to block the road. Forrest, although he did send Jackson's division to try and block the pike, never reported to Hood that Jackson's men had seen long columns of Yankees and wagons on the pike, and had been driven off by them (although it is doubtful Hood would have done anything with the information anyway, given his reaction to the reports of Bate and the anonymous Confederate private of movement on the pike). In Connelly's opinion, though, "Cheatham was particularly at fault." This was due to his constant contradiction of Hood's orders during the afternoon (Hood wanted to take the pike, but Cheatham was arranging his forces for an attack on the village), and the fact that he didn't tell Hood what he was doing. By six p.m., wrote Connelly, Cheatham, without authority, had broken off all activity at Spring Hill, and was so uncommunicative in his subsequent conversation with Hood that he apparently didn't bother to tell Hood that his corps was not adjacent to the pike. During the night, when he received Hood's order to send a regiment to fire on the pike, Cheatham did not go to the pike himself; rather, he sent Johnson's men to fire on stragglers. When Johnson reported the pike was clear, Cheatham did not inform Hood nor leave a regiment on the pike, and so the matter

was dropped. Thus neither Hood nor his subordinates, in Connelly's opinion, performed very well at Spring Hill.¹⁵⁸

Those poor performances have been subjected to a close scrutiny by the modern biographers of both Hood and Cheatham, the two principal Confederate protagonists in the drama of Spring Hill. Hood, in particular, has received most of the attention, having had two biographies written about him in the last fifty years to Cheatham's one (and that one quite recent). The first of these was Richard O'Connor's Hood: Cavalier General (1949), and it followed the traditional interpretation of Spring Hill as a great lost opportunity, while placing the lion's share of the blame on Hood. Throughout his account, O'Connor took it for granted that Hood could have won a great victory at Spring Hill if only he had done things differently; he wrote, for example, that it would not have been "too difficult" to drive Wagner's men from the town and thus lay a trap for Schofield. Since O'Connor was writing in 1949, before the interpretation of Spring Hill later espoused by Horn, Connelly, and others had begun to gain acceptance, these comments are not surprising. At any rate, Hood was primarily at fault for letting this great chance for victory slip away, in O'Connor's opinion. He particularly faulted Hood for not seeing to it that his plan was carried out, but rather retiring to his headquarters and trusting to

¹⁵⁸Connelly, 500-502.

his subordinates to finish the job. The resultant lack of coordination of the Confederate effort led to a failure to intercept and destroy Schofield's forces, and the fault for that was Hood's. Although O'Connor admitted that "there was laxity and incompetence" among Hood's corps commanders, he concluded that "the grand tragedy of Spring Hill . . . was that General Hood chose to fall back to sleep rather than risk the charge of "recklessness" [a reference to Hood's comment in Advance and Retreat that, had he remained on the field and opened the attack personally, his opponents would have accused him of recklessness] by taking the field in person."¹⁵⁹ Thus O'Connor gave a more traditional analysis of Spring Hill, with Hood primarily at fault for the failure there.

Richard McMurry, Hood's most recent biographer, took a different viewpoint about Spring Hill's military importance, but still had harsh criticism of Hood's performance. McMurry's work, John Bell Hood and the War for Southern Independence (1982), is an excellent example of the modern scholarly biographies of key Civil War figures that have been written in recent years; as such, it gives the generally accepted modern view of Spring Hill. McMurry reiterated the points made by Horn, Connelly, and others; namely, that Hood was not trying to destroy Schofield, but instead get around him to Nashville, and that Schofield could simply

¹⁵⁹O'Connor, 229-230, 233; Hood, 287.

