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## STUDENT REPORT

BEDFORD FORREST AND THE AIRLAND BATTLE

MAJOR DYKSTRA J. HEINZE 86-1100

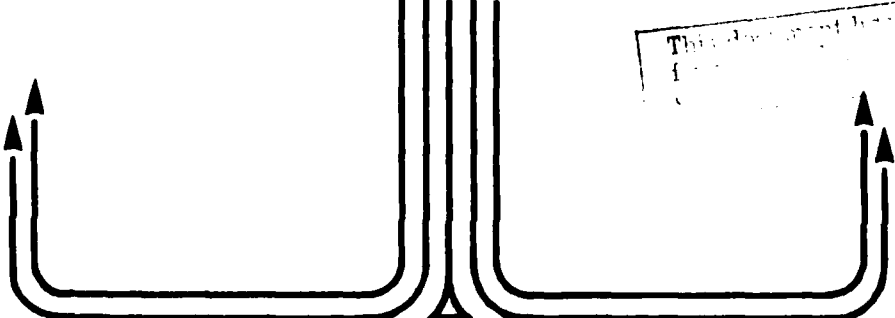
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## INTRODUCTION

The study of warfare has been a continuous process since classical times. The great military thinkers, strategists, and tacticians, after studying or participating in battles, ascertained that there were recurring axioms or principles the commander must follow to succeed on the battlefield. In modern times, these axioms, maxims, and principles have been codified and are referred to as the principles of war. Today, the Army, in its AirLand Battle Doctrine, has developed a series of techniques and practices that are based on various combinations of the principles of war. They are referred to as the combat imperatives. The purpose of this study is to analyze the tactics of a successful Civil War general in the context of the AirLand Battle to determine if the combat imperatives were as applicable in the 1860s as they are today.

Nathan Bedford Forrest, a Confederate general, who operated in western Tennessee and northern Mississippi, conducted a series of highly successful campaigns in 1864. The battles of Okolona and Brice's Crossroads, and the rearguard operation during Hood's retreat from Nashville are considered excellent examples of well executed operations. Each campaign will be analyzed in terms of Forrest's tactics and the application of the principles of war and combat imperatives.

In Chapter One the combat imperatives are defined and are examined in terms of their application during major Civil War engagements. Chapter Two, Three, and Four discuss Okolona, Brice's Crossroads, and the Rearguard, respectively. Chapter Five reviews Forrest's tactics, the evolution of tactics, and discusses why the combat imperatives were as applicable in the 1860s as they are today.

## Chapter One

### COMBAT IMPERATIVES

The Army's AirLand Battle Doctrine defines the concept of dynamics of battle as "the interaction of factors that decide battle" (24:2-4). Two of those factors are combat power and combat imperatives. Combat power refers to the tangible components of maneuver, firepower, and protection, and the intangible component of leadership. The effect these components have in generating superior combat power against the enemy will ultimately determine the outcome of the battle (24:2-4 - 2-6).

Combat imperatives, the other critical factor in the dynamics of battle, are a series of proofs, truths, or axioms that the tactician must understand and comply with while planning for and executing an operation. Ignoring an imperative could easily result in failure or disaster. They are a modern derivation of the time honored principles of war (24:2-6).

The principles of war have evolved through the centuries from the writings of Sun Tzu, Napoleon, Clausewitz, and more recently Major General Fuller (16:82-87). The Army has nine principles: objective, offensive, mass, economy of force, maneuver, unity of command, security, surprise, and simplicity (24:B-1). The Air Force has an additional three: timing and tempo, logistics, and cohesion (23:2-8 - 2-9). The combat imperatives, with the exception of weather and terrain, are a combination of different principles of war that more accurately relate to the modern battlefield.

The combat imperatives are: insure unity of effort; direct friendly strengths against enemy weaknesses; designate and sustain the main effort; sustain the fight; move fast, strike hard, and finish rapidly; use terrain and weather; and protect the force (24:2-6 - 2-7). To better understand these combat imperatives, we will look at each of them and define them in terms of the principles of war and the modern battlefield. In addition, examples of successful application and violations of these imperatives will be shown using major Civil War engagements.

## INSURE UNITY OF EFFORT

This imperative requires a unified effort by the commander and his subordinate leaders toward analyzing the mission, determining the situation, defining the objective/mission, and successful execution through decentralization, initiative, resourcefulness, and imagination. The commander must provide simple and concise mission statements that are understood by his subordinates. They must have a specific objective, understand the commander's intent and be given maximum flexibility in accomplishing the mission. The commander must follow up, see the battlefield, and insure his subordinate leaders are executing in accordance with his intent (24:2-6 - 2-8).

The principles of war which support this imperative are objective, unity of command, and simplicity (24:2-6). The commander provides a specific objective as to what is to be accomplished, understood by all. Every effort is directed toward achieving the objective. The commander, by his position, insures unity of command and provides specific missions to his subordinate leaders. He maintains a simple chain of command which allows him to provide direction and receive information. Most significantly, in developing his operations order he insures it is not complex or confusing. Simplicity insures missions are properly coordinated and successfully executed (24:8-1 - 8-5).

### Grant's Strategy

In 1864, Grant was promoted to lieutenant general and appointed by Lincoln to the office of General-in-Chief of the Armies of the United States (1:302). He immediately devised a grand strategy for winning the war. "When General Grant was placed in charge of the armies, we had unity of command, unity of purpose, and each Army had a definite and fixed mission to carry out, and a single Line of Operation" (16:133). One of the primary objectives of the strategy was the destruction of Lee's army. He told the commander of the Army of the Potomac that "Lee's army will be your objective point. Wherever Lee goes, there you will go also" (1:308). Eventually, Lee was worn down by flanking movements and attrition resulting in his surrender. Grant's strategy had a precise mission, it was simple and clear, unity of command was established, and it was uniformly executed.

### Burnside at Fredericksburg

Major General Burnside's debacle at Fredericksburg resulted from his inability to change his concept of the operation and designate a different objective. In November 1862, as commander

of the Army of the Potomac he devised a plan to cross the Rappahannock River at Fredericksburg, Virginia and move by railroad toward Richmond before Lee could react (2:230). Unfortunately, his pontoon bridge emplacement was delayed and Lee was able to occupy the high ground above Fredericksburg. Burnside refused to change his plan and committed his army to crossing the river under fire and assaulting the well entrenched Army of Northern Virginia. He lost 12,000 men because of his inability to change his operation or show any flexibility. "It is said of Burnside that the more hopeless a plan became the more pertinacity he showed in carrying it out, or trying to carry it out" (16:129). Burnside clearly violated the principle of objective, a component of the imperative, unity of effort.

#### DIRECT FRIENDLY STRENGTHS AGAINST ENEMY WEAKNESSES

The commander, in complying with this imperative, must first understand the organization, personnel, and equipment of his adversary. Further, he has to determine weaknesses in the enemy's tactical formations, troop dispositions, obstacle plans, morale of his men and probable tactical plan. Once weaknesses are identified, he can concentrate on directing his strengths against them. He accomplishes this by using the principles of security, maneuver, and surprise (24:2-8).

By using reconnaissance patrols, scouts, information from local inhabitants, listening and observation posts, and information from higher headquarters, the commander can identify enemy weaknesses. Once identified, he maneuvers his forces to strike the enemy at their weak points. Assaults against the enemy's flanks or rear, ambushes, and raids are offensive maneuvers which enhance the opportunities for success. Preferably, if the maneuvers are done without detection, surprise greatly increases a unit's combat power. Surprise can be achieved by operations in reduced visibility, utilizing terrain to mask your movements, or using deception to make the enemy believe you're stronger than you actually are. In addition, using feints and supporting attacks can keep the enemy unaware of your actual intentions, again achieving surprise.

#### Johnston at Shiloh

One of the greatest examples of a surprise attack was orchestrated by the Confederate general, A.S. Johnston, at the battle of Shiloh, 6 April 1862. The Union forces under Grant were camped between the Snake Creek and Tennessee River in western Tennessee. The Confederate army of 40,000 attacked early that morning, having moved undetected up from Corinth, Mississippi three days before. Grant was caught completely off

guard and the Union army was forced back against the Tennessee River. Only the sudden death of Johnston and the disorganization of the attack (caused by attacking with divisions on line) prevented the Federal forces from being completely annihilated (1:214-215). "The Confederate surprise attack almost defeated Grant's army the first day of the battle. It was a situation which caused many people to question Grant's competency as a commander" (20:24).

### Lee at Gettysburg

Lee's attack against Meade's dug in positions on Cemetery Ridge, 3 July 1863 during the battle of Gettysburg, violated the principle of maneuver. As opposed to attempting another enveloping movement, or withdrawing to make Meade abandon the ridge in pursuit, he sent Pickett with 15,000 men into a frontal assault against Meade's center. The assault failed, and Lee had to retreat to Virginia having lost a third of his command (1:253).

### DESIGNATE AND SUSTAIN THE MAIN EFFORT

In any major operation, offense, defense, or retrograde, the commander must assign the main effort to one unit. In an attack, it would be designated the main attack unit and would receive the necessary personnel and equipment to provide a combat ratio that should succeed. In the defense, the unit covering the main avenue of approach would receive the combat and combat service support necessary to defeat the aggressor. The defense could be either static or dynamic, but still one unit would have responsibility to stop the main attack (24:2-8).

Sustaining the main effort requires the frugal use of combat and combat service support elements. These must be made available to sustain the action. "The purpose of concentrating effort is to shock, paralyze, and overwhelm the enemy at the chosen time and place" (24:2-8).

Mass, economy of force, and the Air Force principle, timing and tempo, are the principles that support this imperative (24:2-8; 23:2-8 - 2-9). By concentrating overwhelming combat power at a critical place and time, the enemy can be defeated. However, while attempting to achieve mass, other forces must be positioned to check, deceive, or prevent the enemy from achieving the initiative. Units with economy of force missions may easily be designated the main effort based on the fluidity of the battle.

If a unit is conducting offensive operations or dynamic defense operations requiring rapid movement and counterattacks, then the principle of the offensive becomes a major component of this imperative. Commanders must seize and maintain the initiative throughout the fight (24:B-2).

### Lee at Chancellorsville

Lee's great victory at Chancellorsville is a superb example of the use of the offensive, mass, and economy of force. In April 1863, Major General Hooker developed an operation which would result in the envelopment of Lee's army at Fredericksburg. He planned to hit Lee's right flank at Fredericksburg and envelop his left flank by crossing the Rappahannock and sweeping down to Chancellorsville. Once the Union move was detected, Lee left a small force to hold the high ground above Fredericksburg and marched with the remainder of his army to meet Hooker's forces at Chancellorsville. Hooker stopped in the town and went on the defense. Lee took the initiative and split the forces again with himself commanding a 17,000 man force at Chancellorsville and Jackson taking 26,000 on a march around Hooker's right. The plan was successful. His forces in Fredericksburg held long enough for Jackson to roll up Hooker's right flank, and Lee was never attacked at Chancellorsville (1:244-246).

### Hooker's Defeat at Chancellorsville

Hooker failed in the campaign because of a complete violation of the principle of mass. He outnumbered Lee's Army nearly two to one but never committed his forces to achieve the combat power necessary to overwhelm Lee at Fredericksburg or Chancellorsville. One third of his army remained idle during the engagement. If properly committed he could have easily defeated Lee's smaller army (31:27; 1:222).

### SUSTAIN THE FIGHT

Once an action has begun and initial successes have been achieved, the commander must continue to maintain the initiative until the mission has been completed. Often this may go beyond his main objective, requiring flexibility in determining subsequent objectives. To sustain the fight he must consider continuous support and the endurance of his men (24:29).

On the modern battlefield, the area of operation will often be immense, requiring lengthy movements and continuous repositioning of forces. This will tax the ability of the combat

service support elements to provide the needed logistics to sustain the operation. Munitions, food, fuel and equipment are essential in allowing the combat elements to continue the battle. How the commander deploys his logistical and maintenance support is directly related to his ability to sustain the fight.

Similarly, the commander must continuously determine the status of his men. He must gauge their morale and will to continue the fight. He has to see to their basic needs: food, water, clothing, equipment, and ammunition. He has to decide which units need a rest, and which ones can continue the battle.

In an attack, meeting engagement or pursuit, the principle of the offensive is a component of this imperative (24:B-2). The Air Force principles of logistics and cohesion are the foundation for it (23:2-9). Troops must be well trained, disciplined and developed into a tightly knit team. A cohesive unit can endure the rigors of combat far better than a unit that is not molded into a team. Similarly, troops that are logistically supported will obviously fight longer and harder.

#### Bull Run

During the first battle of Bull Run, cohesion was evident in the Confederate forces. "Superiority of troops, from the discipline and morale viewpoint, is illustrated by our regular troops during the Civil War. They were almost invariably outnumbered. They generally occupied the position of greatest honor, that of greatest danger. At first Bull Run it was the regulars who saved the day" (16:116).

In addition, the logistical planning by the Confederate high command insured that transportation was available to move Johnston from the Shenandoah Valley to Manassas if necessary. Johnston was able to slip the Union general, Patterson, in the Shenandoah Valley and move his forces by rail to insure a victory at Bull Run (28:36).

#### Bragg at Chattanooga

Bragg's reluctance to follow through on his victory at Chickamauga, Georgia resulted in a complete collapse in cohesion within the leadership of his command. Three of his corps commanders held a conference which resulted in letters being sent to the President of the Confederacy demanding Bragg's relief for incompetency. Davis visited the front and decided to relieve the corps commanders (2:286). His action caused dissension, poor morale, and a lack of spirit in the Army of Tennessee. The collapse of the army during the battle of Chattanooga was in part



due to this lack in cohesion. "Those units not affected by the strife among their senior commanders fought well..." (26:38).

### MOVE FAST, STRIKE HARD, AND FINISH RAPIDLY

This imperative is critical for survival on the modern battlefield. To preclude detection by sophisticated systems and ultimate destruction by highly lethal weapons, units must be able to move quickly and avoid detection. Similarly, with the likelihood of the majority of our engagements being against superior numbers, rapid concentration of forces and violent strikes will allow retention of the initiative and survival on the battlefield (24:2-9).

Speed not only is essential for rapid massing and lightning strikes, it is also critical in completing the action and disengaging. Avoidance of being trapped, bogged down in a lengthy engagement, or confronted with a counterattack is essential in order for a unit to maintain flexibility and react to future contingencies. "Speed allows the commander to seize and to hold the initiative and thereby maintain freedom of action" (24:2-9).

