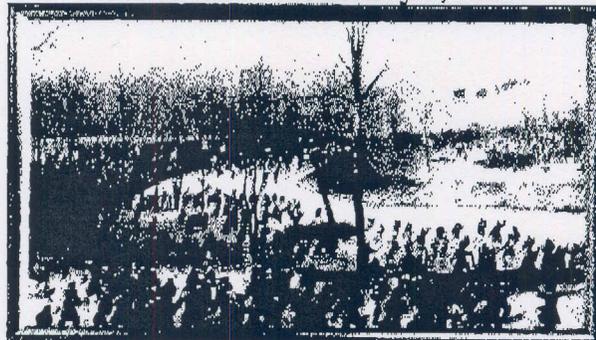


The Battle of Stones River (Murfreesboro)

December 31 - January 2, 1863



After Gen. Braxton Bragg's defeat at Perryville, Kentucky, October 8, 1862, he and his Confederate Army of the Mississippi retreated, reorganized, and were redesignated as the Army of Tennessee. They then advanced to Murfreesboro, Tennessee, and prepared to go into winter quarters. Maj. Gen. William S. Rosecrans's Union Army of the Cumberland followed Bragg from Kentucky to Nashville. Rosecrans left Nashville on December 26, with about 45,000 men, to defeat Bragg's army. He found Bragg's army on December 29 and went into camp that night, within hearing distance of the Rebels. At dawn on the 31st, Bragg's men attacked the Union right flank. The Confederates had driven the Union line back to the Nashville Pike by 10:00 am but there it held. Union reinforcements arrived from Rosecrans's left in the late forenoon to bolster the stand and before fighting stopped that day, the Federals had established a new, strong line. On New Years Day, both armies marked time. Bragg surmised that Rosecrans would now withdraw, but the next morning he was still in position. In late afternoon, Bragg hurled a division at a Union division that, on January 1, had crossed Stones River and had taken up a strong position on the bluff east of the river. The Confederates drove most of the Federals back across McFadden's Ford, but with the assistance of artillery, the Federals repulsed the attack, compelling the Rebels to retire to their original position. Bragg left the field on the January 4-5, retreating to Shelbyville and Tullahoma, Tennessee. Rosecrans did not pursue, but as the Confederates retired, he claimed the victory. Stones River boosted Union morale. The Confederates had been thrown back in the east, west, and in the Trans-Mississippi.

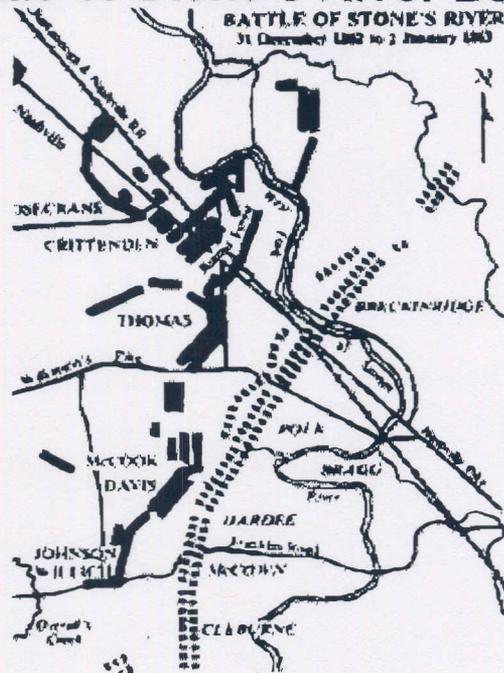
Battle Description	A more detailed description of the battle than provided above plus a map.
The Battle of Stone's River	Article by G. C. Kniffin, Lieut. Colonel, U. S. V., Of General Crittenden's Staff. It has a Union slant and was taken from <i>Battles and Leaders of the Civil War</i> .
The Battle of Stone's River (Union View)	Another Union view by Henry M. Cist, Brevet Brigadier-General U. S. V, from his book, <i>The Army of the Cumberland</i> .
The Advance to Murfreesboro	Still another chapter from Cist's "The Army of Cumberland."
The Battle of Murfreesboro (Confederate View)	Now a little something from the Confederate view. A chapter taken from the Tennessee volume of the <i>Confederate Military History</i> .