have marched around Spring Hill to Franklin and/or Nashville had he chosen to. Hood, apparently ignorant of the terrain north of Columbia, assumed that Schofield would experience as much difficulty getting to Spring Hill as he had; sadly, this was not the case. This tragic misconception was only one of the many mistakes Hood was guilty of at Spring Hill, McMurry wrote. His failure to closely supervise his subordinates, who had not properly executed his orders on other fields, indicated that he had not learned from previous mistakes. His orders were unclear, and his inefficient staff organization led to a lack of knowledge not only of where the enemy was (no provision had been made for reconnaissance) but of the position and movements of his own army. As he had done before Atlanta, he had formulated a good plan, but had failed to execute it. The blame was not entirely Hood's, though; McMurry made mention of S.D. Lee's negligence in not reporting to Hood that Yankees had been marching north from the river in force from noon onwards. Still, in McMurry's opinion, Hood should have more closely supervised things.¹⁶⁰

As was mentioned earlier, good biographies of Frank Cheatham are few and far between. The only one that exists so far is Christopher Losson's Tennessee's Forgotten Warriors: Frank Cheatham and his Confederate Division (1989); it is a quite well-done scholarly account of the

¹⁶⁰McMurry, 171-174.

life and times of this Tennessee general who figured so prominently in the story of Spring Hill. In his book, Losson took a different stance than had other writers with regard to the opportunity presented at Spring Hill; while he did not say outright that Hood blew his greatest chance to win the war, he did suggest, in a left-handed way, that the Confederates just might have been successful there had things gone differently. He noted that there were not just one, but three different opportunities to hit Schofield's force, and all three of them were muffed by the Rebels. The first opportunity was when Bate ran into Ruger's men on the pike, but was pulled back by Cheatham. The second was when Stanley stood alone at Spring Hill before Cheatham's entire corps; this was wasted when for some reason the attack never went in. The last chance to strike the Yankees came after dark, as they marched unimpeded along the pike; none of the Confederate commanders seemed terribly interested in the reports of Federal troops moving along the pike, so this chance was blown too. "Perhaps great results would have been achieved by an assault on Spring Hill," Losson wrote, "since one did not take place, we can never know."¹⁶¹ Thus Losson seemed to suggest that maybe, just maybe, had things gone a bit differently, had the Confederates taken advantage of just one of the above three opportunities, the story of Spring Hill might

¹⁶¹Losson, 209, 212, 216.

have been very different indeed.

More important for our purposes, however, is Losson's analysis of the blame for the fiasco. Instead of putting the blame heavily on one man, as had earlier writers, Losson suggested that "what November 29 really demonstrated was inefficiency within the high command." Consequently, he had much criticism for both Hood and Cheatham's performances at Spring Hill. Cheatham, Losson said, was a poor corps commander at Spring Hill; he failed to show the initiative required of a corps leader. As a division commander, Cheatham had been used to following the orders of his superiors; at the corps level, he had both greater freedom and greater responsibilities. At Spring Hill, he had been operating independently for all intents and purposes, and had failed to prove equal to the task. He failed to remain in contact with Hood, thus leaving his commander in the dark as to what was transpiring at the town; he apparently took it upon himself to call off the attack on Stanley's position; he seemed uninterested in reports of Yankees moving on the pike; he may even, if the rumors of the wild party at the Peters' house are true (Losson mentioned them in his account), have absented himself from his command during the night. In short, concluded Losson, Cheatham failed to perform as an effective corps commander should.¹⁶²

Part of the problem, Losson proposed, was Cheatham's

¹⁶²*Ibid.*, 207, 212-213, 216-217.

fixation on the town itself rather than on the turnpike. The original plan had been to strike the turnpike, but when Cleburne's division was struck in flank near the town, both Cleburne and Cheatham's fighting blood was raised, and attention shifted to Spring Hill itself. This situation explained why Cheatham, both at the time and in his postwar account, paid little or no attention to events on the pike. Not even Bate's encounter with the Yankees could divert him from his objective of taking the town. This fixation undoubtedly aided Schofield's escape to Franklin.¹⁶³