Maneuver and mass are the primary principles that support this imperative (24:2-9). Rapid movements which place the enemy at a disadvantage and the timely massing of forces at the critical point will maximize a unit's combat power in a conflict. In an offensive operation the principle of the offensive works in conjunction with maneuver and mass to give the commander the advantage and allows him to seize and maintain the initiative.

### Jackson in the Valley

Jackson's valley campaign conducted in the Shenandoah Valley from 23 March to 9 June 1862 is unique in the use of maneuver "as a principle means of overcoming numerical superiority" (29:31). "By mobility and maneuver, achieved by rapid marches, surprise, deception, and hard fighting, Jackson neutralized and defeated in detail Federal forces three times larger than his own. In a classic campaign, he fought six battles: Kernstone, McDowell, Front Royal, Winchester, Cross Keys, and Port Republic..." (2:210). His presence alone in the Shenandoah immobilized McDowell's Corps by keeping these reinforcements from joining McClellan who was attempting to move on Richmond.

## McClellan and the Peninsular Campaign

McClellan's actions during the May-July 1862 Peninsular Campaign depicted an inability on the Union's part to achieve a victory, although in excess of 100,000 men opposed Lee's combined forces of 90,000. McClellan continuously moved slowly toward Richmond, fighting defensive battles throughout the campaign. Although Johnston and then Lee were never able to defeat him, they caused him to continuously react as opposed to seizing the initiative and making bold offensive moves against inferior forces. His campaign ultimately stagnated and eventually led to the withdrawal and evacuation of 90,000 men from the Peninsula (1:221-224).

### USE TERRAIN AND WEATHER

This imperative is not supported by any principle of war. However, it is a critical factor in planning and executing an operation. It has direct bearing on the other principles of war. An analysis of the terrain is essential in determining a reasonable course of action. Terrain can preclude a unit's ability to take the offensive or reduce its ability to maneuver. Adverse weather can endanger security and have a negative impact on a unit's cohesion. Inclement weather can destroy the timing of an operation, prevent units from massing, and disrupt logistical support. A change in weather could reduce or increase the likelihood of surprise. Similarly, terrain and adverse weather could disrupt communications, destroying unity of command.

In analyzing weather, the commander must consider temperature, precipitation, visibility, light availability, and humidity, and how they will impact on his men, equipment, terrain, and his operations (24:3-1 - 3-2). For example, low visibility increases the chances of success in the attack. It also enhances the likelihood of achieving surprise and it protects the attacking force by reducing the ability of the defender to detect it.

Commanders must see the terrain by either visual reconnaissance or map reconnaissance. It must be analyzed in terms of what is key terrain, does the terrain provide for observation and fields of fire, or cover and concealment? He must look at the avenues of approach into the area and obstacles to movement. In the AirLand Battle, with emphasis on maximum movement, the commander must conduct indepth reconnaissance of the entire battlefield.

## Lee and the Wilderness

In early May 1864 the Army of the Potomac crossed the Rapidan River with the intent of getting between Lee and Richmond. To do that they had to move through a densely thick forest called the Wilderness located west of Fredericksburg and Chancellorsville. Lee, understanding this move, decided to use the Wilderness to his advantage. Initially outnumbered 120,000 to 60,000, he figured "the disparity in numbers of men and quantity of artillery would be reduced greatly by the heavy undergrowth." His attack caught the Federals moving through the Wilderness and he was able to fight them to a standstill until being reinforced by Longstreet's Corps (2:311-315).

## Bragg at Chattanooga

The defeat of the Army of Tennessee at Chattanooga is a clear example of improper use of terrain. Bragg occupied the high ground above the city with a force of 40,000 versus Grant's 60,000, excellent odds in a defensive operation (6:22). When Grant attacked Bragg's center on Missionary Ridge it collapsed. The defensive works were weak, seven to eight foot gaps existed between soldiers, and there were large gaps between divisions. Failure to properly utilize the easily defendable ridge resulted in the first rout of a Southern army and the relief of Bragg (2:290-294).

## PROTECT THE FORCE

Protecting the force is a combination of providing security, looking after the well being of the troops and developing cohesion (24:2-10). It is the process a commander pursues prior to battle. If he has been successful, the force will be able to sustain the fight (a combat imperative previously mentioned). By thorough training and the instillment of discipline in garrison and the field, troops will be prepared for combat. Not only does training imply weapons fire and tactics, it includes equipment maintenance and personal hygiene. The commander also insures his troops are provided with proper uniforms, equipment, weapons, and rations prior to starting an operation.

Security is taught in garrison, but its successful application in combat is critical. A commander must insure observation posts and listening posts, guards, and obstacles are

emplaced. His troops must dig in during any lengthy halt, camouflage and concealment must be adhered to and stand-to's must be implemented. Operational security, in terms of noise and light discipline and radio procedures must be enforced.

The principle of security and the Air Force principle of cohesion and logistics support this imperative (23:2-9; 24:B-4). The commander protects his force by insuring that security measures are implemented, troop morale and discipline are promoted, and by anticipating the professional and personal needs of the troops.

#### Grant at Chattanooga

When Grant assumed command of operations at Chattanooga in November 1864, he found Smith's Army of the Cumberland cut off and besieged by Bragg's Army of Tennessee. The Union army was in serious trouble, having run out of supplies and food (26:4-9). Grant immediately realized that he must reestablish lines of communications to the besieged army. He was able to accomplish this by placing a bridge over the Tennessee River downstream from Chattanooga and clearing the enemy from the high ground on the southern side of the river. By establishing the "Cracker Line" he was able to reprovision his forces and eventually launch a successful attack against Bragg's forces (26:31).

#### Grant at Shiloh

Earlier in the Civil War, Grant had failed to protect his force by violating the principle of security at the battle of Shiloh. While camping at Pittsburg Landing, he was caught completely unprepared by Johnston's morning attack on 6 April 1862 (30:4-9). He had failed to dig his army into defensive positions. He located the army where it could be trapped between the Tennessee River and Snake Creek. Gaps existed between the divisions. Pickets were improperly emplaced, and most significantly, no patrolling or reconnaissance was being conducted. "The Federal Army really had no outpost organization whatsoever, about the only screen on the enemy's side was the local interior guards" (16:128). All of these violations made his force vulnerable to a surprise attack - which ultimately happened (30:28).

## SUMMARY

The combat imperatives are a critical factor in the planning and execution of an operation. Similarly, the principles of war which are their foundation must be properly applied to be successful. Civil War commanders who failed to consider or implement the principles of war often failed on the battlefield. The next chapter will take a closer look at a Civil War campaign and how Forrest's operational procedures and tactics were strikingly similar to how the combat imperatives have to be implemented today.

## Chapter Two

### OKOLONA

#### BACKGROUND

In January, 1864, Major General Grant was in command of the Union forces in the Military District of the Mississippi. Major General Sherman's Department of the Tennessee was a component of the District. Sherman's primary mission was the security of Memphis, Tennessee, and Vicksburg, Mississippi, and keeping the Mississippi River under Union control. A secondary mission was the invasion of Mississippi and reduction of its war fighting capabilities (10:217; 18:267-269).

Threatening these two missions was Major General Forrest, commanding the "Cavalry Department of West Tennessee and North Mississippi." Major General Stephen Lee was his immediate superior, as commander of the Cavalry Corps in the Army of the Department of Alabama, Mississippi, and Eastern Louisiana (25: Vol 32; 819).

Forrest had just returned from western Tennessee having "raised in twenty-one days four thousand two hundred men and plenty to feed them" (12:257). Operating in a Union controlled area, he was able to secure "forty wagonloads of bacon and other supplies, along with 200 head of cattle and 300 hogs" (4:221). "He had started with two small skeleton regiments, and was now at the head of a victorious little army of his own making, that had supreme confidence in itself and also unbounded confidence in its matchless leader" (3:269).

Sherman, deeply concerned by Forrest's successes, journeyed to Nashville and proposed to Grant a three-prong movement into Mississippi and ultimately Selma, Alabama. He recommended that he lead a mixed force of infantry and cavalry out of Vicksburg across southern Mississippi to Meridian. Simultaneously, a fleet of gunboats would advance up the Yazoo River and a cavalry force would move southeast from Memphis through northern Mississippi and link up with his forces at Meridian. The cavalry force's mission would be to "destroy the rebel cavalry commanded by General Forrest" (15:139), and "strike the Mobile and Ohio Railroad" (10:217). Once linkup was complete, the combined

forces would move on Selma, Alabama to destroy the Confederate war works and foundries.

Grant approved the operation and Brigadier General William Sooy Smith was selected to command the cavalry force which was to strike out from Memphis, Tennessee. Smith assembled a force of 7,500 men organized into three mounted brigades: Waring's First Brigade, Hepburn's Second Brigade, and McCrillis' Third Brigade. The troopers were armed with new breech loading carbines, had excellent horses, and were supported by twenty artillery pieces (12:239).

Sherman directed Smith to move toward Meridian on 1 February 1864 and told him, "do not let the enemy draw you into minor affairs but look solely to the greater object - to destroy his communications from Okolona to Meridian, thence eastward to Selma" (14:148). He also warned Smith about how Forrest would operate against him.

I explained to him personally the nature of Forrest as a man, and of his peculiar force, told him that in his route he was sure to encounter Forrest, who always attacked with a vehemence for which he must be prepared, and that after he had repelled the first attack, he must in turn assume the most determined offensive, overwhelm him and utterly destroy his whole force (15:389).

Sherman led his forces out of Vicksburg 3 February 1864 toward Meridian. However, Smith did not depart until 11 February, a day after he was supposed to meet Sherman at Meridian. His delay was caused by the late arrival of Waring's brigade. The delay not only disrupted Sherman's coordinated operation, it allowed Forrest time to gather needed information from his scouts and spies, and allowed him the opportunity to position his forces to counter Smith's moves (12:260).

CPT Henderson, Forrest's chief scout, had warned him "that extensive preparations were being made" for an invasion of Mississippi as early as 16 January (11:385; 10:220). Because of his excellent intelligence network, Forrest was able to telegraph Lee on 11 February that "Another column of the enemy will no doubt move from Collierville via Selma and Ripley, their destination said to [be the] Prairies and junction with Sherman" (25:Vol 32; 348).

To counter Smith, Forrest had at his disposal approximately 6,000 armed cavalrymen organized as follows:

Brigadier General Chalmers' Division

Forrest's (Jeff) Brigade            1,000

McCulloch's Brigade	1,600	
Bell's Brigade	2,000	
Richardson's Brigade	1,500	(18:272-273)

Farther south, Forrest's superior, Lee, had several thousand troopers to oppose Sherman. Lee's plan was to initially ignore Sherman and concentrate his forces with Forrest to defeat Smith. Accordingly, when Smith moved southeast out of Collierville on 11 February, Forrest allowed him to move with little resistance (18:274).

To confuse Forrest, Smith had sent an infantry brigade toward Wyatt and Abbeville to convey a southern route of march, then swung east toward New Albany, Pontotoc, and Okolona. Forrest was not deceived and responded by sending Chalmers' division from Oxford to Houston with the mission of staying on Smith's right flank. He also sent Bell's brigade to Columbus to prevent Smith (if it was his intent) from crossing the Tombigbee River and moving south on the east bank. With his escort and the remainder of his command, Forrest moved to Starkville. On the 19th, Forrest directed Chalmers to send the Forrest brigade to Aberdeen to ascertain the location and intent of Smith. He further directed Chalmers to take McCulloch's brigade and Richardson's brigade and concentrate at West Point (25:Vol 32; 352).

Forrest's brigade engaged Smith on 20 February and withdrew toward West Point. "Finding the enemy in heavy force and having been informed that General Lee was moving to my assistance, and desiring to delay a general engagement as long as possible, I determined at once to withdraw my forces south of Sakatonchee Creek" (25:Vol 32; 352). Forrest's intent was to draw Smith into a cul-de-sac created by the junction of the Sakatonchee Creek and Tombigbee River. The two waterways surrounded by swamps protected his flanks, and his control of the Ellis Bridge would prevent Smith from crossing the Sakatonchee and continuing his advance toward Meridian (12:260-261).

Smith concentrated his forces at Priaire Station, north of West Point, and conducted a reconnaissance to determine what options he had available. He determined that, "The enemy was in a position in my front and on my flanks which afforded him every advantage. The ground was so obstructed as to make it absolutely necessary that we should fight dismounted, and for this kind of fighting the enemy, armed with Enfield and Austrian rifles, was better prepared than our force, armed mainly with carbines" (25:Vol 32; 277). In addition, Smith had heard from 'deserters'



"that Forrest's numbers had miraculously increased and Lee was on his way to add others" (12:263). To avoid this trap, Smith decided to retire back toward Memphis (18:277).

### THE BATTLE

With the exception of Bell's brigade, which guarded the crossing sites on the Tombigbee to the southeast of Smith's forces, Forrest, on the morning of 21 February, had his forces arrayed along the south bank on the Sakatonchee Creek, protecting the Ellis Bridge. He sent Forrest's brigade across the creek to hold the bridge as long as possible against Smith's expected advance (18:277-278).

Smith, having decided the night before not to be drawn into Forrest's trap, sent the Second Iowa Cavalry toward the bridge to deceive Forrest, and began his retreat toward Okolona. An intense skirmish commenced between the Union forces and Forrest's brigade. General Forrest came forward to determine the situation and asked Chalmers, who was located on the bridge behind Forrest's brigade, what the status of the engagement was. When Chalmers responded that he had received no reports from J. Forrest, "Forrest said quickly, and with evident impatience: 'Is that all you know? Then I'll go and find out myself'" (12:262).

Upon arriving at the scene of the battle he determined that Smith was merely conducting a demonstration and the main body was withdrawing. To develop the situation and gather additional information, he sent a two company detachment after the retiring Union forces. Captain Tyler, in command of this small force, confirmed what Forrest had suspected, the enemy was retreating. He sent a courier back to Forrest who then ordered the advance of his command in pursuit and sent instructions to Colonel Barteau, who was commanding Bell's brigade, to move against Smith's flank. In addition, Richardson was ordered to move toward Okolona with his dismounted forces. Thus, Forrest was concentrating his command with the intent to pursue Smith and hopefully cut off his retreat to Memphis (18:20).

