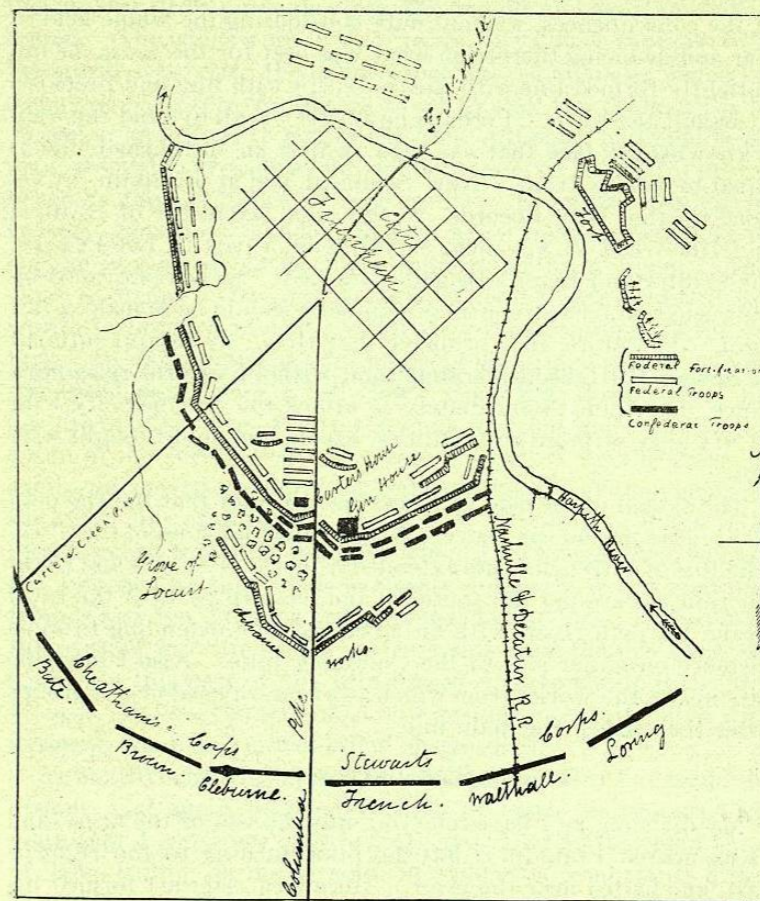


30th. We were up before the morning star. My division was ordered to take the advance to Franklin in *pursuit* of Schofield, for now every one knew he passed by us while we were dreaming. Artillery and wagons, infantry and horse, all gone on to Franklin! When I reached the pike I met Gen. Hood, and he exclaimed; "Well, Gen. French, we have missed the great opportunity of the war!" "Yes," I replied, "I am told the Yankees passed along all night and lit their pipes at our camp fires." Of course my answer was a *little* figurative, but some soldiers heard it, and, taking it literally, it soon spread through the ranks.

The idea of a commanding general reaching his objective point, that required prompt and immediate action and skillful tactics, to turn away and go to bed surpasses the understanding. The truth is, Hood had been outgeneraled, and Stanley with the Federal troops got to Spring Hill before Hood did. What information Hood received of the enemy, when he reached the pike, if any, no one will ever know. Why did he not in person form his line of battle and attack the enemy at Spring Hill? Although we yielded the right of way, the enemy must have been a little nervous, because the slight firing done by Ross's men caused the enemy to abandon about thirty wagons, and I could not but observe what a number of *desks* containing official vouchers had been *thrown* from the wagons by the roadside. Had there been a cavalry force with artillery north of Spring Hill and near the pike to have shelled the road, there would no doubt have been a stampede and a wreck of wagons.

My division overtook the enemy near Franklin, drawn up on a range of hills about two miles from the town, and when I began to deploy my troops, to advance a line on their flank and rear, they fell back to the town.