The major reason for the Confederate failure at Spring Hill, however, according to Losson, was the almost total lack of communication between Hood and Cheatham that day. Those messages Cheatham sent to Hood were both sporadic and misleading; Hood, meanwhile, retired to the rear and thus showed little inclination to keep informed of events at the town. Cheatham, again, was probably too fixated on assaulting the town to keep Hood informed of what he was doing; Hood was most likely too tired to supervise things. Losson criticized Hood greatly for this inaction; if Spring Hill was really as important as Hood later claimed, he should have personally directed the entire operation, made sure the pike was held, and relieved Cheatham if he was performing as ineptly as Hood later accused him of doing. In Losson's opinion, at any rate, much of

¹⁶³*Ibid.*, 216.

the confusion of November 29 might have been prevented (and victory perhaps been achieved?) "if only Cheatham and Hood had dispatched couriers and staff officers at more frequent intervals."¹⁶⁴ To Losson, that was the real mistake made at Spring Hill.

Modern historians of the Civil War, as we have seen, have jumped into the debate over Spring Hill, just as the men they are writing about did over a century ago. Although the above is particularly true of historians of Confederate affairs, some Union historians have added their opinions to the controversy. One of these historians was James L. McDonough, the most recent and most skilled of John Schofield's biographers. As Schofield was a prominent actor in the drama of November 29, 1864, the Spring Hill incident occupied an important part of McDonough's narrative. Yet McDonough's primary purpose was not to resolve the controversy, or even to add his own opinion, but to present a more favorable picture of John Schofield's role in the whole mess.

John Schofield, though he later went on to command the United States Army (as had Grant, Sherman, and Sheridan before him) and compiled an impressive combat record in the Civil War, is virtually unknown today outside of Civil War historical circles. He spent most of the war in administrative duties and backwater areas, and played only

¹⁶⁴*Ibid.*, 213, 217.

a minor role in the Atlanta Campaign; as McDonough noted, he finally gained a measure of fame in the Franklin and Nashville campaign, of which Spring Hill was a part. Schofield considered his performance during that campaign (and particularly at Spring Hill) an excellent demonstration of his tactical skill; this pride can be detected in his account of the campaign in Forty-six Years in the Army. Yet, in the present century, Schofield was portrayed as a bungler who triumphed only because he was lucky and because Hood was a bigger idiot than he was. This unfair assessment came about for reasons which McDonough went over in an article in the August 1974 issue of Civil War Times Illustrated. The first was an oversimplification of the situation at Spring Hill. This has been gone over already in these pages; suffice it to say that McDonough subscribed to the now generally accepted idea that Spring Hill was not the last great chance the South had to win the war. If the premise that Spring Hill was a lost opportunity is accepted, then it logically follows that Schofield miscalculated and escaped only due to the even greater bumbling of Hood and Cheatham. The second reason for Schofield's unfavorable image was his intrigues against George Thomas at Nashville. Schofield was accused by supporters of Thomas of intriguing with Grant to replace Thomas at Nashville. Although Schofield vigorously denied this accusation then and later, McDonough admitted that

there was "considerable circumstantial evidence" to support these allegations; apparently Schofield had been sending reports to Grant that were critical of Thomas for not moving more rapidly against Hood.¹⁶⁵

George Thomas has generally fared well at the hands of modern writers; consequently, it was easy for some authors to paint Schofield as a bumbling idiot, a villain who got his just desserts. In the history-as-morality-play world of the early twentieth century, such an interpretation fit well with the historians' sense of justice. In addition, this view of Spring Hill and Schofield's role in it made it easier for Southerners to accept the failure at Spring Hill; it was simply more reassuring to think that they had had a chance, but blew it, rather than have to live with being outwitted by the villainous Schofield. Thus, wrote McDonough, the legend of the "lost opportunity" grew, nourished and fostered by partisans of both sides, until historians such as Stanley Horn found out the truth.¹⁶⁶

In Schofield's defense, McDonough pointed out the many wise and astute decisions Schofield made during the course of the campaign, particularly at Spring Hill. Schofield, McDonough noted, had been first in his class in

¹⁶⁵James L. McDonough, "John McAllister Schofield," Civil War Times Illustrated XIII (August 1974), 14-15; Warner, Blue, 425-426, 656n.