An interesting, but highly biased, description of the morning engagement between Forrest's brigade and the Second Iowa Cavalry is told by Colonel Thomas F. Berry, who was with Forrest during the Okolona Campaign:

He [Forrest] retreated slowly to a dismal swamp leaving six fine regiments behind in ambush. This swamp was impassable for about 12 miles, except by log road. He continued his retreat beyond this and halted. The sound of bugle notes and the rapid succession of 3 shots from the artillery signaled for the ambushment to open. Our artillery was planted so as to enfilade the masses of the

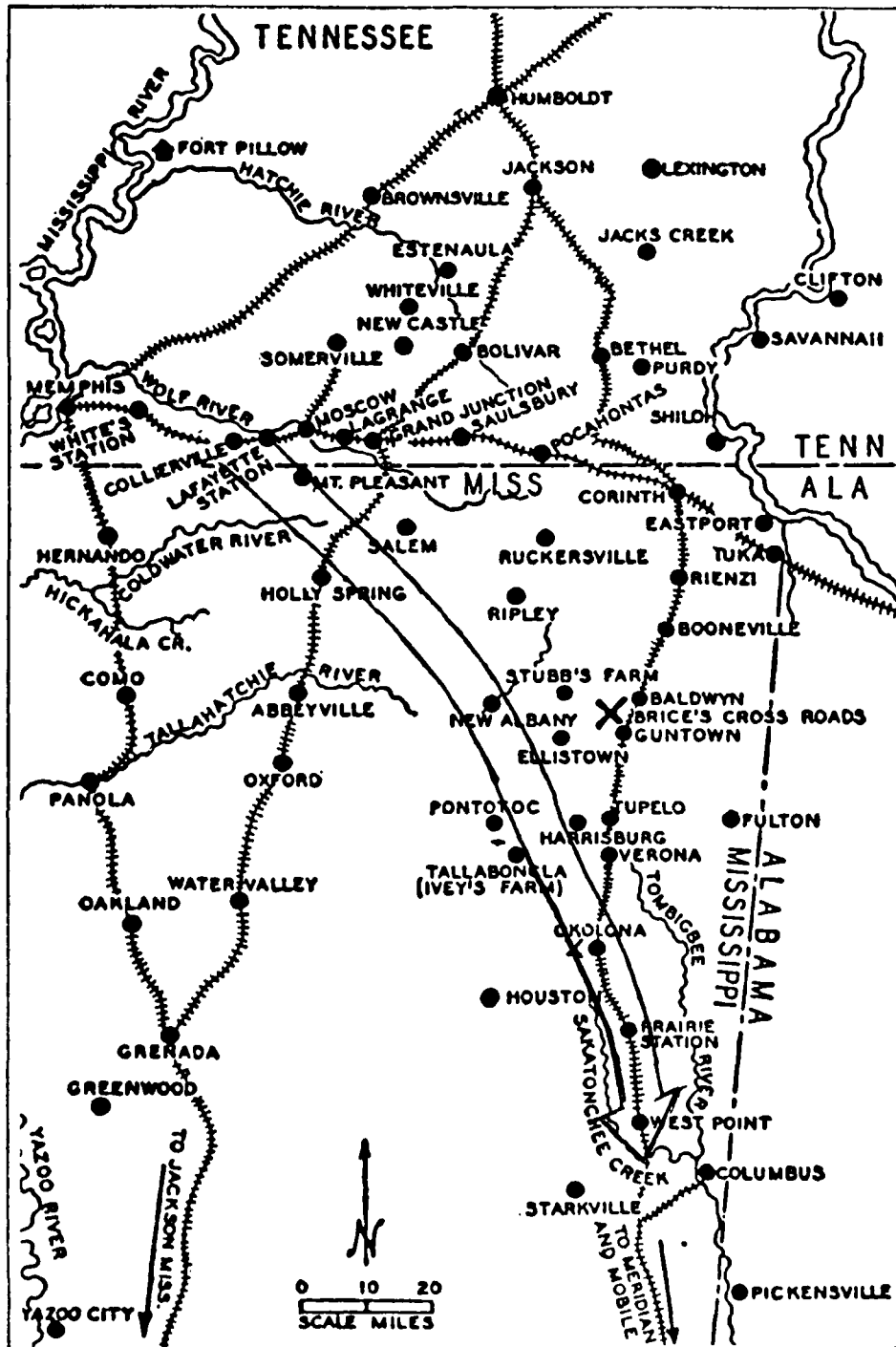


Figure 1: Smith's Invasion

Source: Henry, Robert Selph, "First with the Most" Forrest, p. 218.

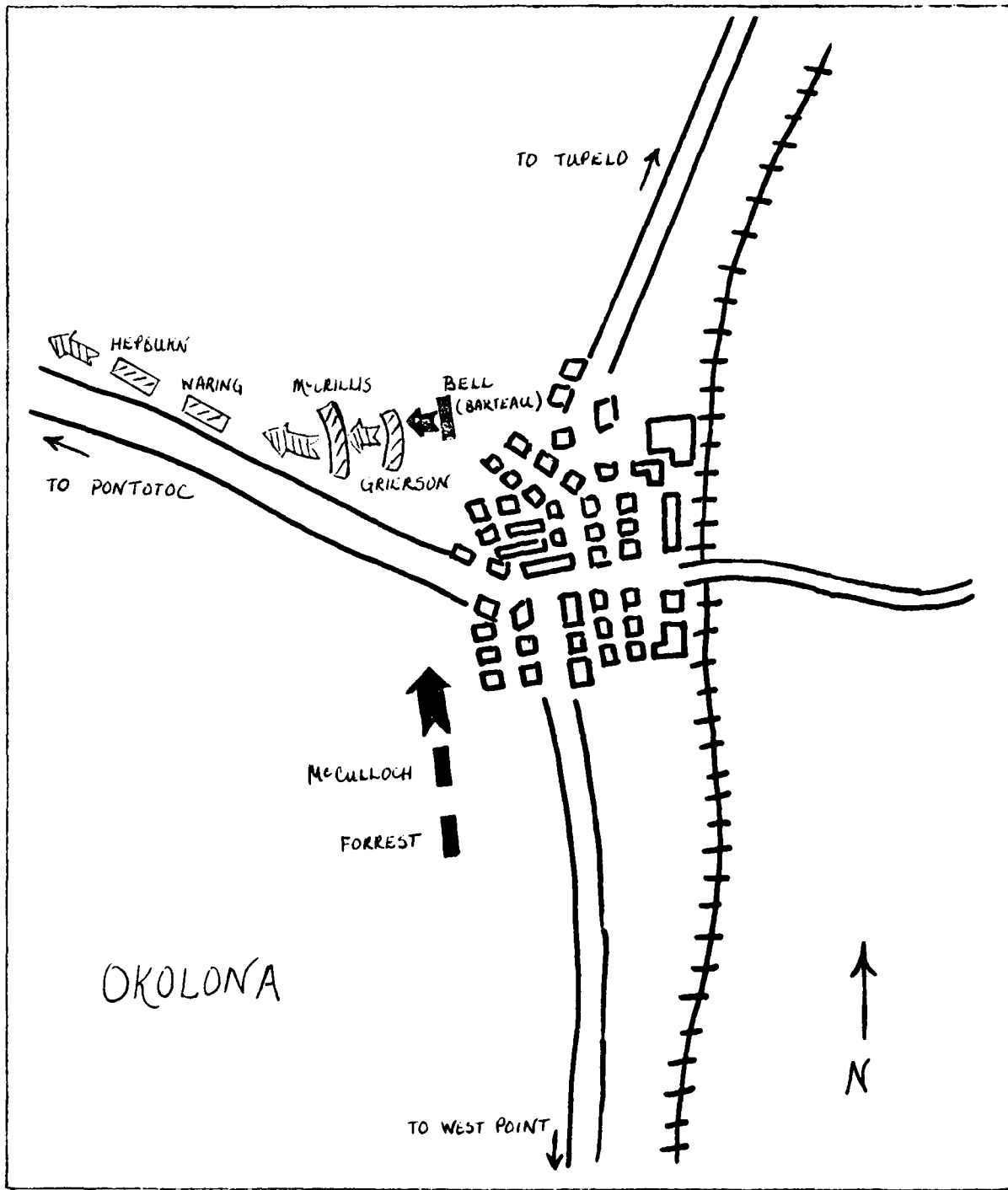


Figure 2: Battle of Okolona

Source: Author's interpretation from sources listed in Bibliography.

enemy across this corduroy road, with grape and canister; the ranks melted rapidly before the blighting fire of iron and lead. Many stricken fugitives fled, only to be overtaken and killed. Thousands of them were crowded off the causeway into the boggy mire where men and horses sank out of site almost immediately (3:272-274).

In reality, Smith's rearguard was doing an excellent job and the withdrawal began in an orderly fashion.

Tyler, followed by Forrest and his escort, and then Chalmers' division, continued to press Smith as he withdrew toward Okolona. Several attempts were made to check Forrest's pursuit, but failed because Forrest would dismount his forward units and direct them to immediately assault the Federal delay positions and simultaneously lead his escort around the enemy's flank, forcing them to retire. These moves, in conjunction with Barteau's continuous pressure from the east, frustrated Smith's attempts to catch Forrest in a position to overwhelm him or check his pursuit against his rear (25:Vol 32; 257).

On the morning of 22 February, Smith was withdrawing his forces through the town of Okolona. His order of march was 1st Brigade, 2d Brigade, and 3d Brigade. The Fourth Regulars mission was to assume the rearguard and retard Forrest's pursuit. In support of the Fourth Regulars, the Seventh Indiana was detached from Waring's brigade, and the combined force placed under the command of Brigadier General Grierson, Smith's second in command (18:286).

As Forrest and his escort closed on Okolona he saw that Barteau had reached Okolona early and had deployed his brigade in an open field west of the town, in sight of Smith's retreating column. Barteau was in danger of being overrun by Smith's superior force. Forrest immediately moved to Bell's Brigade and asked Barteau, "Where is the enemy's whole position? You see it General and they are preparing to charge. Then we will charge them" (12:265). Bell's brigade was immediately mounted and the attack on Grierson's advancing forces commenced. Momentarily halted by deadly rifle fire, Forrest dismounted two thirds of the brigade and continued the advance on foot.

Meanwhile, Grierson, attempting to reposition his forces, caused some confusion in his lines. Forrest "saw Grierson make a bad move", (12:266) remounted his forces, and with Chalmers' division finally arriving on the field, ordered them to "move up" (18:285) and to Bell's brigade said, "come on boys" (12:270). The Federal force was hit in the front and then on the flanks. The Fourth Regulars broke first, then the Seventh Indiana, and finally the 3rd Brigade which had been deployed on line behind the rearguard to assist Grierson if necessary (18:286).

With the collapse of his column imminent, Smith ordered Waring to take up positions five miles west of Okolona to allow the rearguard and beaten 3rd Brigade to pass through and then check Forrest's pursuit. Waring selected a defensible position near the Ivey's Hill Plantation (18:239). The defeated 3rd Brigade streamed through the temporary defenses followed by Forrest with Chalmers' division in hot pursuit. On seeing Waring's position, Forrest deployed his brother's brigade on the right side of the pike and McCulloch's on the left. They immediately charged Waring's positions and were temporarily stopped. Jeff Forrest was killed in the engagement, slowing the momentum. General Forrest, after seeing to his brother, took up the pursuit (10:229).

...remounting in stern silence, Forrest, taking in the situation at a glance, ordered his staff and escort to follow, and, shouting in a loud passionate voice, "Gaus, sound the charge!" dashed with them with the fury of a Scandinavian Berserk, upon the enemy in front, just as they were remounting to retreat. His spirit speedily animated all who followed with the same emotion, and for some moments there was sore havoc in the Federal mass, as it flowed rearward (11:395).

Within ten miles of Pontotoc, the Federal forces attempted one last time to check Forrest's pursuit. In his official report Forrest described the action.

They had formed in three lines across a large field on the left side of the road, but which a turn in the road made it directly to our front. Their lines were at intervals of several hundred paces, and the rear and second lines longer than the first. As the advance of my column moved up they opened with artillery. My ammunition was nearly exhausted, and I knew that if we faltered they would in turn become the attacking party, and that disaster might follow. Many of my men were broken down and exhausted with clambering the hills on foot and fighting almost constantly for the last nine miles. I determined therefore to advance to the attack. (25:Vol 32; 354).

With only 300 men Forrest attacked the Union position, fired on them, then dismounted and assumed a defensive position in a gully. Forrest's small force then withstood three separate charges. The fourth charge broke his lines but the Confederate failed to budge. Forrest ordered them to draw their Navy Sixes and fight the mounted cavalry where they stood. "The dismounted Confederate cavalry, although broken and mingled with a mass of charging horsemen, would neither yield nor fly, but at once commenced waging a hand-to-hand combat with their revolvers against their mounted antagonists." The Union troops were forced to withdraw (5:375).

During a reunion in the early 1900s, William Witherspoon, a member of Forrest's 7th Tennessee Cavalry, was talking to a retired Union colonel about the battle of Okolona, who made the following comments about the last engagement,

We brought against you in the first charge 1,000 men, you drove us back. We then reinforced to 1,200, charged the 2d time, with the same results, driven back... We reinforced to 1,500... met with the same results. I can't understand, that 350 men can be so constituted, out in the open ground, as to be able to do what they did (9:97).

Following this last engagement, Forrest's forces had been expended during the last three days of battle. He therefore directed General Gholson, commander of the state militia, who had arrived the night before, to continue the pursuit of Smith's flying columns. This he did until Smith reached New Albany (12:269).

Although Smith, in his official report to Sherman, attempted to depict a successful campaign, he had really been thoroughly defeated by Forrest, and failed in his two primary missions, destruction of Forrest's forces and linking up with Sherman at Meridian. Further, he had a total of 388 killed, missing, or wounded compared to the 144 for Forrest (285:Vol 32; 258).

Forrest's victory was "achieved with troops, the greater part of whom were the raw, undisciplined young men, whom, less than 60 days before, he had gathered to the standards in West Tennessee" (11:402). Grant, however, felt that although Forrest had defeated a force nearly twice the size of his own, his men were better "man to man" because of more battle experience than Wilson's men possessed (8:356).

#### COMBAT IMPERATIVES

An examination of Forrest's planning, preparation, movements, and tactics during the Smith invasion of northern Mississippi will demonstrate that his techniques are similar to the combat imperatives advocated in the AirLand Battle. An analysis of Forrest's operating procedures within the framework of each imperative follows.

