

The Battle of Stones River, 1863



Battle of Stones River

The **Battle of Stones River** or **Second Battle of Murfreesboro** (in the South, simply the **Battle of Murfreesboro**), was fought from December 31, 1862, to January 2, 1863, in Middle Tennessee, as the culmination of the **Stones River Campaign** in the Western Theater of the American Civil War. Of the major battles of the Civil War, Stones River had the highest percentage of casualties on both sides. Although the battle itself was inconclusive, the Union Army's repulse of two Confederate attacks and the subsequent Confederate withdrawal were a much-needed boost to Union morale after the defeat at the Battle of Fredericksburg, and it dashed Confederate aspirations for control of Middle Tennessee.

Union Maj. Gen. William S. Rosecrans's Army of the Cumberland marched from Nashville, Tennessee, on December 26, 1862, to challenge General Braxton Bragg's Army of Tennessee at Murfreesboro. On December 31, each army commander planned to attack his opponent's right flank, but Bragg struck first. A massive assault by the corps of Maj. Gen. William J. Hardee, followed by that of Leonidas Polk, overran the wing commanded by Maj. Gen. Alexander M. McCook. A stout defense by the division of Brig. Gen. Philip Sheridan in the right center of the line prevented a total collapse and the Union assumed a tight defensive position backing up to the Nashville Turnpike. Repeated Confederate attacks were repulsed from this concentrated line, most notably in the cedar "Round Forest" salient against the brigade of Col. William B. Hazen. Bragg attempted to continue the assault with the corps of Maj. Gen. John C. Breckinridge, but the troops were slow in arriving and their multiple piecemeal attacks failed.

Fighting resumed on January 2, 1863, when Bragg ordered Breckinridge to assault the well-fortified Union position on a hill to the east of the Stones River. Faced with overwhelming artillery, the Confederates were repulsed with heavy losses. Aware that Rosecrans was receiving reinforcements, Bragg chose to withdraw his army on January 3 to Tullahoma, Tennessee.