¹⁶⁶McDonough, CWTI, 15-16.

infantry tactics at West Point, and his dispositions on the morning of November 29 reflected that fact; his men were positioned to meet both a move on Spring Hill and a sweep down the north bank of the Duck River. He also mentioned Schofield's personal direction of affairs throughout the day, in contrast to Hood. Thus McDonough gives a very favorable picture of Schofield's activities at Spring Hill.¹⁶⁷

Regarding Spring Hill itself, McDonough reiterated the point that Hood simply did not have enough time to get sufficient troops into line to do much of anything, and consequently did not have as great a chance for success as previously thought. Still, he stopped short of saying Hood's plan could not have worked; a more capable leader, or even a healthy Hood, he mused, might have been able to take charge of things, eliminate delays, and get the Rebels organized in time to assault Stanley before Schofield could arrive. The best move for Hood, McDonough theorized, was to take position on the pike north of town, a move Schofield apparently feared the most. However, Schofield still could have gotten to Franklin by moving around to the west; furthermore, he could have stood and fought at Spring Hill. This last was actually a viable option, as McDonough pointed out; Stanley had a good position, and Schofield would have had the advantage of the

¹⁶⁷ Ibid., 14; McDonough, Schofield, 107-109, 113-114.

defensive. In addition, Schofield had all his artillery with him. In short, it would have been just like Franklin, only further south. Additionally, if Hood's intention was to merely outrace Schofield to Nashville, as Thomas Connelly argued, then Schofield would have been in an ideal position to pursue and trap Hood between himself and Thomas. In conclusion, McDonough wrote, "it seems clear that the Rebel's [Hood's] chances of cutting off Schofield at Spring Hill were not nearly as good as has generally been supposed in Confederate legend."¹⁶⁸

Just a few months ago, a new book was published that gave an account of the Spring Hill Affair (and the campaign of which it was a part), Wiley Sword's Embrace an Angry Wind (1992). Sword's book was extremely well written, drawing almost exclusively on primary source material to present a fascinating and greatly detailed account of this controversial incident. In his work, Sword presented some interesting interpretations of Spring Hill. As in most modern accounts, Sword spread the blame for the fiasco around the Confederate high command, citing "lackluster personal performance and horrendous communications" among Hood, Cheatham, Brown, and others as causing the defeat there. His account differed from most of the recent accounts of Spring Hill, however, in two key areas. First, he seemed to believe that Hood actually did have a good

¹⁶⁸McDonough, Schofield, 111-113.

chance for success at Spring Hill, discounting the notion that the Unionists simply got there first with more men. He wrote at one point that "survival of the [Union] army was at stake" and that Hood's plan was "bold . . . , with its success dependent only on proper execution." In Sword's view, then, Spring Hill was indeed a great "lost opportunity." Secondly, Sword portrayed Schofield as a bumbler, caught off guard at Spring Hill, who only escaped due to even greater Confederate bungling and Stanley's heroic actions. He described Schofield as a "rogue banker with the glint of evil in his eye," implied he owed his high rank to political connections, and depicted him as confused and indecisive at Spring Hill. He also discounted Schofield's tactical prowess, and asserted, on the contrary, that Schofield's inexperience in combat led him to act indecisively and commit such errors as stringing out his army over a large area. Thus Sword's account, the newest entry into the historiography of Spring Hill, revived some of the old interpretations of that event.¹⁶⁹

By now it should be clear that there are a myriad of opinions on the Spring Hill Affair, its importance, and whose fault it was that the Confederates failed there. It can be argued convincingly, however, that Spring Hill was most certainly not the last great opportunity for the Confederacy to win the war. Hood's plan was a good one,

¹⁶⁹Sword, 97, 99-100, 102, 107, 109, 129, 145, 152-153.