### Insure Unity of Effort

Forrest, prior to Smith's move from Collierville, was aware of his intent. He immediately dispatched his forces to counter the threat. Throughout the campaign, he maintained control of his forces, utilizing a simple chain of command. He had two separate brigade commanders and a division command with two subordinate brigades. He insured his commanders knew their mission, initially to delay before the enemy, which changed to an organized pursuit with the objective of destruction of the enemy forces. "We can't hold them but we can run over them" (4:224).

His orders were brief and concise when he directed his commanders to move to various towns or secure critical crossing sites. While in actual combat, such orders as "move up" or "come on boys" did not require extensive interpretation. Similarly, he allowed his commanders flexibility in movement as evidenced by Barteau's independent movement on Smith's right flank. Forrest also insured he knew the status of a given situation by being forward where he could make the appropriate decisions.

### Direct Friendly Forces Against Enemy Weaknesses

The scout and spy networks used by Forrest during the campaign allowed him to know the enemy's plans early enough to allow him to position his forces accordingly. Smith's initial feint toward Waverly did not fool Forrest because of the excellent intelligence he was receiving. His use of "deserters" to convince Smith of the inflated strength of his forces resulted in Smith's decision to withdraw.

Forrest's continuous pressure on Smith's rear during the retreat, Barteau's movements on the Federals' flank, flanking movements during each engagement, and Forrest's detection of Grierson's tactical error during the Okolona conflict are indicative of Forrest's unique ability to use his forces against the enemy's weaknesses. His decision to have his troopers use their Navy Sixes against the Union final charge on the 21st proved successful because they were the better weapon against carbines and sabers in closer quarters.

### Designate and Sustain the Main Effort

Although Forrest never deployed his forces where he could designate a main attack, he did concentrate his efforts toward the pursuit of Smith once he determined the Union general had decided to retreat. He designated Okolona as the point where his forces would concentrate. The timely arrival of Chalmers'

division to support Bell's brigade resulted in the necessary combat power needed to tip the balance against Grierson's rearguard. The battle lasted for two days, and four decisive engagements took place. During each of these, he attempted to concentrate his forces to defeat the enemy and continue the pursuit with the intention of destroying Smith's column.

### Sustain the Fight

From a logistical point of view, Forrest did not have the resources necessary to continue the pursuit of Smith. After two days of battle he was nearly out of ammunition and for the last engagement only 300 of his original 4,000 men were available to fight. Men and horses were strung out all the way back to Okolona. "Half of my command were out of ammunition, the men and horses exhausted and worn down with two days of hard riding and fighting, night was at hand, and further pursuit impossible" (25:Vol 32; 354). However, his men, though newly recruited, displayed a strong degree of cohesion, especially the 300 who repulsed Smith's final charges. In 60 days "he had been able to impregnate them [his men] with his ardent, indomitable spirit, and mold them into the most formidable instruments, in his hands, for his manner of making war" (11:402). Forrest's decision to use Gholson's men to continue the pursuit demonstrated his awareness of the limitations of his men.

### Move Fast, Strike Hard, and Finish Rapidly

The number of minor and major engagements that Forrest's forces were involved in during the campaign supports his belief in rapid movement and quick violent strikes against the enemy. At every opportunity he maneuvered his forces to catch Smith at a disadvantage, thus gaining the initiative. Repeatedly, Smith was forced to abandon his positions because of rapid flanking movements or by the intense pressure of the frontal assaults. Thus, Forrest, with an inferior force, was able to force Smith to abandon his mission and flee back to Memphis.

### Use Terrain and Weather

Weather was a significant factor during the campaign because recent rains had rendered many of the rivers and creeks unfordable, thus forcing Smith to use known bridge sites, reducing his movement options. Similarly, the swamps which surrounded most of the waterways were impassable. Forrest, being aware of this, deployed his forces in front of Smith's advance to secure the crossing sites on the Tombigbee River and Sakatonchee



Creek. He then hoped to draw the Union cavalry into the cul-de-sac formed by the junction of the Tombigbee and Sakatonchee. Smith, upon reaching West Point, realized it was Forrest's intent to trap him, and fearing such an ambush, decided to withdraw, resulting in his eventual defeat.

### Protect the Force

Forrest went to great lengths to insure his forces were provided for in terms of mounts, clothing, equipment, ammunition and food. In fact, he spent \$20,000 of his own funds to support his newly created army (13:60).

He did not stop trying to get supplies through the usual channels, if possible, however, he took steps independently, also with his own organization intimately acquainted with the mercantile and agricultural situation in the deep South. These men found for Forrest's soldiers and delivered to them all the country had. The rest had to come from the occupied territories or the enemy (13:20).

Grant, in his memoirs, commented on how disciplined Forrest's troops were in comparison to Smith's. An example of how Forrest insured that discipline was enforced took place when 19 of his soldiers were caught attempting to desert just prior to Sherman's Meridian campaign.

The preparations for the execution being proceeded with, even to the presence before the troops of the prisoners, blind folded, seated on their coffins, and the firing party drawn up before them waiting for the command, before he granted a reprieve, and remanded them to prison. The lesson was not lost on anyone who beheld the spectacle (11:387).

### SUMMARY

Forrest successfully applied the AirLand Battle's combat imperatives in his Okolona campaign. The campaign was basically a pursuit with several small battles throughout it. His next major campaign, Brice's Crossroads, started as a meeting engagement, evolved into an attack, and culminated in a pursuit. Each of the combat imperatives will be reviewed in terms of their applicability.

## Chapter Three

### BRICE'S CROSSROADS

#### BACKGROUND

While Sherman was conducting his Meridian Campaign, Grant had been promoted to lieutenant general and was in command of all the Union forces. He immediately devised a plan for the ultimate defeat of the Confederacy by conducting a coordinated invasion across the entire front. He placed Sherman in command of the Military District of the Mississippi with the mission of destroying Joe Johnston's Army of Tennessee, which in June 1864, was opposing his movement toward Atlanta. Simultaneously, Meade, with the Army of the Potomac and Butler's Army of the James, would move on Richmond with the destruction of Lee's Army of Northern Virginia as the primary objective. Sigel would sweep the Shenandoah Valley and Banks would move out of New Orleans to seize Mobile (1:301-311).

S.D. Lee determined it essential to relieve Johnston of the tremendous pressure he was experiencing from Sherman. He therefore directed Forrest, with a force of 2,000 men, to advance into middle Tennessee. In route he would receive reinforcements from Brigadier General Raddey in northern Alabama. His mission was the destruction of the railroad connecting Nashville with Sherman's forces in north Georgia, thus severing his communications (25:Vol 39; 222).

Sherman was deeply concerned that such a move might take place. He had removed one commander of the District of Western Tennessee for his failure to check Forrest and replaced him with Major General Washburn. Brigadier General Samuel D. Sturgis was selected by Sherman and equipped by Washburn to lead an expedition out of Memphis to Corinth and destroy the railroad as far south as Macon and Columbus. Also, he was to either destroy Forrest or disperse him to the extent he would not threaten Sherman's lines (18:345).

Sturgis departed for Lafayette 1 June 1864 with a force of 8,500 men, outfitted with the most efficient weapons available, Colt's repeating rifles and breech-loading carbines (18:344). Washburn also insured that Sturgis had a proper mix of infantry and cavalry with an adequate number of artillery pieces (12:288).

His command consisted of a division of infantry commanded by Colonel McMillian, composed of Wilkin's 2,000 man brigade, Hoge's 1,600 man brigade, and Bouton's 1,200 man Negro brigade. His cavalry division was commanded by Grierson and was organized into Waring's 1,500 man brigade and Winslow's brigade with 1,800 men (12:288).

On 3 June 1864, Forrest received notification from Lee that an invasion of northern Mississippi was underway and directed him to return to meet this movement. Forrest returned to Tupelo, Mississippi by 6 June 1864, and began to deploy the forces he had under his direct command and those attached to him by Lee to meet this new threat. He positioned his four brigades along the Mobile and Ohio railroad with Bell's 2,700 man brigade at Rienzi, Rucker's 700 man brigade at Boonville, and at Baldwyn Johnson's and Lyon's brigades with 500 and 800 men respectively. Forrest positioned himself with his artillery at Boonville. In all, Forrest had approximately 4,700 soldiers to oppose Sturgis' advance (19:35).

By 7 June 1864, Forrest was informed by his scouts that Sturgis was advancing southeast toward Tupelo. Although kept informed of Sturgis' positions, he was still unsure of his intent. By 9 June 1864 Forrest received "dispatches reporting the enemy, in full force, encamped twelve miles east of Ripley on the Guntown road, having abandoned the upper route as impractical" (25:Vol 39; 222). Sturgis' decision to move toward Tupelo was based upon receiving reports that the enemy had abandoned Cornith and Brigadier General Grierson had informed him that forage was unavailable for his horses in that direction. He therefore moved toward Ripley and held a council of war with his commanders on the night of 8 June 1864 (10:283).

During the meeting with his commanders, Sturgis expressed concern that with the weather conditions, lack of forage for his horses, and the likelihood of losing his trains if engaged, it might be wise to abort the expedition and return to Memphis. His commanders agreed that he had turned back once previously and McMillian announced "he was in favor of going ahead, even if they did get whipped." On 9 June 1864, his entire force had moved down from Ripley and was encamped at Stubbs' farm, 8 miles from Brice's Crossroads (12:291).

The same day, Lee had met with Forrest and directed Forrest to retreat south toward Okolona where he could concentrate his forces with Lee's and defeat Sturgis' column. His orders were for Forrest to move toward Brice's Crossroads, then south through Tupelo to Okolona (18:348). However, Forrest told his commanders during a council that night, "He would prefer to get them in the open country, as desired by General Lee, where he could get a good look at them. He added that an emergency might arise which would necessitate a conflict before the prairie country could be

reached and before a concentration with Generals Lee and Chalmers in the vicinity of Okolona could be effected" (18:349). Forrest knew, and had known for two days, that an engagement would take place at Brice's Crossroads (18:349).

#### THE BATTLE

At 0530, 10 June 1864, Grierson, with his two cavalry brigades, began his movement down the Ripley Guntown Road toward Brice's Crossroads, which was eight miles distant. The three infantry brigades were to follow by 0700. Forrest also had his troops in motion toward Brice's Crossroads, with Lyon, having come six miles, leading, followed by Rucker (who had come 18 miles), and then Johnson. Bell, who was 25 miles away, would bring up the rear (12:292).

While riding with Rucker that morning, Forrest described his concept of the operation,

I know they greatly outnumber the troops I have at hand, but the road along which they will march is narrow and muddy; they will make slow progress. The country is densely wooded and the undergrowth so heavy that when we strike them they will not know how few men we have. Their cavalry will move out ahead of the infantry, and should reach the Crossroads three hours in advance. We can whip their cavalry in that time. As soon as the fight opens they will send back to have the infantry hurried up. It is going to be hot as hell, and coming on a run for five or six miles over such roads, their infantry will be so blown we will ride over them. I want everything to move (10:286).

At approximately 1000 hours General Grierson's forward unit ran into Lyon's brigade leading elements just east of the crossroads on the Baldwyn road. Grierson was directed to take a portion of his force and "drive the enemy toward Baldwyn," the remaining cavalymen would wait at the crossroads for the infantry and continue the advance toward Guntown (25:Vol 39; 92). Grierson therefore ordered Waring to dismount his brigade and deploy it across the Baldwyn road. Lyon, moving up with the remainder of his brigade, quickly dismounted them and positioned his forces behind a rail fence. Forrest, being notified of the developing situation, ordered Lyon to "fight on,..., and keep fighting until I come." Upon arrival, Forrest directed that alternate rails in the fence be removed to convey the impression that his forces were about to advance (12:293).

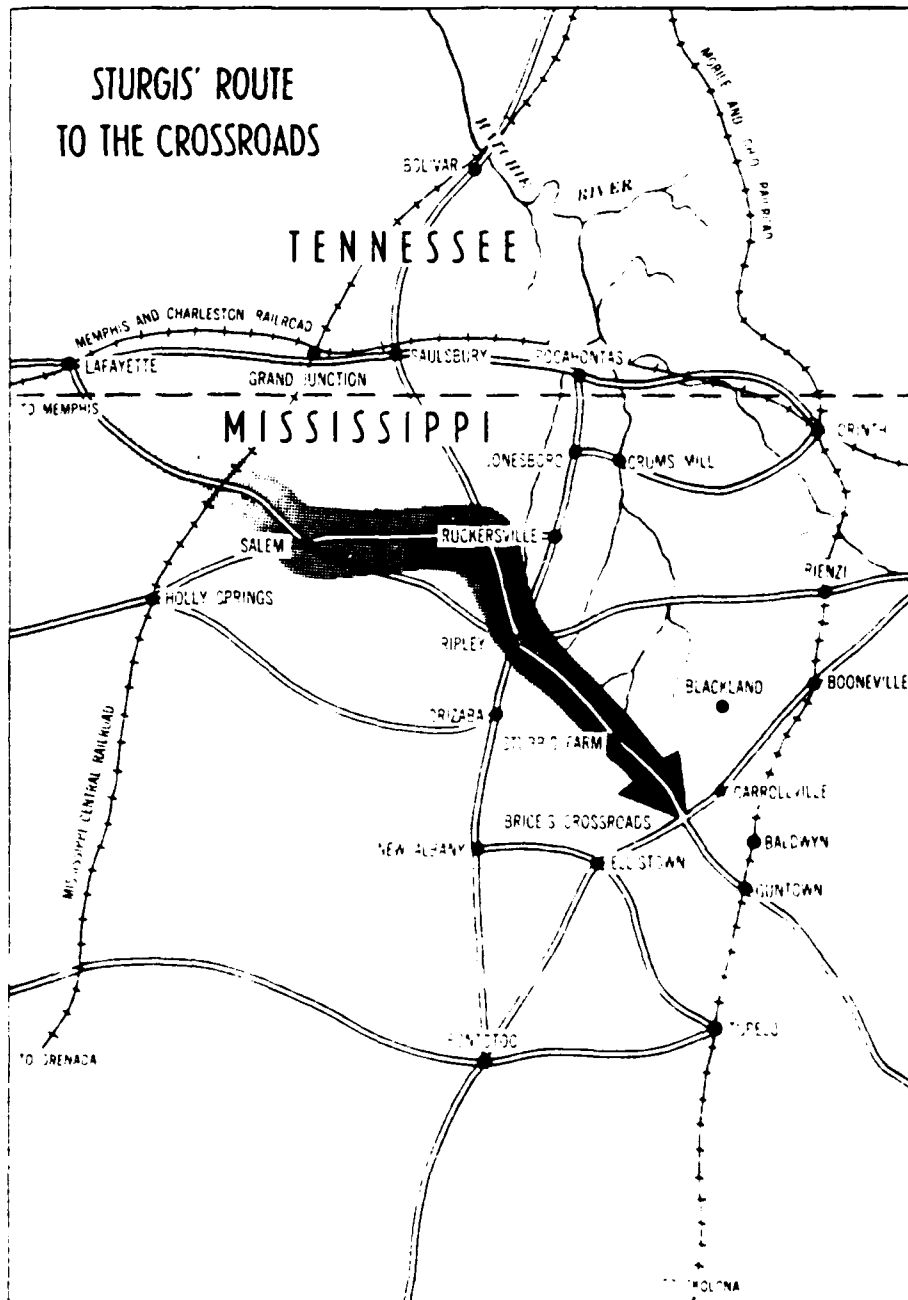


Figure 3: Sturgis' Invasion

Source: Military Review, Vol. 44, (June 1964), p. 89.