I rode with some members of my staff to the top of a high wooded hill, from which I could look down on the surrounding country. Before me were the town, the green plains around it; the line of defensive works, the forts and parks of artillery on the heights across the river, long lines of blue-clad infantry strengthening their lines, and trains moving over the river. While I sat at the root of a giant tree a long time surveying the scene before me, I called to mind that *never* yet had any one seen the Confederates assigned to me driven from any position, much less from defensive works, by assault, and I inferred that it would require a great sacrifice of life to drive the veteran Federals from their lines, and thought if Hood could only ride up



BATTLE OF FRANKLIN.

here and look calmly down on the battle array before him he would not try to take the town by assault. But the offspring of Hood's conception at Columbia came stillborn at Spring Hill, caused by an oversleep. Chagrin at this mishap and awakened at the consequences, without duly considering the whole field of war and deducing therefrom what was best for the *cause*, he impatiently formed line with the two corps with him and prepared to assault the town. Perhaps he forgot to call to mind the well-acknowledged fact that *one* man behind an intrenched line is equal to *five* in front. Now Schofield had at Franklin, by report in the War Records, 25,420 men, exclusive of cavalry; and Hood had 21,874 men, exclusive of a part of Lee's Corps, the cavalry and Ector's Brigade detached. So any one can compute what Hood's strength, or numbers, should be to make a fair fight. Therefore, it is probable that Hood, by disappointment at Spring Hill, inconsiderately, and without careful reconnoissance, determined immediately to attack the fortified city with 21,874 men, without any artillery, except two guns brought with him.

The sketch of the field of Franklin will show that the Harpeth river in its meandering covers three of the four sides of the town. The line of intrenchments extended from the Nashville and Decatur railroad around the southern and western parts of the town to the Harpeth river, with an advanced line extending to some distance on either side of the Columbia pike. Also I saw rifle pits inside the works from which a fire was opened on our troops after they scaled the main line.

THE BATTLE.

My division, as I have told you, was the van of the army, and as we neared Franklin it left the pike, turning to the right or east, and halted near the river. Here Gen. Stewart formed his corps in order of battle by placing Loring on the right, Walthall in the center, and French on the left. This brought me nearest to the Columbia pike, as will be shown. Cheatham's Corps was formed with his right resting on or near the pike, which brought Cleburne's right a half mile distant on my left. We were thus formed, as it were, in a circle like the felloes of a wheel; and each division marching to one common center caused them to overlap before reaching the enemy, because

the circle became smaller and smaller. My division consisted of only two brigades, Cockrell's and Sears's. Ector's Brigade was on detached duty. Stewart's Corps, being in advance, was first formed, and we rested. The sun was sinking in the west, the day was drawing to its close, the tumult and excitement had ceased. The winds were in their caves, the silence that precedes the storm was *felt*; the calm before the earthquake which by some *law* of nature forewarns fowls to seek the fields, birds to fly away, and cattle to run to the hills, although withheld from man, seemed to presage an impending calamity, as painful in suspense as the disclosure of any reality. From this feeling of anxiety, sometimes incident to men when held in readiness to engage in a great battle, there came relief by a signal. And what a change! Twenty thousand gallant Confederates at the word of command moved proudly over the open plain to the attack. It was a glorious and imposing sight, and one so seldom witnessed, as all were in full view. Soon my division came under the artillery fire of both the guns in front and those in position in the forts across the river, undaunted by the crash of shells, all moved gallantly on and met the fire of the enemy in the outer line of defense. It was only the work of a few minutes to crush the outer line, and when it broke and tried to gain the main works they were so closely followed by our men that friends and foe, pursuer and pursued, in one mass, rushed over the parapet into the town. During this time the fire from the enemy on this part of the line ceased so as to admit their own troops. But the Confederates now inside were confronted with a reserve force and either killed or captured.

As our division overlapped, immediately another line made the assault, and again the smoke cloud of battle so obscured the plain that I could see only beneath the cloud an incessant sheet of flame rolling on the ground, in which the combatants flitted about like the pictures of demons in Tophet. The shock was too violent to last. Its force was soon spent. The fire slackened, and as the smoke was wafted away in broken clouds, the sight was appalling! What a ghastly scene was in front of the gin-house! The dead and wounded were visible for a moment, only to be again enveloped in the cloud of battle beneath which the Angel of Death garnered his harvest. "On! on! forward! forward!" was the cry. It was death to stop, and safety was in a

measure found in the ditch beneath the fire from the parapet. There thousands remained all night; others were repulsed and driven back. My division was re-formed beyond the range of musketry, but exposed to artillery in front and from the fort across the river.