From the Official Records

Summary of Principal Events	Taken from the Official Records, provides a summary of the events from Dec. 26, '62 - Jan. 5, '63.
Order of Battle (Union)	Organization of the Fourteenth Army Corps or the Army of the Cumberland
Order of Battle (Confederate)	Organization of the Army of Tennessee

Official Reports

The Battle of Stone's River Battle Map



[RETURN TO STONE'S RIVER BATTLE DESCRIPTION PAGE](#)

Battle of Stones River Summary of Principal Events

Dec. 26, 1862	Skirmish at Franklin, Tenn.
	Skirmish at Nolensville, Tenn.
	Skirmish at Knob Gap, Tenn.
Dec. 26-27, 1862	Skirmish at La Vergne, Tenn.
Dec. 27, 1862	Skirmish on the Jefferson Pike, at Stewart's Creek Bridge, Tenn.
	Skirmish at Triune, Tenn.
	Skirmish at Franklin, Tenn.
	Skirmish on the Murfreesborough pike, at Stewart's Creek Bridge, Tenn.
Dec. 29, 1862	Skirmish at Lizzard's, between Triune and Murfreesborough, Tenn.
	Skirmish at Wilkinson's Cross-Roads, Tenn.
Dec. 29-30, 1862	Skirmishes near Murfreesborough, Tenn.
Dec. 30, 1862	Skirmish at Jefferson, Tenn.
	Skirmish at La Vergne, Tenn.
	Skirmish at Rock Spring, Tenn.
	Skirmish at Nolensville, Tenn.
Dec. 31, 1862	Skirmish at Overall's Creek, Tenn.
Dec. 31, 1862-Jan. 3, 1863	Battle of Stone's River, or Murfreesborough, Tenn.
Jan. 1, 1863	Skirmishes at Stewart's Creek and La Vergne, Tenn.
Jan 3, 1863	Skirmish at the Insane Asylum, or Cox's Hill, Tenn.
Jan 4, 1863	Skirmish on the Manchester pike, Tenn.
	Skirmish at Murfreesborough, Tenn.
Jan. 5, 1863	Murfreesborough occupied by Union forces.
	Skirmish at Lytle's Creek, on the Manchester pike, Tenn.
	Skirmish on the Shelbyville pike, Tenn.

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The Ten Costliest Battles of the Civil War (Data)

Page 3 of 4

Confederate Forces Engaged: 48,527
Union Forces Engaged: 75,896
Winner: Confederacy
Casualties: 25,261 (16,054 Union and 9,197 Confederate)

#8**Battle of Stone's River****Date: December 31, 1862**

Location: Tennessee
Confederate Commander: Braxton Bragg
Union Commander: William S. Rosecrans
Confederate Forces Engaged: 37,739
Union Forces Engaged: 41,400
Winner: Union
Casualties: 24,645 (12,906 Union and 11,739 Confederate)

#9**Battle of Shiloh****Date: April 6-7, 1862**

Location: Tennessee
Confederate Commander: Albert Sidney Johnston/ P. G. T. Beauregard
Union Commander: Ulysses S. Grant
Confederate Forces Engaged: 40,335
Union Forces Engaged: 62,682
Winner: Union
Casualties: 23,741 (13,047 Union and 10,694 Confederate)

#10**Battle of Fort Donelson****Date: February 13-16, 1862**

Location: Tennessee
Confederate Commander: John B. Floyd/Simon B. Buckner
Union Commander: Ulysses S. Grant
Confederate Forces Engaged: 21,000
Union Forces Engaged: 27,000
Winner: Union
Casualties: 19,455 (2,832 Union and 16,623 Confederate)



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Reading 1: The Soldiers and the Battle of Stones River

On the evening of December 30, 1862, Confederate Gen. Braxton Bragg and Union Gen. William S. Rosecrans and their combined total of 83,000 soldiers were camped near Murfreesboro, Tennessee. Everyone knew that a battle was only hours away and that the victor would have a strategic advantage. The bands of both armies played, each trying to drown out the other, as they could be heard for some distance. Then, one of the bands struck up "Home Sweet Home," and "as if by common consent, all other airs ceased, and the bands of both armies, far as the ear could reach, joined in the refrain."¹ Together, the soldiers sang the bittersweet song that brought back memories of home and family. Voices faded as the call came for lights out in the frosty camps.