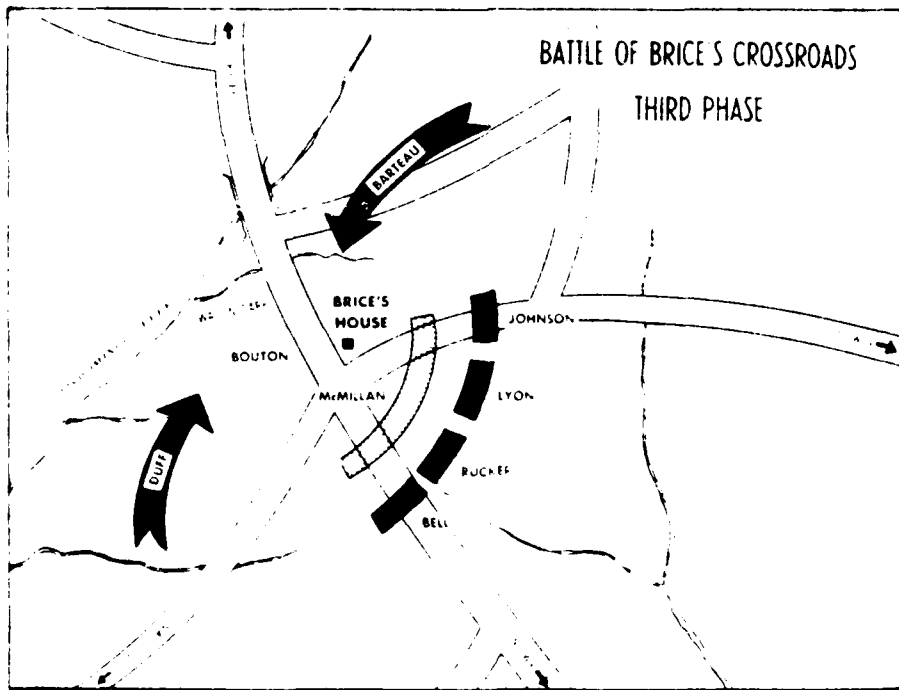
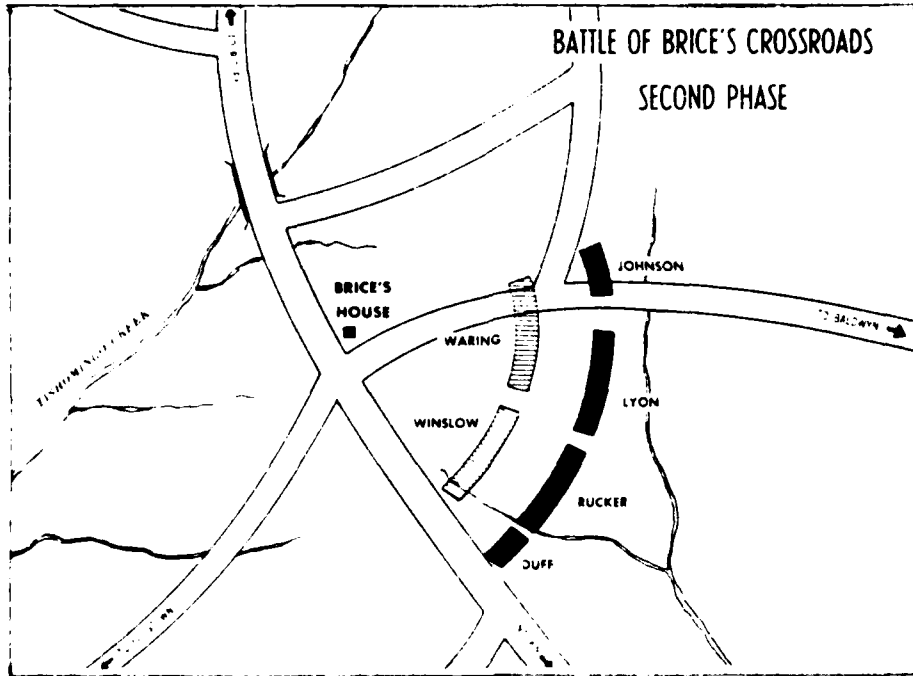


Figure 4: Battle of Brice's Crossroads

Source: Military Review, Vol. 44, (June 1964), pp. 93, 96.

Assessing the situation, Grierson moved Winslow's brigade upon Waring's right flank. At that moment (1000 hours), 3,200 Union cavalry forces faced Lyon's 800. Forrest decided on a feint to deceive the enemy as to his actual strength, in order to gain time, as he waited for Rucker and Johnson to arrive. He had also sent a message to Bell with the orders, "Tell Bell to move up fast and fetch all he's got" (12:294).

Lyon's feints were successful and caused the Federal forces to remain on the defensive. Grierson, in his official report, stated "The first charge was exceedingly fierce and one of three desperate attempts to take our positions. We succeeded, however, in holding our own..." (4:232). Grierson was convinced he was opposed by a force much larger than his own. During the feints Rucker's and Johnson's brigades had arrived and were quickly dismounted, with the exception of Duff's regiment, and positioned on Lyon's left and right, respectively. Duff, on the extreme left, covered the Guntown road and was in position to flank Winslow's brigade (10:287).

Forrest, realizing this was a decisive moment, having bettered his numerical disadvantage, ordered an attack on Grierson's positions before the Union infantry came up (20:93). His orders to Lyon were to "charge and give em hell, and when they fall back keep on charging and giving them hell, I'll soon be there with you and bring Morton's 'Bull pups' [artillery]" (14:198). Simultaneously, Johnson and Rucker continued to press against Grierson's forces.

So close was this struggle that guns once fired were not reloaded, but used as clubs, and pistols were brought into play, while the two lines struggled with the ferocity of wild beasts. Never did men fight more gallantly for their position than did the determined men of the North for this blackjack thicket on that hot June day (4:232).

By 1200 hours, Sturgis had arrived and ascertained that his cavalry forces were receiving unrelenting pressure. He sent orders to the rear to have the infantry hurried up which was interpreted as to be "brought up on a double." The result was his infantry arrived at the crossroads by 1300 hours, exhausted from the forced march through mud in extreme heat (10:290).

By the time the infantry had arrived, Grierson was requesting that his cavalry brigades be relieved because "it [the cavalry] was exhausted and well-nigh out of ammunition." Some of his forces, especially in Winslow's brigade, had already withdrawn (10:291). Forrest had accomplished the first phase of his concept, the defeat of the Union cavalry (4:232).

As the Union infantry were positioning with Hoge's brigade replacing Waring and Winslow, and Wilkin's brigade deploying behind Hoge, Bell's brigade with Morton's artillery had finally arrived. Forrest immediately positioned Bell's forces across the Ripley Guntown Road on Rucker's left flank and repositioned Duff (still mounted) to Bell's left. His plan was to launch "A heavy assault on the front, supported by as heavy an assault on the flanks...", with Lyon hitting McMillian's left and Johnson his flank. Simultaneously, Bell and Rucker would attack McMillian's center and right with Duff's regiment hitting his right flank, Barteau's regiment of Bell's brigade was rapidly moving down the road from Carrollville to get into Sturgis' rear (12:297-298).

At 1400 hours, Forrest attacked along his entire front, personally leading Bell's and Rucker's brigades, with Buford commanding Lyon's and Johnson's. Intense fire from the Federal position stopped Bell and Rucker. Hoge immediately launched a counterattack. Forrest, perceiving serious problems, reacted:

Forrest, knowing that heavy fighting would be just at this point, had remained with the troops, and seeing disaster which now threatened him, dismounted from his horse, called to his two escort companies to dismount and hitch their horses to the bushes. And with these daring fighters gathered about him he rushed into the thickest of the fray, pistol in hand, to take his place in the front ranks with his men (18:362).

Hoge's attack was still going well until Rucker, who was receiving the blunt of the Union counterattack, ordered his men to kneel in the thick vegetation and use their 'sixes' against the Federal bayonets. The tactic was successful, forcing Hoge to retire back to his original positions (12:298).

Forrest followed with another assault which was so fierce "individual commanders were reporting to McMillian, that they were the object of the main attack and other actions were merely demonstrations." In truth, everything was a main attack, for Forrest's aim was to roll Sturgis' entire command back on the crossroads (19:39). McMillian's forces were steadily being forced back but they still had not been broken. By 1400 hours there was a lull in the battle. To maintain the initiative and effect a breakthrough, Forrest told his artillery chief,

Well, I am going to take command of that column and move across this open field right in front of us and strike their column over yonder on that parallel ridge. We'll double them up on the road right up yonder where that piece of artillery is. And when you hear Gaus sound the bugle for the charge, you take your artillery and charge right down the road, and get as close as you can. Give em hell right up yonder where I'm going to double them up (14:178-179).



Barteau had arrived with the Second Tennessee in Sturgis' rear and deployed his men in such a successful manner that the two cavalry brigades were sent to counter his move, thus preventing them from reinforcing the infantry against Forrest's final charge (18:363).

Private Hubbard of the Seventh Tennessee Cavalry, remembered Forrest's simple orders just prior to the final assault on McMillian's infantry. "Get up men! I have ordered Bell to charge on the left. When you hear his guns, and the bugle sounds, every man must charge, and we will give them hell" (9:164). With Morton's guns in the front of the attack double-shot with canister, Johnson sweeping far to the right, and continuous pressure by Bell, Rucker, and Lyon, the Union forces were rolled back toward the Brice House (12:300). Final collapse began when Forrest told his mounted escort and Tyler's command to "hit them on the e-e-e-end" (10:293) resulting in a rapid sweep around the Federal right flank.

Sturgis, seeing the immediate collapse of his front, attempted to get Bouton's brigade up to stop the Confederate advance. His efforts failed as fleeing infantry and cavalry became caught up in the wagon trains, thus preventing the brigade from moving to the front. Forrest had won the second phase of the battle, defeat of the infantry (4:233).

With the Union front broken and the infantry streaming to the rear, Forrest immediately took up the pursuit. Sturgis attempted several times to rally his infantry and cavalry to form some type of resistance but again failed in his efforts (18:366). Captain William Scott of the Union later said, "Forrest pursued closely with all of his cavalry, confident of capturing at least the retreating footmen [infantry]. He pushed the rear with great daring and persistence, impatient to reach his expected captives in front" (9:242).

Eventually, darkness arrived, but Forrest continued the pressure. "...Forrest relieving his force in squads and himself supervising and encouraging them 'come on men!, he shouted to the almost exhausted troopers, 'In a rout like this two men are equal to a hundred. They will not stop to fight'" (14:180). First Rucker and then Bell continued the pursuit of the enemy throughout the night. Private Hubert said, "Instead of an undisturbed night of repose, as we had fondly hope for, the Seventh Tennessee was aroused from its slumbers at two o'clock in the morning with the information that Forrest himself was to lead the pursuit of the enemy" (9:167).

The pursuit contined throughout the night and the next morning. Forrest, seeing the enemy as being "greatly scattered through the surrounding countryside, threw out a regiment on

either side of the highway to sweep for some distance to the right and left...", and continued to press the remainder of the day (11:477).

Sturgis referred to his retreat as a "hell of a stampede where he lost all of his wagon trains and accompanying supplies (10:296-298). In addition, 2,240 soldiers were either killed, wounded, or missing (25:Vol 39; 95). The consolidated reports of his brigade commanders place his losses at 2,612 (12:303). As Colonel Waring described it, "It had taken a week to march out from Collierville to Brice's Crossroads but the return march, ninety miles without rest and virtually without food, was made by men on foot, after a day of battle, in two nights and a day" (10:299), a reflection of the intensity of Forrest's pursuit.

Forrest continued "keeping the skeer on em" (4:244) until the night of the 11th, where near Salem, because of the total exhaustion of his men, he called the pursuit off (18:369). His losses were 493 killed and wounded, a minimal number considering that Forrest had stayed on the offense throughout the engagement (18:371).

#### COMBAT IMPERATIVES

##### Insure Unity of Effort

Forrest made his objective clear the night prior to the battle of Brice's Crossroads. He wanted his forces concentrated to meet Sturgis at the crossroads. His command was already organized into four brigades, similar to the organization at Okolona. Each was sent to a specific location to oppose Sturgis. The morning of the battle he defined his concept for the battle when he told Rucker he would defeat the Union cavalry first, then the infantry, and ultimately take up the pursuit; a three phase concept. To accomplish their mission he gave his subordinate commanders maximum flexibility in movement, as evident by Barteau's move on Sturgis' rear.

But it must be apparent that this brilliant victory was won by his prompt comprehension of the situation on the morning of 10 June, and his recognition of the possibility of taking his adversary at the sore disadvantage of being attacked while his column was extended in a long line, moving over the narrow roads at that densely wooded region. Seeing his advantage at its right value, he planned and executed with equal celerity... (11:483).

Throughout the conflict Forrest kept his commanders informed of his intent and what he expected them to do by message or in person. His orders were brief and to the point. Such commands as "give em hell", "keep fighting", "move up fast", "fetch all you got", and "hit the e-e-e-end" were easily understood by his commanders and executed promptly. Unity of effort was apparent from the planning phase until the end of the campaign.

#### Direct Friendly Forces Against Enemy Weaknesses

As evidenced by his concept of the operation, Forrest had detected Sturgis' primary weakness, the 5-6 mile separation of his cavalry and infantry. His scouts had informed him of the Federal exact location and their axis of advance. Forrest felt by striking Sturgis at Brice's Crossroads, he would catch him completely off guard. As he later told his artillerymen, "Sturgis knew that Lee and I were separated, and thought that, according to book and rule, I would not dare try a forced march and battle on a scorching hot day with a handful of men. In any fight it is the first blow that counts; and if you keep it up hot enough, you can whip em' as fast as they come up" (14:198).