• Gen. Sears's men, those that were repulsed, fell back with some order, but Cockrell's Brigade had nearly all disappeared. Now and then a few came out. Cockrell was wounded. Col. E. Gates came out riding with his bridle reins in his mouth, being wounded in both hands. I was on foot. My horse, during the continued shelling at Kennesaw Mountain, took a dislike to shells, and manifested it on this occasion by using only his hind feet when walking. I had to give him to the orderly to lead.

Gen. Walthall came out at the time we did. He rode up to me, and as I put my hand on his horse's shoulder to talk with him, the animal reared up, plunged violently forward, and fell dead, throwing the General far over his head. The horse had been shot and that was the death struggle. We fell back, and bivouacked just out of range of fire. It was now growing dark; but still the battle raged furiously at intervals till near midnight, especially on the west side of the pike, mainly between our troops in the ditch, and on the captured parapet, with the enemy on inside lines; and the bright glare of musketry with the flashes of artillery lit up the surroundings with seemingly fitful volcanic fires, presenting a night scene frightfully wild and weird.

Gen. S. D. Lee's Corps and the artillery had arrived, and after dark orders were given by Gen. Hood that after midnight or near dawn one hundred rounds would be fired by every piece of artillery, and then the troops *would assault the works again* over the same ground. Festus assigned a reason for St. Paul's madness, but no one attributed Hood's madness to that cause when *this* order was given.* However, when no reply was made to our guns it was discovered that Schofield had, with the main body of his army, abandoned Franklin and was on his way to Nashville.

It was a terrible battle. One of my brigades, Cockrell's, made

* See S. P. Lee's "Brief History of the United States." It confirms my diary. Also book of Gen. J. D. Cox, United States army, and War Records, and Maj. Sanders's letter, on page 340. Also letter of Rev. Thomas R. Harkham, page 342.

the assault with 696 officers and men, and when it was over he had 277 men in his brigade. His loss was, killed, 19 officers and 79 men; wounded, 31 officers and 198 men; missing, 13 officers and 79 men; total, 419, which was over sixty per cent. The missing were captured inside the works, as stated by some who escaped. Sears's Brigade met with less loss, because it stopped a few minutes in the exterior line before moving to the main line. There were twelve general officers killed and wounded and one taken prisoner.*

Hood's official report puts our loss at 4,500. I believe that this grand charge of 21,800 men, for a mile or more over an open plain, all in full view, was grander than any charge at Gettysburg.

After the fall of Vicksburg, and the battle of Gettysburg had been fought, and enlistments in the Confederate service had practically ceased, and the exchange of prisoners stopped, as I have stated, it certainly behooved the government and the generals in command of the armies in the East and in the West to husband their *men* and resources. I know this was the opinion of Gen. J. E. Johnston, and it was perhaps, in a measure, attributable to this that Gen. Hood superseded him in command of the army then at Atlanta, for he had the reputation of being a "fighter," and when put in command had to sustain that reputation. Gen. Grant was intrusted with the exchange of prisoners and (to take the ignominy off the government) discontinued the exchange,†

* Gen. John Adams, of Loring's Division, was killed about two hundred yards east of the ginhouse, and his body was removed to near the ginhouse by order of Col. Casement, United States army, who put a guard over it. So after the battle it was not found where he fell. This led to the belief that Loring's Division extended to near the ginhouse.

† It has been a source of regret to me that I was unable to write an official report of the battle of Franklin immediately after it was ended, but on account of the condition of my eyes it was put off; and now I wonder why I did not have my chief of staff write it under my dictation, but so it is: amidst the confusion following the battle it was neglected. I might add here that it was years before my eyes were well, though treated by a specialist.