but he simply did not have time to carry it out. With sunset at 4:30 p.m. that day, and darkness following shortly thereafter, there wasn't enough daylight for the Confederates to mount a serious effort against Stanley's position. Furthermore, Schofield had the advantage; he had a shorter march route over a hard-surfaced road, while Hood had to march a great distance over broken and muddy ground. Even with Hood's head start, Schofield still beat him to the town. Even if Hood had somehow managed to take Spring Hill and/or the pike to Nashville, Schofield's force could have marched around him to the west and then proceeded on to either Franklin or Nashville. It is interesting to note, as Stanley Horn did, that Nathan Bedford Forrest never spoke of Spring Hill as a lost opportunity; since he was the first Confederate commander there, he was certainly in a position to know. Schofield, as has been said earlier, followed Forrest's famous maxim and got there first with the most men.¹⁷⁰ It was as simple as that; consequently, later accounts of the golden opportunity that was muffed have been greatly exaggerated.

Yet the recent debunking of the Spring Hill legend by Civil War historians does not diminish its importance, for the real significance of Spring Hill lies not in who was to blame nor in whether or not a great victory was bungled away. Rather, what happened at Spring Hill so

¹⁷⁰Horn, "Spring Hill," 32.

long ago was symptomatic of larger problems within the Confederate high command in the Western Theater. Interpreted in this light, the Spring Hill Affair takes on increased significance in the larger picture of Confederate collapse in the last months of the war.

Consider the following. For decades now, it has been generally accepted among scholars of the Civil War that the outcome of the war was determined in the West. The Eastern Theater, with marquee names like Lee and Jackson, has traditionally commanded more attention, both then and now, mainly due to its proximity to the two opposing capitals and the greatness of the above-mentioned generals. Yet it was in the West that the decisive campaigns of the war were fought. The major river systems--Tennessee, Cumberland, and Mississippi, to name the most important--were in the west, and the battles and campaigns fought to take control of them were among the most decisive of the war: Forts Henry and Donelson (the first major Union victories of the war), and Vicksburg. In the vast region west of the Appalachians was the heartland of the South: the rich agricultural regions of Georgia, Alabama, and Mississippi; port cities like Mobile and New Orleans; industrial centers (or what, in the predominantly agricultural South, passed for industrial centers) like Selma; major cities like Montgomery, New Orleans, and Atlanta. Clearly, the defense of these areas was paramount if the Confederacy was to

survive; conversely, the Union had to capture these areas to win.

Modern war has shown us that unity and efficiency of command is needed for success; the Prussian General Staff system, adopted by almost all modern armies, was created to provide such unity and efficiency. The Confederate States of America, faced with defending a huge geographic area with limited resources, desperately needed a well-functioning, efficient high command to make the task of defense easier; sadly, they did not get it. Steven Woodworth, in Jefferson Davis and His Generals: The Failure of Confederate Command in the West (1990), examined the failings of the Confederate high command in the West, primarily through the actions of Jefferson Davis. Woodworth's landmark study divided the war, and Davis' corresponding performance as Commander-in-Chief, into four chronological periods. Without going into too much detail, the gist of Woodworth's analysis was that, after "a period of fairly adequate and sometimes excellent performance, lasting until the battle of Shiloh," things in the West started going downhill and stayed that way until it was too late to stop them, despite Davis' "brave but unavailing perseverance." Through that period, there were struggles to find the right man to command in the West; Beauregard, Joe Johnston, and Bragg all were found wanting, and the situation progressively declined. By the time of the Atlanta Campaign, "the

situation in the high command of the Army of Tennessee . . . was almost a preprogrammed failure."¹⁷¹ Consequently, Atlanta fell.

The narrative in the first three chapters of this work was intended, among other things, to illustrate how the above-described situation had not changed at all at the time of Hood's offensive. Indeed, the high command of the Confederate Army in the West after the fall of Atlanta was on the verge of collapse. Hood's senior corps commander was gone; many of Hood's officers were calling for his removal; the army wanted Johnston back; Hood had an inadequate staff, and lacked a Chief of Staff to smoothly coordinate the business of the army. Furthermore, Hood himself was sadly unfit for command; although a brave soldier who had covered himself with glory on many a field, his grave wounds pointed to an honored retirement instead of active field command. Woodworth argued that Davis should not have appointed Hood to corps command in the Army of Tennessee, but instead should have elevated either Cleburne or Cheatham (the latter of whom later got a corps command). That way, he would have had a better option open when he had to replace Johnston; Cleburne, arguably the best division leader on either side in that war, would have been a candidate for army command. Hood, though, due to the personnel moves that Davis did make, was the best man