In addition to the feints Lyon conducted in the early part of the battle, to deceive Grierson about his actual strength, Forrest used his 'deserters' to weaken Sturgis' resolve. Sturgis, in his official report, said, "A very intelligent sergeant who was captured and remained five days in the hand of the enemy reports the number of enemy actually engaged to have been 12,000 and two divisions of infantry were held in reserve (25:Vol 35; 95).

Finally, Forrest's use of flanking movements, sending Barteau to Sturgis' rear, and his relentless pursuit against the Union's fleeing column, are indicative of his ability to direct friendly forces against enemy weaknesses.

#### Designate and Sustain the Main Effort

During the most critical phase of the battle, the attack against McMillian's infantry, Forrest massed his forces between the Guntown and Baldwin roads, brought his artillery forward in an unsupported role and attacked across the front. The assault was so violent that the two Federal brigade commanders reported to Sturgis that they were receiving the main attack. By sending Barteau to Sturgis' rear, not only did he surprise the Federals and cause confusion, he was using Barteau in an economy of force role. Both cavalry brigades moved toward Barteau and were not available to support the infantry.

Forrest's timing was exceptional during the conflict. He knew when to use feints, when to advance with his entire force against the cavalry and then the infantry, and when to initiate his flanking movements. He used his artillery at a critical moment, and knew when to move his troopers to take up the pursuit.

### Sustain the Fight

Forrest maintained the offensive from 1000 to 1700 hours either by attacking or counter-attacking. When Sturgis' army broke he then took up an unrelentless pursuit which lasted two days and nights. The Federals never had an opportunity to reorganize and offer any viable resistance. Sturgis' response to a brigade commander who requested assistance in saving the trains said, "For God's sake, if Mr. Forrest will leave me alone, I'll leave him alone. You have done all you could and more than was expected of you, and now all you can do is to save yourselves" (12:301).

The majority of Forrest's men marched farther than Sturgis' on the morning of the battle and fought continuously throughout the day, then took up the pursuit through the night and the next day. Clearly the cohesion was there which enabled his force, one-third the size of Sturgis', to fight and win against such odds and sustain the fight for such a lengthy period.

### Move Fast, Strike Hard, and Finish Rapidly

Forrest caught Sturgis at the Crossroads and was able to concentrate his forces much more quickly than the Federal general, even though the distances were farther. During the battle his use of his horses for mobility and flank and rear maneuvers enabled him to continuously strike violently and quickly. His success against superior numbers is attributed to this rapid and flexible movement of his troops throughout the battlefield. Further, his rapid pursuit enabled him to capture all of Sturgis' wagons and nearly a quarter of his men.

In this affair, furthermore, was illustrated the sovereign efficiency in war of the defensive-active, with the concentration and speedy employment of one's whole force when the battle's moment has come. Forrest brought his entire force into action, and kept no reserves employed. In this he was right, for a reserve is an unnecessary subtractive from, and emasculative of a force so small as that which he commanded (11:483).

## Use Terrain and Weather

General Forrest, in his concept, made it clear that the hot weather and muddy conditions would impact on the Federal infantry's ability to close up on the battlefield rapidly and be in any condition to fight. "Forrest's weapons had in the past been varied, but this was the first time he ever conscripted the sun to serve in his ranks. He did not at the moment know how well it had served him, for the heavy green forest covered McMillian's arrival" (12:297). On arrival, the Federal infantry were exhausted and in no condition to fight.

In addition, Forrest used the thick woods to deceive Grierson's cavalry of his numbers when Lyon arrived at the Crossroads. The low visibility caused by nightfall was used by Forrest in making the Union forces believe they were surrounded by thousands of Confederate soldiers during the pursuit.

## Protect the Force

During the engagement, the same forces that Forrest had recruited in western Tennessee and fought at Okolona, were present. Again, they showed their discipline when hit by Grierson's and Hoge's counterattacks, being in inferior numbers. Further, throughout the pursuit, they maintained their organization and cohesiveness.

Forrest had insured they were well supplied with basic needs, to include Navy six-shooters and "sawed off Enfields, both proving extremely effective in the close engagements within the thickets" (16:304). He also used Sturgis' captured trains to feed, rearm, and resupply the forces he was using in the pursuit.

## SUMMARY

Brice's Crossroads was a classic example of the successful application of the combat imperatives. Today's commanders will need to be as aggressive as Forrest, willing to seize the initiative, and capable of making correct decisions, and able to control their forces. The next chapter will analyze another campaign in 1864. Commanding the rearguard during Hood's retreat from Nashville required Forrest to fight a delay action. We'll review the campaign and then analyze his tactics.

## Chapter Four

### REARGUARD DURING THE RETREAT FROM NASHVILLE

#### BACKGROUND

In November 1864, General Hood had lost the battle for the defense of Atlanta and had devised a strategy for drawing General Sherman out of northern Georgia. His plan was to move west to Tuscumbia, Alabama and strike north across the Tennessee River with the objective of seizing Nashville and cutting Sherman's lines of communication. To accomplish this strategy, he intended to defeat Schofield, who was enroute to reinforce Thomas in Nashville. After defeating Schofield he could turn on Thomas (7:621-623, 654-655).

Forrest was ordered to assume command of Hood's cavalry corps and had 6,000 men assigned to him. Rapidly advancing into Tennessee, Forrest was able to intercept Schofield south of Franklin, but Hood failed to bring his infantry up in time to prevent the Union army from occupying the city. Frustrated, Hood launched a piecemeal assault against Schofield's entrenched positions and lost 6,000 men. The following morning, Schofield marched out of Franklin and linked up with Thomas in Nashville (1:329-344).

Hood followed and occupied the high ground around Nashville with a decimated force of 30,000 men, opposing a total Union strength of 60,000. On 15 and 16 December 1864, Thomas launched his assault against Hood's positions and completely routed the Confederate army (1:346). Forrest was not present during the battle, having been sent to Murfreesboro earlier to counter a Federal force there (10:429). His absence was a major factor in the defeat, for the Union cavalry under General Wilson was able to get around Hood's left flank and force him out of his positions (7:654-706; 12:362).

Hood was able to break out of the Union encirclement and begin a disorganized retreat south toward Columbia. He directed Forrest to move south from Murfreesboro to Pulaski and linkup with the army. Forrest decided to meet the army 30 miles north of Pulaski near Columbia, where Hood was desperately attempting to draw his forces across the Duck River. Forrest's unexpected arrival gave him the means to destroy the bridges in the

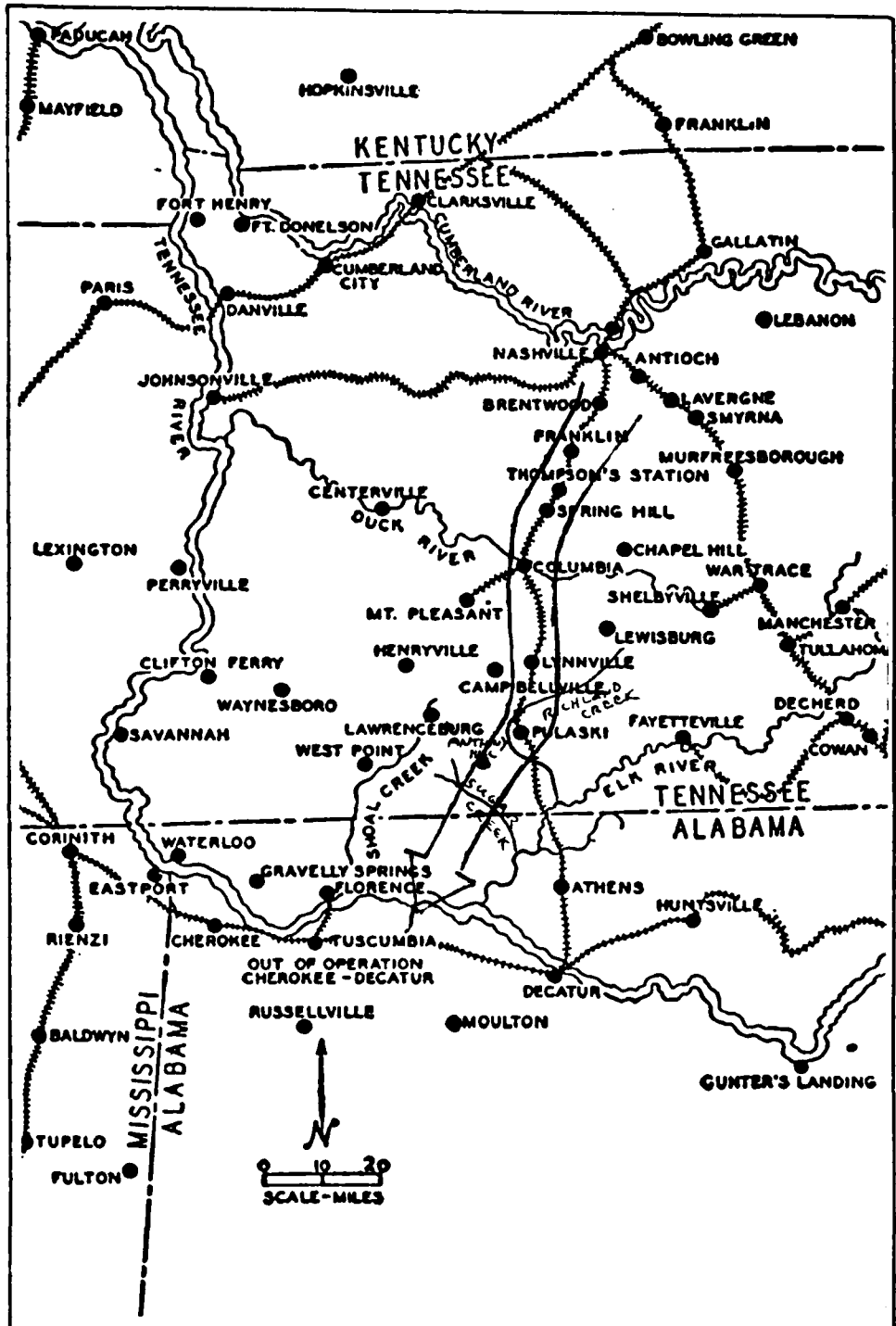


Figure 5: Forrest's Rearguard Route

Source: Henry, Robert Selph, "First with the Most" Forrest, p. 48.

immediate vicinity, thus temporarily slowing the Union pursuit. That night, during a meeting with his commanders, Hood proposed wintering south of the Duck River. Forrest informed him that due to the nature of the defeat and the precarious position the Army of Tennessee was in, a withdrawal south across the Tennessee River was the only alternative. Hood finally agreed and appointed Forrest as his rearguard commander (10:408-412).

At that stage in the campaign, Forrest had approximately 3,000 mounted cavalymen organized into three divisions, Chalmers', Burford's, and Jackson's. To balance his rearguard, he requested an additional 4,000 infantrymen, but actually received 1,900, over 400 of which had no shoes (25:Vol 45; 757). He organized them into four brigades, Palmer's, Field's, Reynold's, and Featherston's, under the command of General Walthall (18:502).

Opposing Forrest, and taking up the pursuit of Hood's army, was General Wilson with 10,000 cavalymen. His force was organized and equipped to accomplish one mission, the destruction of the Army of Tennessee before it reached the Tennessee River. Initially experiencing difficulty crossing Rutherford Creek north of Columbia, he was not able to reach the Duck River until 21 December (18:503).

#### THE CAMPAIGN

While Wilson struggled to get his forces across the flooded Rutherford Creek, Forrest was actively involved in moving Hood's supply trains south and out of danger. The roads were nearly impassable and the wagons with normal teams were making little progress. Forrest decided to use oxen and double the size of the wagon teams. His efforts were successful for he was able to move all of the trains in two trips (18:503). When Hood requested some of Forrest's mule teams for use elsewhere in the army, he responded, "I whipped the enemy and captured every wagon and ambulance in my command; have not made a requisition on the government for anything of the kind in two years, and now that they are indispensable, my teams will go as they are or not at all" (12:366).

Additional time was gained by Forrest when he sent a message to Wilson requesting that his forces stop shelling Columbia (there were no troops in the city, only civilians) from the north bank of the Duck River and requested an exchange of 2,000 prisoners. The time required to forward the message and formulate a reply was used by Forrest to further implement his delay plan (12:365).

The Union forces did not cross the Duck River at Columbia until 22 December. The delay was not only due to Forrest's



destruction of the bridges in the area, but also caused by the difficulties Wilson was experiencing in bringing his pontoon bridges up. In addition, Wilson was deeply concerned about "the country on the right and left of the pike, [as being] very broken and densely timbered, and almost impassable. The pike itself, passing through the gorges of the hills, was advantageous for the enemy. With a few men he could compel the pursuing forces to develop the front almost anywhere" (25:Vol 45; 566).

Meanwhile, Forrest organized his first delay position 6 miles south of Columbia where he was able to temporarily check the Union advance "in a gorge between two ridges" (12:365). From there, he continued to slowly retreat south toward Lynnville, continuously disrupting the Federal pursuit. At one point he actually ordered his "infantry back toward Columbia on the main pike" with his cavalry "on the right and left flanks" (25: Vol 45; 757). The following engagement caused another check in the Union advance. From there he fell back to take up positions at Richland Creek (10:414).

At Richland Creek, Buford's and Chalmers' divisions were deployed on the left flank and Ross' brigade of Jackson's division was on the right flank. Wilson's attack and flanking movement forced Forrest out of this temporary position; however, valuable time had, again, been gained by forcing Wilson to deploy his forces (25:Vol 45; 757).

Forrest withdrew south to Pulaski and began the destruction of all stores and supplies that could not be evacuated. From there he moved the bulk of his rearguard further south to take up a defensible position, leaving Jackson in the city to delay the Union pursuit and destroy the Richland Creek bridge (the same creek that loops north of the city) south of the town. Jackson was able to gain time for Forrest, but he failed to destroy the bridge (25: Vol 45; 567). The Confederate force was now arrayed in a strong position on the flanks of Anthony's Hill.

At Anthony's Hill, Forrest had selected a superb piece of defensible terrain.