† The following is an extract from a letter dated August 18, 1864, written at City Point by Gen. U. S. Grant to Gen. B. F. Butler, agent of exchange at Fortress Monroe, Va.:

"It is hard on our men held in Southern prisons not to exchange them, but it is humanity to those left in the ranks to fight our battles. Every

and thus all increase of our fighting force ceased. Therefore the men in the army had become *the Confederacy*, and to them the power was virtually transmitted, and the commanders of armies held the destiny of the nation in their hands. No dictator appeared! Wisdom called for the Fabian policy; heedless of her voice, the *third* day after being in command he fought the battle of Peach Tree Creek. Two days after this (on the 22d) he fought the battle of Atlanta; and on the 28th, a third battle, without a victory, and all the time the siege of the city continued. The men he lost diminished his power. The loss to the enemy was nothing. Men cost nothing, and they could get all they wanted. Next came Jonesboro, and then Allatoona, both reducing his strength. And now came the battle of Franklin, where he lost about 5,000 more men. Why were the lines of the enemy assaulted at Franklin? Was it a strategical point? No. Were there in the town magazines or army stores? No. Was there anything of such value as to justify 21,874 men assaulting a town defended by 25,420 veteran troops? No! Schofield was crossing his teams as rapidly as possible to join Gen. Thomas at Nashville.

I was asked by Gen. T. J. Wood, U. S. A. (in 1865), who was at Franklin: "Why did you fight us at Franklin, when we were getting away from there as fast as we could?" He said: "The order directing the operation of withdrawing the troops had been issued, and the officers were assembled in Schofield's office, when, to our astonishment, a cannon shot was heard, and, looking out, we saw your troops advancing. That order for evacuating the place was not changed. Our apprehension was that you would cross the river and outflank us, as you did at Spring Hill."

I thought when we arrived at Franklin that Hood, who had declined to attack a garrison of 500 men at Resaca with his

man released on parole or otherwise becomes an active soldier against us at once, either directly or indirectly. If we commence a system of exchange which liberates all prisoners taken, we will have to fight on until the whole South is exterminated. If we hold those caught, they amount to no more than dead men. At this particular time to release all Rebel prisoners North would insure Sherman's defeat, and would compromise our safety here." (See War Records, page 606, Series II., Vol. VII., Serial No. 120.)

whole army present, and did not risk an attack on the works at Decatur when garrisoned by 2,000 men, would surely not assault the town garrisoned by an army of 25,000 men, with the two army corps and one division he had with him numbering only 21,800 men. Why he gave battle when so little could be gained, except some eclat, I cannot tell. I only know that he said to Gen. A. P. Stewart that "captured dispatches told him the time had come to fight."

An army belongs to the nation that made it, and not to the general commanding it. Therefore he has no right to sacrifice it.*

*Gen. J. D. Cox, Union army, who commanded most of the troops engaged in the battle of Franklin, in his volume published describing this battle (on page 15) states that *our killed*—1,750—exceeded "Grant's at Shiloh, McClellan's in the seven days' battle, Burnside's at Fredericksburg, Rosecrans's at Stone's river or at Chickamauga, Hooker's at Chancellorsville, and were almost as many as Grant's at Cold Harbor, and nine less than the British loss at Waterloo out of 43,000 men." The killed, as I have shown at Buena Vista, is very great compared with the wounded; more than at Franklin.

Comparisons often surprise us. An examination of the "United States Army Dictionary," by C. K. Gardner, Adjutant General U. S. A., brought down to 1853, shows also that the number of the killed and wounded in the United States forces during the war with Great Britain from 1812 to 1815 were; killed, 1,045; wounded, 2,656; total 3,701. (The Creek Indian war in Georgia and Alabama omitted.)

Again, the whole number of killed and wounded, from the firing of the first gun on the banks of the Rio Grande to Buena Vista, from Vera Cruz to the City of Mexico, thence to the shore of the Pacific and in California, was only 4,808.

And so the facts of history show that out of the 21,800 Confederate soldiers engaged in the battle of Franklin more were killed, in a few hours, than during either of the two preceding wars. In the Confederate war the United States lost, killed, 99,183, and from disease, 171,806.