At dawn on New Year's Eve, General Bragg took the initiative by attacking while the Union soldiers were building their fires and eating their breakfasts. One Union soldier described that morning:

The comfort of warming chilled fingers and toes and drinking a grateful cup of hot coffee outweighed for the moment any consideration of danger.... As all was so quiet, not a shot having been fired, I...walked out until the enemy's breastworks were in view and there, sure enough,... a succession of long lines of Gray were swarming over the Confederate breastworks and sweeping towards us but not yet within gun shot range.²

Then came chaos. Men began to run in every direction, for no one knew where to go. That soldier continued:

Our only salvation was to lie flat as possible, for the air seethed with the 'zip' of bullets.... It reminded me of the passage of a swarm of bees. Bullets plowed little furrows around us, throwing up grass and soil into our faces or over our bodies, and others struck with a dull 'thud' into some poor unfortunate soul.³

The Union was forced back for three miles, briefly holding several positions long enough to allow General Rosecrans to gather Union cannon and redeploy units to shield the Nashville & Chattanooga Railroad and Nashville Pike--his army's lifelines. The Confederates assaulted the Union cannon and infantry, and were met with such a volley from about 40 cannon that they were forced to beat a retreat as best they could. The Confederates attacked the cannon several times, but were beaten back until all attempts ceased for the day. Even so, the

Confederates had won so much ground that General Bragg telegraphed Richmond, Virginia, exclaiming, "God has granted us a Happy New Year."

The following day in Washington, D.C., Thursday, January 1, 1863, President Abraham Lincoln announced his Emancipation Proclamation: "I do order and declare that all persons held as slaves within any States...in rebellion against the United States shall be...forever free." No one in Murfreesboro knew of this momentous event, however. That day was spent tending to the dead and wounded that covered the ground and filled the makeshift hospitals.

But the fighting resumed the next day, at 4 p.m., near the banks of the Stones River. The Confederates made a successful attack that drove the Union troops in headlong retreat across the river. Once again, the Confederates were met by Union cannon. Firing more than 100 rounds per minute at close range, the cannon mowed down the Confederates. The roar continued for more than 10 minutes, and shook the earth under the soldiers' feet. A soldier from Florida gave the following report:

The nearest the [Yankees] came to getting me was shooting a hole in my pants and cutting hair off my right temple. I know a peck of balls passed in less than a yard of me.... The man in front of me got slightly wounded [and]...the one on my right mortally and the one on my left killed.⁴

In less than an hour, 1,800 Confederates fell dead or wounded, and their earlier successful, dashing charge suddenly turned into a retreat.

Two days later, General Bragg withdrew. In the midst of a cold winter rain, the Confederate army retreated from the field. General Rosecrans remained in Murfreesboro and built the most extensive fortification yet erected during the war. The failure of General Bragg to maintain a hold on middle Tennessee lost the Confederacy rich farmland and opened a corridor for the Union army to penetrate the Deep South, thus providing the opportunity for Union Maj. Gen. William T. Sherman's March to the Sea.

Shortly after the battle, a Union soldier wrote:

Before this battle took place, the outlook for our country was very dark and threatening. Our armies had gained no signal [important] victories for many months, and there was very great danger that some of the Nations of Europe would recognize the Southern Confederacy, and that it would be impossible for us to maintain our blockade. Had General Rosecrans' Army been defeated at the battle of Stones River...it would not only have prolonged the War,

but would have greatly increased our danger of conflicts with foreign countries.⁵

In total, more than 23,000 soldiers were killed, wounded, missing or captured. From the Union army, about 1,700 men were killed, 7,800 were wounded and 3,700 were missing—a total of 13,200 casualties from an army estimated to count 41,400. The Confederates' casualties included 1,300 killed, 7,900 wounded, and about 1,000 missing for a total of 10,200 out of an estimated army of 35,000.

A Confederate soldier wrote of the battle:

I am sick and tired of this war, and I can see no prospects of having peace for a long time to come, I don't think it will ever be stopped by fighting, the Yankees cant whip us and we can never whip them, and I see no prospect of peace unless the Yankees themselves rebell and throw down their arms, and refuse to fight any longer.⁶

Many Yankee soldiers were as tired of the fighting as this unnamed foot soldier, but they did not rebel. The war continued for more than two years after the Battle of Stones River. Finally, with two-thirds of its railroad mileage destroyed, its capital at Richmond in flames, and General Robert E. Lee blocked by General Ulysses S. Grant, the Confederate army was forced to surrender on April 9, 1865, at Appomattox Court House, Virginia.