The approach to the position, for two miles was through a defile formed by two steep ridges. The ascent was sudden, and the ridges wooded. Morton's battery was hidden on the immediate summit, and in position to sweep the road and the hollow below. On the crest of the Hill Featherston's and Palmer's brigades, four hundred of Ross' Texans and four hundred of Armstrong's Mississippians, were placed in support. The rest of Jackson's division was held as cavalry on the flanks. Chalmers took post a mile and a half to the right with his own and Buford's divisions....Reynold's and Field's brigades of infantry formed the reserve. The position was strengthened by rails and felled timber (12:367).

Forrest's concept was to draw the enemy into this natural ambush position using a decoy. Once the Federal cavalry had been drawn into the position, the infantry would charge and then he would "...throw Ross' Texans in on 'em and route 'em" (12:367).

When the Union advance guard saw Forrest's mounted decoy, they immediately gave chase. However, the commander of the Union regiment suspected an ambush and decided to dismount his forces and advance on foot with a piece of artillery. The Confederate artillery opened up and the infantry attacked. "The enemy broke in tumultuous disorder and the Confederates charged upon them with the old time 'Rebel Yell' and spirit. A number of prisoners, several hundred horses, and one piece of artillery were captured (14:296).

General Wilson, though he had over 9,000 cavalrymen, sent a message requesting that infantry be brought up to overcome this "slight" check (18:506). The infantry arrived and Wilson initiated a turning movement which forced Forrest to withdraw toward the Sugar Creek crossing site.

It had been an all-day fight- it was now an all night race. General Forrest never for a moment contemplated getting anywhere last. He simply made no allowances for such a possibility. And such was his genius for animating his men that he could always inspire them to fresh efforts, no matter how jaded they were (14:297-298).

At Sugar Creek, Forrest deployed his forces to retard the Federal advance enough to save the ordnance trains which were located on the south side of the creek. On 26 December, the Confederate forces awaited the Union advance behind temporary fortifications of rails and logs. Ross' brigade was mounted and prepared to conduct an assault at the appropriate moment. Again, decoys had been positioned forward to attempt to draw the Federal cavalry into the trap. The morning was extremely foggy and the enemy was allowed to advance to within fifty paces of the defensive positions. The hidden Confederate soldiers opened fire, causing immediate confusion and panic in the Union formation. At that moment, "two mounted regiments and Reynold's and Field's infantry brigades were ordered to charge. The limited attack was successful, throwing the enemy back two miles, and culminating in 150 prisoners and 150 captured soldiers" (25: Vol 45; 758).

Following the Sugar Creek engagement, Forrest was able to withdraw unmolested to the Tennessee River, which was crossed on 27 December 1864.

The most valuable effect was, that it [Sugar Creek] checked further close pressure upon the rear of Hood's army by the Federal cavalry, who had now been punished so severely in men and horses, here [Sugar Creek] and at Anthony's Hill, as to be altogether unwilling to venture another collision with their formidable adversary (11:653).

His rearguard had successfully prevented the Union pursuit from stopping Hood from crossing the Tennessee River or capturing any of the army's trains.

### COMBAT IMPERATIVES

#### Insure Unity of Effort

Forrest arrived in Columbia, Tennessee, 18 December 1864 and, after analyzing the situation, informed Hood it would be disastrous to attempt to winter there. Upon being made rearguard commander, he requested the infantry he felt necessary to accomplish his mission, protecting the remnants of the Army of Tennessee as it withdrew south to Alabama. Protection included saving the army's trains.

His cavalry was already organized into three divisions; however, he had received eight skeleton infantry brigades. To simplify unity of command he organized them into four brigades under a division commander, Major General Walthall. Similarly, he reorganized the transportation section of Hood's army, resulting in a more efficient system for moving the trains.

From 20 until 27 December, Forrest was able to position his forces and conduct the necessary actions to delay the enemy, using simple operation concepts and mission orders. All missions were successfully executed in an independent and flexible manner by his commanders, except the destruction of the bridge at Pulaski. The control of his forces, although decentralized, was evident in that units were able to disengage successfully and were never routed in a fight or captured.

Unity of effort was practiced up the chain of command by the invaluable advice and assistance Forrest provided Hood during the campaign.

The part which he took in the Hood retreat from Nashville, in directing almost every movement of the army, suggesting the roads that should be taken, the manner in which the artillery and baggage-trains were to be moved, sending

messages every few hours to General Hood, giving the minutest practical details, showed him fully capable of handling any army of any size... (18:507-508).

### Direct Friendly Strengths Against Enemy Weaknesses

The forces were not available to Forrest to conduct full scale offensive operations against the Union pursuit. Wilson was in command of a 9,000 man force which not only was well equipped and rested, but possessed the psychological advantage of having been responsible for the victory at Nashville. However, Forrest was able to use his forces successfully in an economy of force role as he conducted his rearguard operation. The temporary delay positions set up six miles south of Columbia, then Richland Creek, north and south of Pulaski, were utilized effectively in slowing Wilson's advance, and were accomplished with minimal force.

At Anthony's Hill and Sugar Creek, he set up elaborate ambushes from which to conduct limited offensive strikes and force the enemy to react. He was partially successful at Anthony's Hill and fully successful at Sugar Creek. The Federal cavalry was surprised and forced to retreat and deploy, thus gaining critical time for Hood during his retreat to the Tennessee River.

### Designate And Sustain The Main Effort

Forrest's cavalry was in good shape to perform their duties. However, a large number of the infantry attached to him were exhausted, starving and some actually shoeless. These he placed in wagons and dismounted only when an engagement was about to take place. Throughout the rearguard action, Forrest was able to provide the necessary supplies and equipment to sustain the force.

Cohesion had likewise broken down in the Confederate army. The defeat had caused large scale desertion to the Union army. However, "when the news spread through the army that Old Bedford was to organize a rearguard, men rushed to headquarters and asked to join it" (12:364). The rearguard, regardless of the terrible winter conditions and the recent military disaster "was undaunted and firm and did its work bravely to the last" (4:287).

An officer on General Chalmers' staff wrote,

That at no time in his whole career was the fortitude of General Forrest in adversity, and his power of infusing his own cheerfulness into those under his

command, more strikingly exhibited than at this crisis. Defeated and broken as we were, there were not wanting many others as determined as he to do their duty to the last, and who stood out faithfully to the end; but their conversation was that of men who, though determined, were without hope, and who felt that they must gather strength even from despair; but he alone, whatever he may have felt spoke in his usual cheerful and defiant tone, and talked of meeting the enemy with as much assurance of success as he did when driving them before him a month before. Such a spirit is sympathetic, and not a man was brought in contact with him who did not feel strengthened and invigorated, as if he had heard of a reinforcement coming to our relief (12:365).

### Move Fast, Strike Hard, and Finish Rapidly

Again, Forrest was not in a position to force a major engagement as called for by his normal methods of operation. However, in the engagements at Anthony's Hill and Sugar Creek, after the initiation of the ambushes, he struck the enemy with a combined arms force, artillery, cavalry, and infantry. These violent, limited attacks were effective, causing Wilson's lead elements to react defensively, thus losing the initiative.

In addition to concentrating his forces during these two major engagements, he moved rapidly over the battlefield, always ahead of the enemy, setting up delay positions, securing crossing sites, destroying bridges, and harassing and delaying the enemy. Even hampered with 2,000 infantry, he was able to maneuver his forces to gain temporary advantages in positions over the enemy, strike them unexpectedly, and then quickly disengage.

### Use Terrain And Weather

General Forrest's knowledge of Tennessee gave him a tremendous advantage over the enemy. He knew the primary and secondary routes leading south to the Tennessee, greatly assisting Hood in moving his army. His knowledge of river crossing sites, to include fording sites and bridges, not only allowed him to rapidly cross the water obstacles, but enabled him to position forces to guard or destroy the crossings. His control of these sites is one of the primary reasons he was never cut off or flanked by Wilson's cavalry.

The use of Anthony's Hill to set up a strong ambush position is a classic example of using terrain to counter superior forces.

The stand made at Anthony's Hill was to determine the escape or destruction of Hood's army. Nature had made this a strong strategic point for defense, and Forrest utilized it to the best advantage in a great emergency. This pass was not to be a Thermoplae from which none should escape to tell the tale, but rather a vantage ground of resistance made to enable flying columns to escape. The Confederates were well placed and concealed in gap and on the flanks. As an ambush it was the brilliant and resolute conception of a master mind in the hour of defeat and despair (13:327).

Similarly, the delay positions set up at Richland and Sugar Creeks were on terrain easy to defend.

Heavy rains, sleet and fog made the rivers and creeks difficult to cross and the roads almost impassable. Forrest used these adverse conditions to his advantage in slowing the enemy's progress. Fog was interwoven into his defensive plan at Sugar Creek, concealing his positions which enabled him to completely surprise the enemy.

#### Protect The Force

Forrest's cavalry corps, when it joined Hood, was composed basically of the same units that had been recruited in late 1863, and had fought at Okolona, Brice's Crossroads, and many other engagements in 1864. Forrest, either by raids, efforts of his agents, or using his own funds, was always able to provide his men with horses, weapons, ammunition, equipment, clothing, and food. Though Hood's army was in terrible condition after the battle of Nashville, Forrest's cavalry was well provisioned. When the 1900 infantrymen were attached for the rearguard operation, efforts were made to provide for them.

The discipline Forrest had instilled in his men was evident throughout the campaign. They maneuvered and fought successfully against a larger and better equipped force. They endured the hardships of the retreat but never succumbed to a defeatist attitude or desertion as Hood's army had done. Discipline was also evident in the security precautions taken to protect the force during each engagement. Scouts, flank security and temporary fortifications were used routinely. The fact that the Federal cavalry was surprised at Anthony's Hill and Sugar Creek indicates that proper noise and light discipline procedures were being strictly enforced.

## SUMMARY

Again, the tactics of Forrest reflect an awareness and appreciation for the actions and techniques defined by the combat imperatives. Only by the successful application of them was he able to succeed against enormous odds. The final chapter will review his tactics during the three campaigns, discuss the evolution of tactics, and why it has not altered the applicability of the combat imperatives.

## Chapter Five

### APPLICABILITY OF THE COMBAT IMPERATIVES

The previous analysis of the tactics used by Bedford Forrest during three Civil War campaigns clearly demonstrates that all seven combat imperatives were critical factors in the outcome of the engagements. Although some of the tactics used by Forrest have become antiquated, the principles of war which define the combat imperatives have remained valid during the last 120 years. This chapter, within the framework of the combat imperatives, will review Forrest's operational procedures and tactics, discuss how modern warfare has made some of them obsolete, and show that technology has not altered the validity of the principles of war.

#### INSURE UNITY OF EFFORT

Evident throughout Forrest's campaigns was an ability to ascertain what needed to be accomplished, insure his subordinates knew what was expected of them, and make correct decisions at the appropriate time. General Viscount Wolseley, the British field marshal, said, "He always knew what he wanted, and consequently there was no weakness or uncertainty in his views or intentions, nor in the orders he gave to have those intentions carried out" (9:48). In addition, his foremost biographer, General Thomas Jordan, reinforced Wolseley's remarks, "At critical instants he was ever quick to see, clear in his previsions, swift to decide and swift to act" (11:683). And, finally, he was able to "change the objectives of his entire team in a very short time. He possessed battlefield control to an extremely high degree" (21:44).

Today's armies have advance command and control facilities that provide a variety of communication systems which enable commanders to control larger and more complex organizations. Directives, orders, and information can now be rapidly transmitted over vast distances. The battlefield is three dimensional, requiring more sophisticated mission analysis, graphics, and control measures. Forrest did not have to deal with a threat coming from the air. Further, he had only his messengers and what he could personally observe to plan and execute a mission.



Regardless of the complexity of the modern battlefield, objectives must be determined and every effort made in accomplishing the mission. Unity of command insures the continuous flow of information up and down the chain of command and one individual controls the operation. Finally, today's commander must strive to make his orders simple and easily understood, as Forrest did in 1864. Simplicity insures a coordinated effort which prevents confusion and indecision from disrupting the operation. Unity of effort is as important to the AirLand Battle commander as it was for the Civil War commander.

#### DIRECT FRIENDLY STRENGTHS AGAINST ENEMY WEAKNESSES

One of Forrest's greatest attributes was his ability to keep abreast of the enemy situation. "All through his operations, one great secret of his success was his intuitive knowledge of the enemy's movements and intentions. A prominent northern general said, 'We never know where Forrest is, or what he is going to do, but he always knows where we are, and what we propose to do'" (9:43). Once aware of their activities, he would look for weaknesses in organization, strength, and morale. "With his acute judgement and power of perception he was thus generally able to find out for himself the enemy's weak point, and having ascertained it, he forthwith went for it with a dashing determination..." (9:35).

By using a variety of ruses, deceptions, and ambushes he was able to direct his strength against the enemy's weakness. Similarly, during his major engagements, such as at Brice's Crossroads, he would strike the enemy by simultaneous frontal, flank, and rear attacks. When he was able to coordinate all three movements, he was normally victorious (6:340).

Advances in technology have provided commanders with multiple systems to acquire information. Aerial photography, sensors, and intelligence from higher headquarters provide additional sources of information not available during the Civil War. Forrest's use of spies, informers, and 'deserters' would probably not work well on the modern battlefield, because of the rapid pace of the battle and the need for immediate decisions. However, his use of scouts and observations posts (pickets), are still critical assets in the collection of information. Similarly, the use of feints and ambushes is still valid today, and considered a critical factor in our warfighting doctrine. Unless a clear advantage is apparent, frontal assaults are a tactic that the AirLand Battle commander must avoid if he is to preserve his force. The range and lethality of modern weapons would make such attacks futile.

The principle of surprise is critical in the conduct of operations today. Forrest used it quite effectively in the

1860s. In addition, the nature of the deceptive operations he used provided for the security of his forces. The modern commander is expected to be able to use feints and ruses to deceive the enemy and protect his force. Finally, to direct his strengths against the enemy's weakness, the commander must be able to maneuver his forces to strike the opponent's flanks and rear.

#### DESIGNATE AND SUSTAIN THE MAIN EFFORT

In all of his campaigns, Forrest attempted to mass his forces at the critical time and place. Once concentration was achieved, he would organize his forces in such a manner to maximize his various assets. He used "cavalry, infantry, and artillery to achieve the maximum combat power available at the critical time and place" (27:18). He would then "strike furiously before the enemy had time to consider what was coming, and with every available man in action" (9:222). Once he gained the "initiative he held it, never relaxing the pressure as long as it was physically possible to maintain it, even if only a handful of troops were available to him" (6:340). If the enemy broke, he would "pursue them with a brutal relentlessness that was extraordinary in military history" (6:340). During the retreat from Nashville, he was forced to use his forces in an economy of force role. Vastly outnumbered, he still moved and concentrated his units in such a manner to continuously retard the enemy's advance.