The dispatch that Hood captured just before the battle, dated November 29, 1864, 3.30 A.M., will be found in Gen. Cox's book (page 25). There is no information in it to justify Hood in making the assault. Thomas merely "tells Schofield to fall back from Columbia to Franklin, and that Gen. A. J. Smith's command had *not* arrived in Nashville," etc.

MAJ. D. W. SANDERS'S LETTER.

May 6, 1897.

Gen. S. G. French, Pensacola, Fla.

My Dear General: In answer to your letter of the 29th ult., in which you say that in recent correspondence with Gen. A. P. Stewart he says that he

Mrs. S. P. Lee states (on page 493) that "orders were given to carry the inner fortifications at daylight."

has no recollection of Gen. Hood's order for the artillery at Franklin to be put in position, and to open on the enemy about midnight, and when it ceased the infantry was to charge the lines over the same ground that they did in the first attack. In this letter you also ask me to give my recollections about this matter, and if I remember the order.

I remember very distinctly that the order was given, and you communicated it to me as the adjutant general of your division upon your return that night—to wit, November 30, 1864—from Gen. A. P. Stewart's headquarters. This order I delivered to the officers in command of two of your brigades; your third brigade, which was Ector's Brigade, at that time was on detached service guarding the trains in the rear of the two corps which charged the enemy's works November 30, 1864, at Franklin, Tenn.

The artillery had arrived from Columbia, Tenn., and was placed in position to execute this order of Gen. Hood's. Lieut. Col. Llewellyn Hoxton was in command of the battalions of artillery. At the time indicated in the order Col. Hoxton's artillery opened on Franklin with a heavy cannonade, to which there was no response, and it was therefore evident that Schofield had successfully withdrawn his forces and retreated to Nashville.

In September, 1886, I met Col. Hoxton at the Episcopalian school, four or five miles from Alexandria, Va., and had a conversation with him, and he said to me that I was entirely correct in my recollection of this particular order, and that he was in command of the artillery, and in the execution of his order opened upon Franklin, and no reply from the enemy satisfied him that Schofield had retreated, and he ceased firing, and scouts were sent to the works, which they found abandoned, and penetrated the village of Franklin to the crossing of the Harpeth river; and immediately thereafter a great many soldiers, under the command of their officers, went through the streets and alleys of Franklin, and it was thus ascertained to be a fact that the enemy had retreated.

I remember distinctly the comments of the officers of your division upon the delivery of Gen. Hood's order to them, that they would obey promptly and cheerfully, but that it looked to them as the highest desperation to undertake to charge the works under cover of this artillery fire, and carry them at the point of the bayonet. The fact that this order was given, and the circumstances surrounding Hood's troops at that time, are indelibly impressed upon my memory, and I have no hesitancy whatever in saying distinctly and unequivocally that the order was given, and that it was communicated by me to the commanders of the brigades of your division.*

Yours sincerely,

D. W. SANDERS.

*The only official report I know of, which in any manner refers to this order, and this inferentially, is that of Gen. C. L. Stevenson, in which he says:

"During the night (November 30, 1864) this division was put in position preparatory to an assault which it was announced was to be made by the entire army at daybreak." (See War Records, Battle of Franklin.)

D. W. S.

The Rev. Thomas B. Markham, chaplain to Featherstone's Brigade, writes: "Our artillery was moved to within point-blank range of the enemy's works, . . . to open fire on them at earliest daybreak, after which a general assault was to be made by the infantry," etc. (Page 272, *Confederate Veteran*, June Number, 1899.)

NOTE.

It has been a source of much regret to me that I was unable to write an official report of the battle of Franklin immediately after it occurred; but on account of the condition of my eyes it was put off from time to time, and now I wonder why I did not have my adjutant general do it for me. But so it was, under the sorrow for lost friends and comrades, and the immediate pursuit of the enemy to Nashville, it was neglected. Besides, as is usual, no report was called for by the commander of the army; and so with many it has become only a memory of a great and uncalled-for disaster to the Confederate cause—a battle fought against great odds, without any compensating value if successful.