Questions for Reading 1

1. Do you think the time of year may have affected the moods of the soldiers as they prepared for battle? How?
2. Read the following lyrics of "Home Sweet Home," written by John Howard Payne. The music was by Sir Henry Bishop. It was first performed in 1823.

'Mid pleasures and Palaces though we may roam,
Be it ever so humble there's no place like home!
A charm from the skies seems to hallow us there,
Which seek through the world, is ne'er met with elsewhere.
Home! Home, sweet sweet Home!

There's no place like Home! There's no place like Home!
Why do you think the soldiers sang "Home Sweet Home"? Do you think it would have comforted them, or made them more sad and frightened? How do you think the soldiers might have felt about their enemies who were singing the same song, but against whom they would soon be fighting?

3. Do you think Bragg should have telegraphed Richmond with news of his early success? Why or why not?

4. Why do you think both sides took January 1 off as a day to tend to their wounded and readjust their lines? Do you think that would happen in a modern war?
5. If the number of casualties determined who won, would Union or Confederate forces be the victors at the Battle of Stones River?
6. Why do you think General Bragg withdrew his forces?
7. Why was middle Tennessee such an important gain for the Union?

Reading 1 was compiled from David L. Logsdon, Eyewitnesses at the Battle of Stones River (Nashville: Kettle Mills Press, 1989); and E. B. Long with Barbara Long, The Civil War Day by Day--An Almanac 1861-1865 (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday and Company, Inc., 1971).

¹ Samuel Seay, 1st Tennessee, Maney's Brigade, as quoted in David R. Logsdon, Eyewitnesses at the Battle of Stones River (Nashville: Kettle Mills Press, 1989), 13.

² Sgt. Major Widney, 34th Illinois, Kirk's Brigade, as quoted in Logsdon, 14.

³ Sgt. Major Widney, 34th Illinois, Kirk's Brigade, as quoted in Logsdon, 15.

⁴ Washington Mackey Ives, 4th Florida, Preston's Brigade, as quoted in Logsdon, 67.

⁵ J. T. Gibson, 78th Pennsylvania, as quoted in Logsdon, p. iii.

⁶ As quoted in E. B. Long with Barbara Long, The Civil War Day by Day--An Almanac 1861-1865 (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday and Co., Inc., 1971), 307.

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Comments or Questions

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Determining the Facts

Reading 2: Night on the Battlefield

Following are excerpts from two articles that appeared in the Cleveland Herald in April, 1863.

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Night on the Battle Field of Stone's River--The Old Year Out--the New Year's Ride

Carefully, driver, carefully! Let the hard iron of the wheels roll slowly over the pounded stone of the [Nashville] pike. The young soldier still lives. His breath is short, but we may yet reach the hospital ere he dies. Guide steadily past the shattered wagons--round the heaps of dead horses--through the long rows of corpses; watch that no foot of a horse jars against the fallen dead--the heroes of the last day of 1862--resting now, where they fell, or where friends have laid them. Here they lie in rows of miles, sleeping out the old year. On the last day of Sixty-two they stood for their country and for Freedom. At its midnight hour they sleep, no more to awake to war's ringing bugle call.

Well might thoughts of the old year and of eternity crowd upon the mind of the soldier whose duty to the wounded living brought him across that vast field of the ghastly dead--this night so clear and frosty--the last of December.

The story, as he told it--he, a private...--let me tell it.

That awful night! Words will not paint it, yet may give some faint idea of what sad experience a day of carnage brings.

At 9 o'clock of the evening of December 31st, an ambulance left one of the hospitals of Rosecrans' army, moving in the direction of Nashville. Two soldiers lay upon the carriage. The life blood of one, following the passage of a minnie ball through the breast, was oozing out from the right lung, staining the blankets beneath. The other, suffering from a crushing shot through the left leg...[was] scarcely conscious. Along with the carriage walked [the] private--going to care for his wounded companions.

Three miles along the stony pike...lay their route. Here an artillery wagon had been swept by a hursting shell--its gun dismantled, its wheels shattered, the horses and men fallen together, lay mixed as they had gone down. Still tangled in the harness hitched to the caissons, lay the hind parts of a horse, his breast and forelegs swept away, while the lifeless body of an artillerist rested with an arm over the dismantled gun....