Forrest's fighting concepts of, "Git thar furst with the most" (mass, objective, timing) and "I'd give more for fifteen minutes of the bulge [initiative] than three days of tactics" (offensive, surprise) are still valid today (16:612). Modern commanders have a variety of weapon systems that were not available to Forrest. Tac Air, assault helicopter, tanks, and mechanized vehicles are factors in the computation of combat power. Still, forces must be concentrated and the initiative seized by taking the offensive and striking with overwhelming forces at the right time and place. Today's commander will not be able to pursue a defeated force to the degree that Forrest did. The possibility of being cut off or overrun by superior second echelon forces will limit the extent of a pursuit.

The need to concentrate forces for the main attack or in an economy of force role has not varied in the last 120 years. Similarly, to achieve and maintain the initiative, the enemy has to be hit with overwhelming forces at the critical time and location. This can only be accomplished by incorporating the principles of offensive and timing and tempo in the operation.

## SUSTAIN THE FIGHT

Once Forrest initiated an action he took whatever measure necessary to sustain it. "Somehow he managed to have some comparatively fresh men in each new attack. A small body of reinforcements here; a new battery just arrived there; finally, the men who had been holding the horses earlier in the battle. Forrest kept the pressure on and kept his bulge" (21:45). Likewise, he pushed his men to the extreme to achieve victory, but never beyond their limits. "For him, and because of him, men accomplished tasks requiring epic physical endurance. Yet he realized what men could not do" (22:56).

Today's commanders have the complex problem of logistical support that Forrest was normally not faced with during a prolonged engagement though he was considered one of the best logisticians in the Civil War. The requirements for fuel and ammunition alone will tax the distribution and transportation systems. Forrest's men carried enough ammunition to last them for several days and horses could go without fodder for extensive periods. Tanks can only carry limited amounts of munitions and once out of fuel, they become stranded pillboxes. Thus the need for a working logistical system is more critical today. Similarly, our soldiers are expected to endure the rigors of combat for extensive periods. The commander must know their limits and have contingencies for rest and replacements to sustain the fight.

Providing logistical support, pressing soldiers to the limit of their endurance, and maintaining the initiative through offensive actions allows the commander to successfully sustain the fight. Successful commanders during both eras have understood these principles and always considered them in their planning.

## MOVE FAST, STRIKE HARD, AND FINISH RAPIDLY

Forrest moved his forces more rapidly over the battlefield than any opponent he faced. "One of the lessons of his operations will be in the demonstration of the great utility in war of horses in the rapid transportation of a body of men to the field of battle of operations, there to be employed as riflemen, fighting on foot" (11:683). Once his forces were in position he would "take the initiative and deliver the first blow. He believed that one man advancing in attack was equal to two men standing in line of battle..." (14:13). He would press the attack violently until victory was achieved, or he would rapidly disengage. His Okolona and Brice's Crossroads campaigns

demonstrated rapid maneuver and violent execution. Similarly, his rearguard action reflected lightning movement, quick strikes, and immediate disengagement - finishing one action and preparing for another.

Mechanized vehicles, tanks, assault helicopters, and tactical airlift allow commanders to move their forces rapidly and over great distances on the battlefield, just like Forrest's "Foot Cavalry". Increased mobility is essential to avoid being detected and destroyed by superior forces. In addition, the weapon systems of today are more lethal and have greater range. Commanders are expected to move rapidly, shoot accurately, disengage, and reposition to avoid being tied down and overwhelmed by superior forces. Forrest, normally fighting against larger forces, utilized these tactics to survive on the Civil War battlefield.

The rapid movement of forces on the battlefield, quick concentration to achieve a locally superior combat ratio, and offensive actions were as relevant during the Civil War as they are today in achieving victory. The unit that moves fast, strikes hard, and finishes rapidly will not only survive on the battlefield, but should succeed against superior forces.

#### USE TERRAIN AND WEATHER

One of the primary reasons for Forrest's success in Tennessee and Mississippi was his indepth knowledge of the terrain and his ability to use adverse weather conditions to his advantage. At Okolona, he almost trapped Smith in a cul-de-sac formed by two rivers. His knowledge of crossing sites, secondary roads, and bridges allowed him to check many of Smith's moves. At Brice's Crossroads, Sturgis exhausted his infantry by moving them at a double time over several miles in extreme heat. Forrest had planned his operation on the basis of what the weather would do to the Federal infantry. He was able to delay Wilson's pursuit of Hood's army by using the terrain in setting up ambush and delay positions. Finally, wherever Forrest conducted operations, he made a regular personal reconnaissance of the terrain.

Today we have systems that enhance our ability to fight in adverse conditions. Night observation devices, infrared sights, heat sensing optics and radar allow us to conduct operations at night and in inclement weather. In addition, we can extend natural obstacles by using mines, wire obstacles, and manmade ditches. We also have the equipment to reduce and overcome both natural and manmade obstacles. Flooded rivers which Forrest used to his advantage can now be bridged or crossed by using airlift.

Soldiers now possess personal equipment which protect them against the elements and weapons that will operate in any condition.

However, the commander must still be able to overcome adverse weather and use it to his advantage. He has to be able to analyze terrain in terms of key terrain, cover and concealment, observation and fields of fire, avenues of approach and obstacles, in order to enhance his chances and reduce risks. He has to conduct personal reconnaissance of the battlefield as Forrest did during the Civil War. Commanders who have successfully used the terrain and considered the weather in their planning have greatly increased their combat power.

### PROTECT THE FORCE

Forrest was deeply concerned about the well-being of his men. He went to extraordinary efforts to insure they were properly equipped and fed, often at his own expense. Usually, he supported his men by raids on Federal supply depots. "By his captures the Federal government supplied him with guns and artillery and more ordnance, commissary, and quartermaster stores than he could use" (14:12). Even during the terrible retreat from Nashville his troops had provisions. He also "spent hours in inspections and in the training of the men..." (13:61) to instill discipline and cohesion. His men were also drilled in security procedures evident by the inability of the enemy to ever catch him by surprise.

Chemical and nuclear warfare plus other advanced means of conducting war, have compounded the commander's ability to protect his force. Fighting in such an environment will be extremely deadly and mentally fatiguing. Forces must be dispersed to reduce the effects of a nuclear blast. Control must still be maintained and soldiers trained to endure the hardships of this type of warfare. Discipline is still critical, but it cannot be enforced by shooting fleeing soldiers, as Forrest did. Similarly, the modern commander will not be able to provision his forces by raiding the enemy's supply facilities.

Otherwise, the factors of logistics, cohesion, and security are as valid now as in the 1860s. Soldiers must be provided for; they must take protective measures to secure their positions; and, they must establish a sense of unit identity and morale to develop strong mission oriented, cohesive teams. Protecting the force is as paramount now as it was in Forrest's time.

## SUMMARY

Although the tactics used in war have continued to evolve over the last 120 years and modern battlefields have become extremely complex, the combat imperatives and the principles of war which define them have not changed. Many of Forrest's tactics have become obsolete and if implemented today would result in disaster. However, the broader concepts of the combat imperatives are still legitimate and will remain valid regardless of the evolution of tactics. For example, Forrest designated and sustained the main effort by striking the enemy on all fronts and then pursuing until the enemy was completely destroyed or his force exhausted itself. Today, the commander will designate and sustain the main effort by specifying a main attack. Normally, it would be on the enemy's flank or rear, if possible. Frontal assaults and endless pursuits are not feasible today. However, the imperative applies in both instances, taking the offensive and maintaining the initiative, both necessary to win battles. Similarly, the other six combat imperatives were as relevant in the 1860s as they are today.

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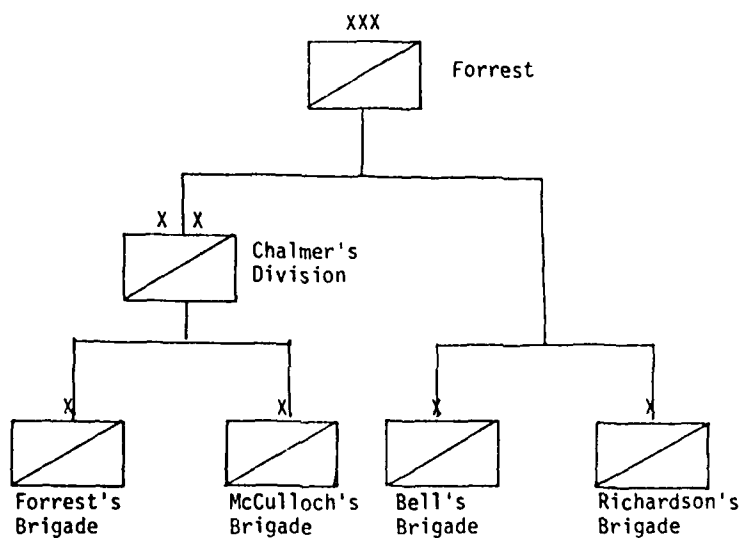
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# APPENDIX

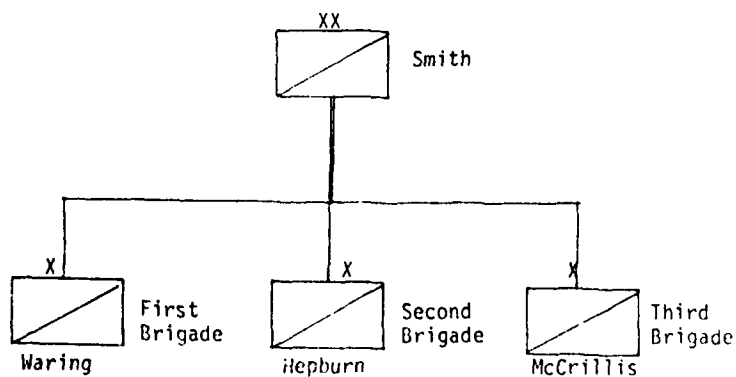
A.

Okolona

Confederate Forces



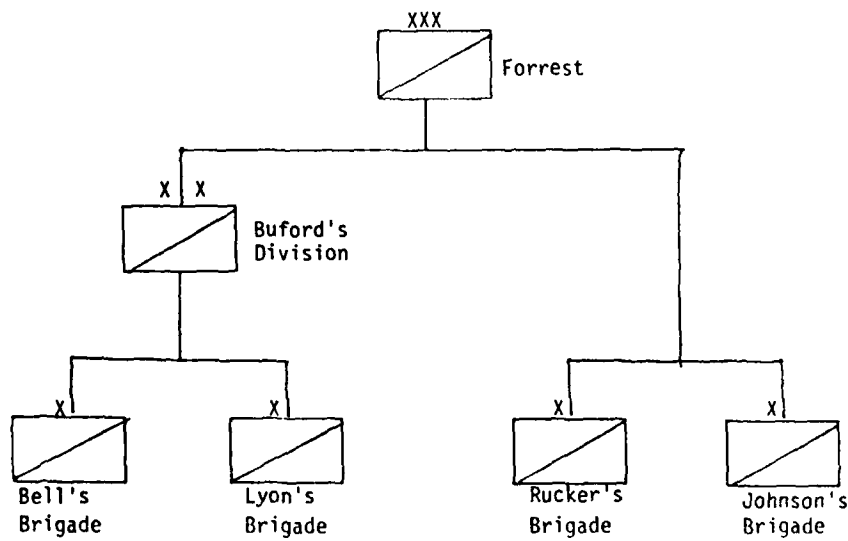
Federal Forces



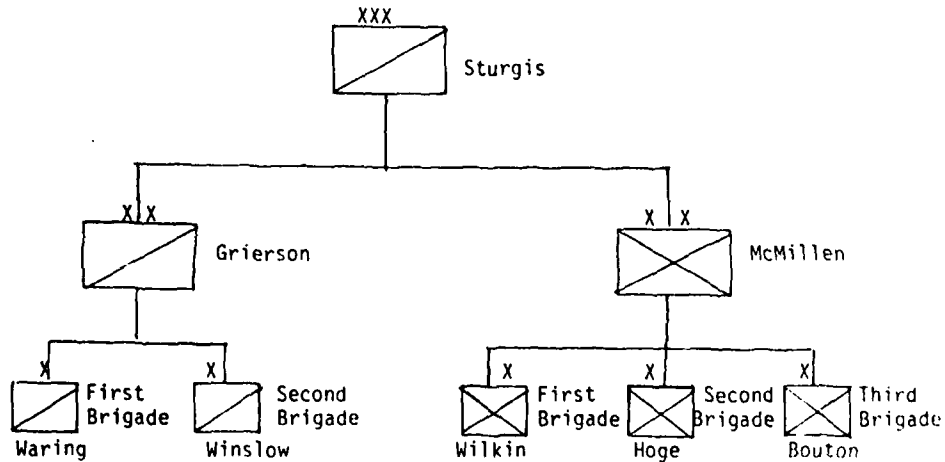
# APPENDIX

B.

Brice's Crossroads  
Confederate Forces



Federal Forces



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# APPENDIX

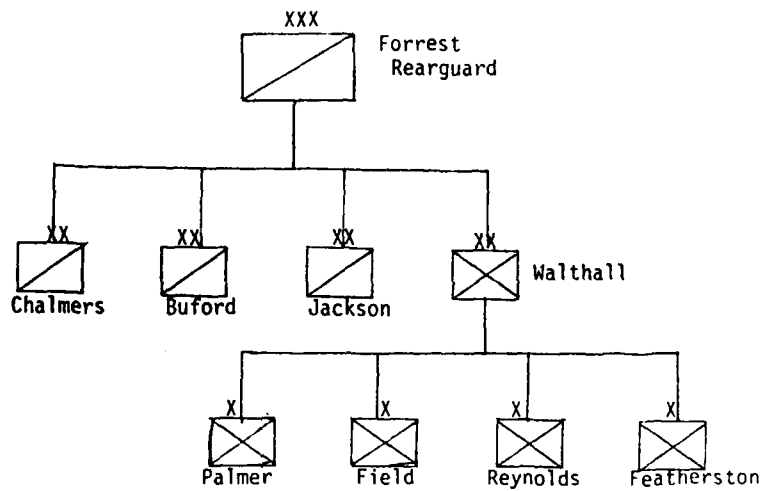
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C.

Hood's Retreat from Nashville

Confederate Forces



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