¹⁷¹Woodworth, 305-312.

available for the job when it needed to be filled; other men, who would have been much better at army command, had not yet been promoted high enough to be eligible.¹⁷²

Despite everything, Hood's plan to operate against Sherman's communications was a good one, in keeping with the advice of the German military theorist Henrich von Bulow that "the best manner of covering a country lying behind . . . is to fall upon the flanks of the enemy advancing, and by this bold movement change defense into an attack." Hood's idol Robert E. Lee had followed this idea often, resulting in the campaigns of Second Manassas, Antietam, and Gettysburg; Hood attempted to duplicate these moves. What Hood failed to realize, though, was that Lee's successes were partially due to excellent communication and adequate staff work, things which were sorely lacking in the West. Davis' attempt to impose some unity and coordination via Beauregard's Military Division of the West failed miserably, due to Beauregard's lack of any real authority and Hood's complete disregard for what authority Beauregard did have. The result was almost a comedy of errors as Hood kept changing plans without telling his superior, who often had to go hunting for army headquarters. Still, Hood's plan did work for a while, and might have worked better had he stayed with it and followed Sherman south; as it was, he only succeeding in briefly diverting

¹⁷² Ibid., 312-313.

Sherman from his plan to march to the sea.¹⁷³

When Hood decided to turn north and try to reconquer Tennessee, however, he ensured his defeat. The Union forces now had the advantage of the defensive, and the inadequacies of Confederate command doomed the expedition to failure. Hood's plans for the expedition were vague; to this day it is not known for certain whether he wanted to cut off and destroy Schofield, or simply get around him and go to Nashville. He was subjected to numerous delays, most of which he could do nothing about. Forrest's troopers, however, could have linked up with him earlier had Forrest been adequately informed of what Hood expected of him; the failure to do this was due to a lack of communication among the Confederate generals in the area. Furthermore, the relationship between Beauregard and Hood broke down so completely that they set up their headquarters on opposite sides of the Tennessee River and stopped communicating. Hood virtually ignored all of Beauregard's dispatches, and Beauregard finally gave up in disgust and left the area, leaving Hood to his own devices. The breakdown in command was complete.¹⁷⁴

¹⁷³ Ibid., 313; Richard E. Beringer, Herman Hattaway, Archer Jones, and William N. Still, Jr., Why The South Lost the Civil War (Athens, Georgia: University of Georgia Press, 1986), 324-325.

¹⁷⁴ Woodworth, 313; Beringer, et. al., 329-330; Brian Steel Wills, A Battle From the Start: The Life of Nathan Bedford Forrest (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, Inc., 1992), 274-275.

With all the problems in the Confederate high command, it is really not surprising that a failure of the magnitude of Spring Hill occurred. All the things that were wrong with the high command in the West--lack of direction, lack of communication, inadequate leadership, poor staff work--came to a climax at Spring Hill. All these factors contributed to the lackluster performance of Confederate arms there; while it is doubtful that the Confederates had a chance to win anyway, a better performance by the high command would certainly have helped. The Spring Hill Affair, then, can more properly be seen as a symbol of the collapse of Confederate fortunes in the West in late 1864, than as the last great opportunity the South had to win.

The Spring Hill controversy will never be fully resolved; historians and history buffs have been debating it for decades, and will continue to do so, and more studies such as this one will be written on the subject. The best explanation for the whole mess, though, was given by an old black preacher who had been a slave at the Thompson House, where Hood had his headquarters that fateful night. His theory was succinct and to the point: "God just didn't want 'at war to go on no longer."¹⁷⁵ Perhaps, in the final analysis, that is all that need be said.

¹⁷⁵McDonough and Connelly, 37.

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