Yonder a cavalryman had fallen, his drawn saber reflecting in the moonlight against the dark earth where he lay; and beside him his

comrade and his horse, all keeping the same silent watch of death.

The sharp frost of a clear night spread its white drapery over the clothes of the dead--on the locks [of hair]...gathered its icy breath, offering alike to all a common shroud....

All along the road for more than two miles, were these scenes of horror met by the weary soldier. Still on rolled the ambulance--past broken wagons--lost muskets and dismounted artillery, to the great general hospital of the fourth division.

Here after midnight lay the wounded and dying, covering an acre of ground...of which every room was filled, every outhouse crowded, the very floor wet with blood. Close by lay a man with an arm gone--next to him one with a leg smashed--there a part of a face was shot away.... Yet all those hundreds living, many waiting the dressing of their wounds with patience.

Our two soldier boys were taken from the ambulance into the building, and with hundreds of others closed no eyes to sleep that last December night.

The morning sun of Jan. 1st, 1863 rose upon a day as clear as ever dawned. Surgeons came that morning, and looked upon the one wounded in the breast,...whispering to the private that "He will die."

At 9 o'clock that morning [another] soldier and the one wounded through the breast were put into a strong army wagon...and, with the private and...driver, started over the pike for Nashville. Just as they reached the bridge the enemy, sweeping round our right, had brought a battery to bear upon the bridge.

Fearfully whirled our driver on, as if careless of the dying men in his charge, and only seeking safety in flight. Full three miles the race continued, when on came dashing a battalion of the rebel Wheeler's cavalry...yelling and firing on the teamster and the wounded. The breast-wounded soldier lay gasping, and ordering the other soldier, who held his footless leg in one hand..., to shoot the driver if he did not stop, that they might surrender, before they were murdered by the now near foe. But on, on heedless alike of threats and enemy, dashed the driver.... Nine miles over the stony road had the race continued. The determined driver had brought his team through, and escaped with the suffering load.

At 9 o'clock that evening they were taken from the wagon...and placed upon good cots, receiving close attention at the hands of skillful surgeons.

Charles Stansell, the driver, and the soldiers he transported survived their ordeal at Stones River. Later, Stansell was killed in a fight. He is buried at the Hazen Brigade Monument on the battlefield at the request of those he saved. The soldier who had been wounded in the breast at Stones River wrote the following tribute for the *Cleveland Herald*:

Death of a Brave Soldier

The untimely death of Charles Stansell, Co. G 41st Ohio, deserves from me more than a passing notice.

Charles Stansell was the fearless driver of a four horse team from Murfreesboro to Nashville...when Lieut. Wolcott and myself were being conveyed to a hospital... He...would not stop, but rushed on, heedless of our protests and threats...thus saving our team, our wagon, and our lives, all of which would have been sacrificed had we fallen into the hands of the rebels.

Questions for Reading 2

1. In your own words, what is the event described in the first newspaper article?
2. How was the narrator able to relate the events in such great detail?
3. What sights did the ambulance pass along the Nashville?
4. How does the narrator describe the hospital area? What words or phrases does he use to give a sense of the numbers of the wounded?
5. Who threatened the ambulance and its occupants after it left the division hospital?
6. Why do you think the breast-wounded soldier was taken to Nashville rather than being left at the division hospital?
7. Why do you think the soldier felt compelled to write a tribute to Charles Stansell after his death?

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Visual Evidence

**Painting 1: A view of the chaos and destruction
of the Battle of Stones River
as painted by William Travis, c. 1865.**



(Smithsonian Institution, Photo no. 49431-A)

Painting 1 shows the chaos and destruction of the battle, and the desperate situation of the Union army as it flees a Confederate onslaught.

Questions for Painting 1

1. Examine closely the action portrayed in this painting. Choose one of the characters shown and describe what you believe your character saw and what he was feeling.
2. What do you think is the focus of the painting? Why do you think the artist might have painted this particular scene?
3. What emotions does this painting evoke in you? Do you think the painter intentionally attempted to elicit strong emotions in this work? Why or why not?

** The painting on this screen has a resolution of 72 dots per inch (dpi), and therefore will print poorly. You can obtain a high quality version of Painting 1, but be aware that the file will take as much as 32 seconds to load with a 28.8K modem.*

Continue

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